

CHRISTIAN FRIEND VOLUME 1

by Unknown

A collection of articles and writings from Christian Friend Volume 1, covering various biblical topics and Christian teaching.

48 Chapters

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Christian Friend Volume 1

God Is Light

The two passages which we meet in 1 John, “God is Light”—“God is Love,” are, what I judge, we may call parent truths. Following the divine revelation from beginning to end, they will be found to form the whole of it—the two lines by which the texture of the divine counsels has been woven. To effect the results of combined “light” and “love,” that is, of perfect purity and perfect goodness, is the secret that quickens and fills the scene throughout. All is light and love, for all is serving the display of God Himself, and “God is light,” and “God is love” —perfect in purity and perfect in goodness.

I would now, for a little, trace the expressions of the truth, “GOD IS LIGHT,” as they show themselves along the current of the divine revelations, desiring to have the soul humbled, and yet also raised and gladdened by such meditations.

At the beginning we get the strongest expression of the holiness and righteousness of God— “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Here the Lord attaches to the first commission of evil nothing less than complete separation from Himself; for He is the living God. As such He had just shown Himself, He had just become the source of all that in that moment was surrounding Him in earth, air, and seas; He was the living and life-giving God, and, therefore, a state of death was a state of separation from Him And this state is announced to be the sure and immediate doom of the creature on the moment of his commission of evil. What a strong assertion, thus, at the very outset, of the purity of God, of the great truth that “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all;” the creature that becomes a child of evil, a child of darkness, must at once be an exile from Him— “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

Thus, does the blessed one at once display Himself. And everything afterward is but a brightening of this; a sealing afresh of the first impression, that “God is light.” We may see also, and fully grant it, that “love” will have its way—that is true and necessary also—but “light” will not give way. In all revealed counsels, in all places and dispensations, it asserts its equal place.

When sin enters, we see this. We read it as distinctly in the promise made for man in guilt, as we read it before in the threat made to man in innocency. Whatever shape the word takes from the altered condition of its object, still it clearly comes forth from Him, who is equally, and perfectly, both “light” and “love.” “It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel,” is now said by the Lord God to the serpent about the woman’s seed. That is, God will provide a way whereby He can be “just” and yet the “justifier” of sinners. All the claims of “light” or righteousness shall be honored, and all the desires of “love” shall be gratified. Such is the interpretation of this first promise of God after sin had entered. Clearly indeed does it announce, in a way of excellent wisdom, which surely passes all thought, that He is both “light” and “love,” and that each must be glorified! Man shall be redeemed, the serpent’s head shall be bruised, because “God is love;” but the penalty of sin shall be endured, or the heel of the woman’s-seed shall be bruised, because “God is light.”

This is surely a full and blessed expression of God! And just for the same reason (because “God is light”) from henceforth we see Him a stranger in the place which sin or death has entered. Man’s habitation has become defiled. The ground is cursed because of sin, and God cannot be at home here He becomes a stranger in His own creation. He visits the earth for the comfort and guidance of His people, because He is “love.” “The Lord went His way as soon as He had left communing with Abraham” (Gen. 18). Quite according to this sanctity of the divine feet, which could not rest on a soiled footstool, we find, in process of time (or rather in the progress of His dispensations), when He is about to assume Canaan for His dwelling-place. The sword of Joshua, the servant of God, who is “light,” rids it of its old corrupters. Cities are made a curse to the Lord. The fruit of cattle, fields, and trees, are all circumcised, as it were, or purified by various ordinances. Israel themselves coming into their inheritance a redeemed people. All, after its manner, is thus cleansed, ere the Lord can dwell there; for the voice still is, “What communion has light with darkness?” — “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.”

So, when all is settled in the land, it is sanctity that is marked still— “holiness to the Lord” is read everywhere. Approach to God is by a path most jealously consecrated. He is Himself withdrawn into that place which is called “the holiest of all,” and the whole way into that sanctuary is marked by testimonies to the jealous unmitigated holiness of the Lord. All tells of “love” in providing a way at all—but the character of the way equally tells us of “light.” The banished ones can return, but they learn that iniquity cannot enter with them. The least stain must be removed; the touch of a grave, or even a bone (symptoms of death, and therefore of sin), though by accident, had to send the worshippers to the purifying water ere they could approach the Lord. (Num. 19) “Love” provided this water, but “light” required that it should be used. And so, the place, the ordinances that furnished and animated it, the worshipper who used it—all still told with one consent, and that, too, clear, full, and unbroken, that “God is light.”

I speak not more particularly here of all this service in Israel of old; it is well known to bear this witness. I would now observe that the law or covenant, which was established at the same time, bore the like testimony. For if man, in the confidence of his heart, will approach God by the law, and not by “the shadows of good things to come,” or the witnesses of grace, he must still learn that “God is light;” and, therefore, “cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” The Lord is perfect in righteousness and holiness, and cannot abate one ray of His glory to accommodate it to man’s injured and abated capacities. If man will stand before Him in himself, as on Mount Sinai, and not at the door of the sanctuary, he must bring with him that “light” of righteousness and holiness which alone is worthy of the divine presence; he must continue in all things written in that law, which was “holy, just, and good.” Nothing less could answer the requisition of Him who is “light.”

This is the strong witness of the law to that great truth we are following through the Scriptures, as before we listened to the same from the services which accompanied the law. The voice of the words from the top of Sinai, and the voice of the sanctuary at the foot of it, equally, though differently, uttered this truth— “God is light.” And still we shall find that as the blessed one advances in dispensing the knowledge of Himself and of His counsels, whether by His hand or by His Spirit, that is, whether by His providence or by His Word, it is all the same.

Israel's captivity becomes the witness in its day. The people had not continued in the "all things" of the law. They had not reflected the "light," as they had bound themselves to do, and they were therefore removed from the divine presence. The dispersion of the tribes tells us that "God is light," as the exile of Adam from Eden had told it before. "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away?" says Jehovah to Israel, "or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away." "What communion has light with darkness?" we may again ask. Iniquity and transgressions must estrange from God. If Israel walk in the darkness of corrupted nature, they must walk outside the presence of God.

Such is the testimony of the divine hand in the scattering of Israel. Such was the testimony of all the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, against a disobedient people. And such, again, the witness of the Baptist, in due time, after this captivity and scattering. All is harmony. The ministry of the Baptist addresses Israel with this truth, that "God is light;" for it finds them in evil, and summons them to repent, or never to count on taking the place of "children unto Abraham," that is, of the people of God.

All this testimony is complete. Whatever witness speaks, it is still to the same purpose, it tells that "God is light." The threat in Eden, the promise after sin, the ordinances, the law, the settlement at first, and then the dispersion of Israel, the ministry of the prophets and of the Baptist, all tell this, and with equal clearness, though, of course, in different style.

But we now reach the testimony of another witness (the most affecting of all), the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All He did was a reflection of God; and all, too, was "light" and "love." They were mingling their beams, and forming that perfect element in which He lived and moved on this earth of ours. He was "God manifest in the flesh." The divine glory shone in His face. Here dwelt "the fullness of the Godhead bodily," and all that emanated was either "light" or "love." The Son of God acted on the principles of the first promise, which I have already considered. He consented to be bruised in His own heel, because of righteousness, because "God is light;" but He undertook to bruise the enemy's head, because of grace, because "God is love." This was declared in His death more particularly; but generally, too, in all His previous life. All told of "light" and of "love," or reflected "righteousness and peace," "mercy and truth" in mingled rays. He vindicated light, and dispensed love. In all that He did this was traced; and His death was the eminent and meritorious assertion of it. For need I say how gloriously the cross of Christ publishes the truth, that "God is light," and that "God is love." It was, indeed, the precious, wondrous witness of this. To understand the cross is, in other words, to understand that it does bear this witness to us as sinners. But in His teaching the Lord bore the same testimony. If we look at His life, or His ministry, whether we listen to the voice of His ways or His words, we may say, as the apostle does say of it all, "This then is the message which we have heard of Him—that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

Such was the life and the doctrine of the Son. And when His witness to "light" and "love" was over, the Holy Spirit held up exactly the same, though in a different form. His teachings by the apostles in their epistles unfold new mysteries, but all assert these truths. "Love" is dispensed, but "light" is still vindicated also. The thought of "the doctrine of Christ" admitting any darkness or evil was a stranger to the mind of the Spirit; the apostle, who spoke as from Him, stands amazed at the

conception of it. "Know ye not," says he, "that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? —that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6) And in another place the same apostle assumes that if any have "learned Christ," if any have "heard Him;" and "been taught by Him," they must have learned to put off the former conversation corrupted by lusts. (Eph. 4) So, also, he interprets the grace that brings salvation, as that which teaches the denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts, and the living soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. (Titus 2) And thus, though it be now grace or salvation, and not law, that is published, it is with equal sureness and distinction, a witness that "God is light."

The apostles teach us that our "Savior" is also our "Lord," a doctrine which secures the honor of the same indestructible truth. The hand which has rescued is ever asserting its dominion over us, and we know that it is a clean and a holy hand.

But we must not multiply testimonies to this most plain fact from the words of the Spirit in the apostles. I would only add that the epistle from whence we take the words "God is light" and "God is love" makes it its business, as it were, to weave those two truths together. All the thoughts of the Holy Spirit seem to pass and repass between them. They are the great tests of saintly standing and character, as the chewing of the cud and the cleaving of the hoof were the notes of cleanness in animals under the law. Consequently, it is there written, "Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." And why so? Because "God is light" and "God is love," therefore he who doeth not righteousness cannot be of Him who is "light," neither can he who loveth not his brother be of Him who is "love." So, it is also there written. These are the constant thoughts of the Spirit in this epistle, that "God is light" and that "God is love," quickens and fills the pen of the ready writer throughout.

Such, then, is the teaching of the Holy Spirit. He sustains unbroken the testimony that "God is light." But as the Son, not only by His teaching, but in His life and person, as we were observing, bore witness to this truth, so does the Holy Spirit in the same twofold way. His teaching through the apostles does this, as we have now seen, and so does His indwelling in the saints. The saints are His temples now. But He dwells in those temples as a "Holy Spirit," grieved by any contradiction, any practical contradiction, of the truth that "God is light." (Eph. 4:30)

How perfect all this is. The Son, and the Holy Spirit, each in the day of His manifestation, maintains the same blessed testimony, both by deed and word. And we have only to add, that the glory, by and by, will keep up the same. The glory which is to close and crown all, will tell the same most precious and excellent truth—that "God is light," and that "God is love," striking that note with such a hand as shall cause it to vibrate forever. The sabbath, or the rest itself of all who have trusted in Jesus, will tell, that "God is love:" the entrance into that rest, and the element that surrounds it, that "God is light." For the earth, which will be the footstool in the age of the glory, must be purged of its corrupters ere the glory can return and dwell there; as we saw of old, that Canaan and all that belonged to it was cleansed ere the Lord of the tribes would make it His inheritance. And when it is thus purged it will be kept clean. "I will early destroy all the wicked of the land," says the Lord of the earth in the days of its glory, "that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord." And so as to the upper house, or the throne, or heavenly glory, nothing can be allowed even to approach, that can in any way defile. "They shall bring the glory and the honor of

the nations to it." "Without are dogs," and so forth. Beyond the sphere which the glory fills must recede all that is unclean, all that is the contradiction of "light." For the darkness will then be outer darkness.

Thus, indeed, from the garden of Eden up to the glory, we get the constant witness, in all the ways of His hand, and in all the revelations of His mind, that "GOD IS LIGHT, and in Him there is no darkness at all."

God Is Love

I have already considered John's words, "God is light." I have called that a parent truth, and been looking at its fruit or results. "God Is Love" is, in like manner, a parent truth; and I would now also trace its path through the Scripture, according to my small measure. But who is sufficient for such a theme? I would, however, with desire pursue it a little, though this has been somewhat anticipated in the previous meditations. May the Spirit direct and control!

At creation God was shown to be "love" —the garden told that by the testimony of all that was there, so that I speak not particularly of it. But so was it afterward, when that garden of delights was forfeited.

We read in 2 Corinthians 3 that the law was a dispensation that was to be "done away;" and in Hebrews 8 that it was not "faultless." These passages strikingly tell us that the law was not altogether according to God's mind, that He could not rest in it. Not that it was faulty in itself; we know that it was "holy, just, and good" —as fully answerable to—its purpose as the gospel; but still found fault with, because not altogether according to God. And this can be at once understood; for "God is love." There the secret appears. The law could not possibly meet Him; for it gave no occasion to His showing Himself, or to His acting agreeably with His nature. It must, therefore be "done away." It could not abide before God. It was not God's own thing. The promise was such. As the garden and all the condition of things at creation told what God was, so to tell the same, as soon as sin entered, it was the promise that was revealed, and not the law (Gen. 3). The law came in afterward to serve, it is true, great purposes; but the promise was God's own thing. And we may just observe, accordingly, that in Deuteronomy 31 and in Galatians 3 (not to mention other scriptures) God keeps Himself in company with the "song," and with "the promise," while "Moses" and "the law" are linked together in both those scriptures.

But this, rather, by the way. The law was clearly not to God's mind; and the reason of this, we see, derives itself out of His nature—blessed be His name! But having thus set God with the promise, or having thus learned that "God is love," we can track His wondrous and excellent path onward. Thus: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "God is love." He looked out upon it according to Himself, and its ruins drew from Him the remedy. He loved a ruined and defiled world, however, in the only way that He could love it, in the only way that He could exercise Himself towards such an object, that is, with the love of pity, and He gave His Son for its relief and rescue.

Here, then, was the beginning of His way; for "God is love." The stream must be according to the spring. The parent truth determines the produce. We learn the way from the character. And as we follow the stream, it is still the same water. Let dispensations roll on and disclose themselves to us, God is seen in each according to Himself. Great unfoldings both of persons and ministries there may be, but all are One. It may be the Father, it may be the Son, it may be the Holy Spirit that is manifested, but still it is but the unfoldings of God, and "God is love."

Thus, the Son, looking back on past dispensations, says, "My Father worked hitherto;" and then, reflecting on the then present one, He adds, "and I work." Similar works, whether in the ministry of "the Father" or "the Son." And those works are works of grace, works of pity to sinners, Bethesda healings (John 5) And so the Son, looking forward to still coming dispensations, says, speaking of the Holy Spirit, "He will abide with you forever;" "He will take of mine and show it unto you;" "He will guide you into all truth." He will indeed be the servant of your need and joy. Herein is love still. All this is God unfolded (to speak after the manner of man), God seen in the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; but all is "love."

We might notice the trial and the proof of this, and we shall see, as to divine love, its unconquerable patience. For the Father, when He worked, had His grace slighted or misunderstood, by generation after generation, from Adam to Christ, but still He worked "hitherto." The Son, when He worked in like grace, was refused, and had all indignities and evil to endure, but He loved and labored to the end, till He was cast out and crucified. The "Holy Spirit," now working, is grieved of the saints, and yet, unfailing, unwearied, abides still the "Comforter," the "Spirit of truth," in them. And thus, is it love, and love of the same quality. "Love never faileth." The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit minister in equal love, tried variously, but alike unfailing in each, and patient in all.

It is not, however, simply thus in pity and in patience—in pity towards the world or sinners, and in patient forbearing towards believers that divine love shows and exercises itself. God has sought another way in which to be among us—in the love of complacency. He has so set His saints before Him, so put them in Christ, so taken counsels about them, and multiplied thoughts about them, as gives Him to look on them without blame or spot, that He may delight in the sight of them and rest in His love. John teaches us to look at this form of love— "My Father will love him" "I will love him," says Jesus of His saint. "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him." This is all the love of complacency, the love of delight: such love is according to the mind of God.

These exercises of God, it is indeed happy to look at, we being the objects of them all. And they still keep in memory the great first truth, "God is love;" they still tell us whence they flow, and are only the narrower or richer current of the one great divine source. It is love in pity, in patience, in complacency; but it is LOVE, and only love, happy and fruitful in its constant though varied exercise.

And what other exercise can it have? If it could, it would. But in this complacency, it abides forever. "God will rest in His love." Glory, by and bye, will be the gift of this love of complacency, as salvation is the gift of His pity now, and the upholding of His saint the fruit of His patience. But beyond this complacency love knows and can know no form more excellent. It will be the clement of the divine presence through endless ages of glory. In it the saints will live and move and have their being forever, after the love that once pitied them in their sins, and was patient with them in their shortcomings, and "perfected" itself towards them in giving them boldness in the very day of judgment, has done its wondrous work.

Love, in every trial of it, will have exercised and displayed itself, and then will get its eternal refreshment in the delight and complacency with which it will rest in its object forever. Love has thus determined the character of God's own way. But we may also see that it equally determines the person and actings of His children; that "God is love," is still the great parent truth.

For the saints, or children of God, “love” is the divine nature; as it is written, “Every one that loveth is born of God.” And again, “He that loveth not knoweth not God.” There is no fruit of His energy or spirit, no communion in knowledge with Him, but through love. “If any man love God, the same is known of Him.”

And this being so, it appears from the further teaching of the Spirit of God that two things are sought for and expected from us as His children. I mean “confidence” and “imitation.” “God is love,” and therefore, in our actings towards Himself, He cannot possibly accept anything less than Confidence. It is the answer love is entitled to, the only answer which, from its nature, it can (shall I say) put up with. Nothing will gratify or satisfy love but love; and in the gospel God is to get it from us. The apostle therefore states this (though we might derive it out of the great parent truth): “We love Him because He first loved us.” We do not fear Him, we do not mistrust Him, but we love Him, because He has already loved us. “There is no fear in love; perfect love casteth out fear.” Love leaves no room for fear. It cannot dwell in the same house with it. The elements are destructive one of another. If we know that love, perfect love, is dealing with us, we cease to fear. Confidence only is the due answer, as it is the necessary demand of love.

But so, in our actions towards others, God cannot approve anything less than imitation. And this all the apostles tell us. It might, again I would say, be derived out of the great parent truth; but the Spirit is pleased to state it largely to us. “If God have so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” “If we shut up our bowels of compassion, how dwelleth the love of God in us?” “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”

In its actings thus, whether upward towards God or out towards others, love will be found in us, this principle of confidence and of imitation. And the Spirit teaches us that to judge ourselves to be “lovers of God” without this confidence and this imitation is practicing a deceit on ourselves; for I read these two sentences— “We love Him because He first loved us;” “He that loveth God must love his brother also.” The first of these holy sentences tells us this, that we can only love God as knowing that He first loved us; that is, we love Him because we have confidence in His love to us. Were it otherwise, it would be an assumption that our love is greater than God’s. If we assert that we have affection towards Him more surely than we are confident He has towards us, it is saying that we are better than God. Therefore, the only true, spiritual, evangelical love of God springs from confidence in His love towards us. So, the second of them tells us, that to assume that we can love God without loving one another is a reflection on God. For how can we think that He will accept the affection of one who has it not for his brother? This would be another way of making ourselves better than God. We would reject such affection ourselves.

How simple, then, those two holy sentences, or judgments, of the Spirit of God are! how necessarily true, when we consider the great parent truth, so to call it again, that “GOD IS LOVE!” “We must, therefore, confide in His love ere we can love Him or have affection towards Him ourselves. We must also love others as well as Him, our brethren as well as God.

Thus, we get the personal acts of the children, as well as God’s own ways, out of this parent truth. We pass into God’s place in this way of love. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” “He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” By love we know that we are in God’s place, in fellowship with Him. This assures the heart. “Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.” The very character of the place, the

very element that fills it, the commandment or voice that is heard there, is this— “that we believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another.” That is, that we assure ourselves of God’s love to us, and exercise love among ourselves from one to the other. This is the commandment, the ordinance, the character, the element of God’s place. And he that keepeth this commandment, the soul that breathes this element, dwelleth in God, and God in him.

This is the region we inhabit. These are the present realms of the saints— “translated into the kingdom of the dear Son.” It will be a region of glory by and bye— “His eternal kingdom and glory.” But the elements will dwell together, and fill the whole place. Love is (as I believe another has said) but hidden glory—glory will be manifested love. Love will be forever quickening the hidden springs and streams of” affection that are known and exercised, and glory will gild the whole scene where these affections flow, and have their happy course forever and forever.

Precious and glorious indeed is thus the constant testimony, that “GOD is LOVE;” and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth, in God, and God in him.

O Wretched Man That I Am!

“We (which have the first-fruits of the Spirit) do groan within ourselves.” Rom. 8:23.

There is nothing so hard for our hearts as to abide in the sense of grace, to continue practically conscious that “we are not under law, but under grace.” It is by grace that the heart is “established;” but then there is nothing more difficult for us really to comprehend than the fullness of grace—that “grace of God wherein we stand,” and to walk in the power and consciousness of it.

It is only in the presence of God that we can know it, and there it is our privilege to be. The moment we get away from the presence of God there will always be certain workings of our own thoughts within us, and our own thoughts can never reach up to the thoughts of God about us—to the “grace of God.”

It is quite impossible for us to draw any right conclusion about grace until we are settled on the great foundation of grace—God’s gift of Jesus. No reasoning of our own hearts could ever reach up to the “grace of God,” for the very simple reason, that in order to be such it must flow directly and freely from God. What I had any, the smallest possible, right to expect, could not be pure, free grace—could not be this “grace of God.”

But then, even after we have “tasted that the Lord is gracious,” it is quite natural for our own thoughts to work as soon as we leave the presence of God; and the moment they do so, whether it be about our sins, or about our graces, or anything else that we are occupied with, we lose the sense of grace, and can no longer reckon upon it.

This getting out of God’s presence is the source of all our weakness as saints; for in God’s strength we can do anything. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” The consciousness of His realized presence with us makes us “more than conquerors.” Whether our thoughts be about ourselves, or about circumstances around us, everything then becomes easy. But it is alone when in communion with Him, that we are able thus to measure everything according to grace.

Are our thoughts about ourselves? When in the presence of God, we rest on His grace, nothing can trouble us. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” “Who is he that condemned?” “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” But the moment that we get out of God’s presence, we cannot any longer rest on His grace as when in communion with Him Again: Are they respecting the condition of things around? We may have sorrow of spirit on this account, as conscious of the evil, misery, and ruin in which everything is (as Jesus—He “groaned in spirit, and was troubled”); but it is impossible, when we are abiding in the sense of God’s presence for anything, be it what it may, even the state of the church, to shake us; for we count on God, and then all things become but a sphere and scene for the operation of His grace.

Nature never counts upon God’s grace; it may count upon God’s mercy in passing by sin, but only because it imagines either that He is indifferent about it (attributing to Him its own low estimate of sin); or that He has no right to judge it. Grace, when understood by the soul, is seen to be the very

opposite of this—to be founded on a just sense of the tremendous evil of sin, on the part of God. And when we have learned in our measure to take God's estimate of sin, we are filled with amazement at that grace of God which can blot it all out—who has given His own Son to die because of it. What the natural man understands by mercy is not this—God's blotting out sin by the blood-shedding of Jesus, but His passing by sin with indifference. This is not grace.

When the conscience becomes awakened, and there are thoughts of responsibility, without the apprehension of grace, the first thing it seeks to do is to put itself under the law; it cannot do otherwise, and the natural man even often does this he knows of no other way of pleasing God than obedience to the law, and this, being ignorant both of God and himself, he thinks he can render.

But the having very simple thoughts of what grace is, is the true source of our strength as Christians; and the abiding in the sense of grace in the presence of God, is all the secret of holiness, peace, and quietness of spirit.

There are two things which may hinder our peace of spirit, and which being frequently confounded and mixed up together, create a difficulty in the minds of the saints.

First, a troubled state of conscience respecting acceptance and salvation.

Secondly, a groaning of spirit similar to that mentioned by Paul in Romans 8:23, because of circumstances around which distress and try us.

But these are quite distinct. The trouble and exercise of spirit which the saint may, and indeed will have, whilst living in this world, because of circumstances around, is altogether an opposite thing to that which is trouble of conscience respecting pardon of sin.

Where there is that (trouble of conscience), love is not in exercise, but self is the center. But when the trouble is because of the state of things around us, the contrary is the case. How deep the trouble of soul of the Lord Jesus! but it flowed from love and from a perfect sense of what the grace of God was.

When grace is fully, that is, simply known; when we are resting upon God as being for us, and know that He is love, there can be no mistake between these two causes of disquiet; but if we do not understand what grace is we shall be apt immediately to confound them.

If there be in us any anxiety of conscience as to our acceptance, we may be quite sure that we are not thoroughly established in grace. It is true there may be the sense of sin in one who is established; but this is a very different thing from distress of conscience as to acceptance. Want of peace may be caused by either of two things—my never having been fully brought to trust in grace, or my having, through carelessness, lost the sense of grace, which is easily done. The “grace of God” is so unlimited, so full, so perfect, that if we get for a moment out of the presence of God—we cannot have the true consciousness of it—we have no strength to apprehend it; and if we attempt to know it out of His presence, we shall only turn it to licentiousness.

If we look at the simple fact of what grace is, it has no limit, no bounds. Be we, what we may (and we cannot be. worse than we are) in spite of all that, what God is towards us is LOVE! Neither our joy nor our peace is dependent on what we are to God, but on what He is to us and that is grace.

Grace supposes all the sin and evil that is in us, and is the blessed revelation that through Jesus all this sin and evil has been put away. A single sin is more horrible to God than a thousand sins, nay, than all the sins in the world are to us; and yet with the fullest consciousness of what we are, all that God is pleased to be towards us is love! It is vain to look to any extent of evil. A person may be (speaking after the manner of men) a great sinner or a little sinner; but that is not the question at all. Grace has reference to what God is, and not to what we are, except indeed that the very greatness of our sins does but magnify the extent of the "grace of God." At the same time we must remember that the object and necessary effect of grace is to bring our souls into communion with God, to sanctify us, by bringing the soul to know God and to love Him. Therefore, the knowledge of grace is the true source of sanctification. If grace, then, be what God is toward me, and has nothing at all to do with what I am, the moment I begin to think about myself as though God would judge me because of my sins, it is evident that I am not then consciously standing in grace.

The heart naturally has these thoughts, and indeed it is also one of the effects of being awakened; for the conscience then begins directly to reason about what God thinks of it: but this is not grace.

The soul that turns back upon itself to learn God's judgment about it, and what His dealings with it are likely to be, is not leaning upon what God is, is not standing in grace.

I have said that there are two things which, though quite distinct, are nevertheless frequently confounded in the minds of the saints—a bad conscience and the "groaning" of the spiritual man because of evil around. The moment we get a little away from the sense of grace we shall be in danger of confusing these together. Suppose, for instance, that I, as a saint, am sensible of the terrible weight of evil which is all around me, and groan about it, soon (unless it be guarded against) this will mix itself up with trouble of conscience; I shall lose the sense of God's love and put myself under law.

But a saint may "groan" thus without at all losing the consciousness of love, nay, for the very reason that he has it.

When the Lord Jesus "groaned in Himself" and wept at the grave of Lazarus, His deep- sense of the sorrow which sin had brought into the world did not affect that of His Father's love. We find Him using at the same time the language of the fullest confidence in that love— "Father, I know that Thou hearest me always." And so, a Christian may be sorrowful, but should not on that account feel as though God were not Love, or lose the sense of His grace.

Love to others, combined with a spiritual perception of evil, will cause us very much sorrow. Jesus felt this infinitely more than we can ever do, because the power of love in His heart made Him so much more deeply sensible of the dreadful weight of evil which was pressing on the hearts of others. He felt the miseries around Him in proportion as He knew the blessedness and love of the Father's presence.

We have "suffering," "groaning," and so forth spoken of in Romans 8 Paul groaned within himself from the consciousness of infirmity, from distress, trials, and so forth, but this raised no question in his mind about the certainty of God's grace—quite the contrary. The more conscious we are that "the Spirit dwells in us," the more we shall "groan." The more certain we are of blessing, the more we realize grace; the more we know of God's love, and the elects of that love, the more shall we "groan" at all that is at present around us; but not as though these things brought the smallest

cloud over divine favor.

Paul is spoken of as “groaning” in spirit; and why? He realized the result of the “grace in which he stood.” Through the power of faith being made conscious of the blessings which are his, he “groans within himself” after them; but never as if there were the slightest doubt respecting his salvation. Delivered he is from all uncertainty as to the fullness, the freeness of divine favor towards him, and in the consciousness of this he “groans within himself, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body.”

The end of chapter 7 describes quite another sort of groaning, though, as before remarked, the two are often confounded together! because as sin is still dwelling in us—in our flesh, those who are not really established in grace do not discern the difference between them.

The whole chapter is full of what people call experience; not of that which is (properly speaking) Christian experience, but of the thoughts of the mind within and about itself. The state described is that of a person quickened indeed, but whose whole set of reasonings centers in himself: I could not venture to say how many times he says “I” and “me;” the whole chapter is full of it.

Observe the difference of expression in verse 14: “We know that the law is spiritual;” all Christians know that. But then does he say, “We know that we are carnal, sold under sin?” No; “I am carnal, sold under sin!” He turns back immediately to self and to the judgment which, being quickened, he had formed of himself by his own. experience as under the law, and begins to reason about what he is before God, and not about what God is towards him, and the consequence is that he exclaims, “O, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

So, it is with us; directly we begin to reason about ourselves we can only say, “O wretched man that I am!” What shall I do? I hate sin, I wish to please God, I confess that the law is good; but the more that I see it is so the worse it is for me, the more miserable I am.

Is there a word of grace in all this? No, not a word. When he brings in Christ at the close, then he is able to thank God: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

This chapter is full of a great deal of truth, in the experience of the individual mentioned, but it is truth stopping short of grace, of the simple fact that whatever be his state, let him be as bad as he may, “God is Love,” and only Love towards him. Instead of looking at God, it is all “I, I, I” In verse 15 six times over does he speak of himself, his own thoughts; and though sonic of these were spiritual, yet it is, “What I hate, that do I;” “When I would do good, evil is present with me.”

All this may be very profitable experience to bring us to the conviction of our utter hopelessness in ourselves; still, let us put it in its right place, and remember that it is not, properly speaking, Christian experience, but that it only describes the feelings of a soul that has not yet fully and experimentally known the simple fact, that “when we were without strength in due time Christ died for the ungodly;” or else that of one who through the workings of the flesh has slipped back to looking at himself and at what he is, instead of looking at God, at grace.

Faith produces many effects in our hearts always suitable to the object at which it looks. If, for instance, faith looks at the law, it sees its spirituality far more clearly than nature can; and then seeing the flesh, too, in its real vileness, if it looks no further, but judges of itself according to this spirituality of the law, the effect must be to bring us under condemnation of it (I mean of course as

to our feeling), under the consciousness of guilt and weakness. We shall hate and seek to separate from evil; but that will be all; it will leave us crying out, "O wretched that I am!" With increased light there will only be increased misery.

But if faith looks at God as He has revealed Himself in grace, it judges accordingly. It never then reasons upon the fruit produced; it rests in the revelation God has given of Himself—grace. The fruits of grace are to be looked for, of course; for if there be life in us, the "fruit of the Spirit" will be manifested. The saint, for instance, knows that "peace" has been "made through the blood of the cross." The effect is that love flows forth; he feels that he is called unto blessing, and therefore has his feet "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; drinking into his own soul the love of God, he becomes as a river of love flowing forth to others" (John 8:38). But though these fruits are produced, faith never reasons on its own fruits; it can alone rest in the revelation God has given of Himself as the God of grace." This is its own and only proper sphere.

The natural heart ever reasons about itself, and in a Christian, it is always judging by fruits. This must necessarily bring disquiet, instead of peace. In itself it can see nothing but sin; and as to any fruit I have even been enabled to bear, this is so mixed with imperfection that it can only be a subject for judgment (though it be the Father's judgment). It cannot give me peace; that can only be found in what Jesus has wrought, in "the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

What, then, is the position in chapter 7? First of all, the apostle establishes the great principle that the believer is "dead to the law." Then he describes the workings of a quickened soul, which, knowing that the "law is spiritual," still feels "under the law," and is therefore compelled to exclaim, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Who is he thinking of in all this? Himself. Now, dear friends, let me ask you, "Am I, or is my state, the object of faith?" No, surely not! Faith never makes what is in my heart its object, but God's revelation of Himself in grace. If we stop half way, and see nothing but the law, it will just discover to us our condemnation, and prove us to be "without strength." If God allows us to know enough of the law and of the experience described in this chapter to show us what is our true state, that is just where grace meets us.

It is not that the conflict here spoken of will not continue. Grace could not be known at all where conflict is not known; the unconverted only are without it. But that which will not continue when grace is fully known is that bitterness of spirit in which, while the conflict is going on, the person judges of himself, seeing the law to be "spiritual," but himself "carnal, sold under sin." The love of God is not realized as his own, and therefore this causes him to cry out, "O wretched man that I am!"

It is quite clear that while there is this experience felt, there is not simple faith in God's grace — there is not a clear view of what God is towards me in Christ; for when the soul apprehends that—when the faculties of the new man are exercised on their proper object, there is perfect rest. And though there is still conflict, yet the soul is at peace — "the battle is not ours, but the Lord's."

But how am I to know what is God's mind towards me? Is it by judging of it from what I find in myself? Surely not! Supposing that I even found good in myself, if I expected God to look at me on that account, would that be grace? There may be a measure of truth in this kind of reasoning, for if there be life in my soul, fruit will be apparent; but that is not to give me peace any more than the

evil that is in me is to hinder my having peace. That, too, is true reasoning, where the apostle says “the law is spiritual, but I am carnal: O wretched man that I am!” but there is nothing of grace in it.

But does the certainty of grace take us out of all trouble? No; I am not at all denying the fact that there is, and while we are in a sinful body that there ever must be, conflict going on between the flesh and the spirit. But then it is a very different thing to have this conflict going on in the conscious certainty that God is for me, because I am “under grace,” to having it in the fear that He is against me, because I am “under law.”

If I see evil in myself (and this I always shall whilst here, in the root, even if it be not manifested in its fruit), and if I think that God will be against me because of it, I shall have no strength for conflict, but be utterly cast down—groaning as to my acceptance. But if certain that God is for me, the consciousness of this will give me courage and victory, nay, even enable me to say, “Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” In the confidence of the love and grace of God, I can ask Him to search out all my evil, what I otherwise dare not do, lest it should overwhelm me with despair. God is my friend—for me, against my own evil.

The apostle speaks (chap. 8) of the “carnal mind” being “enmity against God;” but then God, in the gift of Jesus, has brought out this blessed truth, that when man was at enmity against God, God was love towards man—our enmity was met by His love. The triumph of grace is seen in this, that when man’s enmity had cast out Jesus from the earth, God’s love brought in salvation by that very act—came in to atone for the sin of those who had rejected Him. In the view of the fullest development of man’s sin, faith sees the fullest manifestation of God’s grace. Where does faith see the greatest depth of man’s sin and hatred of God? IN THE CROSS; and at the same glance it sees the greatest extent of God’s triumphant love and mercy to man. The spear of the centurion, which pierced the side of Jesus, only brought out that which spoke of love and mercy.

The apostle then goes on to show that those once at enmity with God are now become His heirs, and that the knowledge of this is founded on the knowledge of grace: “Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again,” and so forth. Grace first makes us children of God, and then gives us the knowledge of it, and that we are heirs of God.

But what is the extent of this grace towards us? It has given us the same portion that the Lord Jesus has? We are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. It is not only certain that grace has visited us, has found us when we were “in our sins,” but it is also certain that it has set us where Christ is, that we are identified with the Lord Jesus in all but His essential glory as God. The soul is placed thus in the consciousness of God’s perfect love, and therefore, as it is said in chapter 5, “we joy in God.”

I have got away from grace if I have the slightest doubt or hesitation about God’s love. I shall then be saying, “I am unhappy, because I am not what I should like to be.” But, dear friends, that is not the question; the real question is, whether God is what we should like Him to be, whether Jesus is all we could wish. If the consciousness of what we are, of what we find in ourselves, has any other effect than, while it humbles us, to increase our adoration of what God is, we are off the ground of pure grace. The immediate effect of such consciousness should be to make our hearts reach out to God and to His grace as abounding over it all.

But while grace thus gives us perfect peace in our souls, it does not save us from sorrow. Even as the Lord Jesus so perfectly entered into the sorrow and groaning around Him when here, and was therefore a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” so in his measure ought the saint to take up the sense of the weight of evil that is in the world, and thus become a man of sorrows also. Just as we abide in grace shall we have in proportion a sense of the weight of evil that is all around—and groan in sympathy with a groaning and travailing creation—and not only so, but being ourselves in the body, we shall “groan” likewise “within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body.”

But is there any uncertainty as to our salvation in this, “groaning”? No, quite the contrary—it is the very certainty “all things are ours” which makes us “groan.” Having the certainty and foretaste of glory, everything here is made the more painful by contrast. That which the saint is entitled to—is so very different from all that is actually around him, that the more he knows of the joy of dwelling in the presence of God, the larger understanding he has of God’s love and grace; the more he realizes the blessedness of his portion in that glory to which he is predestinated, the more will he “groan!”

How different this from the groaning of an uneasy conscience! Let us not mistake, dear friends; let us not confound the two—this “groaning” of one perfectly free from the sense of condemnation described in chapter 8, and groaning of conscience, the “O wretched man that I am!” of chapter 7.

Carelessness of walk, and through it our losing the sense of grace, may indeed bring back again him who has once consciously stood in the power of redemption into the latter state of soul; but this is not, as before remarked, true “Christian experience.” When the heart is made full with the rich blessings of Christ, it will not turn back to gnaw upon itself.

It is our privilege as saints to know that “there is now no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus” —that “the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death.” But we must not stop simply here—there must be the going on to know what we are as “sons of God,” “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ,” the Spirit bearing witness to us of it. God hath “established us in Christ,” “hath anointed us,” and “given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” Having thus the fullest knowledge that God has thought about us in love, and predestinated us to be conformed to the image of Jesus, and to share His glory, understanding what His love is now about in His dealings with us, and not being yet in the glory but still in the body, and in the midst of evil and “groaning” all around, we shall therefore “groan.” “Ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” The very reason of our “groaning” is because of our “having the first-fruits of the Spirit” —not at all because of a bad conscience—it is the Spirit of Christ groaning in us.

And then this “groaning” is always accompanied by confidence in God. As with Jesus, when “groaning in Spirit and troubled” at the grave of Lazarus, He said, “I know that thou hearest me always.” So is it given to the saint to have the like confidence. (See 1 John 5:14, 15) Nor should this confidence even fail when we “know not what to pray for as we ought,” for it is added, “but we know that all things work together for our good.” I may see evil in myself, in another saint, in the church, and seek to pray about it, but yet not have sufficient intelligence to know what would remedy it—the Spirit will “help my infirmity,” and “groan within me.” God does not regard my

ignorance, but answers according to “the mind of the Spirit,” who always “maketh intercession for the saints according to God.”

I ought to be so confident of God’s directing “all things” as to be able to say, “I am certain all shall work together for good. Is a soul in this state, come what may, trouble, sorrow, disappointment, grief, whatever it be—all is peace, for it is resting upon God, and not (as in chap. 7) looking at itself.

Our very griefs then flow from the knowledge of God’s immense love, and from the consciousness of all that belongs to us in Christ. Jesus fully knew, as none other, what the presence of God was—what the enjoyment of His favor, and “groaned,” because, coming from the presence of God, He found man out of it. The life which I now have identifies me, not with responsibility as “under the law,” but with Christ who has borne the judgment of a broken law for me. Instead of being wretched and miserable, because looking at myself as under law, I enjoy the consciousness of redemption, rest in grace, and “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” But the moment we get a glimpse of the glory of Christ as ours, this world becomes to us a scene of misery and bondage.

This “groaning” on account of evil always associates itself with love. If, for instance, I see a saint sin, it leads me at once to the love and grace he is sinning against. It is the consciousness of divine favor which I have towards that saint that makes me anxious about him; and while I grieve at his sin, I have joy in God in the midst of my sorrow.

Well, beloved friends, if these things be so—if this be the place in which grace sets us, let me ask, “Is it so with you?” If God be pure love—nothing else than love to us—if there be no mixed feeling in Him, then if you have not full joy, if there is any hesitation in your souls as to your standing before Him—you cannot be simply resting in His grace.

Is there distrust and distress in your minds? See if it be not because you are still saying, “I,” “I,” and losing sight of God’s grace.

You may indeed have faith, but you want simplicity of heart in looking at God’s grace.

It is better to be thinking of what God is than of what we are. This looking at ourselves at the bottom is really pride, a want of the thorough consciousness that we are good for nothing. Till we see this we never look quite away from self to God. Sometimes perhaps the looking at our evil may be a partial instrument in teaching us it, but still even that is not all that is needed. In looking to Christ, it is our privilege to forget ourselves. True humility does not so much consist in thinking badly of ourselves, as in not thinking of ourselves at all. I am too bad to be worth thinking about; what I want is to forget myself and to look at God, who is indeed worth all my thoughts. Is there need of being humbled about ourselves? We may be quite sure that will do it.

Beloved, if we can say (as in chap. 7) that “in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing,” we have thought quite long enough about ourselves; let us then think about Him who thought about us with “thoughts of good and not of evil” long before we had thought of ourselves at all. Let us see what His thoughts of grace about us are, and take up the words of faith: “If God be for us, who can he against us?”

The Last Words of David

There is a remarkable contrast between the two songs in these chapters—the song of David after he had done with all his enemies, that is after his trials by Saul, and the song of David after he had done with himself—here brought together by the Spirit of God.

At the end of his trials, when looking back at his enemies, he sings of joy and triumph—all is exultation. After his experience of the blessing, it is, “Although my house be not so with God.” The end of all the sorrow and trial with Saul is rejoicing, exultation, and strength. “The waves of death had compassed him, the floods of ungodly men made him afraid, the sorrows of hell compassed him about, and the snares of death prevented him;” yet the result of all he thus went through, in deep and bitter exercise of soul, is triumph, thanksgiving, and praise, in the first instance, when he recounts God’s deliverance; while in the second, the result of the place of honor, blessing and triumph, is deep and bitter sorrow—the confession, “My, house is not so with God!” Not that he was without something to sustain his heart under it all; for he adds, “Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” For this he waited until the “morning without clouds;” but the end of all his blessing here is, “My house is not so with God.”

This contrast makes trouble precious, and is a check to any desire to get out of it.

So practically is it with us. We need to guard against the effects of success. The pressure of circumstances which keep me down, produces nothing but joy and praise, in the experience of God’s goodness; the effect of circumstances which lift me up, is sorrow. How often has a saint, when in trial and conscious weakness, cast therein upon the Lord, cried unto Him, and as a faithful servant been sustained—had blessing and acquired influence, godly influence too; but how often, satisfied with the blessing and the influence thus acquired, and losing the sense of his weakness, has he stopped suddenly short in his course, been arrested in the point of influence obtained, and become comparatively useless in the church of God. This should lead us to desire conformity in suffering to Jesus. The path of grace is, like Him, to be getting on nearer and nearer to the Father, but to be getting nothing here.

There are three things brought before us in these chapters; one of them intended to give us solemn warning—First, the result of all David’s trials at the hand of Saul.

Then, when set upon the throne, the consequence of his being surrounded with all the earthly blessings.

And, thirdly; the joy at the end, of “the sweet Psalmist of Israel,” in anticipation of the “morning without clouds.”

Whilst the heart receives the warning against the effect of success, or anything in present blessing, are we looking out for, and resting on the full, distinct and perfect blessing, which will be in that day when the Lord Jesus comes!

We see here the way in which the Spirit of Christ gathers up the history of Israel into Himself as a center, and makes the harp of David that on which it should be played. There is perhaps nothing of deeper interest, than to see how God takes up the history of David in the Psalms, writing as it were upon the tablets of David's heart the history of the Lord Jesus.

In the first song, there is a remarkable allusion to the whole history of Israel—to dealings of God with them, of which David felt the moral power in himself. We have a wonderful variety of circumstances backward, forward, and around, gathering up all the history of David, and the triumphs of David; unfolding the sympathies of Christ with the heart of David in sorrow, until he is made the head of the heathen, his own people being blessed under him.

In chapter 23, we get "the last words of David." And here we learn where his eye and heart rested, amidst consciousness of his own failure, and the failure of his house. He was looking for the "morning without clouds" —for the one who should rule over men in the fear of the Lord—who should build God's house, and in whom the glory should be manifested. These men of Belial too, there must come one in the sternness of judgment to set them aside—then "they should all of them be as thorns thrust away." There is the deep consciousness of all the ruin, but the effect of the coming morning shining into it. The effect of the coming of the Son of David on David's heart, and the failure of everything around, leading him to reach forward in spirit to the full triumph of that day when all should be full of blessing.

We thus, in the two chapters, have the unfolding of the sympathies of Christ with the heart of David, gathering up all the sorrows of the history of Israel; and also, the heart of David resting in the consciousness of what the "morning without clouds" would be. We should seek so to get the power of the Spirit in the sympathies of Christ, and at the same time to reach out to the hope which the Spirit of God sets before us, as by the way to be thrown upon the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

Let us now trace a little what David was, up to the time of this success.

It is ever just the very thing that seems hopeless in the eyes of man, which is taken up of God. See Sarah—Rebekah—Zacharias and Elisabeth—so too here with David. In him, there was everything contrary to the thoughts of the flesh. Contrast him with Saul. Saul was the comeliest man in Israel, taller than them all by the head, "from the shoulders and upwards he was higher than any of the people," —strength in the flesh. But all this is passed by, and it is the "lad keeping the sheep" that is taken up! Saul is unfaithful—rejected from being king, and then God sets His eye upon David.

Samuel, by the Spirit of prophecy (1 Sam. 16), goes down to Bethlehem, to select from among the sons of Jesse one who should be king in the room of Saul. He causes them to pass before him. Seven come in. Samuel asks, "Is there not another?" Yes, a lad keeping the sheep. "Send and fetch him." David comes, and is designated by the Spirit of prophecy, as the anointed of the Lord. All that is great in Jesse's eyes is suffered to pass unnoticed; the seven were personable men, but it is the "lad keeping the sheep," the eighth, the weak one, that is preferred and taken up.

From that time the Spirit of God departs from Saul, and an evil spirit falls upon him. David is brought into his company as one who could play upon the harp. Here we find him of no importance; so that afterward, when he had killed the giant Goliath, on Saul's inquiring of Abner "whose son is this youth?" Abner says, I cannot tell. His brethren too ask him "with whom he has

left the few sheep in the wilderness?”

But what traits do we find in David? Deep consciousness of having God's strength, and forgetfulness of self in all the difficulties which come in the way of duty. He keeps his father's sheep—a lion and a bear come to take a lamb of the flock—it is his business to guard the sheep, and he goes at once against the lion and the bear and slays them. These energetic works are done with simple reference to duty, therefore the difficulties are as nothing.

Here we see faith in operation. Faith recognizes God and duty to God, and then the thing is a matter of course. Put a child to raise up a stone, and it is all effort; put a strong man, and it is easily accomplished. Faith realizes the strength of God without any reckoning on self, so does that which comes in the way, and thinks nothing about it.

David here in the path of duty gathers up the consciousness of having God's strength with him, to be used in after trial. The secret of strength, thus learned in retirement, prepares him for that which the Lord has subsequently for him to do.

Blessing still followed the career of Saul; we read, “whithersoever he turned himself he vexed his enemies.” Though evil, seeking his own, and rejected from being king, there is blessing to Israel through him. But the Lord in secret had set his eye on David.

The Philistines are gathered together to battle against Israel (chap. 17); David goes up to the camp, sent by his father, with provisions for his brethren, where he hears Goliath challenging Israel. Having learned in the simplicity of the path of duty with the God of Israel, when no eye was upon him, that He was a faithful God, now that he comes to see the people of God, and Goliath against them, he is astonished at finding them all afraid, and asks, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” Why he is an uncircumcised Philistine, and he is defying the armies of the living God! Bad motives are imputed to him by his brother for coming to the camp; but there is in him that simplicity of heart in recognizing God, that the path of duty is straight forward, and in power. Whether as a shepherd, whose business it was to guard the sheep—if the lion came, he took him by the beard and slew him, or the bear in like manner, he slew it, without display and without boast—they were simply matters of duty, and are untold until there is a needed occasion for mentioning them; or, if afterward, it be this uncircumcised Philistine, it is the same thing— “he shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God!”

Onwards he moves in the energy of faith—he looks not to Israel for help—he rejects the proffered armor of Saul—he thinks not of the spear like a weaver's beam—is this ‘uncircumcised Philistine to defy the God of Israel? that is the question; and he says, “This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hands!” His heart is on Israel—he takes up the relationship of God with Israel. Although the exercise of faith depends on a single individual, “the battle is the Lord's,” he identifies the glory of God with Israel, and then the “uncircumcised Philistine” can have no power at all. With a sling and a stone from the brook, he destroys the Philistine, and cuts off his head with his own sword! as it is said of Jesus, that He destroyed through death him that had the power of death, by the very weapon of him who had the power.

His heart rested on the faithfulness of the God of saints. This was the secret of his strength, learned by himself, to be acted upon in any circumstance. And this is always the character of faith.

Faith when acting, brings in God—makes God everything, circumstances nothing. Whether it be the lion and the bear, or the uncircumcised Philistine, it is the same thing. The secret of God's strength learned when alone, is that by which faith looks upon every circumstance as the same, making God the great circumstance that governs all else.

After this they begin to sing, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands;" and then David becomes the object of Saul's hatred— "Saul eyed David from that day and forward."

Subsequently, we find in the character of David, when in the midst of mighty enemies, the consciousness of weakness and infirmity, and the absence of all thought of avenging himself against Saul. He never takes a single step without consulting God, save in one instance, and then he gets chastened for it. Everything is against him, he is conscious of being in the midst of subtle enemies, and of conflicting with a power which he cannot set aside—Saul seeks his life (18:10, 11), but he has no right to set aside the power of Saul. The enemy cannot be got rid of, and therefore he is forced to go to the Lord for guidance, as to every step he takes.

So is it with the saints. And this is just what they need now—the consciousness of conflicting with a power which they cannot set aside; and the sense of their, own utter weakness, so as to be forced into direct reference to God in every circumstance—to be thrown into dependence upon Him for every step.

At last Saul drives him fairly away; full hostility is manifested, and he becomes an outcast. All this is necessary for—the exercise of his faith, and he gets practiced thereby in waiting on the Lord—"In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God."

He escapes to the cave of Adullam (chap. 22)—is separate from all that God is about to judge, and gathers together his mighty men.

The beginning of this chapter opens with a most miserable scene— "Every one in distress, and every one in debt, and every one that is discontented," gathering themselves unto David in the cave of Adullam; but it is there with these outcasts that we find God's prophet, God's priest, and God's king—all that God really owned was there.

Let us follow David in his course. Through all the scene we find him in constant dependence on God's strength, not avenging himself, but ever gracious to Saul when in his power. (See chapters 24 and 26) Such is his constant dependence on the strength of God, that, no matter what the consciousness of weakness, however reproach may break his heart, the moment he is in the power of ungodliness, he confesses unworthiness of self, but still can take the place of superiority. Just as Jacob, recounting all the misery of the days of the years of his pilgrimage, and yet blessing Pharaoh there. This poor, weak man, because identified with God, could stand in conscious superiority in the presence of the power and glory of the world, as faith always does; and thus, in the very confession of weakness, take the place of the better—"the less is blessed of the better."

David had led a miserable, sorrowful life, because of Saul; but when Abishai says, "God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand, this (lay," he answers, "The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed." Again, when pleading with Saul, "The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee, but mine hand shall not be upon thee" — "the Lord deliver me out of thine hand." So was it with the Lord Jesus, "when He was reviled, He

reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed His cause to Him that judgeth righteously.”

And this is what the church is called upon to do amidst enemies whom it cannot set aside. If seeking God’s glory, we shall not want to justify ourselves; there may be entreaty— “being defamed, we entreat” —but not haughty self-vindication. Peter says, “If when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.” This is a strange principle for anything but faith. But, as a saint, I cannot, whilst the usurper is in power, take my portion (just as David could not touch the Lord’s anointed). There is “a morning without clouds “coming, when the true King will be set up—then I shall have it; now it is doing well, suffering for it, and taking it patiently, just what the Lord Jesus did, but with this comfort—the consciousness that “this is acceptable with God.”

At last (chap. 28) Saul is in the sad, terrible condition that the Lord has departed from him. The day comes when he has to sink down with the consciousness of not having the answer of the Lord, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. All depart from him, and are with the suffering man who had nothing here.

Then Saul falls, Jonathan falls, and David takes the kingdom. And now we come to a sad picture; we see a different line of conduct in David. How fearful!

What marks his confidence as king in his own house? He trusts in his own power. “I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.” He is going to build the temple when he had no word from the Lord to do it. The thing itself is not bad which he purposes, but he has not the perception of the mind of the Lord about it, because he has not consulted, he has not waited upon Him. We find in Him now the want of that direct reference to the Lord which had so marked his previous course; he trusts in his own strength, lives in self-indulgence, and then falls into gross sin.

Self-will having come in, self-indulgence follows; then there is the breaking out of positive sin in the murder of Uriah and adultery with Bathsheba, and afterward distrust of the Lord in the numbering of the people!

The end of all this is the word of the Lord by the prophet, that the sword should never depart from his house. David is chastened, repentance given, and the sin put away; but the sword departs not from his house.

In this latter part of the history of David we see the consequence of blessing, the result of faith, when used in the flesh and for himself. It is not that he was like Saul, beginning in the flesh, ending in the flesh, and not blest at all. It is a lovely picture of faith and humble, gracious walk, up to the time of his being king in his own house. The Lord had said, “I have found a man after mine own heart” (not that his conduct was so, but “a man after mine own heart”). He was a godly man with grace shining in a lovely way, and in the end there is rich blessing.

But we see thy godly man blessed, and the results of his fidelity too much for the faith that brought him there! Grace shines through, and there is lovely humbleness afterward, most precious grace; but at the same time, we have in his history solemn warning as to the result in blessing, of faith being too strong for the faith through which it came.

The only safety for us is in the word in Philippians— “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus;” the going down, down, down, always humbling oneself. David was blessed as much when king, whilst humble, as when an outcast he was hunted by Saul like a partridge in the mountains.

In these “last words of David,” as we have seen, there is deep consciousness of the failure and ruin— “My house is not so with God.” Where did the heart of David find rest amidst it all? In this, “Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although He make it not to grow.”

Where does the church find its comfort, resource, and joy upon the perception of ruin—when, in looking upon its present state, it has to say, “not so with God”? And is there a single heart, having the Spirit of Christ in it, that does not feel thus, as not satisfied with any honor now, resting upon the house of Christ? Is there one not bowed down at the condition of Christ’s house, looked at in what way you please? Is it such as can give joy and gladness, or has not one to say— “not so with God”?

Well, we should have sorrow and humiliation at this, though all turns to practical comfort as to the end; for David’s house shall yet be glorified in the person of Christ, in the midst of the nation now “scattered and peeled;” and we shall be united with Him in His glory, as the head of His body, the church. There is a “covenant, ordered in all things, and sure,” in which we stand—an everlasting covenant—a covenant established before the foundation of the world—and this we need to sustain our souls.

But is it the effect of having the assurance of that covenant to make us content with the ruin, satisfied with the want of honor now given to Christ’s house? When David felt all the ruin of his own house, although he could still say, “I have a covenant ordered in all things and sure,” could he be content and happy? Impossible! It was David feeling about David’s house. So, should it be with us. If we have the Spirit of Christ, there will be grief and sorrow of heart, because the house is not so with God; we shall say, after all the manifestation of Christ’s honor and glory in the day of His appearing is revealed to us as an assured thing, what I have to seek is His glory now; so will there be sorrow of heart at His present dishonor.

It is a most terrible thing to say the covenant makes all things secure for me forever, and therefore I don’t care for Christ’s glory now; it is just saying Christ’s glory may go for nothing. This is practically as much Antinomianism in the church, as the making the grace of God a cloak for licentiousness is Antinomianism in an individual, though not so tangible.

Still, amidst all the ruin around us, it is a comfort to know that that which is before us is blessing. We need for the sustainment of our souls, what is presented to us as our hope, the coming of the Lord. This it is which really brightens up our hearts; it is most important for us practically to have that upon which our hearts can rest as a sphere and scene of blessing amidst our present trial. Where will you find the manifestation of happy affection in an individual? It will be in the one who can turn to a home where those happy affections are in exercise; and so with us, as Christians, it is most important that we should have a full, unhindered sphere where our affections may be called forth, and all our association be pure and happy. Where is there the man who, being always occupied in cleaning that which is dirty, does not get a little dirty himself. I want to have my soul

sometimes undividedly occupied with what is good; it must center in God. But He has not shut Himself up! Being love, He has come as it were out of Himself, and flowed forth in the communication of love. We should seek to have our associations in that sphere where God becomes the center of communicated blessing.

It is when God shall have put all things under the Lord Jesus Christ, as the one that is just, ruling in the fear of the Lord—when the power of evil shall be set aside, the men of Belial be all of them as thorns thrust away at the revelation of Jesus Christ—that the thoughts of the Lord's mind will be exhibited.

Then, too, man is set as the head and center of all this blessing, man as the executor—the Lord Jesus Christ. Man has failed in every dispensation of blessing from the hand of God—left to himself after he has seen the glory, will fail; but God's heart rests on the manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ—the unfailing Man, as the center of all the blessing. It is when He—the great Melchizedek Priest—comes down out of heaven from God, that the fullness of the blessing will shine forth. There is that which is from heaven now, but it is the life which makes us cry, as conscious of all the disorder here—not so with God! Then there will be an ordered state of blessing in this world—a time when the order of blessing, and the communicator of blessing, comes down from God. This is the great character of the day—blessing according to God's mind coming down from heaven in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Everything takes its place then in reference to its relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. If the church is the bride of Christ, the church takes its place in its proper relationship to Him as such.

Israel the same. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God; and he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain." "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is the name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:5-25). But if He shall reign, we shall reign with Him, as the wife, associated in His glory. Israel will be blessed under Him as their King; but still He is "the head of His body, the church," — "the fullness of Him that filleth all in all."

So too the Gentiles. Israel will then be the center of the blessing on earth, yet "in Him shall the Gentiles trust." "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign to the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and His rest shall be glorious." (Isa. 11:10) "All nations shall call Him blessed." (Ps. 72:17)

And further: "All things were created by Him and for Him" As a "faithful Creator," this too is a sphere of blessing which He is to reconcile to Himself—in which His power is to be manifested. Dominion is already put into His hands — "all power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth:" but the power is not as yet applied. "We see not yet all things put under Him."

It is not for us to be looking for blessing here, apart from the future manifestation of Him in whom the blessing comes in the "morning without clouds." Until the power of evil is set aside, the effect of the energy of the Spirit is to make us groan and suffer in proportion to it. Our groaning, as saints, should ever be that of spirit, because of holiness of mind, as amidst the evil, and not on account of

our own evil. So was it with Jesus: He groaned because of holy affections, and not because of unholy. Until the power of evil is set aside, the greater the energy of the Spirit, the more is the individual in whom it is manifested exposed to the fury of Satan.

These “men of Belial,” too—the saint has to do with them. The soft hand of grace cannot touch them. They “shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands; but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.” Tares have sprung up among the wheat. (Matt. 13) Grace cannot take the tares out of the field; grace cannot turn the tares into wheat! They must be “let alone until the harvest.” Then are they to be “gathered together in bundles to be burned.”

There was no reckoning in David of setting the house in order again when it had failed. He was looking for the “morning without clouds,” when there would be full blessing. So should it be with us. Take Israel, the church, David, whatever it may be, all has failed; the “house is not so with God.” Man has failed, must fail. Paul had to say, “No man stood with me; all men forsook me: Notwithstanding—the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me.” God must, be the center of our blessing. We feel that we need something; the bright energy of faith realizes God. Not the increased outpouring of the Spirit because of our faithfulness, but God’s faithfulness in spite of our failure. “If we believe not, He remaineth faithful: He cannot deny Himself.” But it is a good thing for us not only to be able to say, “God is faithful,” but to have our affections unfolded and exercised in a sphere where all is perfect blessing; to have them engaged with those things which satisfy His own heart. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:9-10). That which the Holy Spirit reveals unto us is the display and character of the glory in heaven and earth, which the Lord Jesus Christ will be the center and displayer of by and by, when He comes again. This is a sphere of joy, comfort, and rest for us. Affections raised by the Spirit of God never can get their rest until they find it where His own heart rests.

Here is their center, their sphere, and their rest—the glory of Jesus.

The practical effect of all this upon our hearts and conscience is to throw us into the first part of the history of David. Be it in what it may, if we are faithful in singleness of eye in the camp of Saul we shall soon find ourselves in the cave of Adullam, taking as the portion of our souls’ fellowship in Christ’s sufferings. It is there we shall have all the unfoldings of those internal affections, those secret affections of heart, which were developed in David when humble. It was when David was a partaker beforehand of the sufferings and afflictions of Christ in the cave of Adullam, hunted as a partridge upon the mountains, that he was compassed about with songs of deliverance.

The Lord give us singleness of eye, and in the power of his resurrection, to have fellowship with His sufferings.

I Will Guide Thee With Mine Eye

There are three special characters of blessing mentioned in the Psalms.

First, that which we get at the very opening of them: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of Jehovah, and in His law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water," and so forth. (Psa. 1) It is here a contrast between the ungodly and Christ, the righteous Man.

In Psalm 119 we go a little farther. This psalm speaks, of having wandered, and of being restored (vss. 67, 71, 176). It is here, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way; who walk in the law of Jehovah." It speaks of one who has the Word, delights in it, looks to it, and seeks to be guided by it; still it is not so absolute.

In the psalm before us (Psa. 32), we get the blessedness of, and God's dealings with, the sinner whose transgressions are removed. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered [not who has not transgressed, who has not sinned]. Blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (that is, the restored soul).

It is important to notice the work of the Spirit of God, in the process through which the soul is going here (as it says, "Thy hand was heavy upon me"), God's dealings with the soul that does not submit itself entirely in bringing it down into full subjection and confession. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." (vss. 2-5) This is always true, if the Lord's hand is upon a man, until he recognizes the evil before God; and then there is forgiveness of the iniquity.

It is very important that we should distinguish the government of God towards our souls in forgiveness.

Until there is confession of sin, and not merely of a sin, there is no forgiveness. We find David (Psa. 51), when he was confessing his sin, saying, "Behold, I was she pen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me," and so forth; not merely, I have done this particular evil; that he does (vss. 1-4); but he recognizes the root and principle of sin. When our hearts are brought to recognize God's hand, it is not merely—then a question of what particular sin, or of what particular iniquity, may need forgiveness; God has brought down the soul, through the working of His Spirit on it, to detect the principle of sin, and so there is confession of that, and not merely of a particular sin. There is then positive restoration of soul.

Now this is a much deeper thing in its practical consequences, and the Lord's dealings thereon, than we are apt to suppose. Freed from the bondage of things which hindered its intercourse with God, the soul learns to lean upon God, instead of upon those things which, so to speak, had taken

the place of God. "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." (vss. 6, 7) There is its confidence.

And then follows what more especially is the object of this paper: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." (vss. 8, 9)

Now we are often like the horse, or the mule, every one of us—and this because our souls have not been plowed up. When there is anything in which the will of man is at work, the Lord deals with us, as with the horse, or the mule, holding us in. When every part of the heart is in contact with Himself, He guides us with His "eye." "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light." (Luke 11:34-36) When there is anything wherein the eye is not single, so long as this is the case, there is not free intercourse in heart and affections with God; and the consequence is, our will not being subdued, we are not led simply of God.

When the heart is in a right state, the whole body is "full of light," and there is the quick perception of the will of God. He just teaches us by His "eye" all He wishes, and produces in us quickness of understanding in His fear. (Isa. 11:3) This is our portion, as having the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, "quickness of understanding in the fear of Jehovah," hearts without any object, save the will and glory of God. And that is just what Christ was: "Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." (Psa. 40:7, 8; Heb. 10:7) Where there is this, it may be bitter and painful as to the circumstances of the path, but there is in it the joy of obedience as obedience. There is always joy, and the consequence—God guiding us by His eye.

Before anything can be done, if we have not this certainty, before we enter upon any particular service, we should seek to get it, judging our own hearts as to what may be hindering. Suppose I set about doing a thing, and meet with difficulties, I shall begin to be uncertain as to whether it is God's mind or not, and hence there will be feebleness and discouragement. But, on the other hand, if acting in the intelligence of God's mind in communion, I shall be "more than conqueror," whatever may meet me by the way (Rom. 8:37). And note here, not only does the power of faith, in the path of faith, remove mountains; but the Lord deals morally, and will not let me find out His way, unless there be in me the spirit of obedience. What would it avail? unless indeed God should provide for His own dishonor! "If any man will do [wills to do] his will," says our Lord, "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." (John 7:17) This is precisely the obedience of faith. The heart must be in the condition of obedience, as Christ's was, "Lo, I come," and so forth. The apostle speaks to the Colossians of being "filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 1:9). Here it is quickness of understanding in the fear of the Lord, the condition of a man's own soul, though his spirit of mind will be necessarily shown in outward acts, when that will is set before him; as Paul goes on to say, "that

ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

Here then is the blessed, joyful state of being guided by God’s “eye.” “I have meat to eat,” says our Lord to the disciples (John 4), “that ye know not of” And what was that meat? “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.”

The Lord guides, or rather controls us in another way, by providential circumstances, so that we may not go wrong, even though we are those which have no understanding. And thankful we ought to be that He does so. But it is only as the horse or mule. Your wills being subject to mine, He says, “I will guide you with mine eye;” but if you are not subject, I must keep you in with “bit and bridle.” This is, evidently, a very different thing.

May our hearts be led to desire, to know, and to do God’s will. It will then be not so much a question of what that will is, but of knowing and doing God’s will. And then we shall have the certain and blessed knowledge of being guided by His “eye.” There is all this government of God with those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, unto whom the Lord. imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile-whose whole dependence is upon Him, and who feel they are sure to go wrong if not guided by Himself.

There is a guidance with knowledge, and there is also guidance without knowledge. The former is our blessed privilege; but it may be the latter is needed to humble us. In Christ there was everything exactly according to God. In a certain sense He had no character. When I look at Him, what do I see? A constant, never-failing life-manifestation of obedience. He goes up to Bethany just when He is to go up, regardless of the fears of the disciples; He abides two days still in the same place where He is, after he has heard that Lazarus is sick (John 11). He is nothing but to do all, to accomplish all, for the glory of God. One man is tender and soft; in another firmness and decision predominate. There is great diversity of character amongst men. You do not see that in Christ at all; there is no unevenness; every faculty in His humanity obeyed, and was the instrument of the impulse the divine will gave to it.

Divine life has to be guided in a vessel that has constantly to be kept down. Thus even for the apostles the command not to go into Bithynia (Acts 16:7) was not guidance by the Spirit of the highest sort. It was blessed guidance, yet not the highest character of guidance an apostle knew. It was more like the government of the horse or the mule, not so much the intelligence of God’s mind in communion.

A vast quantity of the guidance of the Spirit is just what we get in Colossians 1:9-11 to those in communion with God. There we find the individual to be “filled with the knowledge of his will.” The Holy Spirit guides into the knowledge of the divine will, and there is no occasion even to pray about it. If I have spiritual understanding about a given thing, it may be the result of a great deal of previous prayer, and not necessarily of the things having been prayed about at the time. One has often had to pray about a thing, because not in communion. I may have my mind exercised about that today, honestly, truly, graciously exercised, which, five years hence, it might be, I should not have a doubt about. When God is using us, if we have lost ourselves, He may put it into our hearts to go here, or to go there; then God is positively guiding us. But this assumes a person to be walking with God, and that diligently; it assumes death to self. If we are walking humbly, God will

guide us. I may be in a certain place, and there have one say to me, "Will you go to?" (naming some other place) Now, if I have not the mind of God, as to my going or otherwise, I shall have to pray for guidance; but this, of course, assumes that I am not walking in the knowledge of God's mind. I may have motives pulling me one way or the other, and clouding my spiritual judgment. The Lord says (John 11), when the disciples speak of the Jews having of late sought to stone Him, and ask, "Goest thou thither again?" "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." This is just an application of the simple fact, that, if walking in the night, I must be on the lookout for stones, lest I stumble over them. So, Paul prays for the Philippians, that their love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that they might approve things that are excellent [try things that differ]; that they might be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, without a single stumble all the way along.

Many speak of providence as a guide. Providence does sometimes control, but it never, properly speaking, guides us; it guides things. If I am going to a place to preach, and I find, when I get to the terminus, that the train has started, God has ordered things about me (and I may have to be thankful for the overruling); but it is not God's guiding me; for I, should really have gone, had the train not left: my will was to go. All we get of this guidance of providence is very blessed; but it is not guidance by the Spirit of God, not guidance by the "eye," but rather by the "bit" of God. Though providence overrules, it does not, properly speaking, guide.

The Spirit, Not of Fear, But of Power Such exhortations are never given unless there are circumstances to require it. They are intended to meet some tendency in the flesh, that we may guard against it in the Spirit. It is well to remember how the Lord deals with us, just as we are; how, in all His ways, He takes into account the circumstances we are in, and does not, like philosophy, take us into other circumstances

With regard to our cares and trials, Christ does not take us out of them: "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world." While He leaves us in the world, He leaves us liable to all that is incident to man; but, in the new nature, teaches us to lean on God. The thought with us often is, that (because we are Christians) we are to get away from trials; or else, if in them, we are not to feel them. This is not God's thought concerning us.

The theoretical Christian may be placid and calm; he has fine books and nice sayings; but, when he has something from God to, ruffle his placidity, you will find he is a Christian more conscious of the difficulties there are in the world, and of the difficulty of getting over such. The nearer a man walks with God through grace, the more tender he becomes as to the faults of others; the longer he lives as a saint, the more conscious of the faithfulness and tenderness of God, and of what it has been applied to in himself.

See the life of the Lord Jesus; take Gethsemane, what do we find? Never a cloud over His soul, uniform placidity. You never see Him off His center. He is always Himself. But take the Psalms, and do we find nothing within to break that placidity The Psalms bring out what was passing within. In the Gospels He is presented to man, as the testimony of the power of God with Him, in those very things that would have vexed man. He walked with God about them; and so we find Him in perfect peace, saying with calmness, "Whom seek ye?" — "I am He." How peaceful! How commanding! (for peace in the midst of difficulties does command). When by Himself, in an agony, He sweats as it were great drops of blood; it was not a placidity bemuse He had not heart-feeling within. He felt the full trial, in Spirit; but God was always with Him in the circumstances, and, therefore, He was uniformly calm before men.

We are not to expect never to be exercised, or troubled, or cast down, as though we were without feeling. "They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." He thoroughly felt it all. The iron entered His soul. "Reproach," He says, "hath broken my heart." But there is this difference between Christ, in suffering and affliction, and ourselves; with Him there was never an instant elapsed between the trial and communion with God. This is not the case with us. We have first to find out that we are weak, and cannot help ourselves; then we turn, and look to God.

Where was Paul when he said, "All men forsook me"? His confidence in God was not shaken; but, looking around him, by the time he got to the end of his ministry, his heart was broken because of the unfaithfulness. He saw the flood of evil coming in (chap. 3, 4) and the danger of Timothy's being left alone, looking at the evil, and feeling his own weakness; and so (lest Timothy should get into a spirit of fear), he says, "Stir up the gift that is in thee,... for God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou, therefore, ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God." If we have got the spirit of fear, this is not of God; for God has given us the spirit of power. He has met the whole power of the enemy in the weakness of men, in Christ, and Christ is now set down on the right hand of the majesty on high.

"Be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God." What! a partaker of afflictions? Yes. Of deliverance from the sense of them? No-a partaker of afflictions that may be felt as a man, but "according to the power of God!"

This is not in not feeling the pressure of sorrow and weakness. Paul had a "thorn in the flesh." (2 Cor. 12); and did he not feel it, think you? Ay, he felt it daily; and as "a messenger of Satan to buffet him" withal. And what did he say? "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities [in those things in which I am sensibly weak], that the power of Christ may rest upon me." The power of God coming in on our side does not lessen the feeling to us, but we "cast all our care upon him; for he careth for us." Not that at the very moment we refer it to God we shall get an answer. Daniel had to wait three full weeks for an answer from God; but from the first day that he set his heart to understand and to chasten, himself before his God, his words were heard (Dan. 10). With us the first thing often is to think about the thing, and begin to work in our own minds, before we go to God. There was none of this in Christ. "At that time, Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father," and so forth (Matt. 11). We weary ourselves in the greatness of our way.

"Be careful for nothing." (Phil. 4:6) That is easily said. But what? not be careful about the state of the church, or about the pressure of a family? and so forth. "Be careful for nothing." Whatever produces a care in us, produces God's care for us; therefore "be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." So, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Jesus Christ:" not your hearts keep the peace of God; but the peace that God Himself is in, His peace, the unmoved stability of all God's thoughts, keep your hearts.

Further, when not careful, the mind set free, and the peace of God keeping the heart, God sets the soul thinking on happy things. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest-just-pure-lovely-of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you." God is there the companion of the soul; not merely "the peace of God," but "the God of peace."

When the soul is cast upon God, the Lord is with the soul in the trial, and the mind is kept perfectly calm. The Spirit of love, the Spirit of Christ, is there; if thinking of myself, this is the spirit of selfishness.

Faith Furnished for the Evil Day

The very blessings of the church set us in a sort of conflict, that, without such blessings, we should not have. Thus, we are subject to more of failure and evil. A Jew might do many things that would be monstrous in a Christian, and find no defilement of conscience. The veil being rent, the light shines out, and the consequence is, that the light coming from the holiest cannot tolerate evil.

Blessed be God, we have power to meet the difficulties of our position; and this epistle brings out the provision which God has made for the saints.

The church is seated “in heavenly places in Christ” (chap. 2:6)—blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Chapter 1:3). So also are we said to contend with spiritual wickedness in heavenly places (vs. 12). We are carried into conflict in the very place of strength; for the nearer we are to God, the more we want strength to walk there.

Israel, when they had got into the land, found the consequences of sin desperate. What a terrible slaughter at Ai, for the sin of Achan! (Josh. 7) And again the consequences of neglecting to ask counsel of the Lord about the men of Gibeon went on for generations, even to Saul’s time (2 Sam. 6). In the land where God was, and took His place, the consequences of sin were proportionate.

By virtue of our privileges we get this conflict. Moreover, if you and I have more knowledge than many other Christians, there will be more dishonor and failure amongst us than amongst other Christians, unless we are walking according to the light.

“Be strong in the Lord” (vs. 10). Here is the place of strength—strength found only in Him. Whatever instrumentality He may be pleased to use, there is no object of faith but the Lord Himself. Whilst there is nothing more blessed than the ministry of the word, and also, if I have been instrumental in the conversion of a soul, through God’s blessing, that soul will cleave to me; and rightly so, it is of God, and God owns it (for if He breaks that which is of the flesh, He creates that which is of the Spirit: God gives it—it may be abused, yet God makes the link between the one blessed and the instrument); yet you cannot exercise faith in man, you cannot put your dependence on man. It is true, there is this link; but it is because the soul is brought to Christ. This alone is conversion. And here is the place of strength. There is no strength but in Christ. I have none, at any time, except as my soul is in secret communion with Him, and (through Him) with God the Father.

Now the direct power of Satan is towards this point, to keep our souls from living on Christ.

What we call duties, but what God calls “cares,” often separate from Christ. They fatigue and oppress the soul; and, if the saints do not cast all this on Christ, they unnerve themselves by things which distract the mind. The person says, “I do not enjoy Christ;” he knows not how it is, but thinks it is from the pressure of unavoidable care; whilst, in truth, it is the effect and result of having sought his resource elsewhere than in Christ. The soul has got distressed because it has not found Christ in the suffering, and this has thrown it toward something that is not Christ, something

that (to human sight) promised fair. Thus, it gets a taste for mere idle things. What we are led to by the Spirit is to be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” It is no good talking of cares—Satan is behind them all—it is no good talking of difficulties—Satan is behind the difficulties, thrusting them on to shake the power of the Word in us; and we may be quite sure of this that, if not in communion, Satan will have the advantage of us, because these cares, and so forth are not about Christ. I have all to do to, and for, Christ. He will make us feel our dependence, but it is never falsified.

Whilst thus oppressed with the turmoils of life, it is ever a truth, that we are not in the strength of Christ; for He is stronger than the shop or the family or any other care. It may be I am occupied with something I ought not to be; if I cannot do it “to the Lord,” I ought not to do it. It is quite certain that Christ’s strength does carry us through everything, no matter what the difficulties are: we shall feel them, we may groan under them; but when I can say with David, “It is God that girdeth me with strength” (Psa. 18), the enemy may come against me—“a bow of steel is broken by my arms.” The Lord made him triumph over all.

It is in difficulties that we learn this strength. Hence in little things the believer is apt to forget that our whole dependence is to be “strong in the Lord;” that is, not being taken out of the place of conscious weakness. Paul says, “I was with you in weakness,” and so forth (1 Cor. 2:3). So again: “Without were fightings, within were fears” (2 Cor. 7:5). It is not that the saint will be able to say, “I am strong,” when put into difficulties: these make us lean on Christ, when in them, and strength is always there—“strength made perfect in weakness” (a consciousness of weakness). The whole truth of it is in the spirit of dependence, whether we see bright light or not. Paul said, “I glory in mine infirmities.” Why? Because they made him lean on Christ. Faith in exercise is strengthened, and Christ giveth light to him that wakes up: “Unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness.” The reason why a saint who has had a great deal of joy often gets into failure is because it has taken him away from the present consciousness of dependence; the very goodness of the Lord has made him enjoy himself. There is always a tendency for the flesh to slip in.

After showing the place of the Christian’s strength, the apostle says, “Put on the whole armor of God” (vs. 11). The great thing is, that it is God’s armor. There is no standing against Satan without this. What is not of God fails. If ever so skillful in argument, and able to confute an opposer with the truth, I have nevertheless done him no good, and myself much harm, because I was acting in the flesh: Satan was working on me, and not God.

Whenever it is God’s armor, it must be by faith, and in secret communion with God. There is the departure from all strength when we lose this; not anything we know will be of use—the Word of God even; for it is the “sword of the Spirit,” and it is shut up. Strength is always the effect of having to do with God in the spirit of dependence. In the exercise of this dependence I may have such a blessed sense of His power that I may triumph over all; but, whether in trial or in triumph, I shall be strong in a sense of dependence. If Moses’ hands were not upheld, Amalek prevailed. (Ex. 17) One who looked on might have been astonished at seeing Amalek prevail at certain times, and would be calculating about the array (the advantages or disadvantages of the array) in which Israel were set; but the secret was, when Amalek prevailed, Moses’ hands were hanging down. It was not because Joshua was not in the blessed place of doing God’s work, but because the act of dependence on God was stayed. If my mind has been exercised about a brother, and in walking

along the streets, on my way to him, I get apart from God, I shall do him no good, though I say ever so much to him.

See the contrast between Jonathan and Saul (1 Sam. 14), between confidence in God overcoming difficulties and self-failing, with all the resources of royalty. Jonathan clammers up upon his hands and feet, confident in God, and the enemy falls before him. Saul, when he sees the Lord's work going on, not knowing the Lord's mind, calls for the priest. It may be that he had a right intention, but certainly not simplicity of dependence on God (when inquiring what he should do); and he spoils all by his 'foolish oath. It was said of Jonathan, "He hath wrought with God this day." God was with him, and he had strength and liberty. When we are walking in dependence upon God there will always be liberty before God. Jonathan knew what he should do, and took some honey, because he went on in liberty; for God was with him; whilst Saul, in legality, put himself and people into bondage.

Unless we are dependent on God, the very things that would be our armor will be weapons against us, striking friends instead of enemies, or injuring ourselves.

Observe it is said, "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may stand against the wiles of the devil" - "Take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may withstand in the evil day," and so forth. (vs. 13) If I saw a person going into battle without a shield, and without his helmet, and so forth, I should say he was mad. One living in theory might not have it; but, if we live near enough to God, to be practically in conflict, we shall need "the whole armor." If we pray without searching the word, or read the word without prayer, we may get no guidance. Jesus said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). Without this, I may be asking some foolish thing that will not be given.

Conscious weakness causes a saint not to dare to move without God. I cannot go to meet an enemy with the Word and without prayer. If I felt as a sheep in the midst of wolves (1 Peter 5:8), I should be aware of my weakness.

I may be, like an antiquary, anatomizing the theory of the armor, and not putting it on, not having any real dependence on God.

We have to stand against the wiles of the devil (it is not said his power). As soon as I see them I can avoid them. But after all it is not knowing Satan that keeps us intelligent of and able in discovering his "wiles," but keeping in God's presence. It was always so with Christ. Even Peter's affection tried to make the cross ugly to Him. (Matt. 16:22) Jesus resisted Satan, and discovered his wiles; He not only always received things from above, but in the spirit of dependence on God. The moment we know the thing to be of Satan, the temptation is over if we are walking with God. When the devil came to our Lord (Luke 4), Christ did not at once say to him, "Thou art Satan;" that would have been only showing His power. He acted as the obedient Man, and thus foiled the tempter. When the devil claims worship, He then says, "Get thee hence, Satan." To discern his "wiles," we should see whether the thing proposed leads from obedience to Christ; if it does, no matter who proposes, I must reject it. The devil has this character of subtlety (not always of open opposition), as the serpent (see 2 Cor. 11:3); but the place of obedience to God will always upset him.

This is a remarkable expression— “the evil day.” (vs. 13) It supposes, in a general way, all this present time, for it is the time of Satan’s temptations; but then there are certain circumstances which cause Satan’s power to be more exercised at one season than another. There is a time when the soul will be put to it. It is different to be going on in energy against Satan, and exercising the triumphs of victory, enjoying the triumphs; we may be walking in an energy that overcomes all opposition, or in the conscious weakness of being hardly able to stand. A soul often gets “an evil day” after triumphing through Christ. There may be exaltation in the remembrance of the triumph, and a new source of trial and dependence comes. I may give up the world, and be so very happy in the esteem and love of Christians as may bring out a bit of the flesh lower down. A saint often gets into this state, having gone on for a while in the strength of former conquests. A fresh battle comes; and if he is not prepared for this, he is overcome for a season. The place of strength is always that of being forced to lean on God. As noticed some years ago, respecting David, what a contrast between his songs of deliverance and thanksgiving to God, and the mournful words, “My house is not so with God” (2 Sam. 22, 23).

The saint that always fears God is always strong; for God is always with him; the secret of his strength is, he has God on his side. We are apt to look at means, even right means, and forget God. The most important victory has often come when we have been most afraid of being beaten; the brightest songs, when an evil day has forced us to lean on God. The soul fearing and in dependence, difficulties fall before us. We might not be able to explain why success was there; but the secret is, the hands were lifted up.

The Lord is always working out His own plans.

“Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.” Truth is never really ours but as the affections are kept in order by it. I might preach beautiful truth, and many delight in the truth; but, the soul not having been in communion with God in the truth spoken, the loins would not be girt with it.

“And having on the breastplate of righteousness.” A person not having a clean conscience, Satan crows in his walk; but if the conscience is good, he has on the “breastplate,” and so is not continually thinking of attacks there. If Satan accuse me, I say, “Christ is my righteousness.” But here it is Satan troubling me as to conscience. If I am not honest in my confessions before God, I am without the “breastplate.” If I have it, there is no need that I should keep looking at my own breast; I can go on in the confidence that I am hiding nothing from God, but am walking in all good conscience before Him. The Lord may shield us in the battle, but we cannot go on in conflict unless we have on this part of the “whole armor.” There is a resource, doubtless, in God’s grace, in all our failure; but the right place is to have a good conscience; and it is the place of liberty and strength.

“And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” The gospel of peace is ours in Christ; but I must have the spirit of peace in my heart. Peace has been made for us that we may dwell in peace. It is the peace that “passeth all understanding,” “the peace of God,” that is to keep our hearts and minds. There is no place so full of peace as heaven: no jar there; myriads of worshippers all in concord, while there are a thousand harmonies round the center of God’s glory. The soul in communion with God will live in the spirit of peace. There is nothing more important, to meet the turmoil of the world, than getting into this spirit of peace.

When the spirit of peace does not rule in the heart, how can the saint walk as having always peace? There may be uncompromising faithfulness in such a man, but he cannot walk as Jesus walked. Nothing keeps the soul in such peace as a settled confidence in God. Without this a man will be continually excited, in haste, and full of anxiety. If the peace of God keeps your hearts, you will have the triumph of it; nothing can be heard that is distinctive from it, that does not perfectly harmonize with it. Uncompromising firmness becomes us, yet calmness; and nothing keeps the soul so calm as a sense of grace. This is a sign of power, and, moreover, connected with humbleness. All grace has come to us. A sense of nothingness, with the spirit of peace, gives a power to surmount all things.

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” Every “fiery dart” is quenched by confidence in God. A Christian need not be afraid to hold up his head in the day of battle, because God is with and for him. This is not shaken by whatever abominable thought Satan puts into the mind. All is quenched by this confidence.

“And take the helmet of salvation.” I hold up my head because I am safe. Salvation is mine.

Strength begins from within. We first have the loins girded about with truth, the breast covered with righteousness, the feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and so forth, and then we can take (our only offensive weapon) “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” There is nothing more dangerous than to use the Word when it has not touched my conscience. I put myself into Satan’s hands if I go beyond what I have from God, what is in possession of my soul, and use it in ministry or privately. There is nothing more dangerous than the handling of the Word apart from the guidance of the Spirit. To talk with saints on the things of God beyond what I hold in communion is most pernicious. There would be a great deal not said that is said were we watchful as to this, and the Word not so used in an unclean way. I know of nothing that more separates from God than truth spoken out of communion with God: there is uncommon danger in it.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints,” and so forth. The word “always” is not used in reference to some other things; prayer is the expression and exercise of dependence. If a person asks me a question, and I answer without speaking to God about it, it will be more likely to lead from God than to God. Just as with Hezekiah (Isa. 39) when the ambassadors came, and he turned them to his treasures instead of to the Lord who had healed him. When a question or a difficulty comes, do we turn to God. We may have turned to God before, and the thing is answered; and we ought to have that power of prayer that there would be no difficulty when any circumstance arises—this continual supplication: we ought to be furnished unto every good word and work. Thus, it was with Jesus. He had prayed before, so when the cup came He was quite ready to drink it.

A wish or a desire expressed to God, in the confidence of a child to its father, is heard; but this is not necessarily prayer “in the Spirit.” When living really in the power of communion, we have that energy of supplication that looks for answers (1 John 3:21, 22; 5:14, 15), and the apostle here speaks of one who is in communion. Thus, should it be with us; we should be so walking in the liberty of Christ as not to be tripped, or thrown out of communion, by the cares, lusts, and anxieties of this life, though it may be an “evil day.”

Suppose you begin the day with a sweet spirit of prayer and confidence in God; in the course of the day, in this wicked world, you will find a thousand causes of agitation; but if you are spiritually exercised, alive to see the things God is exercised in, everything will become a matter of prayer and intercession according to the mind of God. Thus, humbleness and dependence should be marked on all a saint's actions. Instead of being full of regrets at what we meet with, if walking with Christ, we shall see His interests in a brother or the church. What a blessed thing to carry everything to God! to take all to Him, instead of constantly murmuring over failure!

This is our position—to have on the whole armor of God, and not to be tripped of Satan. Unless right ourselves, we cannot make intercession for others. The words in verse 18 refer to a man who is walking in “the whole armor.”

The apostle could pray for everybody, and yet he the more needed the prayers of all saints, because he had more cares than others. (vss. 19-20) He always wanted their prayers, as we see. (vs. 19) Walking in full affection himself, he reckoned upon people caring for him; walking as Paul did, this is taken for granted. Here too (vss. 21- 22), and to the saints at Colosse, he speaks of having sent Tychicus to declare his state— “that ye may know my affairs, and how I do.” He takes their love for granted. We also, if walking in the love of the Spirit, can always count upon others being interested in our “affairs.” In the world it would be pride to suppose others anxious about our concerns; but the saint knows, and counts on, the love of the Spirit in the saints.

To come back to the first great principle-” Be strong in the Lord,” and so forth. Spite of Satan, and of all he may do to hinder, we have the privilege of individual dependence upon God. Everything may look dark, but the Lord tells us “to be strong.” This is always accompanied with lowliness of heart. Come what will, when the Lord is rested on, we are strong. But our dependence must be simply and singly on God.

The Failure of the Sons of Aaron

One of the blessed places in which we are set, as children of God, is that of being made “priests” unto Him. But whilst we are apt, and justly so, to consider this a position of highest privilege, we too often forget practically that it is one of constant service. Set in blessed nearness unto God, yet (and by that very nearness) the priests in Israel became mere servants of all the people. Jesus, though “made an High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek “(a priest and king), is now a “minister of the sanctuary,” after the pattern of the priestly service of Aaron; and we, “priests and kings unto God,” and so forth, are set in the place of service, as the “sons of Aaron.”

We trace all through the Scriptures the record of the failure of man. In every circumstance wherein he has been set; man has failed. And yet (as we have often heard) all this failure is seen but, in the end, to redound to the glory of God—to the praise of His grace. How full of blessing and goodness is this! It meets the pride of our hearts, and their natural tendency (that which is in every one of us) to self-dependence. Adam—Noah—Israel in every form, teaches this lesson: the giving of the law—priesthood—prophets—kings—the whole history of the wilderness and of the land, the same. Failure is ever the character of the ways of man; and the chapter before us presents it in most striking as well as touching circumstances.

The “sons of Aaron” were set in the place of grace, and there in the place of grace they failed.

The law had in itself no aspect of grace; this of course.

Let me take law in its highest sense, as that which even concerns angels-unfallen, perfect beings, what does it teach? What God requires—what ought to be. “They do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His Word.” And thus, also the ten words were the distinct demand, on the part of God, of righteousness from man, of what man ought to be towards Him and before Him— “Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself.” Nay, more; the law supposed sin—was adapted to those who had a tendency to sin; but the foundation and center of all our blessings—what God is towards man in love and grace—was never brought out at all. Thus law (properly so) utterly fails in bringing us to God.

But there were accompaniments to the law-sacrifices, which had the character of grace, because they were on behalf of transgressors. And here, properly speaking, priesthood found its place. (See Heb. 5) The priest was “ordained for men to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin.” That is grace—God not requiring goodness, but providing for sinners.

Here then we find the failure of the “sons of Aaron “in this practical development of grace, and man’s services in grace.

But first let us look a little at another part of priestly service—I mean worship. All worship, properly such, is while there is sacrifice for sin, yet, strictly speaking, not founded upon the presentation of the “sin-offering.” As redeemed, we cannot draw nigh to worship without it; it is the door of

entrance indeed, but not the proper character of our worship. This assumes the “sweet savor” of the “burnt-offering”—the coming up to God. not only in the value of the blood, but in our acceptance in Jesus, as having all the positive savor of what He was and did unto God. Blessed thought!

There is this great principle in all worship—death must come in between us and God. See the case of Cain and Abel. Cain brought of the fruit of the ground upon which the curse rested—that which every natural man brings to God. His worship cost more of the “sweat of his brow,” the judicial toil of the curse consequent on sin, than that of Abel; but there was no faith in it, no recognition of the ground of his own standing before God, or of God’s judgment, mercy, and patience. The offering of Cain (as of every natural man) is the witness of the most perfect insensibility of heart as to what he was before God. All that we can offer of our natural hearts is “the sacrifice of fools.” The contrary was the case with Abel: his “more excellent sacrifice” “consisted in this—it confessed that death must come in between the soul and God. And so it ever must—there can be no worship without it: in all circumstances death must come in between us and God.

Still there are two very distinct characters in death, as the wages of sin, and for God. While it is the witness of man’s sin, yet because of the death of the Lord Jesus, death is now one of our servants. All things are ours, whether life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are ours. Death is for us now as it was against us before, because Christ has tasted death. “Forasmuch 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.” (Heb. 2:14, 15) It was “by the grace of God” Christ tasted death. In His death we see the grace of God, though it was on account of sin. All that was against us is gone. The Lord Jesus Christ turns everything He touches into blessing. “Out of the eater cometh forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness.” If I am able to contemplate death in its mightiest power—the death of Jesus, I see in it the power of grace.

And here it is that I find the proper character of the savor of worship, in the “burnt-offering.” The blessedness of the offering of Jesus was in the perfectness of His will, and the entireness of self-sacrifice to God— “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down My life, that I may take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father” (John 10:17,18). He was not only the spotless victim, but one able to give Himself to God. “Being in the form of God, He thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:6-8). Again, “Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me,) I delight to do thy will, O God; yea, Thy law is within My heart” (Psa. 40:7,8; Heb. 10:7). So we get not only the grace of God in the gift of Jesus, but that Jesus, “through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God” (Heb. 9:14).

Will, which in us is sin, becomes in the offering up of Himself, obedience. In every shape was perfectness. Perfect in all His ways—in all His life—in self-consecration to God; but this perfect thing itself He offered up to God in perfect obedience— “not my will, but thine, be done.” There

was the perfection of glorifying God in it. Just as the purpose of self-will in the first Adam, who sought himself, brought in death, so that of the will to glorify God in the second, the Lord Jesus Christ, through death brought in life to us. The divine glory was gone, so far as man was concerned. He had insulted the character and majesty of God, had listened to the lie of Satan against God (for he denied that truth and goodness was in God), he had taken Satan for his friend; but the Lord Jesus Christ, in thus offering up Himself, glorified God in all. And so, when Judas had gone out, He says, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." (John 13:31) God found rest there.

God was glorified. Was He true in saying that the "wages of sin is death"? Satan had said, "Ye shall not surely die:" see Jesus. Was He true in His love for man? This Satan had questioned: Jesus died for him. Did Satan tempt man, and say, "Then shall ye be as gods "I God gave His Son, and conformity to His image. God Was vindicated thus against man, though for man.

When the Lord Jesus Christ "through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God," God found His rest there. It is no matter where I find my rest, if I am not seeking rest where God has found His. God has found it in Jesus (He can look for or to nothing else, in one sense); and we can rest there also. Here we have the ground of worship, and worship itself: it assumes the proper savor of all that Christ was and did for us, and thus has the character of the "burnt-offering."

In another character—as the "sin-offering" —sin was laid upon Him, "He was made sin for us." (2 Cor. 5:21) This was not "an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto Jehovah," but was burnt without the camp as an unclean thing. (Lev. 4)

When the offerings themselves are brought out in Leviticus, the "burnt-offering," "meat-offering," and "peace-offering "are mentioned first, and then the "sin-offering but in application, when the individual worshipper is treated of, he presented his "sin-offering "first, then his "burnt-offering," and so forth, because he could not worship whilst sin was against him, but had to approach by the efficacy of that which took it away.

Though God meets us in our sins by the blood of Christ, yet when we speak, of worship we speak of Him in His own savor before God. We come in all the savor of Christ's sacrifice. Sin is gone out of the place, and we stand in the value, the intrinsic value, of Christ.

The burnt-offering was a "sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savor unto Jehovah." (Lev. 1:9) The more it was searched by the fire, the more its sweetness came out before God. So was it in Christ. The coming down of the fire of the holiness of God, trying and searching all the inwards of everything in Him, only brought out a "sweet savor" unto God. This too is our acceptance; it is in this value that we ascend up to God, and being there, we have communion of worship and fellowship before Him. In the sacrifices God had His food, the priest his share, and the rest ate of them also. All our feasting upon Christ is in this value.

It was from the "altar of burnt-offering" that coals were taken to kindle the incense that went up before God. "Strange fire" not arising from this source was inadmissible. All our worship, our singing a hymn together, for instance, must have this character, the savor of Christ; God accepts it as such, though full of failure. Everything must be "salted with fire;" if it does not go up through fire it cannot stand; apart from it there is only condemnation and judgment -the character of the sin of Nadab and Abihu. The fire tries every man's work; and if judgment has already done its work on

Jesus, we have nothing but the savor of Jesus to be in before God.

This is the real value of our place before the Lord. In this is our joy. It is the place of grace.

But then it was here that the “sons of Aaron” failed.

“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire thereon, and put incense therein, and offered strange fire before Jehovah, which he commanded them not.” (Vs. 1) There was the separation of service from the power of its acceptance, and thus failure in the place of grace; failure, not on God’s part, but on man’s.

Man has failed under law, that might be expected; but when brought near to God in grace, there also has he failed.

The sin of Nadab and Abihu (in this the awful type of the professing church) was sin against the very grace of God, want of respect in the sense of their position, of reverence of God. Our place, though that of perfectness of joy, is ever that of reverence. (Heb. 12:28,29)

But how is the sin met? As must needs be, in judgment—judgment coming forth from the very place of grace: “There went out fire from before Jehovah, and they died before Jehovah.” (vs. 2) It is a terrible character the Lord puts on here! The “strange fire” met in result by holiness, the true fire of God’s judgment— “they died before Jehovah.” Awful thought! He was found to be a God of judgment, in the very place of blessing and of grace. And thus, must it ever be with that which takes falsely a place “before Jehovah,” for after all, though it is the place of grace, it is still one of judgment: “I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me.” We have ever to judge ourselves, that we be not judged of God. (1 Cor. 11:31)

We read, “But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.” (1 Peter 1:15-17) The Lord always judges according to the place into which we are brought, according to the position in which we stand. And so do we of others, in some sort. For instance, I judge of those who are within my house differently from what I do of those without; I say, not to a stranger, but to one brought into my house, “you must have clean habits to live here.” God is dealing with us on the ground of grace, yet of holiness; for holiness is with us as much a part of grace as any other blessing. “Be ye holy; for I am holy” is the expression of intimacy, and comes not merely in the way of command. Grace must make us holy, “partakers of His holiness.” (See Heb. 12) It is not God requiring man’s holiness, but making us partakers of His. What could we wish more? Love does it, and we are made partakers of that which separates God from all that is inconsistent with Himself—holiness, not mere innocence. Innocence is the ignorance of good and evil: you would not say that God was innocent, but holy. He makes us “partakers of His holiness.” It is “His holiness”—the knowledge of evil as He knows it, and ability to rise above it. The holiness is as much a part of the grace as the love that does it.

They died. “And Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that Jehovah spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.” (Verse 3) There was silence as to the place of intercession. “There is a sin unto death.” the church has to be silent. (1 John 5:16) God has taken the cause into His own hands, He has acted in His

holy place, and all that man can do is to hold his peace.

But this is not all. The Lord takes occasion by this failure to bring out what is our position “before Him” day by day, and to show forth yet other failure.

“And Jehovah spake unto Aaron”—to Aaron, because about that which became the priests, those who go in “before Jehovah.” We have instructions from Christ, as the Priest, as well as the Lawgiver. There are things which refer to the comeliness of the saint, and not to mere righteousness—things which are known by the Spirit to be comely to us as priests. We read in Hebrews 4 that those are priests who are “called of God, as was Aaron,” and that “Christ glorified not Himself to be made an High Priest, but He that said unto Him, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee.” So, though in an altogether inferior sense, we are priests as born of God; we become priests. That which is here brought before us is not merely precept; it is priestly instruction as to the manner of our approach to God; and that which understands and estimates it is the new nature in which we are born of God.

“And Jehovah spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations: and that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; and that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which Jehovah has spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.” (vss. 8-11) “Wine” and “strong drink” -all that excites the flesh, that does not belong to the cleanness of spiritual apprehension and judgment becoming those who go into the sanctuary, must be put away.

I believe we are often hindered going into God’s presence by this “drinking of wine.” The moment there is that which acts on the flesh and excites nature, the going to find pleasure and joy in things harmless even in themselves, no matter what (nature may take up anything), there is “wine” and “strong drink,” that which would put us out of the place of spiritual discernment; and it is inadmissible.

There are ten thousand things which may thus excite, eloquence for instance. If excited by eloquence, this would hinder the enjoyment of truth: the same truth, were it presented without it, and thus that which is of Christ, would pall on the taste. Eloquence is not in itself a wrong thing, and yet Paul says, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.”

There is a vast deal connected with the things of God that is not like this; a vast deal which after all is “wine” and “strong drink,” and it unfits for the sanctuary. Whatever has not the real, calm, spiritual joy fit for the presence of God is so. Look at it—we see it connected with all the forms of false worship. Again, thought as to the beauty and elegance of the edifice where we meet for worship, and so forth, has the same character; it acts on nature, and whatever does this cannot be fit for the presence of God—cannot be carried into His sanctuary. So of all things around which hinder the power of spiritual discernment, though not in themselves wrong. We might be in a lovely

place and not think of it, then it is not “strong drink.”

The object of this instruction is not merely as to our acting rightly. The condition of mind which gives the capacity of judging “between unclean and clean,” depends on the absence of these things—the capacity of learning, through fellowship with God in the sanctuary, to “put difference between holy and unholy.” So the apostle prays for the saints at Colosse, that they might be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,” and so forth. So, too, for the Philippians that they might have such a knowledge of the will of God, “that ye may approve things that are excellent [try the things that differ]; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ”—without a single stumble all the way along until the coming of the Lord. He supposes there might be such intimacy of acquaintance with the mind of God that there should not.

We can never give the least justification to sin and say, “the flesh is in us, and we could not help it;” for “there hath no temptation taken us but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that we may be able to bear it.” The theory of the Christian is this—the flesh should never be discovered but in the presence of God, where it is always in the presence of grace and of holiness too.

This is the true power, of our walk. It is not any particular measure of attainment; it is simply a man walking according to his communion, who never gets into the weakness of the flesh; for the flesh is known only before God, and not before Satan. When I learn the flesh thus, I drink into the opposite of it, the grace of God, and so go forth in the strength of what is in God, and not in the shame and weakness of what is in myself.

Thus it is that, in estrangement from all that acts upon the flesh, and near God, I learn in the sanctuary His mind, and am able to “put difference between holy and unholy, unclean and clean.” Then also I can teach others, and say, That is the mind of the Lord about such and such a thing; as it is said here, “Teach the children of Israel all the statutes which Jehovah hath spoken unto them by the hands of Moses.” But have we not often found an incapacity to judge according to the mind of God, where there was no failure in precept—a spiritual incompetency! Alas, my friends! we have been content to “drink wine, and strong drink,” and thus our spiritual faculties have become darkened.

There is another thing to notice. The “sons of Aaron” were to eat of the “meat-offering” and the “peace-offering.” (vss. 12-15) See the fellowship here. The inward parts were fed upon by God (of the “peace-offering,” it was “the food of the offering made by fire unto Jehovah”). Aaron and his sons had their part, and so also the particular worshipper. I cannot then separate myself from God herein, because I cannot separate myself from God’s delight in Christ, nor from “the whole family of God who have all their portion.” There is no proper worship that does not take in God, Christ, and the whole family of Aaron—the church: it is a common feast, if true. So in Ephesians “that ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.” How can I “comprehend with all saints” if I leave out any? I cannot separate from them without diminishing my own sense of the fullness of the love of Christ and of God. If I leave out one, he is Christ’s joy. And here we fail.

Again. There is, in a certain sense, a priestly way in which we have to bear the sins and sorrows of our brethren; not, of course as to atonement (that was Christ's alone; the blood carried inside was Christ's alone), but still there is a true sense in which we have to bear them. And in this, I believe above everything else, we fail. It is not only that Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire: Eleazar and Ithamar were not like them, and yet their failure is recorded. "And Moses diligently sought the goat of the sin-offering, and, behold, it was burnt: and he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron, which were left alive, saying, Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin-offering in the holy place, seeing it is most holy, and God hath given it you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before Jehovah? Behold, the blood of it was not brought in within the holy place: ye should indeed have eaten it in the holy place, as I commanded." (vss. 16-18)

The rule as to the "sin-offering" was this: if the blood was carried inside, to be sprinkled before Jehovah, the body was carried without the camp to be burnt; but in the "sin-offering" for offenses, the priest was to eat it; and in this the "sons of Aaron" had a share.

We get the pattern for the exercise of grace in the saints, as to the failure and sins of their brethren, in John 13: "If I, your Lord and Master, wash your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." Where there is defilement seen in a brother, there should ever be this washing by us; but it is impossible that there can, unless in spirit we bear before the Lord all the burden of the fault and sin we desire to confess (washing the feet is not atonement); and here we all fail in the use of this priestly service.

Suppose I were really walking in the power of the place in which I am set, if I see sin in my brother, and go to pray for him, I find him identified with Christ as represented to the world: the garment of Christ is soiled, the honor of Christ is affected, the joy of Christ is hindered, all is spoiled in that sense, communion with Christ is lost. It is a terrible thing to see the saints of God dishonor Christ thus! Well, now, it is to bear the misery and the sorrow of all this, as though I had been in the sin myself. Love gets into the place of the sinner, and his sin becomes the occasion of the outgoings of the heart in intercession to God, of the working of love.

Suppose a child in agony—the mother sees it thus distressed, convulsed by pain; and, though she herself has no pain of body, she suffers far more than it in pain of mind, in agony of heart. Thus should it be with us, in sympathy with the saints, when writhing under false doctrine or unworthiness of walk. All is borne by Jesus, but then we should identify ourselves with Jesus in dealing about the sin—in feeding on the "sin-offering." See Daniel, in his confession. Did he say Israel has sinned? No, but we have sinned; to us belongeth confusion of faces; we have rebelled. And this is our place.

When Moses charges Eleazar and Ithamar with the sin, Aaron comes in (vs. 19) and answers for them; he lays it all upon himself. And so Christ for us: He makes Himself responsible for it all. It was, however, their privilege to have eaten of the "sin-offering," as it is ours: we are given this portion. God, in the riches of His grace, not only blesses us, but uses us: we are fellow-workers under Him. Paul plants, Apollos waters, God gives the increase; whilst it is God who has done it all. If a man was converted, whose joy was it?

"Ye are our joy." It was Paul's joy. Paul had not redeemed them, but he had the joy of love.

In giving us this service of love, we have His Spirit in us, and so the joy of love is ours. But it is not merely that we should go out and preach the gospel to sinners (preaching the gospel answers to the ministry of apostleship, whilst teaching and admonishing the saints answers to that of priesthood); prayer for a brother is ministry of love in priesthood. If it be a matter of intercession, we ought to bear all the iniquity of it on our own hearts before the Lord. Thus the very sin itself becomes the occasion of the outflowing of love, and not of judgment.

But is it not true that we have failed Whilst the outward professing church has offered strange fire “before the Lord,” have we known how to “eat the sin-offering” for our brethren? Have we not been charging them with the offense in righteousness, laying them down as under law, instead of “eating the sin-offering in the holy place”?

Grief should not hinder our acting thus in priestly service before the Lord; but let us take care also that the joy of nature does not, the “wine” and “strong drink.” Again, I say, have we not shrunk from bearing the iniquity of our brethren in intercession before the Lord, from “eating the sin-offering in the holy place”? How little do the faults of a dear brother pain us as our own! Have we really pleaded, as feeling the evil, in the intercession of grace? How seldom do we thus deal with it, standing as it were in the gap! There is a vast deal of failure in all of us as to this-abundant failure! There is not that sense among us of the identity of Christ with His saints, which would put us thus in the place of intercession.

But the voice of Aaron is lifted up (ver. 19) and it prevails; Moses, the commander and requirer, is “content.” (vs. 20) So, in hearing the voice of our Aaron, when lifted up on our behalf, God is “content.” And here is our comfort under the sense of it all.

Peace is heard again. But if it be so, the sense of that should not make us think lightly about the sins of our brethren.

God's Rest, the Saint's Rest

It is a blessed thing, though in one sense a terrible one (terrible ever to the flesh), to know that we have to do with God. (vs. 13) Yet there is nothing that we so easily forget, or so often lose sight of. The natural tendency of our hearts is to get out of and then (as the disobedient child that of the parent whose eye he fears to meet) to dislike and dread God's presence. Always, every moment, under every circumstance, it is God with whom we "have to do."

People who are ever looking at second causes are led into practical infidelity; and so is it in measure with the saint of God: if he be resting in circumstances, he loses the sense of "having to do" with God.

But whether it be for blessing, or for profit to the conscience, we have alike "to do" with God.

Are we seeking happiness, where shall we find it? where shall we get blessing that nothing can touch or hinder, that nothing can separate from, except in God? He is not only the source of our blessing, but the blessing itself. There are indeed many outward blessings given to His children by the way, and these even the unconverted may have; but the strength, the comfort, the joy of the Christian is this—he "has to do" with God. God is the source and center of his blessing.

When once we come really to know God, we know Him as love. Then, knowing that everything comes to us from Him, though we be in a desert—no matter where, or what the circumstances—we interpret all by His love. I may be called on to pass through pain, and sorrow, and trial, as part of His discipline; but everything that comes from God, comes from a source and spring in which I have confidence. I look, through the circumstances, to Him; and nothing can separate me from His love.

Where God is but little known, and where there is not therefore confidence in His love, there will be repining at circumstances, and murmuring, and rebellion. In such a case, the sense of "having to do" with God will cause more fear than gladness. The Apostle John says, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

It is not quite true that we often stop, practically, at the circumstances in which we find ourselves placed, and consider only our own feelings and judgment about them. Now this is a proof that our souls are not living in the fullness of communion with God. That with which we should be occupied is, not the circumstances, but what God intends by them.

Conscience must be in exercise as well; for it is equally true, that in our consciences we "have to do" with God. This is very profitable, though not so pleasant. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (vs. 13) And after all, dear brethren, is it not a blessed thing to know that nothing can escape either the hand or eye of God? What a comfort that He discerns every thought of our hearts that would hinder blessing, or dim communion with Himself! There may be some secret evil (one of the ten thousand things that, if indulged, would

hinder the enjoyment of God) working in my heart, and yet I remain unconscious of it. Well, God sends some circumstance that discovers to me the evil, in order that it may be put away. Is not this a blessing? The circumstance does not create the evil which it excites; it only acts upon what it finds to be in my heart, and makes it manifest. Since I “have to do “with God, I am made to understand evil in myself which I had never understood before, or known to be there. God discovers the “thoughts and intents of the heart;” He could not rest whilst leaving anything there that would hinder our love and confidence, our comfort and peace in Himself. The evil being discovered, circumstances are all forgotten—God’s end alone is seen.

The heart of man naturally seeks rest, and seeks it here. Now, there is no rest to be found here for the saint; but it is written, “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” (vs. 9) To know this is both full of blessing and full of sorrow: sorrow to the flesh, because, as it is always seeking its rest here, it has always to be disappointed—blessing to the spirit, because the spirit, being born of God, can only rest in God’s own rest, as it is said, “If they shall enter into My rest.” (vss. 3, 5)

God cannot rest in the corruption of sin. He can only rest in that which is perfectly holy. And because He who thus rests is love and loves us, He makes us understand that He will bring us into His own rest, into His own delight.

Now let the soul once know what this rest of God is, let the heart once be set upon it, there will be joy unspeakable in understanding that God’s love can rest in nothing short of bringing us into His own delight. There will then also be the full, settled consciousness that we cannot find rest elsewhere. There are indeed joys by the way, but the moment we rest in them, they become, as the quails of Israel (Num. 11), poison.

Whenever the soul loses practically the knowledge that its rest is in God’s rest, the moment the eye is off that which “remaineth,” we begin to seek a rest here, and consequently get uneasy, restless, and dissatisfied. Every time we find something on which we attempt to settle, that very thing proves but a new source of trouble and conflict to us, a new source of exercise and weariness of heart. God loves us too well to let us rest here.

Are you content, dear brother, to have or seek your rest nowhere, save in God’s rest?

What is the secret of the unhappiness and restlessness of many a saint? A hankering after rest here. God is therefore obliged to discipline and exercise that soul; to allow, it may be, some circumstance to detect the real state of the heart by touching that about which the will is concerned. Circumstances would not trouble, if they did not find something in us contrary to God; they would rustle by as the wind. God deals with that in us which hinders communion, and prevents our seeking rest in Him alone. His discipline is the continual and unwearied exercise of love, which rests not now in order that we may enter into His rest. If He destroys our rest here, if He turns our meat into poison, it is only that He may bring us into His own rest, that we may have that which satisfies His desires, not ours. “He will rest in his love.”

“For he that is entered into His rest, he also hath ceased from his works, as God did from His own.” (vs. 10) This is not a question about justification or rest of conscience as to judgment: that is all settled. “As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” (Rom. 5:19) There we rest, and there God rests. Again, “By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.” (Heb. 10:14) The believer has already

and altogether come to rest on Christ's work as to that. He has peace through the blood of Christ.

The point is one which concerns those who are justified, whom God has brought into His family: God is training such, and bringing them up into the full enjoyment of His own blessedness and rest. If I, being a parent, enjoy anything, it is impossible (if I really love my child) not to wish him to enjoy it with me. And if we, who are evil, do this, how much more our heavenly Father! What God desires for us, as we have seen (and He delights to do it), is to bring us into the enjoyment of all that which He Himself enjoys. He has made us partakers of the divine nature that we may enjoy it. The Hebrews were continually liable to sink into the seeking a rest here; in short, not to live a life of faith. The great point on which the apostle insists is, that God has not His rest here—that while there was that which hindered the comfort of His love He could not rest. And this is proved by a variety of testimonies. (See verses 3-8)

As to their own state, though he says, "We which have believed do enter into rest" (ver. 3), it was not needful to prove to them, any more than it would be to ourselves, that they were not in the rest. We read of their enduring a great fight of afflictions, of their being made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions, and of their becoming companions of them that were so used. They were still in circumstances in which it could be said to them, "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." The exhortations, "Let us therefore fear" (ver. 1)", "Let us labor therefore" (ver. 11), are plainly inconsistent with a state of rest.

It may seem strange to have pressed upon us at one moment unqualified assurance in the love and faithfulness of God, and at the next to be addressed thus, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." (vs. 1) But God never ceases to warn in order that there may be the exercise of responsibility towards Himself, while we are on our way to the rest. Were justification spoken of, had that been the point in question, it would have been said, 'Do not fear, and do not labor; for Christ has done all for you.' "To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt."

This "fear" and this "labor" begin when that question is settled, and settled forever. The blessed principle brought out is, that they are consequences of our "having to do" with God. Because we have full confidence in the love of God, and because we value the rest of God, we fear everything; not only the temptations and snares that are in the way, but every working of the flesh and the like that would come in between us and God. Blessing is secured at the end, "reserved," as it is said, "in heaven for us;" but conscience reasons thus, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" It is "through faith" that we are "kept by the power of God unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time?" Faith realizes the presence of God. Therefore there is this holy fear: we pass the time of our sojourning here in fear.

The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Philippians, says, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus;" and again, "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (Chapter 3) Was it that he did not see the certainty of the end? No, but because he saw the way as well as the end, and all the difficulties of the way. Paul greatly feared whatever might distract him in his course, or lead him for a moment in the downward path (the flesh, whenever indulged, does this), and then he adds, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as

ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”

Where there is this holy fear, the promise made being that of God’s rest, we know the end of the path; but we “labor, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” (vs. 11) Grace will prevent such a result; but it is that to which the flesh-the working of man’s will -must bring the unrenowned professor.

There is no such evidence of a true-hearted saint as this holy fear. An unconverted man has, properly speaking, no dread of Satan; but, if not quite hardened, he has great dread of God. The saint of God has no fear (that is, dread) of God, whilst he has great fear of Satan. Jesus, speaking of His sheep (John 10), says, “A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.” (vs. 5) There is in them the distrust of everything but the known voice of their own shepherd. (vs. 27) Above all they fear the wolf, because conscious of their weakness. If any were to say, “The end is sure, never mind the means,” the sheep would know that that was no true shepherd’s voice. Everything that would dim our eye as to the glory, or prevent its being single unto God, however precious or valuable it may seem, has to be watched against, for its tendency is to hurry us on in the downward road. Where the eye is single, the whole body is full of light; and therefore every evil is detected, every hindrance to the affections being fixed simply and undividedly on God.

It is not then from any uncertainty about God’s love; but from the certainty of being in the desert, that we are to “fear” and to “labor.” The saint knows that this is a “dry and thirsty land, where no water is:” bring him into God’s presence, and his soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, it is made to drink of the river of His pleasures. Redemption from Egypt brings into the desert. If we have not God there, we have nothing. There is nothing in this wide world, or of it, which can refresh the new man, any more than there is in heaven to satisfy the old. Should we lose sight of God’s eye and hand, we have nothing but our own folly and the desert sands around us. One may say to a saint, “The rest is pleasant at the end.” “Ah!” he replies, it is not enough for me to know that; by and by I shall be with God; I have rest in God now, I know God now, I enjoy God’s presence now, I cannot be satisfied without having God as a present portion, and I exceedingly dread anything that would come in between me and God.”

While the eye is fixed on God, and the soul is resting on Him, the ways, and not the end only, are in our hearts, and become to us channels of communion with Him.

Everything, dear friends, proves to us that our rest is not here. Fearing, because I am in the desert with a heart prone to depart from God, is not rest. Having to conflict with Satan is not rest. Labor is not rest. “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.”

Then there is also the diligence and activity of the new man in its own portion. It is of real importance for our joy, that we should be diligent in our own portion. The church needs to know that it has its own proper portion its own peculiar sphere of labor. “Much food is in the tillage of the poor; but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment.” When we are poor in spirit, and are laboring to enter into God’s rest, there is a reality found to be in the riches which are in Christ Jesus that many a saint has no conception of. Have we not a sphere in which our life has its

portion? The men of this world have their own pursuits, they have that which occupies and engages them; and has the life of God in us no resources to strengthen it, no riches in Christ to feed on? Yes, “We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle.” We have a sphere in which the divine life communicated to us can exercise its own faculties, and find its own resources. The church has its own joys, its own interests, its own treasures, its own sphere of life, its own field for the affections, its own topics—its own world, in short, in which there is fruit unto God. Have you, dear reader, consciously this portion, and is it the delight of your soul to search out therein the riches of Christ? Oh the goodness that is in God! All that I have yet got of Christ’s riches, is only in order that I may become the more enriched, a means by which to attain those riches which are unsearchable.

This holy labor, in searching out the riches that are, in Christ, keeps us in the lively sense of what is ours in Him, and therefore makes all else worthless., Having the soul fixed on Christ will enable us to resist temptation and sin. It is not so much by thinking of the object that may be a temptation to us, that we shall get strength; it is not in letting our minds dwell on it, even though it be with the effort to resist it. Our privilege is to be occupied with Christ, and thus obtain the victory. Our liberty is to be no longer, and never, subject to sin—a liberty to serve God without hindrance of the flesh. I do not, want liberty to the flesh, but liberty to the new man; and that is to do my Father’s will. If anything could have taken away the liberty of the Lord Jesus, when on earth (which of course was impossible) it would have been this, His being prevented doing the will of His Father.

It may not perhaps sound like privilege to talk of “fear” and “labor;” but it really is so. And because we fail so much in these things, it is also a blessed privilege to know that God searches the heart and deals with the conscience, that “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

If we do not judge ourselves, God will judge us. But “when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

Is it not a comfort to the soul that really loves holiness, to know that God will come and sweep the house, lest there should be a single thing left there, to offend His eye, or hinder us from walking in the light in which He dwells? Grace emboldens the saint to say, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be, any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting,” What amazing confidence! And God does search us, and that by, the light of the word. He shows us the evil by the word. This is the use the Spirit makes of the Word: “For the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit; and of the joints and marrow; and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of, the heart.” (vs. 12) We are brought into God’s presence; we have, as it were, God speaking to us. He searches my heart even in the sweetest testimonies of His grace, and then, having discovered to me the evil, does He speak about it in judgment, as that which is imputed to me as sin? No! He says, “Here is something not in accordance with My love, something that does not satisfy My love.”

If we have neglected to judge ourselves by God’s Word, there may be something more needful in the way of discipline; but still it is our comfort and consolation that we “have to do” with God. Perhaps, for instance, we have been seeking rest here, and have at last well-nigh settled down, and found a home in the wilderness. Then God begins to work in uprooting us again; unless

indeed He sees it needful to leave us to ourselves for awhile, in order that, by stumbling, our consciences may be awakened.

If there are circumstances that try and perplex our hearts, let us just say, It is God with whom I “have to do;” and what is He about with me? The moment the heart is brought into the recognition of God’s presence, all is done it submits. The soul finds itself in communion with Him about the circumstances. All is peace.

It is not rest to be searched and tried. Rest, blessed be God, is not to be our portion here. His holiness will not let us rest where there is sin; His love will not let us rest where there is sorrow. There “remaineth a rest” for us, His own rest—God’s rest. There will be neither sin, nor trouble, nor sorrow, in God’s rest. There will be Himself there. And we shall rest in Him.

If we did but know a little more of the comfort and joy of drinking into the fullness of God’s love, we should feel present circumstances to be as nothing. Nay, if we entered a little more into His purpose towards us, we should say, “Let Him deal with us, let Him chasten us, let Him uproot us as He so that we have but full fellowship with His love.”

Oh, let us not be satisfied with small portions of blessing- low measures, low enjoyments; let us press forward, let our eyes look right onward, let us seek, through the power of the Spirit, after the realization of all that is ours in Jesus.

The Call of the Bride

In Abraham, as being the depositary of the promises of God to the patriarchs, we find the fundamental principles of the believer. Abraham having offered up his son Isaac, and having received him back, this act gives us the type of the resurrection of Jesus, who becomes, like Isaac, heir of all the goods of His Father. Rebekah, type of the church, is called to be the bride of Isaac risen. Afterward in Jacob we have the typical history of the Jewish people.

In Abraham we have the principle of man's relationship with God, pure grace without law. Hagar is introduced as a figure of the law coming in. Isaac, raised from the dead in figure, shows us Christ, the Head, having accomplished His work, and being in the position to maintain all the results of the divine counsels.

In this chapter Abraham sends Eliezer to seek a wife for Isaac. This represents the Holy Spirit sent by the Father to seek the church, "the bride, the Lamb's wife." It is not Isaac who goes to look for a bride. No more does Christ return to this earth to choose a church for Himself. Rebekah must leave her country and come to the land of promise. In this chapter we see the features of the Holy Spirit's work, and how a soul is conducted under His guidance. That is what we are about to see in Eliezer and Rebekah.

Abraham, having become old, says to the eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, "Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: and I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell" (vss. 1-3). The first thing which is presented to us here is Eliezer, who has the superintendence of all the goods of his master. He is not the heir—the son is the heir. Thus the Holy Spirit has the disposal of all things. He takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us; that is, to the church. "But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again." (Verse 4) It is impossible that there should be any relation between Christ risen again and this world. Isaac does not go for Rebekah, but she must come to him.

Abraham gives directions to his servant. Thus the first thing is to be directed by the word of God. Instead of making further inquiries, Abraham's servant makes ready and goes off to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor, with no other information. (vs. 9-11)

It is important that we should act in the same manner. Natural wisdom can form a judgment up to a certain point, but it takes the soul away from the presence of God, even when we are doing things according to God. If we begin to deliberate, there is hesitation: we take counsel of flesh and blood. The first thing is to put ourselves in the presence of God: without that there is neither wisdom nor power; whereas, placed in the path of blessing, we get from Him all the intelligence which we shall need. We observe this in the journey of Abraham's servant.

Eliezer says, "O Lord God of my master Abraham," He does not say "my God." The promises had been made to Abraham, and God had revealed Himself as the God of Abraham. Here the servant shows himself in entire dependence; and we find him in the path of promise, not exalting himself, but acting according to the counsels of God in entire dependence, and not pretending to have anything, except where God had placed the blessing; for the promises had been made to Abraham. For us this blessing is in Christ, and there is the answer to our requests; nor do we desire to obtain anything save where God has put His blessing; namely, in the path of obedience to the faith.

Eliezer addresses the God of his master Abraham, praying him to favor his master: "O Lord, let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master." (O Lord, Thou must act, and I must know by that the one whom thou hast designed to be the wife of thy servant Isaac; the one who will do these things will be the one whom thou hast chosen) "And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Micah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up. And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. And she hastened, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels. And the man wondering at her held his peace."

Why any doubt? Why does the servant hesitate, since his request has obtained such an answer? Here is the reason. Whatever may be the apparent manifestation of the hand of God, there is a positive rule in the Word to which the Christian must pay attention, and which he must not neglect, because of his weakness in discerning what is of God. Faith looks to the power of God, but judges all by the Word; for God must act according to His Word; and the servant, being in communion with God, ought to act in this thought; and even when there may be signs, he should decide nothing until the will of God be clear according to His Word. He must be able, to say, "This is indeed according to God."

"And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold; and said, Whose daughter art thou tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? And she said unto him, I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bare unto Nahor. She said moreover unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in."

God had perfectly answered the desire of Abraham. Eliezer, for his part, sees that he has been heard. Before going farther, before even entering the house, inasmuch as he had recognized the intervention of God in the whole of this business, he bowed himself and worshipped the Lord, and said, "Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren."

We see the same thing in Daniel; he betakes himself to prayer with his companions; and when Daniel has received the revelation of the dream, before presenting himself before the king who

had commanded that he should come, he blesses God for having revealed to him that which the king wanted to know. It is always thus when God is in our hearts; we feel that it is He who is acting, and we thank Him.

“And the damsel ran, and told them of her mother’s house these things. And Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban: and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. And it came to pass, when he saw the earring and bracelets upon his sister’s hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man; and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well. And he said, Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels.”

Laban and Bethuel, after having heard Abraham’s servant narrate the circumstances, acknowledge that the thing proceeds from the Lord, and say, “We cannot speak unto thee bad or good.” (vs. 50) Thus, if in the circumstances of our Christian life we act in entire dependence on God, He will make our way plain, and will even soften our enemies, on account of the dependence on Him in which we live. Because we have set the Lord before us, He will be always at our right hand.

If I have asked anything of God, and have received His answer, I then act with assurance; with the conviction that I am in the path of God’s will; I am happy and contented. If I meet with some difficulty, this does not stop me; it is only an obstacle which faith has to surmount. But if I have not this certainty before I begin, I am in indecision, I know not what to do. There may be a trial of my faith, or it may be that I ought not to do what I am doing. I am in suspense, and I hesitate; even if I am doing the will of God, I am not sure about it, and I am not happy. I ought therefore to be assured that I am doing His will before I begin to act.

Observe, in passing, that God disposes all things according to the desire of Eliezer. This is what necessarily happens to all those who have their delight in the Lord. All the wheels of God’s providence go in the way of His will which I am carrying out. The Holy Spirit, by the Word, gives me the knowledge of His will. This is all that I want. God causes that all things should contribute to the accomplishment of His will. If, by spiritual intelligence, we are walking according to God, He assists us in the carrying out of His will, of His objects. There is need of this spiritual discernment, that it may abound in us in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” I know not whither He will lead me, but this is the step I must take to proceed in the path in which I have to walk.

Abraham’s servant enters into the house. “And there was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told my errand.” Laban said, “Speak on.” What firmness of character in the servant! Look at a man who is not decided: he consults this one and that one, when it is a question of how he is to act; and even, having some desire to do his own will, he will rather seek counsel of those who have not as much faith as himself. Paul took counsel of neither flesh nor blood. He saw that it was Christ who called him, and he went forward.

Eliezer, taken up with this errand, does not accept the offer of food which is made him. He does what he has to do. One secret of the Christian’s life, as soon as he knows God’s will, is to do his work, to occupy himself with it, to let no delay interfere with it, even to satisfy the wants of his body. This is the effect and the sign of the Holy Spirit’s work. Eliezer wishes to deliver his errand. And

what was it that was in question"! The interests and the honor of Abraham his master. He had entrusted to him the interests of Isaac his son.

And God has committed to us down here the glory of Jesus His Son; and this glory occupies us by the Holy Spirit who is given to us; that is, where there is a single eye in spiritual discernment, according to the position in which God hath placed us. If we are there, there is no hesitation; being in our place, we act with liberty and joy. If I think about my convenience, my interests, about what concerns myself or my family (there are a thousand reasons which are contrary to a prompt obedience), this is to consult flesh and blood. But if I inquire what is the interest of Christ, the thing will be instantly decided. If I think of anything else I have not at heart the glory which is entrusted to me, nor confidence in Him who has placed me there.

Eliezer thinks always about Abraham, who had entrusted everything to him; his thoughts are upon this as he sets forth before Rebekah the privileges and the good tidings of his master's house.

If our hearts are filled with the Holy Spirit, it will be the same with us. It is very important for us to bear in mind that God has confided to us the glory of Jesus. He had no need of us; besides, what can we do? It is He who works in us, and we have but to let Him act. It is His will to be glorified in us by the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the same thing we see in those to whom the five and the ten talents were committed. Confidence in the master displays itself in the decision of the servant; as here Eliezer says, "I will not eat until I have told my errand."

This pre-occupation with his master's glory makes him refuse to take any food until his errand was performed. This is to do God's will. He tells Laban about the matter, and how he had been guided, and that without using any argument, without saying it would be wise to act in such and such a way, but with simplicity committing to God the issue of the affair. "Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord." If, instead of spending our time in reasoning, we were more simple and obedient, and presented things as the Holy Spirit tells them to us, the result would be better. But we often substitute our human wisdom for the commands of God. Often the things which are the most simply said produce the greatest effect. Peter said to the Jews, "You killed the Prince of life." This is what you did, and what I have to tell you on the part of God. (Acts 3)

If we apprehend things, and present them to men such as they are in the sight of God, the Holy Spirit accompanies the testimony, and the conscience is reached. Thus men, think neither of Peter nor of John (except so far as they recognize them to be men of intelligence according to God, according as God had manifested them to themselves); it was God whom they had found, or rather who had found them. When God gives us this simplicity, which makes us occupy ourselves with things in the manner in which God sees them, we ought to speak to anyone, according to the state he is in before God. If I feel that he is lost, I tell him so simply; and the most simple addresses are the best and the most blessed.

"And he did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away unto my master. And her brother and mother said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go. And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master."

We see Eliezer asking that he may hasten his departure; he must use dispatch in this business, so as to conduct Rebekah to his master's son; and, having accomplished his mission, he says, "Delay me not." He does not trouble himself about Laban's house, and he gives no consideration to his request—he does not stop on account of it. His love for his master makes him consider his orders before everything else.

It is in this generally that weakness is shown. We spare the flesh, and neglect what we owe to God: in reality, we are sparing ourselves through fear of not being agreeable to others, I have seen men, who are faithful in what they have to say to others, blessed of God, when they speak with simplicity and without hesitation.

"And they said, We will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go." There is no hesitation here. So likewise, through the influence of the: Holy Spirit, the bride says, "I will go." She makes up her mind instantly, in the most decided manner, and leaves all "I will go," she says.

Now let us examine Rebekah's position: she had neither the house of Laban nor that of Isaac. It is the same with us. We have neither the earth, on which we are, nor heaven, to which we are going. Rebekah has left everything, and said, "I will go." Eliezer, type of the Holy Spirit, talks to Rebekah during the journey of that which is in the house of her bridegroom's father: precious conversation for the soul which needs to be encouraged by the view of these things, so as to be able to endure the fatigues and difficulties of the journey, and not to think of the house and the country from whence they came out! For Rebekah was going, like us, across the desert; and Eliezer, the faithful servant, who was leading her, took care to comfort her, and to speak to her of the precious things which are in the father's house; to repeat to her the greatness and power of the father, and that "he has given all that he hath to his son."

For us the servant sets forth the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who likewise communicates to us all that there is in the Father's house for those who are the bride of Christ. It is He who takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. It is He who leads us into all truth, while we are crossing the wilderness of this world, and who teaches us all things.

If Rebekah had hesitated, and had thought about the country which she had left, she would have been unhappy; she would have had neither Isaac's house nor her father Bethuel's. To have left all, and to have neither one thing nor the other, her heart, isolated in the wilderness, would have felt itself in an untenable position. But she has left all; and, conversing with Eliezer, she occupies herself with what interests her heart, and raises it above the things which she has now left forever. And she journeys in peace towards the abode of her bridegroom.

So it is with us now. The Christian who is not spiritual, but rather worldly, has a sorrowful lot—he cannot be happy if seeking after the world. The worldly man has at least something; he makes trial of these passing pleasures, and finds in them his joy, worthless as it may be, for in truth this joy does not satisfy. But the Christian finds in these things only uneasiness, because he bears about a conscience affected by the Holy Spirit. If he wishes to take his pleasure in the things of earth, and his heart hangs back from following the Lord, he is unhappy; he cannot chide a conscience which torments him; and as he has not listened to the Holy Spirit's invitation, and has not obeyed it, there is no joy for him. The spiritual things, which ought to have constituted his joy, produce reproaches

in his heart when turns towards them. But we have the grace of Him who calls us, and who leads us, if we are faithful, in a uniform path, for the sake of His name. If we sin, this does not put us under the law; but we have an advocate with the Father, who intercedes for us, and God, who is faithful, cannot fail when He is appealed to. "What wilt Thou do with Thy great name?" Besides, His glory is involved in lifting us up again; and this is grace. Yes, we have a Savior who intercedes with the Father for us, and who works to bring us back to the gracious God who has begun this work in, us and will perfect it till the day of Christ, accomplishing all that concerns us.

In the scene before us Eliezer conducts Rebekah to her bridegroom. So also the Holy Spirit conducts us to the end and goal. What Rebekah first perceives is Isaac; and Isaac takes his bride into his mother's tent. Possessing the bridegroom, she no longer takes thought for anything; she thinks no longer of the possessions, but of the bridegroom himself: The important business was to bring the bride to the bridegroom.

And, as to what regards us in the type which is here presented to us, God seeks us in this world of sin; He finds us; He wills that we should not delay to follow Him when we have said, "I will go;" and He leads us into the presence of Jesus. The Holy Spirit accompanies us in the journey, to help us, to comfort us, to tell us of the blessings and glory which await us, and to introduce us into the presence of Jesus, our heavenly Bridegroom.

This may be modified, as regards the manner, by various circumstances; but such is the effect of the power of the Holy Spirit. The efficacious principle of our calling is that we should freely decide to allow ourselves to be led by Him, to walk with goodwill; knowing that, being in this manner led, we shall arrive at the wished-for end: "So shall we ever be with the Lord."

May God grant us all this mercy. Amen.

Peace - My Peace

Two things are brought before us here. The first is the fact of peace, though there may not be earthly blessing and prosperity, like the Jews, but trouble outwardly; the second is that which characterizes the peace. "My peace" is what He has Himself, and the extent of it. Being thus characterized, it implies that they had not it while He was with them. They lacked nothing; they had purse and scrip, and so forth. He could speak peace in the forgiveness of sins; but this peace, His peace, was not before given to the disciples.

Peace shuts out trouble, as to the realization of it. It is not peace of conscience with God here, but that which could not be disturbed by the knowledge of God. It is not peace without God, and it is independent of all circumstances. So much trouble as there is in circumstances, the peace could not be secure if it could be altered by them.

This peace is the possession of such quiet as to be undisturbed about other things. It is peace with God in the sight of His righteousness and His holiness; and it is an absorbing thing. Suppose I am at peace with someone I do not care much about, I may be troubled enough about other things. The peace does not absorb my affections. When we have the peace itself, we may acquaint ourselves with God. The soul, so satisfied with its own peace, desires nothing else. It knows God, and finds nothing to disturb it in God or out of God.

This peace will keep God between the trouble and us, instead of the trouble coming between us and God. Such is our danger, and such the remedy.

Mark the extent of the peace— "My peace;" and how thoroughly well He knew what He had, that He could give it them! He had been tried, rejected, had suffered; "He had not where to lay his head," "hunted like a partridge on the mountains," the "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" and yet He knew so well the blessedness He had that He could speak of it to leave it to them. There was an unclouded rest in God, and God an unclouded source of blessing to Him, in all His path of sorrow and trouble, so unlike that which anyone else ever had. But "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee," and so forth, was known experimentally by Him; and was there ever uncertainty as to whether His Father heard Him? No; there was an unclouded certainty. Nothing could bring it into question. He need not put it to the test by throwing Himself down from the temple; this were tempting God.

The two expressions in the verse explain each other; "peace," "My peace," and so forth. "Let not your heart be troubled." I am giving you My own "peace." What we have we know to be His; not the knowledge of what we are with God, but what He is to God. We cannot have peace if we have the thought, When I come to know God, what will He think of me? I must know God in order to have peace.

If the Lord came this moment, would you have peace, and be able to say, "This is our God, we have waited for Him"? If you have the consciousness of liking anything that God does not like, you cannot be at peace. Even if you have found peace of conscience about your sins, through the

blood of the cross, it will destroy your communion and peace of heart if you like anything that God does not like. If there is anything not given up in the will, there cannot be peace; if you have peace, then, if God came in, your peace would stay.

Peace is never imperfect; there can be no flaw in it. If anything comes in and produces an uncertainty, it cannot be peace. Water in a dirty pool may look clear at the surface, but if it is stirred up, the dirt comes to the surface; and so with the heart.

Christ gives us His peace; and can wrath disturb it? Did He not know the wrath due to our sin? He bore the wrath. Did He not know the sin? "He was made sin," and so forth. Did He not know God? He came forth from Him.

How can we have peace? Because He has made it "by the blood of His cross." He has expiated sin. The question that agitates your heart He settled between Himself and God, not on His own account, but for us. He was the Son of God. In the presence of wrath He settled it; in the presence of holiness, too, He made His soul an offering for sin. God spent His Son for us; and can He fail to claim us as the objects of His love? He has bought us at an unspeakable price.

He has seen the sin, judged the sin, put the sin away in Christ. Peace is made, peace is given, peace is known by the "blood of the cross." Is it a thought of mine about my getting this peace? No. He says, "My peace I leave with you." He knows what God's wrath is; what God's righteousness is; what God's holiness is; what all His requirements are; and we have the assurance of His peace from His own mouth. Have I earned it? No; He has earned it. Can He deceive me? What is my warrant for expecting the favor of God? If you have believed what wrath is, you will value the favor of Christ. Christ would rather give up His life than God's favor for us.

If Christ is your peace, He is as sinless for you as He was in Himself. He is "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

Dead and Risen With Christ

If you examine the writings of Paul with a little care, you will find this principle at the root of all his teaching—that we are dead and risen with Christ. It is not only that He has died and risen for us, but that we are dead and risen with Him. He adds another thing, and that is our union with Him, now that He is ascended. “We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.” These two principles are found here: our being dead and risen with Him, and our union with Him now that He is on high. When he speaks of union, there is so far a difference that he looks at us as dead to begin with, and the whole power of Christ comes in to raise us. When he looks at people as living in sin, he brings in the doctrine of being dead to sin. On the other hand, if we are looked at as dead in sins, with no spiritual life, then the whole work is of God in raising us out of that state; so in Ephesians he unfolds the privileges of the child of God, from death to union with Christ. Here he lays, as the foundation of his teaching, our being dead and risen with Christ. Thus he associates us with Christ in every respect; first by death, then by resurrection, and lastly, “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory.”

The difference in the two epistles lies specially in this. To the Colossians he speaks of life, or the new nature, we have in Christ; whereas in the Ephesians we have much more of the Holy Spirit, by whom we are made one with Christ, “members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.” Here it is death and resurrection and association with Christ. Indeed this is his doctrine everywhere. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.” “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” His constant theme is that, as believers, our entire association is with Christ.

Now I repeat that, blessed as the full privileges are into which we thus come, the great doctrine, which lies at the foundation and root of all this, is the being dead and risen with Him. The true condition of every believer, that which from the very starting-point this doctrine teaches, is the utter judgment of the old man—the sentence of death passed upon it, and condemnation altogether. There is no recognition of the flesh as to allowance or acceptance of it. But when I have found out that the old man is simply this evil thing, then I discover that it is a question of putting it off and of putting on something else. It is not a correction of the old nature, but the having done with it, and having something else instead of it. I put off the one, and I put on the other. It is a figure, of course, but the figure of what is most real to faith. On the one hand, I have done with my Adam-life; and on the other, the nature that I get or put on by grace is the Christ-life. But how can I put off a I can put off an opinion or a bad habit; but how can I put off a life. The only way of putting off a life is by dying. But here I am alive. How, then, can it be true of me that I have put off the old man? This is the great truth that the apostle brings before us. After having received Christ for my life (the second man—He is called, the last Adam, the life-giving Spirit), after having received life from Christ, He Himself being in me, God has appropriated to me all the value and power of that in which Christ is, and which is in Him.

Here it is more particularly as regards life; but He has been crucified for us, not merely as putting away sins, but “in that He died, He died unto sin once. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” There is this great basis of truth upon which all the apostle’s teaching is founded: that Christ comes, presents Himself to man as in the flesh, and man will not have Him. Man could not have to say to God as a living man in the flesh. But Christ dies for him and those who receive Him into their hearts now live by Him. “As many of us as were baptized unto Christ Jesus, were baptized unto his death.” Such is the way he answers in Romans 6, where the charge is made, “Let us continue in sin that grace may abound.” If it be said, “Christ by his death and resurrection has made me righteous before God, and so I may live in sin,” there is this doctrine in reply. The obedience of Christ is obedience unto death; and if you are dead with Christ, a dead man does not live. He strikes at the root of the matter, and says, You have got this justification of life by Christ’s death and resurrection, and you are denying the very thing that justifies you. It is death to sin and life to God; and therefore you who plead for sin are upsetting the great truth upon which your salvation is founded. If you have died with Christ to all that is in this world, you cannot be living in it. “How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?” It is a sweeping conclusion to every cavil. If I take death, as I do in baptism unto Christ, I take it to all that which I was living in—to sin, flesh, the world, yea, to the law itself. The law has power over a man as long as he lives. Put a man in prison for stealing; and if he dies, it is all over with him. The prisoner is no longer there to be dealt with. The law has not lost its power; but it cannot touch a dead man. And if I say as a believer, I am dead with Christ, my life is over in that sense. It is the same thing as to sin. Obedience becomes obedience to God. Death closes necessarily the connection of the living man with all the things to which the old man had to say. I am crucified with Christ, I am dead with Christ, and I am risen with Him.

On the other hand, there is the positive side: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.” I have received Him who has risen as my life. Nothing can be more important in its place than a distinct and definite apprehension of this; not only Christ has died for us, but we can also say that we have died with Him. How it cuts at the root of everything that flesh seeks! What can a dead man seek? We are to reckon ourselves dead -not to reason that we must die, which will not give us power; but we are to reckon ourselves dead. Supposing a person comes to tempt me; how can he tempt a dead man? He tells me to come and amuse myself in something. But I say, I am dead; and the reason I can say so is, that my life is another kind of life altogether. The old stock may spring up and show itself sometimes; but I learn to treat the old life as not the tree at all. We may fail to do this, and then it will produce the old bad fruit; but inasmuch as Christ is my life, I am but a grafted tree; I have a right to take that which I am grafted into as the real tree, and have nothing to do with anything else.

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” What are the things that belong to a risen life? The things down here in the world? No. What can a risen man seek in the world? He has nothing to do with the, things of this life. That is the position in which He puts us. But, blessed be God, the risen man, supposing we are actually risen, has objects; his life belongs to another world, even to heaven. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.” If I am risen with Christ, and Christ has become my life, where is Christ? Up at the right hand of God. He does not say, You are there; but, speaking of life, he says, “If ye are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on

the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."

Mark how distinctly he here associates us with Christ. He says, Christ is hid in God; well, He is your life, and your life is hid there too. But Christ is going to appear; and when He appears, ye also shall appear with Him in glory. There is complete association with the Lord Jesus now for life, so that my life is hid with Him in God, because He is my life; and when He appears, I also shall appear with Him in glory. It is not union, but complete association with Christ. It is this which gives its character to the Christian, and shows what his life is: "that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal bodies." It is the reproducing Christ in this world: and we get, in the verses that I have read, the complete description of what this life is in a practical sense. The life itself is Christ. "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." But what a truth this is, that, if I am a Christian at all, it is Christ that is my life! It is not the old tree dug about and dunged; that was dine with. When He cursed the fig-tree, it was pronouncing upon the old stock its everlasting fruitlessness. There was no fruit to be found on it; and He said, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever." The old man, the flesh, is a judged, condemned thing; it is the second Man, the Lord from heaven, who is the spring of everything which is good or blessed. It is the great principle that is thus laid down: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God."

Now mark one thing very distinctly of this life. If Christ is my life, in that sense Christ and heavenly things become the object of my life. Every creature must have an object. It is God's supreme prerogative not to want an object. He may love an object; but I cannot live without an object any inure than without food. This life has an object. The law wanted this; it gave no object. It said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength;" but it told me no more about the matter. It is very blessed, in our life as Christians, that, while Christ is our life, yet I am crucified with Christ; and "the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." That is, I get now an object which acts upon and feeds this life, and mikes it grow. "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, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" There is the life; and this life has got a perfect, blessed object which it delights in and contemplates; and this object the Lord Jesus is, not in His humiliation, but in His glory.

Therefore, what is looked for is "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." There is nothing accepted short of what is seen in Christ. Where He is the life in me, and the object of this life, the point is purifying myself even as He is pure. Getting more and more of His grace by thus looking at Him, we are to reckon ourselves dead, instead of having to die. You may ask the flesh to die, but it never will. We talk of having to die to the flesh, because we have not got the consciousness of the positive distinctness of the two natures. The old man will take good care not to die. But being alive in Christ, I have the privilege and title to treat the other nature, the old one, as dead, because He died. It is never said that we have to die, but that as Christians we are entitled to, and do, hold ourselves for dead; because we have this new life. The person who talks of dying to sin, actually holds himself to be alive to sin. The moment I say I found myself ruined, but now I have got Christ for my life, I can say I am dead to sin. There is never the slightest varying of Scripture with regard to this.

That point being thus settled, with the one blessed object before us, we seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. I have got Ode formed and fashioned in His very nature, delighting in these heavenly things, causing us to grow up into Him in all things.

But now comes the actual unfolding of this life. He begins with the lowest things and goes on to the highest, and gives the whole principle and development of this life. He says, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." He will not own the old nature as a life; but lie says, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." And if I look at these members on earth, what are they? Gross sins. All these members upon the earth are lusts. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them." But that is not all. He adds, "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth." If I get angry, it is a proof that the will of the old man is not broken. Anger is not a lust; but if you are living in grace, you do not get into a passion. There is the power of a life which does not these things, and which masters that which does them. We find anger and violence in Satan, who is a murderer; corruption and violence in men. We find all the negative parts here. He says, "Lie not one to the other." He is speaking of that which would be produced by the flesh where it is not kept in check. I am to put off the movements of the old nature. "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds."

We have "put off the old man with his deeds;" but we have also "put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him."

Mark here what we are brought into. I have put off the old man with his deeds; and I have put on something. What have I put on? The new man, which is Christ. I have put on an entirely other nature. And what is the measure of this? Christ is the image of the invisible God; and I am renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created me. God has created this new man; and what is the measure of it? Christ is the source of it and the measure of it; Christ in all His perfection above is the image of Him that created it; and what the Christian sees now in heaven is what he is to be practically—it is Christ. "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also to walk, even as He walked." He is "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him." The measure of it is the revelation of God in Christ. If I am looking at a legal character of right and wrong, I am looking at something in my conduct as a man, and this is not the measure. "Be ye imitators of God, as dear children." But am I to be a sacrifice to God? Certainly. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

That is just the very fruit of all that we are. Wherever the power of divine life comes down and takes possession of a man, it manifests itself in his giving himself up to God. The love of God came down in Christ; and how did it show itself in practice? By giving Himself up to death. "Ye are bought with a price." Then "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Therefore, he says, "Be ye imitators of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor." So again here, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved,

bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

I must begin, then, by treating the old man as dead. We shall soon feel our shortcomings. But that puts us in the blessed place of being dead with Him, and calls us to show the power of the life in which we are called to walk. “Ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all.” If I am speaking of myself as an Englishman or a Frenchman, I forget that I am dead and risen again, and that Christ is all. He is the only object, the only thing that the mind is right in resting on and looking at. “Christ is all.” Looked at as the object, it is Christ, and nothing else, for one that is dead and risen with Him, be he who he may. What do I want? Christ. What am I to follow? Christ. What is the object that my heart has to think of? Christ.

The other truth is this: He is in all Christians; He is their life. “Christ is all and in all.” He is in us as our life; and, being in us as our life, Christ lives in me; and “the life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.” He is all to me. There is the Christian depicted in a few words. Having positively put off the old man with his deeds, and having put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him, Christ is everything to him, and Christ is his life in him. Christ is everything as the fullness of this object, and Christ is in him as his life. Most simple, but wonderfully full! He does not say what a Christian ought to be; it is what a Christian is that we have here. Christ is his life, and Christ is everything to him as having this life. He knows nothing else. We may find our shortcomings, which is another thing; but this is what we are as Christians “Christ is all and in all.”

We see then how blessedly the apostle refers to this for power and practice. He takes now the positive side—the spirit and path in which I walk. “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” That is, walk like Christ. Having now Christ as my life, and Christ as my object, I am given power over the motives that were mine before, and things that are around me have lost their force. I speak of what the life is in its character and principles. The one object that the new life has is Christ; that which alone forms and governs this life is Christ; and, the soul of the believer being filled with Him, the things of the outward world have lost their force: his mind is filled with something else. The life that is in him is occupied with Christ. The consequence of this is, that outward things have no longer their influence over him. “The eye is single, and the whole body is full of light.” Hence what excites the old man is not working now in that way, and the thing manifested is the effect of Christ as revealed to the new man—the new man living on Him. The apostle puts it thus “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved,” and so forth. He does not say, You make out that you are “elect of God, holy and beloved.” He says, This is your place: I want you to live in the consciousness of this; and you are now as such to do so-and-so. Such is the truth of all blessed affections. If I as a child doubted that my father was my father, how could I have the affections of a child? I should say, I wish I were sure of it; but I could not have the full flow of affection that follows from having no doubt about it.

The apostle, then, says, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved," and so forth. Now I am walking in the consciousness of God's delight in me. Is there not love, joy, peace in the soul? That is the place the heart lives in; and now I have to put on all these things. But the way of putting them on is walking in the blessed consciousness of the truth of my place in Christ. If a man is quickened there will be the desires of that new nature, though he may not be able to enjoy it. There are affections and duties which flow from the place I am in. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved." Oh, if my heart can live in that—in what I am—as elect of God, holy and beloved, I can put on anything then! It flows from the blessedness of the place I am in. If I live in the consciousness of my relationship, in the consciousness of what God is to me, these are the fruits that will follow. The first-named fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace; then there will be long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. But I must have love, joy, and peace first. If I am perfectly happy in God I do not mind if a person insults me, but take it patiently. I am perfectly happy, and have got my soul in the place of these blessed affections. Hence other things will not have the power to turn me from it. He says therefore, "Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved."

So, with Christ. He is above all; He is the blessed object, elect, precious—the Holy One, the beloved one above all. And He is our life. When I can act as being in this place, my heart is true in its affections. There we are in this blessed relationship; and we must seek to have the abiding consciousness of what we are before God, that we may, in the enjoyment of this, produce the fruits suitable to this state. Put on these various things which are the life of Christ in this world—"Bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another.... even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God [or Christ] rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."

But now, having spoken of its practical character, he goes on to another step in this life. He looks for the word of Christ dwelling richly in us in all wisdom; and he calls us to live in the largeness of heart and understanding that belongs to a person that has this place in Christ. He says, I want to have your heart and mind enlarged to live in these things; I want the word of Christ, this full revelation which God has given to us of His thoughts and mind as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, to be dwelling in you richly.

Let us now stop and ask ourselves, What has my mind been occupied with today? What has it been running after? Could you say, The word of Christ has dwelt in me richly? Now, perhaps we have been occupied with politics; perhaps with the town talk, or with something of our own. Has the word of our own heart, the work of our own mind, filled up the greater part of our day? That is not Christ. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom." All knowledge is in Him, and all practical wisdom. They are distinct things; but if they are real, they go wonderfully together. Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This, then, is what is looked for; that in this condition there be unfolding and development of the blessed knowledge of Christ. The Spirit of God takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. We live in that sphere in which God unfolds His own mind.

You may mark along with this, that it is not merely knowledge or wisdom of which he speaks, but he adds, "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,

singing with grace- in your hearts to the Lord.” It enters into the affections, because that is the character of hymns and spiritual songs. It is not so much knowledge written down like a sermon, but it is where the heart answers in its affections to the revelation of Christ, perhaps something that I have heard in a meeting when Christ has been unfolded: it is the Holy Spirit raising up the affections in answer to the revelation of Christ that has come down. Then there is the expression of the heart that has received it in the affections of the new man, answering to this in the praise and adoration that it produces. It may not be the reproduction of the same ideas, but it is the adoration of the heart that is drawn out towards the person that has been revealed.

“Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.” Here I get the whole course of everyday life. There are constantly difficulties that I find in passing this world. I say, Ought I to do this thing or that, or not? I am uncertain as to the right course, or I may find great hindrances to doing what I think to be right. Now if ever I find myself in doubt, my eye is not single; my whole body is not full of light; therefore my eye is not single. God brings me into certain circumstances of difficulty until I detect this. It may be something that I never suspected in myself before which hinders me from seeing aright; but it is something between me and Christ; and until that is put away I shall never have certainty as to my path. Therefore he says, “Whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” This will settle nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand. If you are questioning whether you shall do a thing or not, just ask yourself, Am I going to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus? It will settle it at once.

Thus if a person says, “What harm is there in my doing such and such a thing?” I ask, “Are you going to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus?” Perhaps it may be something of which you will answer at once, “Of course not.” Then it is settled at once. It is the test of the state of the heart. If my eye is single, if the purpose of my heart is all right, I get here what settles every question: it tests my heart. I wanted to know the right path, and it is as simple as A B C. If my heart is not upon Christ, I shall endeavor to do my own will; and this is not God’s will. There is the constant uniform rule which clearly judges every path and circumstance: am I simply doing it in the name of the Lord Jesus?

But what do I find with it? “Giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.” In another place it is said, “In everything give thanks.” Where my heart can take Christ with me, my mind is on God, and I can say He is with me, even if it is tribulation. I have got the path of God; I have got Christ with me in my path; and I would rather be there than in what is apparently the fairest and pleasantest thing in the world; as it is said in Psalm 84, “In whose heart are the ways of them.”

Thus closes this unfolding of the life of Christ. It begins with the great truth that we are dead and risen with Christ—the judgment of the old man absolutely and completely, and our reckoning it practically to be dead. People have talked about dying to the flesh, and of its being a slow death, and so forth, which is all nonsense. It is a simple fact that is true already. And if I died with Him, I shall live with Him. It is the power of this that works in my soul. The root of all Paul’s doctrine is that we have been crucified with Him, and have died with Him; and it is not now we who live, but Christ that lives in us. Then Christ becomes the object of this life. Having laid that ground, that the old man is put off and the new man put on, which is Christ, he draws the consequence of the blessing in which we stand, and the fruits which spring from Him; and then there is this simple but

blessed rule for him that is in earnest-I do nothing but what I can do in the name of the Lord Jesus.

One great thing here practically put before us is this—Christ is all. He is in all; but this is the great thing we have to look to, Is He practically all? Can you honestly say, Though a poor, weak creature, notwithstanding I am not conscious of having a single other object in the world but Christ? You find many difficulties—you are not watchful enough—your faith is feeble—you know your shortcomings; but can you, notwithstanding all this, honestly say, I have no object in the world but Christ?

First, the root of all is Christ as the life. Then we pass over to the outward conduct in the man's walk. And let me remark that, while a person may be walking outwardly uprightly and blamelessly, it may be very feebly as a Christian and without spirituality. You will find many a true Christian, who has Christ as his life, and nothing to reproach him with as to his walk, and yet has no spirituality whatever. If you talk to him about Christ, there is nothing that answers. There is, between the life that is at the bottom and the blamelessness that is at the top, between him and Christ, a whole host of affections and objects that are not Christ at all. How much of the day, or of the practice of your soul, is filled up with Christ? How far is He the one object of your heart? When you come to pray to God, do you never get to a point where you shut the door against Him, where there is some reserve, some single thing in your heart, that you keep back from Him? If we pray for blessing up to a certain point only, there is reserve; Christ is not all practically to us.

God's Comforts the Stay of the Soul

Psalms 90-100 are connected together, and seem to me to describe the dealings of the Lord with the Jews, and so forth, in the latter day on the earth. But I am not going to speak of that now. We may often derive comfort from principles which we find in such portions of the Scripture, revealing to us as they do God's character, and so forth; but it is important, to know the mind of the Spirit in the primary sense, as we shall then be able to discern what God is teaching us through them with a great deal more clearness and certainty.

The two principles which form the basis of what is dwelt on here are, that the workers of iniquity are allowed to lift up their heads and flourish, but that the Lord is, and will be, Most High for evermore.

There is the clear perception of this throughout. Under the temporary exaltation and prevalence of wickedness, the godly are in a very tried state, the righteous suffer; but vengeance belongs to God (not to the sufferer), therefore the cry. (vss. 1, 2)

To such a height are the workers of iniquity allowed to go that, in the consciousness that the LORD'S throne could not be cast down, the question comes in, "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?" (vs. 20) So completely has wickedness got place in the earth that there is a sort of question raised, whether the throne of iniquity could subsist in companionship in judgment with the divine throne. The answer is, judgment is coming— "The LORD our God shall cut them off." (vs. 23) Judgment shall return to righteousness in the place of trial and suffering.

The point on which I would dwell a little at present is the consolation of the saints during this time of trial—God's "comforts."

In the first place, we have the assurance— "The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity." (vs. 11)

Then— "Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O LORD," and so forth. (vss. 12, 13)

As to the pride and purpose of man, it is settled in a word. The "thoughts of man" are not only inferior to God's wisdom, they are "vanity." That settles the whole question. All that begins and ends in the heart of man is "vanity," and nothing else. 'Whatever the state of things around, though there may be a "multitude of thoughts within," as 'what will all this come to?' 'how will that end?' and the like—every barrier we can raise, all our strength, all our weakness, whatever the wave after wave that may flow over us—the LORD'S thought about it all is, that it is "vanity." All is working together to one object, God's plan, that upon which his heart is set, the glorification of Jesus; and ours, with Him. Every thought and every plan of man must therefore be "vanity," because it has not this, God's object, for its object; and God's object always comes to pass. There cannot be two ends to what is going on. Let men break their hearts about it, all simply comes to nothing, the end of it is "vanity." God's object is, that "all men should honor the Son, even as they

honor the Father.”

Take a man of the world—the shrewdest calculator, the ablest politician, or the greatest statesman—a poor bedridden saint is wiser than he, and more sure of having his plans brought about; for the heart of the simplest, feeblest saint runs in the same channel with God’s, and, though the saint has no strength, God has.

In this psalm we find, first, the tumult of the enemies—then, that God has done it. So with the saint constantly in trial: he sees the work of Satan—then, God’s hand in it, and he gets blessing. All the present effect of these dealings of “the wicked” is, “Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; that thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked.” The pit is not yet digged, the throne of iniquity is not yet put down. If in chastening, the power of the adversary is against us, the Lord’s hand in it is, to give “rest in the day of adversity,” and so forth.

I speak not merely of suffering for Christ—if we are reproached for the name of Christ, it is only for joy, and triumph, and glory to us; but of those things in which there may be the “multitude of thoughts within,” because we see that we have been walking inconsistently and carelessly in the Lord’s ways. Still it is, “Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord,” and so forth. The Lord does not chasten willingly, without a needs-be for it. And when there has been failure or inconsistency that brings chastisement, He turns the occasion of the chastisement to the working out of the heart’s evil that needed to be chastened. The Lord, in chastening, throws back the heart upon the springs which have been the occasion of the evil. The soul is hereby laid bare for the application of God’s truth unto it, that the word may come home with power. It is taught wherefore it has been chastened; and not only so, but it is brought into the secret of God’s heart—it learns more of His character, who “will not cast off His people, neither forsake His inheritance.” (vs. 14) What God desires for us is, not only that we should have privileges conferred upon us, but that we should have fellowship with Himself. Through these chastenings the whole framework of the heart is brought into juxtaposition with God. And this stabilizes and settles it on the certainty of the hope that grace affords.

Look at Peter after the enemy had sifted him. Though his fall was most humbling and bitter, yet by it he gained a deeper knowledge of God, and a deeper acquaintance with himself, so that he could apply all that he had learned to his brethren. The Lord gives our souls “rest from the day of adversity” by communion with Himself; not only communion in joy, but in holiness. We are thus brought into the secret of God. Circumstances are only used to break down the door, and let in God. God is near to the soul when He in the certainty of love comes within the circumstances, and is known as better than any circumstance.

The LORD never chastens without occasion for it, and yet “Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O LORD.” There is not a more wonderful word than that! I do not say that a man can say this always while under chastening; for if the soul is judging itself, there will be often anxiety and sorrow; but the effects are blessed. What we want is that all our thoughts, and ways, and actings of will should be displaced, and that God should be everything. All chastening must have in principle the character of law in it; for it is the Lord dealing with His people in righteousness (as it is said, “If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work”), not in the sovereign riches of divine grace. It is God’s allowing nothing in the heart

inconsistent with that holiness of which the believer has been made partaker. It is indeed most blessed grace that takes all the pains with us; but that is not the character it assumes.

What we exceedingly need is intimacy of soul with God, resting in quietness in Him, though all be confusion and tumult around us. When the man here had God near his heart, though iniquity abounded, it was only the means of making God's "comforts" known to his soul; as it is said, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul." (vs. 19) Our portion is not only to know the riches of God's grace, but the secret of the Lord—to have intimacy of communion with Him in His holiness. Then, however adverse the circumstances, the soul rests quietly and steadfastly in Him.

If, my friends, you would have full unhindered peace and depth of fellowship with God, and one with another; if you would meet circumstances and temptations without being moved thereby, it must flow from this, not merely the knowledge that all things are yours in Christ, but acquaintance with God Himself; as it is said, "Being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."

May we, through grace enabling, let God have all His way in our hearts.

God's Own Joy in Love, and Man's Murmurings Against It

"Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."-Luke 15:1,2.

It is a wonderfully blessed thing to have one (the thoughts, and words, and ways of one down here, in His actings amongst men) who could so well manifest God as the Lord Jesus.

We may look at the sin of man as a question to be judged of in the light of righteousness before God, and most important it is as such; still, in one sense, God moves above all the evil, and asserts His right to show out what He is. Blessed is it for us that God will be God, in spite of sin! "God is love," and if He will be God, He must be love; and that notwithstanding all the reasonings and murmurings of the heart of man against Him. God acts, so to speak, upon the feelings of His heart, and makes them find their way into the hearts of men. And that is just the reason there is such a freshness in the word—God never fails; the moment He speaks and reveals Himself we have always the full blessedness of what He is. It is Himself who has come forth, and that with power to our hearts, as the blessed God. He will take no character from man. If He has to deal with sin, to show what it is, how He has put it away, and the like, still, above and through all, He manifests himself. And here it is our hearts get rest. We have the privilege to have done with ourselves in the blessedness of the house and bosom of God.

In a certain sense (for man could not have borne the manifestation of God in the brightness of glory) God hid Himself. He clothed Himself in flesh. But what was the effect of the wicked and heartless reasonings of man's corrupt judgment? —for man was ever rejecting, finding fault, and carping at certain things with which he could not agree in the ways of Christ—to force Christ back, pressing out from Him what He really was as God. The soul becomes arrested in reading chapters which exhibit this, it finds itself with unhesitating certainty in the presence of God, in the presence of Love. And there we get rest and peace.

Here (Luke 15) Jesus is forced to tell out all the truth. God will be God. If there is that which makes God "glad," He will have His own joy, spite of the objections of man. It is God's own joy to act in love. And this is just what man objects to. Man does not object to God's being righteous; he does not deny that God is going to judge (I speak not of the professed infidel): no, as a general principle, man does not object to the one or deny the other; but the moment God comes to have His own full joy, and to bring out that which is the joy of heaven, man objects, and says, "It must not be all grace!" "God must not deal with publicans and sinners thus! "And why not? Because, what then becomes of man's righteousness? God dealing in grace makes nothing of man's righteousness—"there is no difference;" "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3). Christ manifesting light proved this; Pharisee and publican were alike detected; and man hated it. Grace deals with all men upon one common ground, that of being sinners; it levels their moral condition, and comes only to those who have need of it (Luke 5:31-32). This man cannot bear; what he is always seeking to do is, to make a difference between righteousness and unrighteousness in man, so that himself may have a certain character before others. Slighting God's righteousness, and

magnifying our own, always go together.

In John 8 we find one brought by the scribes and Pharisees before Jesus, who, judged according to the law, was worthy of death, one undeniably guilty; that Jesus might be obliged to deny either mercy or righteousness. This was their motive. They thought to place Him in an inextricable difficulty. If He let her sin pass unnoticed, He would break the law of Moses; and, again, should He say, "Let her be stoned," it would be no more than Moses had done. How does He act? He lets law and righteousness have all their course, but tells her accusers at the same time, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Conscience begins to act (not rightly, it is true, for their character was what they cared about), and they get out of the presence of light, because light makes manifest, and proves them sinners. "Beginning at the eldest even to the youngest," all went out (he that had the longest reputation glad to be the first from before that eye which could penetrate and detect what there was within), "and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst." He will not execute the law. No. "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." That which is produced is only Love. Whenever one stood before Him, or had anything to do with Him as a detected and confessed sinner, it was always grace, and all grace. The more the discovered sin, the more grace was revealed, free and unqualified.

In all the parables of this chapter, put forth by Jesus because grace had been objected to, in His dealings with "publicans and sinners," we get this one great and blessed thought—God manifested. "I will suppose," He says, "a man reduced to the worst, the vilest possible condition, as bad as you please; but then there is something still behind all this that I am going to bring out—something, too, which even your own natural hearts ought to recognize—the father's delight in receiving back his child. Would not a father's heart justify itself in its own feelings of kindness, let the condition of the child be what it may?"

After the Lord Jesus Himself had gone through this world, and found no place where a really broken heart could rest, He could find proud morality enough, but no place where a poor, weary, broken heart could find sympathy and rest; He comes to tell us that what was not to be found for man elsewhere, could be found in God. And this is so blessed! So blessed, that, after all, a poor wearied heart, wearied with itself, with its own ways, with the world, with everything, can find rest in the bosom of the Father. What it could do in no other place, it can do there—tell itself out, and that in truthfulness. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psa. 32). So long as I am afraid of being blamed for what may be discovered, there will be guile in the heart; but the moment I know it forgiven, that nothing but love is drawn out by it, I can go and tell all to God. The only thing that produces "truth in the inward parts," is the grace that imputes nothing. That is the secret of God's power in setting hearts right with Himself— "there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." There is all the difference possible between a man's flying from God by reason of his conscience, and his finding in God the one who says, "neither do I condemn thee."

The first parable is that of the shepherd who sought the lost sheep.

The second, that of the woman who sought the lost piece of money.

The third, the father's reception of the returning prodigal.

The last is not a question of seeking at all, but of the manner of the father's receiving the son when he had come back. And this is of much importance. Our souls need to understand it aright, as well as to know the great cardinal truth, that God seeks the lost. One principle runs through all the parables—God is acting upon His own character. No doubt it is joy to the sinner to be received, but it is the joy of God to receive him. "It is meet that we should make merry, and be glad;" not merely meet that the child should be glad to be back again in the house; the father is the happy one.

The return of the prodigal is joy to heaven, whatever men, whatever Pharisees may think about it.

It is something wonderfully lovely to be let into heaven in this way, and that, too, by one who knew heaven so well. The chord which God strikes, heaven responds to and reechoes, and so must every heart down here that is tuned by grace. What discord is there in self-righteousness! Jesus tells forth the joy and grace of God, the joy of heaven, but puts all this in contrast with the feelings of the elder brother—those of any self-righteous person.

It is this note, sounded from heaven in love, that we read in the heart and ways of Jesus down here. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." And oh, how sweet a note! On earth, astonishing; in heaven, natural. Here, on earth, amongst us, God has manifested what He is, "which things the angels desire to look into." (1 Peter 1)

1. The first thing the Lord Jesus does, is to justify God in being good to sinners. He appeals at once to the natural heart of man. "What man of you, having an hundred sheep," and so forth. (vs. 4) "The shepherd puts his sheep upon his shoulder, and brings it home rejoicing; have I not a right to seek the 'lost'?" is it not right for God to come amongst "publicans and sinners" ' ? This may not suit a moral man, but it suits God; it is His privilege to come amongst sin, near to the sinner, because He can deliver. The shepherd puts his sheep upon his shoulder, he goes out to seek it—charges himself with it—takes the whole toil of it (it is his interest to do so because he values the sheep), and he brings it home again rejoicing. Thus He presents the shepherd here. And thus is it with the "great Shepherd of the sheep." It is His interest to "seek and to save that which was lost" (He ever makes it His interest, in the sense of love), the sheep is His own, and He brings it home rejoicing, bidding others to rejoice with Him— "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

But how does He set about it? We tell people sometimes to seek Christ, and rightly so in one sense; it is quite true, "he that seeketh findeth;" but Jesus did not say, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," until He had first come Himself to "seek and to save." Because the sinner could not go to heaven to seek Christ, Christ came to earth to seek the sinner. He did not say to the poor leper, "Come up to heaven, and be thou clean;" but came down to the leper in all his need to make him clean. Had any other laid his hand upon the leper, he would have become unclean. Christ alone could touch the power of evil, and have no contamination. "Come unto Me; rest is not to be found here, any more than it was by Noah's dove amidst the deluge; I have tried the world all through, and it is a sea of evil without a shore."

2. We see another thing in this second parable (vss. 8-10)—the painstaking of the love, eager diligence with the determination to succeed in seeking the sinner. Everything is done to get the money; the woman lights the candle, sweeps the house, nor stops in her task of love—diligent,

active love, until the piece is found. It was her interest to do this, because the money was hers. Then again there is the joy in the recovered possession, her own joy and the tone given to others, who are called in to have communion with her. And this, too, is the way of the Lord in His dealings with "that which is lost." There is the patient activity of love, in the use of means, by the Holy Spirit, until the effect is produced. And "likewise," Jesus adds, "I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

In both parables we get the absolute actings of grace, without any reference to the effect in the heart of the sinner; and in both this great principle (common, as noticed before, to the three), God's own joy in love. Thus the result of man's pharisaic objection to grace was but the bringing out of the declaration by Jesus of the energetic power and activities of divine love, as well as the good-will. The piece of money, as the sheep, could do nothing: it was their joy, who had lost, to get them back again, because they value them. Worth nothing in a certain sense, but to God's love the sinner is immensely valuable.

At the same time there is a most important work, an effect, produced in the heart of the one who, having gone astray, is brought back. On this account we have a third parable, which shows us the feelings of the wanderer, and, further, the manner of his reception. The father's heart and the prodigal's are both laid open. Not only are the inward workings of the former told out, but we have in addition the manifestation of the latter. In a word, it is not the estimate formed by the prodigal about the love of the father's heart that gives the answer to all his thoughts; but the manifestation of his own heart by the father. This one simple fact, the father is on his neck kissing him, tells the prodigal what that heart is.

3. In this the last of the three parables the Lord pursues the sinner to his utmost degradation—eating husks with the swine, (and we should remember here what swine were in the estimate of those to whom He spoke)—there, too, of his own choice. Why was the picture drawn thus? To show that nothing could put the sinner beyond the reach of grace. Trace it as far as you please, God will act as God at the end of the story. "Where sin abounded, grace has much more abounded."

Let us look a little at the case in detail. "A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country." (vss. 11-13) This is just our history, as men. Whether living in vice or not, we have all turned our back on God. The son here was happier far, as a man, when going from home, than when returning; he was doing his own will. This is the secret of all sin. The prodigal was as completely a sinner when he stepped, rich, across his father's threshold, as when feeding with swine in the "far country."

He had chosen to act independently. The fruits of this, it is true, were reaped afterward; but that is not the question. Nay, in one sense, the very consequences of his sin were mercies, because through them he was brought to find out his sin. (vs. 18). When he first left the house, he showed where his heart was -alienated, revolted, gone; his back was turned upon his father and his father's house, and his face was towards the "far country." He went forth to do his own will. A parent's heart will understand that. Our children sin against us, and we feel it; but we sin against God, and feel it not. We are all of us in that sense, children that "have turned every one to his own

way.”

“And there” (having reached the far country), he went on gaily in his own will as long as he could, he “spent his substance in riotous living.” (vs. 13) The sinner, if he thinks himself quite happy, does so, because he has got at a distance from God, where he has no restraint upon his will. But then, after all, he is in the devil’s country, and enslaved to him. Liberty of will is just slavery to the devil.

“And when he had spent all” (anyone who lives beyond his means looks rich for a time), “there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.” (vs. 14) He “began to be in want;” but his will was not touched yet, as we shall see directly. There is many a heart not easy in the world; but it is never the effect of that merely, to bring back to God. Very few have arrived at a certain time of life who have not “begun to be in want;” but then they go and seek in pleasure or in vice, in one thing or another, it matters not what—last of all, in God, something to satisfy them. A man of the world says, you must have everything that is in the world, in order to know that the world can never satisfy you; but the knowledge that all the world cannot satisfy would never turn a man to God. He must know more, even that he is perishing; not merely not satisfied, but ruined.

Being “in want,” the prodigal next “joined himself to a citizen of that country,” and was sent by him into the fields to “feed swine:” he was reduced to all this degradation—manifestly a servant of the devil; “and he would fain have filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat: but no man gave unto him.” (vss. 15-16) There is no giving in the “far country,” not even of “husks;” you must buy everything. The world’s principle is, “nothing for nothing;” “everything must bring its price.” Your gratifications there must be purchased at the sacrifice of reputation and soul.

After a time, we find this young man “came to himself.” (vs. 17) He awoke to the consciousness, “I perish with hunger;” and then it was he thought of the “father’s house,” the very place that he had been so anxious to get away from at first. He did not yet understand how he would be received there; but he did understand there was love in that house, that the very “hired servants”, had “enough and to spare;” and he did understand also that he was not only hungry, but “perishing with hunger.” He wanted the goodness of that house; his was no mere abstract delighting in it. Wisdom and philosophy never found out God; He makes Himself known to us through our need—necessity finds Him out. Who is it that really discovers the value of bread?—the chemist? No, a hungry man. The sinner’s heart—yes, and the saint’s heart too, is put in its right place in this way. I doubt much if we have ever learned anything solidly, except we have learned it thus.

“I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” (vss. 18-19) He knew that there was goodness there, and that it was all over with him where he was; the need of his condition, everything, told him he must get back; but he did not yet know the extent of that goodness. We see the same thing in Peter (Luke 5); he goes and falls at the feet of Jesus, and says, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” What an inconsistency! at the knees of Jesus, and yet telling Him to go away! And there is often this apparent inconsistency when there is a work on the conscience and the affections. God becomes necessary to us, and yet conscience says, “you are too sinful.” Peter felt his own worthlessness; he thought Jesus was too holy, too righteous, to be with such a one as he, and yet he could not help going to Him.

The prodigal did go back, glad to be in the house, but not having a true estimate of the father's heart. No more worthy to be called a "son," his thought was to get into the place of a "hired servant." (vs. 19) And this is just the state of a multitude of hearts around, they are lowering down the standard of what the Father must do, in the sense of what they have been and are. I am not speaking of positive self-righteousness, but of hearts which have still the remains of legalism, and would take the place of servants in the house. Now God can only receive us in grace, because we have spent all-ruined ourselves, and forfeited every claim upon Him. Look at the history before us. This "snake me as one of thy hired servants" would not do for the father, though it might have done for the son. What constant misery and wretchedness to that father's heart would it have been, as well as degradation to the son, to receive and treat him thus his very condition in the house a constant memorial of his sin. And thus is it with us. Our Father cannot have sons in His house as servants: if boundless grace brings them in, He must show the manner of their reception to be worthy of a Father's love.

The prodigal was not yet brought to feel it must be grace or nothing; but the father did not give him time to say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants;" he let him tell out the confession of his sin, but no more; "he was on his neck, kissing him!" How could he say, Make me an "hired servant," when his father was on his neck, producing the consciousness that he was still a son? The prodigal's judgment about the father's heart was drawn from what the father was actually to him, and not from any abstract reasonings about it. And that is the true way of receiving the "gospel of the grace of God." It is not the working up of my mind to think what I am before God, but the revelation by the Holy Spirit of what the Father is to me. He is a Father, I am a son.

Look again at the manner of the reception the prodigal had. He determined in his own mind what he would do, and what he would say, and the conditions of his reception, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him," and so forth (vss. 18-19); and before he had time to reach the father's house, and say all this, "while yet a great way off," the father "saw him," "had compassion on him" (the son was lost in the father), "ran to meet him, fell on his neck, and kissed him." (vs. 20) There was nothing in the son but confession of unworthiness. We are left, as it were, to discover the nature of his thoughts and feelings by the knowledge of the father's. And so entirely is it in the estimate of our salvation. We are left to discover what we are, in the revelation of the love of the Father.

Why did the father fall on his neck, and kiss him? Was it for anything in the son? No; it was because of the love that was in his own heart. The rags of the "far country" were still upon him: the father did not stop to ask him anything, he knew that he had acted wrongly. It would have been of no good or use to say, "He has disgraced you, dishonored your name:" he could see that very well. It was no question of fitness or worthiness in the son (the father's heart did not reason in that way), he was acting from himself, and for himself—worthily of a father. He was on his neck, because the father loved to be there. It is the love that is in God, not any loveliness in the sinner, that accounts for the extravagant liberality of his reception, through Christ. If I know that my sins are forgiven, that the Father is on my neck kissing me, the more I know of my sins—thus knowing the Father's love, the happier I am. (Luke 7:47) Suppose a merchant having liabilities which he is unable to meet, but ignorant of the exact amount; he might be afraid to look fairly through his books. But suppose, on the other hand, that the debt had been discharged, and that he had the certainty of an immense fund of riches, when all was paid (some friend having done it), he would no longer

hesitate to look at them; the discovery of his obligation would serve to enhance his friend's love. Grace has put all away; therefore the whole effect of the discovery of sin, when we know its forgiveness, is to enhance the love. If the Father is kissing me, the very consciousness that he is doing it, when I am in my rags, proves what a forgiveness it is. There is not another in the whole world that would not have thought about my rags, before he was on my neck.

But look again at the prodigal. The servants are now called out to introduce him into the house fittingly. "The father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." (vss. 22-24) God clothes us with Christ, and brings us into the house where the servants are, with nothing less than all the honor He can put upon us—as He would have us be there, and with His mind expressed about the value of a "son." The best robe, the ring, the shoes, the fatted calf, the feast of joy that welcomed the returning prodigal—the father's mind was, that a son of his was worth it all, and that it was worthy of him to give it.

How little worthy would it have been of a father, acting in grace, to keep him as a servant in the house. It may be that some who read these pages are thinking it humility to desire the servant's place. But it is not humility, it is only ignorance of the Father's mind. "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of his grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:4-7) If we begin at this end, would it have been worthy of Him to put us in the house with a constant memorial of the sin and shame of our former degradation upon us? No! If there were any sense of shame, the barest trace of the "far country," would it have been worthy of the Father? The "worshipper once purged" has "no more conscience of sin." All that is in God's house must be worthy of God.

But perhaps our wretched, unbelieving hearts may whisper, "Ah, that will be quite true when there, when really in the Father's house." Let me ask what faith is. Faith judges as God judges. I see sin in the light of God's holiness, and learn grace in the heart of my Father. He that believes "sets to his seal that God is true." Faith is the only thing that gives certainty. Reasoning may be all quite well for the things of this world; but if God speaks, faith believes. Faith "sets to its seal," not that it may be, perhaps; but, that "God is true." "Abraham believed God;" (not in God, though that is also true); he believed that what God said was true. What, then, does God tell me, if I am a believer in His Son? That my sins and iniquities He "remembers no more." I believe it. That I have "eternal life." I believe that, too. It was sin to doubt it; not to believe that of which He assures me, is to wrong God. If a son, I am in His presence without a spot of sin through the blood of the Lamb. Faith believes this: God has said it. Were it my own righteousness in which I stood there, it must be torn to shreds; but it is a question about God's estimate of the value of the blood. What has it done? cleansed half my sins? No, it "cleanses from all sin." Again, I read, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree" — is this some of our sins? It is "our sins." And then if my soul knows, on the one hand, the value to God of the blood of the Lamb, I know, on the other, that it all results from the love of the Father.

When I see the character Christ gives here of what God is towards me as a sinner (and he was forced to do this by the self-righteousness of the Pharisees—of man), the doubts of my heart are silenced before such grace.

Is there one who, after having read this paper, can say that divine grace sanctions sin? one in the spirit of the elder brother? (vs. 28) I would reply, “therefore came his father out, and entreated him” We see the patience of love towards this wretched man—not merely towards the poor prodigal, but towards this one who shared not in the general joy. The servants were glad; they could say, “thy brother is come,” and so forth. All caught the tone of joy save one. And who was he? The man who thought of self and self-righteousness, who said, “Lo these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment.” Take care lest your heart be turning to sourness the love and grace that God shows to a fellow-sinner. “He would not go in.” The father reasoned with him; said, “It is (not my son, but) thy brother come back,” and so forth (love is high enough up for anything)—but in vain. He could not enter into the spirit which actuated all in the house, from the father down to the lowest menial: “he remained without,” and had none of the happiness and none of the joy. There was in him manifested opposition of heart to the riches of the father’s grace; and this is man.

How can I know God’s heart? Is it by looking to my own heart? No; but by learning it in the gift of His Son. The God we have to say to, is the God who has given His Son for sinners; and if we do not know this, we do not know Him at all. “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?”

Do not be saying to God, “make me as one of thine hired servants;” all true service must result from the knowledge of Himself. Do not be putting the estimate of your own hearts on God’s goodness. Our wretched hearts have such a tendency to turn back to legalism, and call it humbleness. The only real humbleness, and strength, and blessing, is to forget self in the presence and blessedness of God.

Wilderness Grace

Those who are familiar with the study of this part of Scripture will remember that the history of Israel, from the Red Sea to Sinai (that is, from the time of their deliverance out of Egypt until they placed themselves under law), contains an exceedingly remarkable testimony to the grace of God.

At Sinai, Israel took up the promises of God on the condition of their own obedience, and then their entire failure was manifested. But, up to that moment, all God's dealings with them had been in grace. Though there was continual murmuring, and unbelief, and disobedience, He did not chasten for these things, as afterward, when they had taken a stand before Him on the ground of obedience.

It was an immense transition in their history.

The law "came in," as it were (though of course it was perfect in itself), "by-the-by," between the promises and the accomplishment of the promises, to show what the condition of man would be if he stood on his own ground before God. The law was not before the promises, the apostle argues (Gal. 3), "that it should make the promises of none effect." Promise was given first. And "he to whom the promises were made" came after the law. Meanwhile the law entered in order to manifest what man was, and the effect that would be produced on man, when placed on the ground of obedience to the known will of God.

It was needful to do this, because of the constant tendency of the heart to put itself under law, in spite of repeated failures; not that God's promises of grace were not simple and clear, but because of this natural tendency of the heart of man. Supposing my conscience to be awakened, I must know that it is my duty (that I ought) to please and obey God. The effect of this naturally is, that I expect God would accept me on this condition. Till a man is brought to feel his really lost state, this is very natural. It is quite too late to talk of pleasing and obeying God when we know ourselves to be lost sinners.

Now God, who is wonderfully painstaking with us for our blessing, sent the law, in order that this tendency of man's heart, and his utter worthlessness, might be shown out and proved to man. But before He did this, He had made known abounding grace, pure grace, flowing from His own thoughts and purposes, without any reference to the feelings of man about Him, or any condition of man's obedience.

So that those whose hearts were opened to believe the promises could rest in peace upon them, all the while they were learning more of their own sinfulness, through the law. The very starting-point of all God's dealings with us is pure grace, suitable to sinners, whose state He knows, and therefore knows how to meet.

There was no promise given to Adam before he fell. He needed none; he was happy in his innocence and then present condition. And, after he had sinned, the promise given was not made to rest on anything in him. The Lord came down to the garden, saying, "Adam, where art thou?"

that he might be made to feel what the condition was into which sin had plunged him; and he answered, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." The Lord did not give a promise to Adam (for he could not, in the state of sin in which he was, without dealing lightly with sin; neither could He leave Adam without promise, unless He cast him into remediless despair). What God does is to bring in "the seed of the woman"—the Second Adam. There was not a word of promise to Adam personally, the promise was made to "the seed of the woman" in pronouncing the curse on the serpent—"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This was a promise for Adam, one on which his soul might rest, one that faith could lay hold of—no promise to Adam in his sin, but a promise of blessing in and to Christ. And it appears that through grace Adam did rest on this interference of God, for he afterward speaks of Eve as "the mother of all living."

This was developed onwards and onwards, till we come to the history of Abraham; where it is revealed still more definitely; "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Isaac was only the type of Christ. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Thus Christ was the seed to whom the promise was made. (Gal. 3) "All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen;" and we, through grace, can now add, "unto the glory of God by us."

The promises were not only made to Abraham (Gen. 12) and to his seed, but confirmed to the seed through resurrection. (Gen. 22) This was shown in Abraham's being commanded to offer up Isaac, and his receiving of him again from the dead "in a figure" (as the apostle speaks, Hebrews 11). Christ takes the promises, not as on earth incarnate, but as risen from the dead. Without His death and resurrection, we could have had no part in them, for God cannot bless people in sin. "What concord hath Christ with Bella?" It is impossible that there could be communion between God and the sinner in his sins. If the Lord Jesus had not died, and become the source of a new life to the sinner, we could have had no portion with Him in these promises. After the resurrection of Isaac there was a confirmation to the seed of the promises made to Abraham. "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." This is referred to by the Spirit in Galatians.

As to blessing, unless we speak on the presumption of our own thoughts about sin, we must look to Christ in reference to it. All the blessing is Christ's; it belongs to Him, and to us only, as having our portion in and with Him. It all rests on promise, without any reference to the state of man. Our strength and comfort is, in seeing this, that it flows down from God as the expression of His thoughts towards us. Just as water reaching a thirsty man, the water has only to do with the thirsty man as it regards quenching his thirst; it does not come from, but merely to him.

There was, then, the sentence of punishment pronounced on the serpent, and the promise given to the seed. All is of grace, and in Christ.

The Lord having settled this great basis of truth, that all is of grace, in Christ, and established in resurrection, He began to manifest His ways more in detail, and that, first, amongst His own people Israel, the seed of Abraham after the flesh. He began to show, not merely His grace in

giving the promises to the seed, on which faith might lay hold, but His own considerate love in caring for the need and sorrows of His people. When once it was completely settled, that the promises came simply from God and from His love, then He shows that He can consider all the need of His people, and take every possible thought about them and their sorrows, saying to Moses (chap. 3), "I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto Me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them," and so forth. He took notice of every circumstance of their trouble and sorrow.

Having sent this message to them by the hand of Moses, that He knew their sorrows, and having touched their heart in this way, giving them confidence in His love, in spite of their sinfulness, so that "the people believed and bowed their head and worshipped," He does not pass over their sin. He cannot help seeing their evil; and, if He is to have them in communion with Himself, He must take notice of their condition towards Himself, as well as towards Pharaoh, that is to say, that of being sinners God and sin must be always at variance; we ourselves feel it to be so. When quickened and convinced of sin, the first expression of our hearts, like that of Peter's, is, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" We see at once, as he did, that God's holiness cannot, and ought not, to allow of sin. There is always great ignorance in us when we say this, though it is a very true feeling; for it is as though we thought that the Lord did not know a great deal more of what is in our hearts than we do ourselves. A moment's consideration, in the case of Peter, would have made him feel, The Lord knew that I was a sinful man before He came into my ship; and yet He came; surely then I need not shrink from Him.

The Lord gives us confidence in Himself by taking the start of us about the knowledge of our sinfulness. Jesus said to Peter, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men"—planting him at once in confidence in Himself, because showing him that though He knew quite well he was a sinner, yet His purpose was to make him the means of saving sinners. It was as much as to say, You need not shrink from me; for if I could not meet you in grace, and put away your sin, I could not, of course, make use of you to save others.

In bringing Israel into direct fellowship with Himself, God showed, by putting the blood on their door-posts (Ex. 12), that when He executed judgment on Egypt, He secured deliverance from it to His people. And just so in God's dealings with us; the judgment that has passed on Christ because of sin is the security of the church (of every believer) against judgment. When the soul apprehends the Lord Jesus as the one offering for sin, it has confidence in God, and that on the very ground of His knowing thoroughly our sinfulness. It is impossible that God should pass over the blood of the Lord Jesus, and impute to sinners those sins which He has washed away. He cannot impute sin to a believer without condemning the value of His blood-shedding, and virtually denying the efficacy of it. And if that be true when He judges men by and by, it must be true now. Faith knows that death is God's own sentence against sin, and that it has been executed on Christ in the sinner's stead. Faith "sets to its seal that God is true," and receives His thoughts, who has said, "When I see the blood I will pass over."

But there is another thing; it is not merely that God says, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people, I know their sorrows," and so forth; there must be also His power put forth in delivering. This is shown in the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea (Ex. 14), and to us in the Lord Jesus having, "through death, destroyed him that had the power of death." (Heb. 2:14) In the cross Satan put forth all his power and energy against the Prince of life; and he did it successfully, arraying both Jew and Gentile against Him—it was "your hour, and the power of darkness," Luke 22:53); but in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus the mightiest power of Satan was destroyed forever. And so with Israel. God had taken up the cause of His people. It was not merely that He had given them peace through the blood sprinkled on their door-posts, but He Himself had entered into conflict with their enemies, and Satan's power in enslaving them was completely gone. We may have been brought to see the sinfulness and evil of our condition before God, and the power of the blood of Jesus in satisfying the holiness of God; but we do not know liberty till we see God for us in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

What was the effect of deliverance to Israel? and what is the effect of our deliverance from the bondage of Pharaoh (Satan, looked at as such) To bring into the wilderness, and not at once into Canaan. Being in the wilderness implies all sorts of trials. It may seem strange to sight, that they who had just been singing the song of triumph and deliverance (Ex. 15) should be allowed to be three days in the wilderness without water; and then when they came to water, should find it so bitter that they could not drink of it. But God permits of these trials, in order that we may see our own need, and prove His faithfulness. From the Red Sea to Sinai Israel proved the grace which belongs to us now. Let us ever remember, when speaking of the wilderness, that though there is trial in it, and plenty of trial, it is the place of the ministration of grace. The Lord's previous dealings were, as I may say, preliminary; He brought Israel into the wilderness in order to have them quite alone with Himself; that He might teach them what He was; as He said afterward, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself." (Ex. 19:4) He lets us pass through these trials, that we may thoroughly understand that all is from God there. The eagle's wing never tires or fails. It is either the most blessed triumph, security, and victory, that we enjoy, or it is nothing. It is wonderful how our hearts cling, not only to the thought of our own righteousness, but to the practical denial of our not having any strength in ourselves. Many have peace in Jesus who do not see so entirely that they have no strength, either for service or conflict. Well, they learn it in the wilderness. Our journey through the wilderness is the weaning us from trusting in ourselves, in order that we may trust only in God.

The first thing God taught Israel in the wilderness was that they could not get a drop of water except He gave it to them. They were kept without it three days and when they came to water at last (when there was something within reach that man seemed able to grasp), they could not drink of it, it was so bitter, until the Lord showed Moses a tree to cast into the waters, which made them sweet—the Lord causing that which was death to become the means of life, as Hezekiah says: "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit" (Isa. 38). In death to the flesh there is life to the Spirit.

Exodus 16: The Israelites want bread, and begin to murmur again. The Lord deals with them in grace, and gives them bread. But it was such bread as showed them, morning by morning, that they must depend on Him. Had He withheld the manna one day, they would have had nothing to eat; for they could not keep it till the morrow—"it bred worms, and stank." The Lord will not allow

us to lay up anything (no, not even grace) in store that would tend to lead us into independence of Himself it will turn to evil if we do. He showed His people perpetual grace in His dealings towards them; but He never took them, nor can He ever take us, out of the condition of dependence on Himself.

The manna was the type of Christ, as the water of the Spirit.

Soon after (Ex. 17) in journeying from the wilderness of Sin, we find the Israelites murmuring again because they had no water. "Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water, that we may drink." But new murmurings only bring out fresh grace (for they had not yet come to Sinai). God gave them water. His grace abounded where their sin abounded. The more they murmured, the more, in one sense, they got.

I would just remark in passing that it is sin not to have confidence in the Lord-not to be quite sure that He will help us, whatever the need may be, when we are walking in His ways. It is recorded of the children of Israel as sin that they tempted the Lord in that which they said here: "Is the Lord among us, or not?" (vs. 7) When we are going on wickedly and willfully, and say, "Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us," that is quite a different thing. The Lord (if His children) will indeed be with us even then, but to chasten us. Whenever there is real need in the wilderness, it is sin to doubt whether God will help us or not. If we are not as sure of water in the midst of the sandy desert as though we saw rivers of water running through the country, we are tempting God.

This is the force of that expression of our Lord to Satan: "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Satan wanted Jesus to try by an experiment whether God would be as good as His word. Had He done so, it would have implied a doubt. His answer was, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Tempting the Lord is doubting the supply of His goodness in giving us all that we need.

The supply of water and of manna to the Israelites did not take them out of trouble. They drank, and were refreshed; there was the gathering up a little strength, and then Amalek comes and fights against them. It was but the preparation for conflict. So those who feed on Christ as the manna, and have in their souls the well of water springing up into everlasting life, have still the wilderness and conflict with Amalek.

In that sense we have to do with Satan, though we are entirely delivered from his bondage. We are never under the power of Satan, as Israel was under the power of Pharaoh. (If Israel binds itself to Amalek, it is its own fault) It is said to us, "Sin shall not have the dominion over you: for ye are not under law, but under grace." But we have to fight with AMALEK, though delivered from PHARAOH. When we have been brought into the wilderness, and fed and refreshed through this grace, conflict begins. Yet we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me; for He has said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (Heb. 13) The being delivered from the bondage of Satan, and the being ranged on the Lord's side, is that which brings us into conflict; and in this the Lord never lets us be taken out of dependence on Himself. The moment we forget this we shall be overcome. Satan can never make us his slaves again, but we may be beaten and wounded by him.

In every detail of our lives there is no blessing but in dependence on God. Whenever self-dependence comes in, whenever our own wills are working, there is failure. If in speaking to

you now I were to cease from depending on the Lord in doing it, all blessing to my own soul would cease. "Without Me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5) Neither can I speak, nor you hear, to profit, without dependence on Him. If a Christian gets out of dependence on the Lord, he will be beaten by Satan in conflict. But we ought not merely not to be beaten by Satan, we ought to be gaining ground upon him whether it be in winning souls to Christ, or whether it be in making progress truly ourselves in knowledge, in holiness, or in love, we are gaining ground on Satan's possessions. We have been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. As Satan takes possession of my heart by ignorance, then every step I make in the knowledge of God is gain on the possession of Satan. He uses our flesh too, so that to mortify and keep the flesh in death is gaining ground upon him. But every inch must be won, every bit of knowledge gained, by conflict. In this conflict we are directly and hourly cast in dependence upon God.

God did not put Amalek out of the way of Israel, they must fight with him; and it is just so with us. "And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in mine hand." (vs. 9) This is very different from what we get, Exodus 14: "The Lord shall fight for you; and ye shall hold your peace."

See what the Lord had said to Moses concerning Israel (chap. 3:8), that He would "bring them up out of the land of Egypt unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey." Now, where are they brought? Into the wilderness, to thirst for water, and to fight with Amalek. They had not reckoned on this. (vs. 3) And thus is it often with the saints of God, when they have had joy, and have sung the song of triumph: in being delivered from the power of Satan, they are afterward astonished at finding themselves, not in Canaan, but in the wilderness. Jeremiah found the Lord's word the joy and rejoicing of his heart (Jer. 15:16), yet afterward he was so discouraged that he says, "O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived." Of course, this is only a strong expression of sorrow, "Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. For since I spoke, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name," and so forth. (Jer. 20) When the saint finds what the road is, he is apt to forget the end, where there will be fullness of joy and blessing. The Lord desires to purge out that which would hinder our blessing, and keep us from having our hearts and hopes set upon the end, and to humble us.

Moses; Aaron, and Hur go up to the top of the hill, and Israel under Joshua fights in the plain below with Amalek. (vs. 10) They fought the Lord's battle; but it is not sufficient even to be fighting the Lord's battle, unless the Lord stretched forth His hand to help them. Otherwise "Amalek prevailed." Israel might have reasoned on the manner of their fighting, on the strength of the enemy, and on ten thousand things; but, after all, their success depended on Moses' hands being stretched out. It is very hard for us to see ourselves and Satan to be as nothing, and God to be everything. The moment we get out of dependence on God, we find out our own weakness, though we have this comfort, that, under whatever circumstances, through the priesthood and the advocacy of the Lord Jesus, our blessing is substantially maintained for us, and that until the going down of the sun. "And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one

on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.”

Enemies were as nothing, when Israel had the power of God with them. The day is won— “Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.” (vs. 13)

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi (that is, the Lord my banner): for he said, Because the Lord hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” (vss. 14-16) I dare say many of us have thought, when we have seen the necessity of dependence on the Lord, that, one good battle with Satan, and all will be over; but no such thing, we have security and the certainty of victory, but no promise of cessation from conflict whilst in the wilderness. God has promised that He “will bruise Satan under our feet shortly,” as He did to Israel that He would “utterly put out the name of Amalek from under heaven;” but, still, “the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” Till Christ comes, when Satan will be bound, and we shall have the full result of victory, we must reckon on conflict (not on slavery to Pharaoh, but on war with Amalek), but with the comfort of knowing that it is THE LORD who makes war, though it is through Israel, and Israel, therefore, has to fight. It is the Lord’s battle against Satan—there is our comfort, but still a battle which we have to carry on; hence we are kept in an unceasing state of dependence. The moment it was not so, Israel were put to the worst.

As it regards the accusations of Satan, the blood on the door-posts is the eternal answer to that.

As to slavery to Satan, the Lord Jesus has delivered us from that; we have stood, the living ones on the other side of the Red Sea; and we “shall see “Pharaoh and his host “no more again forever.”

What we find in the desert is grace, conflict, and the LORD having war with Amalek from generation to generation.

We are to be kept moment by moment in a state of dependence, yet reckoning on the constant grace and help of God. There is not blessing, and joy, and comfort, where there is not dependence on the Lord exercised. It is not enough for victory, that in the battle we have ranged ourselves on the Lord’s side. You will find the tendency of the flesh, whether in praying, or preaching, or anything else, is to get out of dependence on God. We may be saying true things in prayer or in testimony, but if we are not realizing our dependence on the Lord, we shall not have His strength in the battle; and the Lord must make us learn our dependence on Him, through weakness, and failure, and defeat, because we have refused to learn it in the joy and confidence of communion with Himself.

Victory is turned to worship, in the scene before us. (“And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi—the Lord is my banner.”) When victory does not tend to worship, we and God part company as soon as the victory is achieved. How sad to see victory often leading to mere joy, instead of still greater dependence on and delight in God.

May we trace out, in all these paths of His wondrous ways, still more and more of the depths of His divine love.

Peace With Gibeon

“If acting faithfully, to every step of faithfulness the Lord will surely add more light; only it behooves us to take counsel of the Lord at every step. Peace with Gibeon only deprives us of victory, and brings upon us other wars and troubles; for the presence of what is not of God always opens the door to Satan. This, perhaps, is not so much felt when all is in vigor in the soul; but when there is decline, then the evil and consequence is felt. In the days of David there was a famine three years; it was for Saul and for his bloody house, because he had slain the Gibeonites. All this arose from the little act of not taking counsel with God.

When all was war, it appeared a convenient thing, a blessing, to find some peace and recognition from those who said, ‘The Lord your God.’ It sounded like Rahab’s believing voice; and in appearance, with these far distant travelers, there was nothing wrong in peace—they were not of the forbidden and accursed race. But they asked not counsel of the Lord; and it turned out they were of the accursed race, and it went nigh to separate between Joshua and the people. So cunning is the enemy, it is almost as bad, or worse, to lean for one’s wisdom on the ways of God, as on one’s own strength for the battles of God: peace with Gibeon and war with Ai end in defeat, or in confusion and shame.”

Jesus Forgiving Sins

God was showing His rich and various mercy in the old time; but this was done after a peculiar manner. He forgave sin, He healed disease, He fed His people. But all this was done in a peculiar manner. There was a certain distance and reserve, as it were, a remaining still in His own sanctuary, still in the heavens, though He was thus gracious. He met the need of a sinner; but He was in the temple withdrawn to the holiest place, and the sinner had to come through a consecrated path to get the virtue of the mercy-seat. He met the need of His camp in the desert; but it was by remaining still in heaven, and sending from thence the angels' food, the mighty's meat, and giving them water, after His mystic rod had opened the rock. He met the disease of a poor leper; but it was after such leper had been separated to Him outside the camp, every eye and hand, all interference and inspection of man, withdrawn and removed. Thus He was God acting in His own due love and power; but there was a style in the action that bespoke distance from the objects of His care and goodness. Whether He pardoned, Jed, or healed, this manner was preserved.

The Lord Jesus, "God manifest in the flesh," is seen doing the same works of divine love and power. He pardons, feeds, and heals. And He does so in full assertion of His divine right or glory, thinking it no robbery to be equal with God. But there is altogether another style in those same actions when in His hand. The reserve, the distance is gone. It is God we see, not withdrawn into the holiest, but abroad in the prisons, the hospitals, and poor-houses of this ruined world. He pardons, but He stands beside the sinner to do this, saying, "Thy sins be forgiven thee;" or, "Neither do I condemn thee." He feeds, but He is at the very table with the fed. He heals, but He puts forth His hand, in the crowd, on as many as were diseased, or stands at their sick-beds. He thus comes down to the needy ones. With pardon, food, and healing, He goes among them, letting them know and see that He is supplied with various virtues to be used by them without reserve. And there is in this a glory that excelleth, so that the former has no glory by reason of it.

How should we bless Him for this display of Himself! It is the same God of love and power in both—but He has increased in the brightness of His manifestations.

The religious rulers found this way of Jesus interfere with them. Their interest was to keep God and the people separate; for then they had hopes of being used themselves. Thus they were angry when the Lord said to the man, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." It was a great interference with them. It trespassed on their place. "Who can forgive sins but God only?"—and God was in heaven. The Son of Man forgiving sins on earth was a sad disturbance of that order by which they lived in credit and plenty in the world. But whether they received it or not, this was the way of the Son of God on the earth. He dealt with our necessities in such wise as encouraged the happy, near, and confident approach of all needy ones to Him He did all to show that He was a cheerful giver; nay, more, that He gave Himself with His gifts. For with His own hand, as we have seen, He brought the blessing home to every man's door.

It was, therefore, only the happy confidence of faith that fully met and refreshed His spirit—that faith which knew the title of a needy one to come right up to him—the faith of a Bartimaeus, which was not to be silenced by the mistaken scrupulousness of even disciples. And little children are to be in His arms, though the same mistake would forbid them.

This was His mind. He came into the world to be used by sick and needy sinners, and the faith that understood and used Him accordingly was its due answer. Such answer we see recorded by the evangelists here, in the action of the faithful little band, who, breaking up the roof, let down the bed whereon the sick of the palsy lay, “into the midst before Jesus.” There was no ceremoniousness in this; nothing of the ancient reserve of the temple; no waiting for introduction. This little company felt their necessity, knew the virtues of the Son of God, and believed that these suited each other; nay, that the Lord carried the one because necessitous sinners were bearing the other. It was a very strong expression of this, and I believe the strength of it was according to the mind of Jesus; so that on seeing their faith, as we read, without further to do, or more words, His heart, and the grace that it carried, uttered itself in an expression as full and strong: “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

Here was sympathy. Jesus was rending all veils between God and sinners, and so was the faith of this happy little company. His blood was soon to rend the veil of the temple, which kept God from poor sinners, from top to bottom, and now their faith was rending that which kept them from Jesus. This surely was meeting and entertaining the Son of God in character; and His Spirit deeply owns it: “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

Happy faith that can thus break down all partition-walls! Oh, this faith, that takes knowledge of Jesus the Savior of the world as the mighty render of all veils! which knows that nothing stands before Him

“Join thou, my soul, for thou canst tell

His sovereign grace broke up thy cell,

And burst thy native chains;

And from that dear and blessed day,

How oft art thou constrained to say

That grace triumphant reigns!”

In the lively, happy impression of this truth, through the Spirit, the soul tastes something of heaven. What blessedness to know that this is the way of God our Savior! Grace and glory are both brought to us. We have not to ascend to heaven to seek them there, nor to descend to the depths to search after them there. “Behold, I come, and My reward is with Me,” will Jesus say, when He brings the glory, as we have already seen Him with His grace standing at the door, or by the bedside, or in the crowd of needy sinners.

This is of God indeed. It is only divine love that can account for it. But the rulers did not like it. Their interest and credit in the world was to keep the forgiveness of sins still in the hand of Him who was in heaven; for then, as the consecrated path, they hoped and judged that they themselves would

still be used.

And so it is to this day. Forgiveness is brought near and sure to the soul; the word of faith to the heart and to the mouth. This shortens the path; but it does not suit those who transact (as themselves and others judge) the interests of the soul.

Nothing appears more simple than all this on the principles of nature. The Pharisees in the Lord's time represented it. They were the religious rulers; and the more God was kept in the distance, the more reserve was preserved between Him and the people, the more they were likely to be venerated, used, and enriched. Jesus, the Son of Man, forgiving sins on the earth, was a sad trespasser on their place and plan of action. How, alas! is this principle still alive, still dominant! And the "people love to have it so;" it suits the religiousness of man's nature too well to be lightly refused. The simplicity that is in Christ is sadly thus "corrupted," and our souls, beloved, should be grieved, deeply grieved, because of it.

But we may also say that much occasion in our day has been given to this principle—to live and act as vigorously as it seems to be doing. For there has not been the meeting of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, this pardoning, feeding, healing love and power of Him who has come down to walk amid our ruins, in the spirit which alone was due to it. There has been the assertion of grace, and the denial that God in this dispensation is to be sought for as at a distance, under the hiding of ceremonies, or within the cloisters of temples. There has been the producing of the blessed Savior, and giving Him to walk abroad among our necessities according to the place He has Himself taken in the gospel. There has been the presenting of the marvelous condescending grace of the dispensation; but those who have asserted it have not carried themselves towards it, and in the presence of it, with that reverence, that holiness of confidence, which alone became them. And this has given man's religiousness (which would keep God still in heaven) occasion to revive, and be listened to and learned again.

But is this religiousness the due corrective of abused grace? Is this the divine remedy? Is this God's way of rectifying evil? or is it not simple human reaction? Many are doing what they can to withdraw the Lord to that place which He has most advisedly and forever abandoned. They are making Him appear to build again the things which He had destroyed. They are putting Him back into the holiest place, there to be sought unto by the old aisles and vistas of the "worldly sanctuary"—to cover Him with veils, and cast up the long-consecrated path by which of old the sinner came to Him. It was well to be righteously angry at Jesus and His grace being treated with so indelicate and untender a hand; but these correct the error by a worse. While they would protect the holiness of Christ, they obscure His grace. They are seeking to do a service for Him that grieves Him the most deeply. They are teaching man that He is an austere Master; they withdraw Him to the place where it is felt to be a fearful thing to plant one's foot.

Indeed, this is a service He did not ask for. "Who has required this at your hands?" is, I am assured in my soul, the voice of the Son of God to those who thus withdraw Him from the nearest and most assured approach of the poor sinner. They have been doing what they could to change His place and attitude, instead of MAN'S. Correction was needed surely. It is ever needed. Man will be spoiling or abusing everything. There has been an intellectual arrogance, and carnal freedom with Christ and His truth, which may well have grieved the righteous. But it was man that ought to be corrected, and not Christ. It was man that ought to have been challenged to change

his place and bearing, and not the Lord. He has not repented of having come on earth to forgive sins, of having visited the poor Samaritan at the well, or Levi or Zaccheus in their houses, or Peter's wife's mother on her bed of sickness. He is still the same Lord, and purposes to be so. He has not retired within the vail again, nor bound up that which was rent from top to bottom. He has not built again that which He had destroyed. It is not a worldly sanctuary that He fills, and furnishes again, nor ceremonies and observances, and rites and practices, under which He is again concealing Himself. He has descended from heaven to earth; He is abroad among men, in the ministry of His precious gospel and by His Spirit, beseeching sinners to be reconciled.

What then, alas! is the character of that effort that would force him back to the "thick darkness"? (2 Chron. 6:1-2) It is an attempt made in the strength and with the subtlety of the devil, upon the Son of God, as of old. It is a taking Him, as it were, to the pinnacle of the temple, to some withdrawn and proud elevation, where the multitude may gaze at Him. But His purpose is, blessed be His name, to stand in the midst of them, that they may use Him. We should change our place; that is equally true. We should learn to pass and repass before this gracious, blessed Son of Man with the unshod foot. It is for us to change our attitude, and not to seek to make Him change His.

We have still to see Him in all the grace of this happy dispensation; we have to read "the gospel of the blessed God" (1 Tim. 1) as they read it of old, who knew and felt that the Son of Man had power on earth to forgive sins; but we have to read all this more in their spirit also. We are to wonder at the strange sight as they did-to tell Jesus with the centurion, that we are not worthy that He should come under our roof, while we still use His immediate presence and grace, to stand before Him like Zacchaeus, and call Him "Lord," though, like him, receiving Him to our house, and to follow Him in the way with adoring, thankful praise, though having refused, as Bartimaeus, to be put at a distance by the vain, religious scruples of even His own disciples.

Ah! this is what should have been done. This would have been the divine corrective of the mischief that has come in. But this was not so easy. For this would have been spiritual; the thing that has been done is carnal. Elements of the world are revived and multiplied. Jesus has been forced back at a distance from the sinner. He has been put into "the thick darkness," under cover of fleshly observances and rites, and at the end of a long path through the aisles of a sanctuary, where He waits to receive the homage of a fearing and bondaged people. This is the place and attitude which many teachers (who are daily rising in the esteem of the people) make the blessed Savior to fill and to take.

The Lord Jesus is kept at a distance; religious observances are brought near, and the people (for they have ever been so minded) like the feelings that come from all that which is acted before them. Their eye and ear are engaged, a certain sacred sense of God is awakened, but the precious immediate confidence of the heart and conscience is refused. Ah, shall any who love the Lord thus sink down again into man, when the Spirit would have them up into Christ! "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain."

Thus speaks the aggrieved Spirit in the apostle over those who once had been eminently his joy, but were now his sorrow, because they were turning again to the weak and beggarly elements,

whereunto they were desiring again to be in bondage, because they were deserting faith for religiousness, “the simplicity that is in Christ,” and in which the “virgin” or “uncorrupted” mind ever walks, for the ceremonies and observances of “a worldly sanctuary.”

But religiousness is neither faith nor righteousness. With the Pharisees it was adopted as a relief for a bad conscience, or a cover for evil—in them it was therefore opposed to righteousness. With the Galatians, because there had been a departure from the truth—the simplicity that is in Christ—in them, therefore, it was opposed to faith. The Galatian cannot properly be said to have been a Pharisee, it is true; but the Spirit of God had a serious question with both.

And I may just further observe, that in our passage (Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:9; Luke 5:24) the Lord seeks to lead man away from his own reasonings and calculations to Himself and His works. He perceived that the scribes were “reasoning among themselves,” and then proposed to them what He was doing— “that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he said unto the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go unto thine house.”

How simple, how precious! And on this hangs the grand distinction between faith and religiousness, of which I have just been speaking. Religiousness, or man’s religion, gives the soul many a serious thought about itself, and many a devout thought about God. But faith, or God’s religion, gives the soul Jesus, and the works and words of Jesus.

And yet it is faith and faith only that secures any end that is valued of God. Faith “works by love,” faith “overcomes the world,” faith “purifies the heart,” by faith “the elders obtained a good report.” Religiousness does not this. It ever works by fear, not by love. It does not “overcome the world,” but oftentimes takes it away within to some recess or hiding-place. It does not “purify the heart” by giving it an object, a divine object, to detach it from self, but keeps self in a religious attire ever before it, and leaves the conscience unpurged. And in God’s record it gets no “good report.” From the beginning to the end of that record it is the people of religion, the devout observers of carnal ceremonies, those who would not “defile themselves” with a judgment-hall, that have stood most cruel in the resistance of the truth. But it is the men of faith, the lovers of the truth, the poor, brokenhearted sinners who have found their relief in Jesus “forgiving sins,” who have stood, and labored, and conquered, and have their happy memorial with Him and in the records of Him whom they trusted, and in whom by faith they found their eternal life, and sure and full salvation.

“Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

I Will Never Leave Thee

Hebrews 13:5

"Himself hath done it" all—Oh, how those words
Should hush to silence every murmuring thought!

Himself hath done it—He who loves me best,
He who my soul with His own blood hath bought.

"Himself hath done it."—Yes, although severe
May seem the stroke, and bitter be the cup,
'Tis His own hand that holds it, and I know
He'll give me grace to drink it meekly up.

"Himself hath done it."—Oh, no arm but His
Could e'er sustain beneath earth's dreary lot;
But while I know He's doing all things well,
My heart His loving-kindness questions not.

"Himself hath done it."—He who 's searched me through,
See how I clave to earth's ensnaring ties;
And so He breaks each reed on which my soul
Too much for happiness and joy relies.

"Himself hath done it."—He would have me see
What broken cisterns human friends must prove;
That I may turn and quench my burning thirst
At His own fount of ever-living love.

"Himself hath done."—Then I fain would say,
"Thy will in all things for evermore be done;"
E'en though that will remove whom best I love,
While Jesus lives I cannot be alone.

And when, in His eternal presence blest,

I at His feet my crown immortal cast,
I'll gladly own, with all His ransomed saints,
"Himself hath done it."—all, from first to last.

To Him That Overcometh

The failure of man, of the church even, does not touch the source of divine grace—the goodness of God. From Adam downwards, everything placed in the hands of man has failed; but this very failure and evil of man has been made the opportunity by God of showing out more and richer grace. He judges the failure, and then presents an object of hope. When Adam sinned, “the seed of the woman” was promised. When the law was broken, and Israel failed, prophetic testimony came in, and all the promises of the Messiah. Promise is that on which faith can rest when everything else fails.

Times of declension and unfaithfulness in the body give occasion for brighter manifestations of grace in individuals, who, under such circumstances, are brought into the enjoyment of close and blessed communion with God. See Elijah, Moses, and so forth. Moses had to leave the camp (Ex. 33) because the golden calf was there, and to go outside; but in so doing he got into a place of greater nearness to God than he had ever known before: “And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.”

At the beginning of the gospel dispensation, the energy of the Holy Spirit was so plainly manifested in the church that man was nothing, God everything. This is, of course, true to faith all through the dispensation. But then, even before these epistles to the churches were given, things had become sadly changed. The Lord, in this and the following chapter, turns His eye to that which should have been “the place of righteousness,” and behold, “iniquity is there;” therefore it is necessary that judgment begin at the house of God, as it is said, “The Lord shall judge His people.” At first this is in the way of testimony against the evil; for the Lord ever warns before He executes judgment, and in judgment He remembers mercy.

The Lord takes notice of every circumstance, every shade of difference in these churches, as also in individuals in them; thus showing that He is not indifferent as to the state of His people by the way, their daily steps, because He has secured blessing to them at the end. His love is not a careless love. We have all, more or less, lost sight of the judgment exercised by the Lord in “His own house;” and it is too frequently supposed that, because the salvation of the saint is a sure thing, God is indifferent about character here. But this is impossible to love. A child would be sure eventually to inherit his father’s property, but then, what parent would be satisfied (if he loved his child) with knowing that? Would he not anxiously train him up, watching every development of his mind and faculties, and ordering all things in his education so as best to fit him for his future destination’s? How much more is this the way of the Lord’s love with His children! This is for our comfort and blessing—there is wonderful comfort in seeing it to be the spring of all God’s dealings with us—but, at the same time, it is intended to act strongly on our conscience in the way of warning.

We have to remember that the church, and indeed every individual saint, is set in the place of direct conflict with Satan, the more so because of the high standing and privilege given us in Christ. Now it may be in triumphant victory, as it is said, “The God of peace shall bruise Satan

under your feet shortly." To effect the purpose of God's glory coming in, as it will by and by when He shall establish His kingdom, we know that Satan must be really, fully dethroned; but in order, even now (ere that time comes), that we realize our blessings in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3), it is needful he should be practically dethroned from the heart, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Although it is quite certain that he shall be bruised under our feet "shortly" (there is no doubt, of course, about the power of the Lord Jesus to do it), yet the certainty of Christ's final victory with the church should not lessen our sense of the power of the enemy in the meantime. This is so great as to make constant watchfulness necessary; for without it we shall be giving him a direct handle against ourselves. The flesh, by which Satan works, is still present, and it needs to be "mortified." Perhaps we have been surprised at grievous falls in ourselves or others, but if we fail to watch against the flesh, it is not really at all surprising such should be the result. Habitual faithfulness in judging the flesh in little things is the secret of not falling.

The promise at the close of each of these messages to the churches is addressed to "him that overcometh." As stated above, it has ever been in times of general failure that the promises of God have been most graciously brought out, and that His faithful ones have had increased communion, being thrown thereby more entirely upon Himself. If, through any measure of faithfulness, we find ourselves in trial and exercise of soul because of corporate, general declension, that is just the very time we should look for more intimate revelation of the grace of God and of His love to our hearts. And this, not only in giving us clear and firm apprehension of the promises of God, but also in a fuller knowledge of all that in Christ which is suited to be drawn upon by our need. He that is faithful may ever count on this. The principle is clearly seen in these epistles, both in the promises, and also in the different character in which the Lord Jesus presents Himself according to the circumstances of each "church."

It is very sad to see man (whether it be in Israel, the church, or any other place) failing; but still the faithful ones in the midst of failure find a fuller, deeper revelation of the grace of God, even through it, than when all is going on well. This is most blessed!

From the message to "the church of Ephesus" (vss. 1-7) we see that there had already been failure there—failure in its "first love." And therefore, instead of being spoken to (as in Paul's epistle to the same church) of the high and holy things connected with the church at large, or of being addressed as occupying the place of witness and testimony to others, the eye has to be turned inward to its own state; a clear proof how far it had declined. When a church or an individual Christian is walking in the light, and not grieving the Spirit, there can then be entrance into the privileges belonging to the whole church of God; but when the Spirit is grieved there can no longer be this revelation, each is shut up in its own particular state, and judged.

The message is from Him "that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, and that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks" (vs. 1); the Lord taking the place of examination and judgment.

The overcoming spoken of (vs. 7), and indeed throughout the chapter, is not so much the overcoming of the world and that which was without, as of all the evil discovered to be within. There had been a leaving of the "first love;" and when there is diminution of this, in the smallest degree, the Lord says, "I have somewhat against thee." (vs. 4) He takes notice of the least failure. Whenever it has begun He speaks of excision, and inflicts it, too, unless there be repentance. We

always find that, in judging, God goes back to the original sin. When Stephen charges the Jews (Acts 7), although they had crucified the Lord Jesus, that which he goes back to is their first sin, of making the golden calf. And thus with an individual Christian. There is often failure when the first glow of zeal is gone off. At such a time, we have not only to see where the failure is manifested, but when it was we first went away from the Lord, and we shall very generally find it to have been in getting out of communion, this leaving of the “first love.” Well, this should not be — is not necessary; but even when it is the case, the grace of the Lord will still be found greater than all the evil that is discovered to be within.

We see peculiarity of blessing. (vs. 7) It is to the eye and ear of faith that the Lord brings out the promise of “the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” He sees the church failing in fellowship with God, and therefore sets before it “the tree of life,” and “the paradise of God.” It is God’s paradise-blessed security! there can be no declension there. It was man’s paradise first, failure came in, and lest he should take of the fruit of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever, God drove out the man; but now the promise to “him that overcometh” is to eat of the tree of life freely, and in security, in “the paradise of God.”

Whilst we feed on the fruit of it, “the leaves of the tree” will be “for the healing of the nations.” (Rev. 22:2) When the church is in glory, it will not lose the character of grace. God gives us now to feed on the bread of life; our first delight must be in God; but then, secondarily, we have the joy of love in being made ministers of blessing unto others; well, so also in glory, our portion will be grace, but we shall be able likewise to minister in grace to others.

In the case of “the church in Smyrna” (vss. 8-11), they had begun the downward course; but the Lord had come in most graciously, and arrested the decay by tribulation. I say most graciously; for one goes wonderfully quickly downhill unless a strong hand stops us.

Well, they were in tribulation, poverty, and persecution, and how does the Lord reveal Himself?—as the one whom nothing can touch, not all the clouds and storms, the difficulties and trials affect (like the sun, bright before the storm and bright after it)—“the FIRST and the LAST.” (vs. 8)

‘Yes,’ it may be said, this is true of Him; but, then, the storm rolls over us, and threatens to overwhelm, we have no power against it.’ But He reveals Himself not only as “the FIRST and the LAST”—the one therefore on whom we may lean for eternal strength—but also as, “He which WAS DEAD, and IS ALIVE.” He says, as it were, I have gone through it all; I have entered into the weakness of man, and undergone all the power that could come against it, all the trials, even unto death; I have entered into everything, for I have died, and yet I am alive. There is nothing that the Lord has not gone through; death is the last effort of Satan’s power, it ends there, for the sinner as well as for the saint. The unconverted even are out of Satan’s power when they die: if they die in their sins, of course they come under the judgment of God, but Satan has no power in hell. He may have pre-eminence in misery, but no power there (his reigning is some poet’s dream; it is here he reigns, and that by means of the pride and vanity, the evil passions and idleness of men); he is “the ruler of the darkness of this world,” not of the next. But, whatever may be the extent of power which he seeks now to exercise against the children of God, the Lord says, I have been under it all; I have been dead.’ Therefore it is impossible for us to be in any circumstance of difficulty or of trial through which Jesus has not been. He has met the power of Satan there; and

yet He is alive. And now He “is alive for evermore,” not only to sustain us while passing through the storm, but to feel for, to sympathize, as having experienced more than all the heaviness of the circumstances in which we are. He can pity with the utmost tenderness, for He came into the very center of our misery.

“I know thy works.” (vs. 9) The Lord recognizes all that He can in us. We may say, Our works are not what we could desire them to be; well, it is very true, they are not, but then the Lord knows them. Though it is a right and useful thing for us to judge ourselves in order to detect the evil and correct it; yet it is very bad and unhealthy to be always occupied in considering whether our works will be approved of by God. The answer to all our thoughts and estimate about ourselves is I ‘know your works, your business is to know me.’ He presents Himself as our object, not our own works.

There were all sorts of opposition to the faithful in this church, but what does the Lord say to them? — “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer.” (vs. 10) It is the constant effort of Satan to produce in us fear and discouragement, when passing through trial; but the Lord says, “Fear none of those things.” In like manner the Philippians are told to be “in nothing terrified by their adversaries;” again in Peter we read, “Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.” Our wisdom is ever to rest confidently in Him who is “the FIRST and the LAST,” who rises up in as great power at the end as at the beginning. The Lord does not say to this church, I will save you from suffering,’ for suffering was needful in order to prevent it from tumbling headlong into decay—just as Israel was obliged, in consequence of its sin, to go a long way round the desert and yet the Lord says, as it were, to some among them who were faithful, ‘Don’t be the least uneasy;’ so here, His word is, Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer.’

In the beginning of the failure in “the churches,” the promise to the “overcomer” in the midst of the decay was, that he should eat in security and peace of the “tree of life;” so again here, in a time of especial suffering and trial, there is held out as a stimulus (to the new man of course) a recompense of reward. If they lost everything, they should gain everything. The Lord’s own voice encourages: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh, shall not be hurt of the second death.” He may be hurt of the first, death, but not of the second—the only real exclusion from the presence of God.

In the message to “the church in Pergamos” (vss. 12-17), the Lord is seen exercising a special form of judicial power, as “He which hath the sharp sword with two edges.” (vs. 12) We read (Heb. 4) “the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart;” and the Lord is here presented as having this thoroughly piercing power, which judges and discerns the secret workings of the heart and conscience.

“I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is.” (vs. 13) That is where the church now found itself, “where Satan’s throne is” (for he is “the prince” of this world). And the faithful may find themselves they too, if the church be there (Caleb and Joshua had to go the whole round of the wilderness with the rest, though not sharers in their unbelief); we have to separate ourselves from the evil around, though we may not be able to separate from the consequences of the evil. We may find ourselves to be in feebleness and weakness, as the faithful in this church did; but our comfort, like theirs, is, that the Lord says, “I know thy works, and where

thou dwelled.”

God in His grace takes full knowledge of all that concerns us; not only of our conduct, our ways and condition, but also of the circumstances in which we are, saying, as it were, I know that you are where Satan’s seat is, and this even when He may still have somewhat against us. There is great comfort in knowing this. We might be placed, by means over which we had no control, in a very trying position, but in one which it might not be at all the mind of the Lord that we should quit, where Christian conduct would be very difficult; as, for instance, a converted child in an ungodly, worldly family, where there is nothing of the Spirit of Christ. The Lord would not merely, in such a case, judge His child’s conduct, as to those things in which she might have failed. He would do that indeed, but He would also take the most thorough knowledge of, and notice the circumstances in which she was, yes, every little circumstance that rendered it trying.

He just as well knew the power of Pharaoh, and the detail of his tyranny, as He did the crying and groans of the Israelites. “I know,” He says, “that he will not let you go.” There is indeed great comfort in thus seeing the Lord’s perfect knowledge as to where we dwell, because it may not be always His will to take us out of the place, nor yet to change the circumstances in which we are—He may choose to have us glorify him there, and learn through them what perhaps we could not learn elsewhere. We are too apt to think we must do great works in the Lord’s name, in order to glorify Him; there may not always be opportunity for this (there does not appear to have been opportunity for great works in service without to this church); He takes notice if we do but hold fast His name amidst circumstances which make even that measure of faithfulness difficult— “Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith,” and so forth. (vs. 13)

The Lord gives His people all this encouragement, and yet says, “I have a few things against thee.” (vss. 14-15) In the first place, they were slipping back into the world, some of them having already fallen into the habits of it, “eating and drinking with the drunken.” And secondarily, they were beginning to allow of evil in the church, through pretense of liberty. He therefore warns: “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against thee with the sword of my mouth.” (vs. 16) Worldliness characterized the danger of this church, and it required “the sword with two edges” “to cut between their evil and the circumstances in which they were; if this were not effected, it is “I will fight against thee with the sword of My mouth.”

But at the same time that He thus warns, there is plenty of encouragement given—promises suited to counteract their temptations. (vs. 17) Were they tempted “to eat of things sacrificed unto idols” with the world, the promise to “him that overcometh” is, “I will give him to eat of the hidden manna.” If they had grace to separate themselves from the open evil, the encouragement was that there should be this feeding on “the hidden manna.” Again, were they tempted to deny the name and faith of Christ; the promise given is “a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, save he that receiveth it;” that which would be especially blessed to the heart, whilst incurring, as must needs be, in separation, the disapprobation of so many.

The “white stone” seems to mark the individual approbation of Christ; the “new name,” peculiar intercourse between Christ and the individual, different from that which all shall share alike, different from the public joy. There is a public joy. All saints will together enjoy the comforts of Christ’s love, will enter into the “joy of their Lord,” and with one heart and one voice sound His praise. There will also be joy in seeing the fruit of our labors; as it is said, “What is our hope, or joy,

or crown of rejoicing ‘? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?’ And again, there will be another joy in seeing the company of the redeemed, all according to Christ’s heart, in holiness and glory. But besides this public joy there will be Christ’s peculiar, private, individual recognition and approval—the “white stone,” and the “new name, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it.”

Our souls must value this personal approval of Christ, as well as think of the public approval. The latter will be great blessedness; but there is no peculiar affection in it, nothing that stamps peculiar love on the individual. Glory will be common to all; but glory is not affection. This “new name” is a different thing; it is the proof of Christ’s value for a person who has been faithful in difficult and trying circumstances; for one who has acted on the knowledge of His mind, and overcome through communion with Him. There is the public joy and approval in various ways, and the manifestation of our being loved by the Father as Jesus is loved. But this is not all that is given for our encouragement in individual conduct through trial, failure, and difficulty; there is also this special, private joy of love.

When the common course of the church is not straight, not in the full energy of the Holy Spirit, though there may be a great deal of faithfulness, yet there is danger of disorder. We find that the Lord then applies Himself more to the walk of individual saints, and suits His promises to the peculiar state in which they are. This takes out of all fancied walking (the especial danger which belongs to such a state of things)—each according to his own will, chalking out a path for himself because of the unfaithfulness and disobedient walk of the professing body. What faith has to do in such circumstances, is to lay hold intelligently, soberly, and solemnly on the Lord’s mind, and to walk according to it, strengthened by the promises which He has attached to such a path as He can own.

What a comfort it is, beloved friends! how full of encouragement to the feeblest saint, to have thus the guidance of the Lord, and the promise of His peculiar approbation—so peculiar, that it is known only to him who receives it—when the course of the church is such that one is thrown greatly on individual responsibility of conduct. But then, whilst it gives us strength for walk, it puts the soul in direct responsibility to the Lord, and breaks down human will. When the professing church has become mingled with the world, “eating and drinking with the drunken,” those who seek to be most faithful must often have to walk alone, incurring the charge of folly and self-will (and that too even from their brethren), because they refuse to follow the beaten path. And indeed it is quite a real danger, a natural consequence, that when the common course is broken up, individual will should work. The natural tendency would ever be towards self-will. Our only safety is in having the soul brought under the sense of direct responsibility to God, though at the same time we may be obliged to act independently of all around.

It should be joy to anyone who loves the Lord Jesus, to think of having His individual, peculiar approbation and love, to find that He has approved of our conduct in such and such circumstances, though none know this but ourselves who receive the approval. But, beloved, are we really content to have an approval which Christ only knows? Let us try ourselves a little. Are we not too desirous of man’s commendation of our conduct 1 or at least that he should know and give us credit for the motives which actuate it? Are we content, so long as good is done, that nobody should know anything about us—even in the church to be thought nothing of—that Christ alone

should give us the “white stone” of His approval, and the “new name which no man knoweth, save only he that receiveth it”? Are we content, I say, to seek anything else? Oh, think what the terrible evil and treachery of that heart must be, that is not satisfied with Christ’s special favor, but seeks honor (as we do) one of another instead! I ask you, beloved, which would be most precious to you, which would you prefer—the Lord’s public owning of you as a good and faithful servant, or the private, individual love of Christ resting upon you, the secret knowledge of His love and approval of He whose heart is specially attached to Christ will respond “the latter.” Both will be ours if faithful, but we shall value this most, and there is nothing that will carry us so straight on our course as the anticipation of it.

In the address to the following church, “the church in Thyatira” (vss. 18-19), it is more the external glory which is brought before us as the portion of “him that overcometh” (vss. 26-28). It is a public testimony of His approval, and so far it must be precious to us; but after all, the great blessing and joy of the promise is, that it identifies us with Christ” even as I have received of my Father.” Poor, wretched, and feeble as we are now, the Lord will put us in the very same glory with Himself. We never shall have right thoughts about our privileges and blessings, until we see our union with the Lord Jesus in everything. The way to judge of ourselves, is to look directly at Him. It is not only seeing that we have been cleansed by His blood from our sins, and thus have peace with God: the thing that gives the true character to our hopes, is living union (not a mystical union, though there is truth in this, for we have been crucified with Christ, &c) with the Lord Jesus.

We thus come in hope and practice into identity of circumstances with Him. Being united to Him, everything that belongs to Him belongs to us, as it is said, “Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” All our conduct should flow from this. Whatever glorifies the Lord Jesus, becomes us, we have to do with. This is the proper measure of our conduct, whatever does not savor of it, is wrong conduct in a Christian. We are united to one who is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens,” and we, therefore, are so too. Most sublime truth! Yet how simple and practical! When realized, it must tell in every way and detail of life. How could one made higher than the heavens be seeking earthly things? How could he, for instance, desire riches here? As another has said, “If an angel were to come down here, he would be just as willing to sweep the streets as to be a king; much more then one who has this personal, intimate consciousness of union with Christ.” Nay, the more of a servant, the happier he will be. Love necessarily made Jesus a servant when here below.

But in acting thus, we must remember there is much of difficulty. We have Satan always to resist us. We have to overcome him in a variety of circumstances and trials; not only to contend with, but to overcome; and this too with a flesh that, if not mortified, will always be ready to lend a hand to him. So that it is not all joy, although we are set in so blessed a place. This keeping the flesh mortified is the great thing, the secret of all strength in practical difficulties; and nothing will do it but living in communion and fellowship with the Lord. We must watch against its first strivings and desires, or before we are aware it will be giving a handle to the temptations of Satan. If we are holding fast (as the faithful ones in Pergamos were commended for doing) the name of Christ, we shall gain the victory over Satan; he will lose his power, and then all is joy, even suffering (for we shall suffer in consequence of our union with Christ, for His name sake); all will be joy. But if there is not the everyday common-place diligence to break the power of the every-day difficulties, and keep down the every-day evil, we shall have to contend with the flesh instead of Satan (with whom

our conflict ought to be), while it will give him power to come in when we are not ready to meet him, we shall have to get the armor in order, at the time the fight should begin.

I pray you take heed to what I say, beloved friends, for if we fail in this daily judging and keeping down the flesh, we lose the power of victory over Satan; in conflict he will gain the advantage over us, or at least we shall only stand our ground, instead of gaining ground on him, and triumphing in victory over him. If it be so, we are unfaithful to Christ; we owe it to Him to gain ground upon the world where Satan reigns, to stand in such a position as to be able to go forward and deliver individual souls from his power in every shape. There is not the looking to His grace, and the holding fast His name, if it is not so.

I ask you, in the name of the Lord's love to you, and because of the privileges that are yours, to judge yourselves, and see whether you are ready for the battle, or whether Satan would not find that in you, the flesh, so alive, which would serve as a handle he might use. But whilst thus judging yourselves remember that Jesus is ever in the presence of God for us, though to have overcome will add to our joy in the day of His appearing, and bring more glory to Him now.

The Lord enable us so to walk in the Spirit, that we may discover and know more and more the grace and suitability which is in Him for our every necessity, and understand in our own souls the fitness and power of His promises.

Christ's Coming, Faith's Crowning

The apostle, after speaking of Christ's first coming, and the work accomplished by Him, as the sacrifice for sin, and of His having entered in once, by His own blood, into the holy place (heaven itself), "having obtained eternal redemption," sums up the whole doctrine in the closing verses of this chapter, and there contrasts in a definite way the portion of the first Adam, and those who belong to the first Adam, with the place and expectations of the believer. "As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after that the judgment" (that is what we have to say as to men—there their history is ended) "so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (for the believer, death and judgment have been already met—Christ having died for him, and borne his sins); "and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

A word in explanation of a portion of this passage. The Lord Jesus, as regards Himself, appeared the first time, as truly "without sin," as He will the second. But then, He appeared the first time, though without sin, about it. (vs. 26) He came to bear it. The second time, He has nothing more to do with sin; it will be "unto salvation;" as He says, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14) His second coming is to fulfill in the results all the designs of His first coming, for those who believe. This makes it their hope; "that blessed hope." (Titus 2:13)

This event has nothing whatever to do with death (with which it has often been confounded). So far from it, that, when the Lord Jesus Christ appears, if a believer be alive, he will never see death (1 Cor. 15:51- 52; 1 Thess. 4:15, 17). So little has it to do with death, that the apostle declares expressly, "We shall not all sleep," and so forth. Here it is contrasted with death.

Another thing. It is said, "Unto them that look for Him, shall He appear." It is not a question about Christ's appearing to us at death; we "depart, to be with Christ."

So Colossians 3:4: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory; "not only He appears, but we appear with Him.

So 1 John 3:2: "We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him," and so forth; at His coming, we are to be conformed to the image of God's Son in glory (Rom. 8:29).

So Philippians 3:20-21: "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body," and so forth.

Many other scriptures might be quoted; but these will suffice to show that it has nothing to do with death. It is the power of the living Savior taking us out of the reach of death.

If the Spirit of God works in our hearts with power, this gives us present fellowship with Jesus glorified at the right hand of God. The heart of the saint is fixed on Christ Himself. That is what sanctifies: "We all with open face," and so forth. What then, is our HOPE connected with this? Our hope is to be conformed to the image of God's Son in glory. "As we have borne the image of the

earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” (1 Cor. 15:49) That is the desire, the object of hope, in the soul. Now, we are bearing the image of the earthy, but we hope to be made like Christ, and so forth; “we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him.” It is not that there is not a moral change wrought now, but the effect of this is to produce the desire to be conformed to the image of God’s Son in glory.

This being so, God could not have given us a more glorious hope, or one more practically powerful in disentangling from the world. But when is it we are to be conformed to His image? At death? Clearly not; for then the bodies of the saints are in the grave, and our hope is to have them fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body. Scripture speaks of men being glorified, but nowhere of glorified souls. It is “far better to depart, and to be with Christ” (Phil. 1:23): I would not weaken that. “We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened,” says the apostle (2 Cor. 5): “not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.” (That is what I want, to have this mortal body changed without seeing death) “Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident,” and so forth. The confidence I have is not interrupted at death; the life in my soul will not be affected if I depart, it will be to be present with the Lord, and I am “willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord;” but I want “mortality to be swallowed up of life;” I want this to be accomplished in myself; I am to be conformed to what I have seen of His image by the power of the Holy Spirit, and I want to be “like Him “

There are but four passages in the New Testament which speak of the joy of the disembodied spirit: Luke 23:42-43, where the dying thief says to the Lord, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom,” and the Lord replies, “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise;” Acts 7:59, where Stephen says, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;” and 2 Corinthians 5:8, and Philippians 1:23 (already referred to). We see in these passages that the soul, on departing from this world, freed from sorrow, placed out of the reach of sin, enjoys the Lord apart from it; but that is not the object of our hope—our hope is to be conformed to the image of God’s Son in glory. We are to be “like Him” — “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure.” There is the practical effect of this expectation. It is never said (blessed as that is), ‘he that hath the hope of going to heaven, purifieth,’ and so forth. What am I expecting? To be like Christ. What is the effect of this? I am trying to be as like Him as I can now. This is the present practical effect of the certainty of being like Christ when He appears.

But it is a hope which I have in common with all saints, not merely my individual hope. It is the church’s hope. And therefore, as regards the Lord’s Supper, it is said, “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death (not, till death, but) till He come” (1 Cor. 11:26). There is the basis of our common hope—the death of Christ, and we go on showing this, till He comes again to receive us unto Himself. If I think of death, of my departing to be with Christ, it is myself that I am thinking about; I shall be happy, but not the whole church glorified. When Christ comes every saint will be there, and Christ shall then see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. The Bride shall have the Bridegroom, and the Bridegroom shall have the Bride. It is not merely that I shall be happy. The Spirit of God carries me out of myself, in thinking about it, to the whole body of Christ. Christ shall have that church which He loved, and for which He gave Himself

(Eph. 5), with Him in the glory.

Another thing. It fixes the heart on Christ Himself. I am looking for a person whom I love. He, who has loved me, died for me, is coming again to receive me to Himself, and I am looking for Him. The angels said, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1). The person whom they loved they had lost; they stood looking steadfastly towards heaven, longing after Him, and the first thought God brings upon the heart is, He will come back in like manner. They were to expect His return. It was a grand truth, to be kept as a present thing before the soul. I see it all through the epistles, mixed up with every present feeling, whether of joy or of sorrow.

For example, turn to 1 Corinthians 1:7. They were all there together "waiting" (it was not only an individual hope, it was a common hope) "for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:" not all waiting to die, but "waiting for the coming," and so forth.

And mark another thing. Many have supposed that we are to be waiting for another outpouring of the Holy Spirit. A very characteristic and essential feature of the church of God, is the fact that the Holy Spirit dwells in it. This is not our hope, it is that we have already. The Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost, that "other Comforter" to "abide with us forever." (John 14) "I thank my God," says the apostle, "always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given unto you," and so forth.

If we turn to the first epistle to the Thessalonians, we find everything there having reference to the coming of Christ. It is mixed up with all the constant daily thoughts, hopes, affections, motives (with every element in the daily life) of the saints. As to their conversion itself (chap. 1), the power of the Word had made them so like what Paul preached, that their neighbors could not help seeing it. The very world was speaking about them (perhaps saying, How foolish, yet still bearing witness). And what did they say? That they had "turned to God from idols," and were "waiting for His Son from heaven." That is, that they had left their idols, the stocks and stones they had formerly worshipped, and were waiting for God's Son to come down from heaven. And the apostle Paul sanctions it. It was so little their death they were expecting, that he says (chap. 4), "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord," and so forth. Let us be only, as an habitual thing, waiting for God's Son from heaven, it would cut short the links that bind us to the world, and knit us in heart to Him, and to one another.

Look at Christian affections in the apostle. (2) What a picture of careful tending of the flock! And he concludes: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? for ye are our glory and joy." That is the time, he says, I shall get all the joy of Christian affections.

Again (3), it is associated with holiness in the saints" to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

Again (4), with comfort at the death of brethren, where it is still more remarkable. They were uneasy at seeing Christians die (so present a thing was the hope of the return of Christ), and it was therefore a mutual comfort at the deathbed of a saint, to be enabled to remind one another of a mutual meeting. "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are

asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent [go before] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." The apostolic consolation to saints mourning the death of brethren was not, 'Be content, they are gone to heaven,' then it would have been, 'You will go to them;' but so did the coming of the Lord fill the soul, as a present thing, that he gives this comfort, as it were, at the dying-bed of a Christian, 'Be content, God will bring him back when Jesus comes.' It need not be said that it is not death, for it is comfort against death.

In the second epistle, we get it linked with comfort in trial and persecution. They were in terrible trouble (though exceedingly patient under all; their faith growing exceedingly, and their love one towards another abounding). What comfort does Paul give them? "You will go to heaven soon?" No, there will be respite when Jesus comes. Again, it has no connection with death.

These passages have been quoted, and it may be added, that all through the epistles we find the same thing, in order to show that this grand truth (not death) is kept as a present thing before the soul, mixed up with the whole course of feelings amongst them in their every-day condition; that it enters into the whole frame work of Christian service.

It is quite evident, if that be left out, there must be a gap, a spiritual gap. And this becomes even still more evident, when we consider (as properly characteristic of the saint) such passages as, "Unto them that LOOK for Him,"— "Unto all them that Love his appearing."

At the close of Matthew 24, the Lord mentions the sign and characteristic of the "evil servant," and what I find there is this, the evil servant says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth his coming, and then begins to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken." Were we going to trace to its source the evil, ruined state of the church (considered in its relations and responsibilities here below), we should find that the putting off of the Lord's coming brought in all kinds of evil.

See in connection the beginning of the next chapter: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom" (death is not the Bridegroom), and so forth. "While the Bridegroom tarried," it is said "they all slumbered and slept." The whole were asleep, the wise as well as the foolish, and both awoke together. While the wisdom of the first was in having oil in their lamps (grace in the heart), when the others had not, there was forgetfulness of their hope, and consequent slothfulness. They had gone to sleep. What brought them out of this condition? What roused them? "At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh," and so forth. That was what was to rouse the slumbering church. Time sufficient is given to prove if there is oil in the lamp, but not to procure it.

Passages might be multiplied from the gospels, as from the epistles: one more, however, will suffice. "And as they heard these things, He added and spake a parable, because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to

return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come," and so forth. (Luke 19:12-27)

We cannot mistake, if we really attach importance to the Word of God, the vital importance of all this.

The resurrection of the saints (the "first resurrection ") takes place at Christ's coming; as it is said, "Every man in his own order; Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." This resurrection is altogether another thing from the resurrection of the wicked. There will be a resurrection both of the just and of the unjust, but on different principles. The former have life in Christ, which life has nothing in common with the world around. Moreover, they have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." (Rom. 8:11) "The body is.... for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by His own power." (1 Cor. 6:13, 14) The body is the Lord's as well as the soul. As to the wicked, Christ raises them up for judgment, but not at the same time. Christ will accomplish, for the bodies of the saints, what He has already accomplished for the soul; the wicked will be called up for judgment, and forced to honor Christ, in spite of themselves. (John 5) Luke 20:35, 36, there is a remarkable distinction. As regards all my sins, He put them away at His first coming. I am going to appear before Him who has already died for me.

But then, there is another aspect of the coming of Christ, and a most important one, as regards the present interests and operations of the church; namely, the way in which God is going to accomplish, through it, His purposes towards the world.

I quite understand a person saying, I do not see this; but I do not understand the saint saying, I do not see the importance of it. Christ is soon coming again, and He is coming to judge the world. Now is not that important? A man may not believe it; but it is folly to say that it is unimportant. The world is going on in a rapid progress of evil, concerning which Scripture gives abundant testimony, and the preaching of the gospel is not that which is to convert the world; it is all ripening for judgment. And here it would be well to guard against a false thought; namely, that to insist upon this would hinder the preaching of the gospel. Quite the contrary. It would urge to it—with more power and energy, with more of the activity of love to go and say to poor sinners, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." Did the sure knowledge of judgment coming hinder Noah? It is admitted on all hands that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will one day fill the earth, as the waters cover the sea. But the question is, How is this to be brought about? In Scripture this event is attributed to the glory of Christ. Nobody can be saved, unless born again, unless washed in the blood of Jesus; but they may believe through seeing Him, like Thomas.

If we turn to Isaiah 26:9-11, we there find it said, "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Let favor be shown to the wicked (the character of the gospel), yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord. (Grace does not produce that effect) Lord, when Thy hand is lifted up (just ready, as it were; to strike), they will not see: but they shall see," and so forth.

Habakkuk 2 speaks of the universality of blessing; "Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people shall labor in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?" Is that

the success of the gospel! Yet it makes the prophet say, "For the earth shall be filled," and so forth.

So Isaiah 11; and here, again, it is connected with His glory.

Isaiah 25:6-8, we read, "And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things. And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory," and so forth. Doubtless, it is the desire of our hearts that this terrible vail might be taken off, and we get (1 Cor. 15:54) a positive revelation as to the time at which it shall be so taken off. "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." We must be subject to the Word of God, as to when and how.

We ought, as regards responsibility, to have filled the earth with the knowledge of the Lord; but we have not. And what have we done? We have let into the church of God the enemy. See the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13), "While men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way." Through the carelessness of men, Satan could come and spoil the results of Christ's sowing. Could that be repaired? Are we to undo it? No, we cannot undo it! The mischief is done, and there they must stay until the harvest. (vss. 28-30) It will be rectified by a dispensation of judgment- a harvest, not a re-sowing of the field. We ought to have filled the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, but we have failed; and here we get a truly sorrowful revelation (blessed be God, He can come and set all to rights); the mischief done, where good was done, is irreparable.

God, in the accomplishment of His purposes, is gathering out, through the gospel, the co-heirs of Christ; but there is a sorrowful side of the picture. It is blessed to preach the gospel to sinners, but it is profitable for us, as saints, to own where we have failed. "In the last days," says the Apostle Paul to Timothy, "perilous times shall come;" and again, "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."

If we take two other passages, we find the same testimony as regards the carelessness of man in responsibility, and the continuance of evil (so introduced), up to the time of Christ's coming, leaving no room for intervening blessing.

First, 2 Thessalonians 2:7,8: "The mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." (The principle of evil is already working in the church, it has begun, and it will go on working till Christ comes; there is now a hinderer; but, when that is taken away, the man of sin will be manifested; and then it will be put an end to by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ)

The same truth is revealed in the Epistle of Jude. When Jude gave all diligence to write about the common salvation, he found it needful to exhort believers earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints; "for," says he, "there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation" (their character is described in detail, vss. 4-13). And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints," and so forth. He identifies these very men with those whom the Lord is about to destroy.

Let us now turn to God's dealings with the nations.

When "Lo-ammi" was written upon Israel, God gave power into the hands of the Gentiles. (Dan. 2) How is it that the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ? Is it by the preaching of the gospel—a clear duty, whether the earth be filled by that, or whether judgment is to come first? It says, "Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them in pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them (there was the most complete and utter destruction of the whole system of the image): and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth" (vss. 34, 35). There again I get a positive revelation that the universal prevalence of Christianity will be preceded by the execution of the judgments of God. The little stone cut out without hands does not become a mountain, and so forth, until it has executed judgment upon, broken in pieces, and destroyed, the image. And note, the act of smiting the image, and then filling the whole earth, is not the setting up of Christ's kingdom at the day of Pentecost. It is not an influence that changes the gold, the silver, and so forth, into the character of the stone; but the sudden execution of judgment upon the statue, a blow which breaks in pieces, and leaves not a trace of the existence of the statue, so that we read, "No place was found for them."

If I turn to Revelation 19:11-22, and compare it with Isaiah 63:1-6, I get a striking testimony respecting the judgment of the nations: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozra? this that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me (it is not here, 'He that was trodden in the winepress,' but 'He treadeth, the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God,' Rev. 19:16); for I will tread them in Mine anger, and trample them in My fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon My garments, and I will stain all My raiment" (not whiten theirs). "For the day of vengeance is in Mine heart, and the year of My redeemed is come."

Revelation 14:17, to end: the clusters of the vine of the earth are gathered, and cast into the great wine-press of the wrath of God.

One passage more—Zephaniah 3:8: "Therefore wait ye upon Me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them Mine indignation, even all My fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy." Verse 9 brings out subsequent blessing. This needs no comment.

Whatever part of Scripture I turn to, bearing upon these things, I find the same uniform testimony.

There is another part of the subject, for which there is not space now, beyond a brief notice; viz., its connection with the destinies of the Jewish people, "as concerning the gospel, enemies for your sakes; but as touching the election, beloved for the fathers' sakes" (Rom. 11:28); "of whom as concerning the flesh. Christ came." (Rom. 9:5) We say with the apostle, "Hath God cast away His people? God forbid." Israel, as a nation, will be saved, and planted in the land. "There shall come

out of Zion the deliverer,” and so forth. “The gifts and callings of God are without repentance.” The promises have never been accomplished. God gave certain promises to Abraham, unconditionally: they got into the land conditionally, under Joshua; failed, and were turned out of the land. The promises are taken up under the new covenant, and connected with Messiah. Their return from Babylon was nothing, in that sense. (Neh. 9:36) And Messiah was not there. When He came the first time they rejected Him. But even this, while it filled up the measure of their guilt, did not touch the promises given without condition. If this be so, it must be under a new dispensation. It is another state and condition of things altogether.

“In the dispensation of the fullness of times,” God will “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him,” and so forth (Eph. 1:10,12) When Christ, who is “heir of all things,” takes the inheritance, we, as joint-heirs with Him, shall be brought into the same glory.

In conclusion, as it regards Christ’s coming to judgment, I find there a very solemn testimony against being identified with the world in its interests, its pursuits, expectations, and so forth. The world—aye, and the church (in the general, vague sense of the word) too, is ripening for judgment. “In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.” How can I be found identifying the interests and objects of the world with my interests and objects as a saint, making myself a nest in the place where Christ has been crucified, and where He is coming to judge?

But there is another thing; if I look up, ‘Glory is coming! there is the Bridegroom! — I am going see Him as He is—to be with Him in the glory—to be like Him.’ “Every man that hath this hope,” and so forth. (1 John 3:3)

The Lord gives you to search the Word, and see if these things be so. May you receive them, not merely as matters of knowledge, but of faith, and of hope. This plants a thousand joys.

Holy and Beloved

God hath purposed in Himself to have before Himself that which shall reflect His own blessedness—He taking pleasure in us, and we taking pleasure in Him; as it is said here: “That we should be holy, and without blame before Him in love.” He will have His people of the same nature as Himself, gathered around Himself, happy there, and for Himself. His thought is not merely that we should have an inheritance; we read of “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” He “hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

And this is just the character of this epistle; the apostle in speaking of redemption does so, not so much as of something needed by us in order to appear before God, as of these purposes of God concerning us. We may look at God as a Judge; but, more than this, God is working for the display of the riches of the glory of His grace.

This lifts up the soul. God has thoughts and intentions about us. As in the case of a young man whom a person has (in ordinary language) “taken up” and is about to provide for, it is not a question of what the one was, but of the thoughts and intentions of the other, of what, in a word, he is, and will do for the young man; so, though in a much more blessed sense, has God “taken up” poor sinners that He might act towards them worthily of Himself, to the praise of the glory of His grace. The other thing remains true, God is a Judge, and “we have forgiveness of sins, through the blood of Christ; and we must understand this before we can enjoy our privileges in Christ.

God has “taken us up.” Our very existence in the new creation is the fruit of His purpose and thoughts about us. This has a double bearing. It shows how we are to measure what God is doing for us; as a question of God’s purpose; and besides being this measure, it makes us understand the source of it all. And this has a most happy effect; instead of looking at ourselves, and judging from ourselves, we look at God. Nothing but life-giving power could ever have wrought this. Our thoughts about God are, that He is the source of all our blessing. As the young man, before alluded to, would have pleasure in thinking about the friend who had “taken him up,” so this thought about God is a happy thought, and, moreover, one of great sanctifying power.

God has “predestinated us unto the adoption of children.” It is not here simply a question of purpose (of God’s counsel, and therefore sure), that to which He has predestinated us is the present adoption of children. I, a poor sinner, a sinner of the Gentiles, had no title whatever to blessing; I trace all my title to God’s purpose, which He hath purposed in Himself. This is true also of the Jews, though, in a certain sense, they stood on different ground. Christ was “a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers;” but of the Gentiles it is said, “And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.” It is of grace, of God’s free thought about us. He has taken pleasure in us, as Joshua said to Israel: “If the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it unto us, a land which floweth with milk and

honey.” We cannot boast in anything; for we have not anything whatever wherein to boast, except in this, that God has taken delight in us to give us the adoption. The effect is most blessed; we know Himself— “after ye have known God, or rather are known of God.” That He has predestinated us unto, is not a distant thing, nor yet merely salvation (in the sense of escape from the wrath of God), it is the nearest place He could have put us into, not as with the Jews: “I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born,” we are adopted with the “adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved.” Here we get, not only the source, but the manner—the source, God’s love; the manner, in Christ.

“The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us”—the Word that was in the beginning with God, and was God. But the light shone in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. It is not said that there was want of power, but that men’s deeds were evil, and that, therefore, they would not come unto the light. A Christian who is walking carelessly does not like a godly Christian to come into contact with him, he feels condemned; whenever the heart is not right with God, light makes uneasy. But besides being light, “In Him was life,” and that is what we needed; while He shows us our evil, He is the good we need. Predestinated unto the adoption of children, it is in Him. Called according to God’s purpose, we are to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace. We are brought into the presence of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, when Jesus goes away, He says, “I ascend unto My Father and your Father, unto my God and your God.” He has Himself met all our responsibility, otherwise the light would have been terrible. There are two things, substitution and communication of life. In substitution, He stood alone. But, our guilt being taken away, we are quickened together with Him, and He presents us in the Father’s presence, as He is.

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” But not merely has the Son of God visited us when we were in our sins, not merely, either, been delivered for our offenses. “Herein is our love (love with us) made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world.” We have no life apart from Christ; we have no acceptance apart from Christ. He has made us accepted in the Beloved—the measure is just that. It is God’s delight to bring us, in Christ, and by Christ, into His own presence. We can go no further. “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ,” writes John. We may enjoy it more and more, we may delight in it in deepened measure, but we cannot have anything beyond. When God speaks of glorifying Himself; or of our glorifying Him, it means through the display of what He is; it is God’s glory to display Himself; therefore in this, which is to the glory of His grace, we have the display of Himself.

And do not let us suppose that this goes beyond that we may think about (a very natural thought; the apostle says further on: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled into all the fullness of God.” (Chapter 3:14-19) It is not a matter of human wisdom, learning,

or attainment; in proportion as we become simple as little children, we shall understand these things, through the Holy Spirit. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." It has nothing to do with human learning; lowliness of mind is what is needed.

"The good pleasure of His will" is not simply sovereignty, it is the good pleasure of His will. God is acting in His love, displaying the will of His grace, "taking up "poor, wretched, vile sinners, and unfolding, on these objects of His mercy, all the riches of His own goodness. "The good pleasure of His will," that which God takes delight in, is the ministering of the fullness of His blessing to us. Here the soul gets established. It is quite evident that the measure of His goodness cannot be, in any sense, the measure of what we are, as deserving at His hands; while it is His good pleasure, it is the good pleasure of His grace. And further, whilst I have need, for the establishment of my soul, to learn what He is, to be delighting in the goodness of God, it is this too which sanctifies. If I could be always thinking of what He is, I should be perfectly happy, and there would be the reflection in me of that with which my soul was occupied.

We begin often at the wrong end. On what are we resting our acceptance? It is not anything in ourselves that will do. Or is it a question of sanctification? — "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord" (that is, I look at the Lord, and, as a consequence of my looking at the Lord, I reveal to men what He is). Moses, on coming down from the mount, was not inquiring whether his face shone, in order to know if he had been with God; others saw this.

It is such a comfort to get to God, and feel that it is in Him, and from Him.

Where, naturally, would our souls rest? It is quite a natural feeling, if we have been convinced of sin, that we should want to get at ease, at peace, to know there is nothing against us, it is a natural feeling, a feeling that must be; but the apostle here is looking at those whom God has "taken up," and He has "made us accepted in the beloved." That is God's thought about us; He has shown us this grace in a particular way, and in a particular person—Christ. It is not merely a negative thing; He takes as positive delight in us as He does in Jesus. He is no double-measure God.

"Put on as the elect of God," Paul writes to the Colossians, "holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness," and so forth. Saints and beloved ones of God, objects of God's love, God's delight (the measure of which is Christ), thus he addresses them. If I am beloved of a person, this draws out love. So the consciousness of God's love, God's delight produces links in affection, that exists not without it. My thought of being accepted is not merely that my sins are put away, so that I could stand before Him, I am the object of His delight; holy affections are drawn out, and I pass through the world as a beloved one of God. We cannot suppose, in Christ's going through this world (and this shows us our deficiency as Christians), one single thing of it, that acts on our hearts, acting on His; He was the beloved one of God- "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," and He was going through the world as such. Thus, too, should the Christian walk through the world, with the consciousness of being beloved of God. With this we do not want the world; without it, we are obliged to turn to something that makes self the center.

Young or old, that is what we are-beloved of God. Perhaps, you will say: Ah, but I am very proud, very worldly; I do not give up the things of the world.' Very likely not, and that is a reason for your being reminded of this, that you may.

"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." This is the leading thought in the apostle's mind. And remark, he speaks of that which is positively possessed, not of something we are hoping for, or expecting; He "hath made us accepted in the beloved," we "have redemption through His blood," and so forth. This grace of God, this "good pleasure of His will," has planted and set us in it all. We may be practically destitute of the joy of these things, but that is where we are. And He has given to those whom He has set in this place the knowledge of His purpose as to the glory of Christ, as it goes on to say: "Wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence (the apostle explains it); having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself;" here again it comes from the good pleasure of His will, "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth." Having placed the saints in all this fellowship and blessing, He imparts (as with Abraham—"Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I am about to do?") unto them His thoughts. Not only has He accepted us in Christ, but He will have everything brought under Christ's dominion and power—He is to gather together in one all things in Christ—"even in Him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will: that we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory." We are joint-heirs with Christ. Hence the prayer at the end of the chapter.

We cannot deny, we do not deny (whatever man's efforts to make the best of the world), that sin is in the world; there is not a single thing, take dress for instance, that does not tell us that. There is not a single thing we are buying or selling, a single thing we are looking upon, that is not in some sort a proof of sin. All that man does for pleasure is necessitated by sin; Adam in Paradise had no need of it. What makes the world get on without God? the principle of sin; this is running through everything: it has got, so to speak, into the vital blood, and (though it be God's creation through which it runs) it runs through everything. Man builds his city, invents his instruments of music (Gen. 4), and strives to make the world happy without God. Introduce God and His amazing work where men are occupied with gain or with pleasure, it is all wrong and out of place. Whether for pleasure or for gain, God must be excluded. That is the character of the whole world, and to tack on the name of Christ does not mend it; an avaricious Christian (nominally such) is in nothing better than an avaricious heathen. God is lingering over it, but the existence of the gospel in the world is proof that the world is lost. "We know," says John, "that the whole world lieth in the wicked one;" and again, "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. As it is, as a plain matter of fact, it is not God's inheritance. Who is called its god? Satan. God's title cast away through the lust of men, and the pride and power of Satan, whom they follow, God has designated Satan "the god of this world," and made known to us (those who are of faith) the mystery of His will. The apostle speaks here of hope (vs. 18)-We have obtained an inheritance in Christ, and all things are going to be put under Christ; meanwhile (like Abraham, who had not so much as whereon to set his foot) "having nothing, and yet possessing all things," the Christian walks through the world, as one beloved of God, in the consciousness that he is the object of God's purposes, and of God's delight. But what

do we see in the Lord Jesus? Not merely that He has been designated the heir of all things; "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand." So too, our proper delight is in knowing that we are beloved of God, and that God will have us before Himself, and for Himself-His delight in us, and our delight in Him! It is as a consequence of this love, that we shall have the glory of the inheritance. Where are our hearts? what is our joy? Are we journeying, aye, journeying through the world in the blessed, joyful confidence of this secret of God? Then will the world be to us a "dry and thirsty land;" instead of finding delight in things around, we shall have to guard against them, as against that which would bring us down to Satan's ground. Are we taking the world, with its pleasures and its gain? If so, we are entering into Cain's portion, and not into that of Abraham, and we are "enemies of the cross of Christ." Through these things Satan is deceiving the world. Are we taking the position (not of Adam before he sinned, not of Christ when He was in the world, neither of Christ in the glory, but) of the "men of the earth"?

The Lord give us to see, and so to estimate, so to value, that which is God's object, that we may have done with this present evil world.

What Want I With the World?

What want I with the world
And all its treasures?
In Thee alone, Lord Jesus,
Are my true pleasures.
Thou art my soul's delight;
My joy I find in Thee!
My rest and peace art Thou!
My heart's tranquility!
What want I with the world?
The world is as a smoke
Which vanishes in air;
And, like a shadow fleet,
That stays not anywhere:
My Jesus, though, remains,
When all things else decline;
My heart's true confidence,
Jesus alone is mine!
What want I with the world?
The world seeks its renown
Among the grand and great;
Thinks not how quickly glides
Its fantasy and state;
But sweeter far to me
Is Jesus' love alone;
And this my heart's desire,
To see Him on His throne.

What want I with the world?
The world seeks worldly wealth;
Its hope on mammon rests;
Its comforts rise and fall,
With money in its chests:
There is a nobler prize,
On which my heart reclines;
The joys of Jesus' love,
Which in my spirit shines.
What want I with the world?
The world is sorely tried,
If scorn its portion be;
And most, when over-reached
By deeper subtlety:
I bear the cross of Christ,
His pleasure to fulfill;
His favor my delight;
My peace to do His will!
What want I with the world?
The world so high esteems
Its fleeting fancies gay;
Its follies to retain
Would barter heaven away;
She hangs her hope on that
Which care can only yield:
I love my Lord and God,
My fortress and my shield.
What want I with the world?
What want I with the world?

As grass it fades away;
The stamp of death is there;
It hasteth to decay;
Health doth itself depart;
All earthly creatures fade:
Jesus sustains; my heart
Is by His love repaid.
What want I with the world?
What want I with the world?
My Jesus is my life,
My substance, and my joy,
In this poor scene of strife:
To Him I gladly bow;
I worship at His feet;
He is my heaven, my all;
Therefore do I repeat,
What want I with the world?
From the German.

The Waters of Strife

A word on unadvised spearing.

“They angered Him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.” (Psa. 106:32-33).

It is an exceedingly establishing thing for our souls, fully to perceive that God is dealing with us on the ground of His own relationship towards us, and that He never deals with us on any other. This is as true in discipline and present correction as in anything else—correction from our Heavenly Father because He is our Father.

“I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes,” is among the covenant dealings of Psalm 89:32. God cannot pass over the sins of His saints as over those of the world. He brings them under present discipline. Sin in a saint of God is much more fearful than in an unbeliever, since the glory of God suffers so much more at our hands. That which might appear a trifling thing in another, is not so in us. We need to apply the balance of the sanctuary, so as to discern what is according to God and what is riot.

Further, it is most full of comfort to see that God is able to record in His Word the failures of His saints—and that He does not hesitate to record them. He is showing us in them, and through them, as things written for our admonition, that, notwithstanding this failure, His faithfulness never fails. But it requires a deepened tone of spirituality to perceive that God thus visits the sins of His people, and yet that their blessing, through His grace, shall not fail as to the end. “Nevertheless My loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips.” He cannot suffer His truth to fail; He cannot deny Himself. (2 Tim. 2:13)

Another very remarkable thing is, that the sins recorded of the saints are not infrequently those which we should have supposed them least likely to fall into. For instance, Peter’s fall, most largely recorded. Again, David’s foul sin. And when we come to Moses, there is failure too in him. We find that that which is recorded here is mentioned in many other parts of the Word. “He spake unadvisedly with his lips.” Moses himself records it over and over again, to show that even an unadvised word (that which might be regarded as a light thing) is not passed over unnoticed.

Now, I believe that where we sin much is in this very respect, in speaking unadvisedly with our lips. As the Apostle James says, “In many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.” (James 3:2) When I find an unadvised speech of Moses in a chafed moment thus recorded, I see the deep necessity there is for having a bridled tongue. it is here that Satan gets such advantage over us—yes, where God’s saints have constant need of correction is for unadvised talk. The amount of sorrow thus brought upon souls is hardly to be estimated; perhaps it is not too much to say, that almost all the mischief that arises amongst saints is from speaking unadvisedly with the lips.

God is able to record those things in which His saints have grieved Him; but this does not hinder His truth, this does not hinder the one being in the glory with the Lord, concerning whom such failure is recorded. Then he will be able to look back and trace all the way in which God has led him, and see how all has been overruled for good.

I would just notice by the way, that which is remarkably testified of the Lord Jesus as standing where Moses failed. When He was here, all the sitting down in the seat of the scornful of those who sought to entangle Him in His talk, all the contradiction of sinners against Himself, all their cavils, never drew out an unadvised word from His lips. On the contrary, when He was attacked on every hand—by Pharisees, by Sadducees, by Herodians—after He had met them all, His wisdom shone conspicuously forth in silencing them with the simple question: “What think ye of Christ? whose son is He? If David then call him Lord, how is He his son?” (Matt. 22:41-45) And Jesus is our example; as Peter tells us, “If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously.” (1 Peter 2:20-23)

But let us turn to the narrative before us: “Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin, in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh and Miriam died there, and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us into this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.” (vs. 1-5) It is no uncommon thing for those who have known redemption through the blood of the Lamb, and the passage of the Red Sea—perfect deliverance from Egypt—to murmur thus, because of not having the vines and figs and pomegranates.

But what can Moses and Aaron do? They have not any resources in themselves, they can only cast it before the Lord. “And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces.” (vs. 6)

But what I desire to press upon our consideration here is this, that it is frequently, when we have been near the Lord, when we have in humility laid the matter before Him, just on returning back amidst the circumstances, something unforeseen occurring, that failure is at once manifested.

“And the glory of the Lord appeared unto them.” How blessed this for Moses! And our portion is peculiarly that now; whatever the perplexity, whatever the trial, whatever the circumstances may be, the moment we get before the Lord, the glory of the Lord appears. It is this God places before us, for the comfort and stay of our souls.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.” (vss. 7, 8)

At the bidding of the Lord, the rod had been cast down, and it had become a serpent. At the bidding of the Lord, Moses' rod stretched out over the Red Sea, the Red Sea had been made dry land, and Israel had passed over on dry ground, and the waters had been divided; the rod stretched out again, and the Lord had overthrown the Egyptians in the midst of the Sea. The moment he is told to take "the rod," Moses ought to rest simply in the Lord. But, beloved, have we not found it very hard, when we have had a difficulty, and taken it before the Lord, to leave it entirely with Him, to wait for His continent?

We are instructed, through that which we are considering, that the Lord expects we should attend most minutely to His Word. "Speak ye unto the rock before their eyes," is the direction. We find that when they have gathered the congregation together before the rock, Moses speaks unto the people, and he speaks unadvisedly with his lips—here is failure. It is a little thing, but the Lord must notice it. And so with things in us which are as blemishes, as spots and wrinkles; if the Lord Jesus has "loved the church, and given Himself for it "in order that He might "present it to Himself a glorious church, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish," when there are these spots and wrinkles, they displease the Lord. In Rev. 2 and 3, the Lord Jesus Christ is seen walking in the midst of the churches with the eyes of fire (not in the world), to the end that "all the churches may know that I am He who searcheth the reins and hearts." In His discipline He may be dealing with that in us which we know nothing about, but which He sees. Just as in His intercession for Peter — "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:31-34), was before Peter ever thought at all of denying Him "He searches the reins and the hearts;" and we need to give heed to Him. It is a very solemn thing for us to despise the chastening of the Lord. He chastens us because we are beloved, because we are His.

It was this sin caused Moses to lose Canaan, and the high honor of leading Israel over Jordan into the land. We too are losers by sin, though it may be that, through the grace of Him with whom we have to do, His restoring grace, the soul is brought upon higher and firmer ground. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Could Peter ever forget the lesson of restoring grace! He was placed on higher ground—higher, stronger ground, as to the establishment of his soul, than that on which he stood before his fall. Our very sins and failures are overruled for our good.

There is one very remarkable feature of God's dealings presented to us in this picture. He ever delights to honor His saints in the eyes of others; but then they must not seek their own honor. He will honor His servants; but the moment we step out of the servant's place, to take, as we judge it, a higher one, He humbles us. The Lord Jesus Christ, the one faithful servant of Jehovah, was always hiding Himself, that God might appear; and God was always honoring Him in the eyes of others, "approving Him by wonders, miracles, and signs." When we honor God, He honors us. "Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." (1 Sam. 2:30). God says to Moses, "Take the rod, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink." Thou shalt do it. This was a high honoring of Moses in the sight of all Israel. But when Moses takes the rod, and he says, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" That is, he does not sanctify the Lord in the eyes of the congregation; it is "we," not "the Lord." No sooner do we assume to be anything, than we get out of the servant's place.

But further, we have some little insight given us herein to the deceitfulness of sin. "Moses took," we are told, "the rod from before the Lord, as He commanded him" (vs. 2); he obeys up to a certain point, but there he stops; it is an act of partial obedience, and partial obedience must always be allied to self-will "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees," and so forth; their obedience was exceedingly partial; they took those parts of the law which gave them honor in the sight of others; doing it to be seen of men; but passed by that which would have involved self-denial. And it is too frequently so with us in our service, we are found self-seekers, pleasers of men. He takes the rod as the Lord has commanded him. "And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them"-there is disobedience! God has never commanded him to do that: He has commanded him to speak unto the rock — "Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?" (vs. 10) What words! O Moses, Moses! O sad picture of the flesh! Moses the man of God speaks unadvisedly with his lips! "The man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3); but the meekest man on the earth is here the one to say, "Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?" putting himself in the place of God; the one of whom it is testified, "It went ill with Moses for their sakes, because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips." They chafe his spirit, they grieve him, the meekest of men, by their murmurings, and he says, "Hear now, ye rebels, must we?" That odious word "we!" most odious word in the mouth of a saint! Everything that we have, and all that we are, we have and are by the Lord's grace, and all must be used to His glory.

Moses has forgotten the rod. What is Moses I Nothing; he has no power to fetch water from the rock, and he has forgotten the present power of God, that which alone can enable him to do it; he has forgotten God, he is thinking about himself. Here we see again the sin of our hearts, in the using of the very grace which God has given us, for the purpose of self-exaltation, to say "we." But this is a sin which would not be noticed by the world; because the world only talks of "I" and "me." Not so faith. Paul says, "By the grace of God, I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10), ashamed to be forced, as it were, into this mention of himself. The flesh would seek to use the very grace of God, the light of God, the truth of God, the power of God, to exalt ourselves. That may seem a little thing which is recorded of Moses here; but when we come to take it to pieces, to analyze it, we feel it to be most odious before God. So it is with us, if the light which God has given us, the truth and knowledge we have, are made stepping-stones to self-exaltation.

"And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice." He has been told to speak to the rock; but he smites it twice, as though divine power has need of being seconded by human energy. But still "the water came out." God's faithfulness is not touched by the failure of His servant. So is it with us; one may preach the gospel of strife and contention; Paul could rejoice even in this, since Christ was preached (Phil. 1:18); and yet not hinder God's sovereignty in owning His own ordinance. Moses fails; but God does not deny Moses to be His servant, neither does He deny the power of the rod. "Moses took the rod, and smote the rock twice, and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also." (vs. 11) God may be using an individual's ministry for blessing to the souls of others, when He is about to discipline that very person, so used of Him. He abideth faithful; He will not (blessed be His name!) deny His own

truth, though mixed up with much of weakness, of foolishness, and even of self, in those who preach it.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. This is the water of Meribah, because the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and He was sanctified in them.”

We have the failure of Moses mentioned in several other parts of the Word, some of which we will now consider.

Chapter 27:12-14. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered. For ye rebelled against My commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify Me at the water before their eyes: that is the water of Meribah in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.” Moses loses Canaan, through speaking unadvisedly with his lips; but, beloved, does that alter God’s intention of blessing him everlastingly? or is it not rather the occasion of proving that “His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting toward them that fear Him.” However necessary it may be to chasten Moses, and to hold him up as an instance of a rebellious saint, this cannot cause God to “alter the thing that has gone out of His lips.” We afterward see Moses on the mount of glory, with the Lord, in the transfiguration (Matt. 17:3; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30). When there he could, doubtless, look back and see the path by which the goodness of the Lord had led him, and the links of the chain which we cannot see, and how that God had made all things “work together for good.” It is an exceedingly establishing thing for us to see, that “whom He loveth (He loves unto the end) He chasteneth.” It is His saints whom He chastens; He hates sin, and He will show, in His dealings with His children about it, what a fearful thing it is. We must not expect, because we are made the righteousness of God in Christ, and because we are heirs of glory, that He does not mark our sins; this, on the contrary, is the very reason that He does, in order that we may be made to see that “it is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against God the Lord.”

Deuteronomy 3:23-28. “I besought the Lord at that time, saying, O Lord God, thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness and Thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to Thy works, and according to Thy might? I pray Thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto Me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see.” The Lord denies the prayer of His saint. The Lord may deny the prayers of His saints, or He may answer them in a way we little expect. It was thus in respect of Paul’s thorn in the flesh: “For this cause,” he tells us, “I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.” (The prayer was not answered in the manner the apostle looked for it to be.) “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:8, 9) The thorn was needed! God may let, and sometimes does let, the consequences of the sin of a saint hang over

him. all the time he is here. The saint Moses prays, but the Lord denies the prayer of His saint. They have just come to the very border of the land, and Moses says, "Let me go over, and see the good land." But the Lord tells him, "Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto Me of this matter." What graciousness there is in this "Let it suffice thee;" we see here all God's restoring mercy; it seems, so to speak, as if He hardly could deny Moses, as if, were he to be importunate, He could not refuse him. It was wiser, it was better, it was more for the glory of God, that Moses' prayer should not be answered; but there is something exquisitely tender in the reply of the Lord "Let it suffice thee;" just as in that to Paul— "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Deuteronomy 32:48-52. "And the Lord spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain Abiram, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession: and die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother did in mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people: because ye trespassed against Me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified Me not in the midst of the children of Israel. Yet thou shalt see the land before thee; but thou shalt not go thither unto the land which I give the children of Israel." We see here the way in which the Lord is able to tell of the sins of the saints—to record the failures of the saints. Let man narrate the life of his fellow man, he seeks to hide his failures, and why? Because he wishes to exalt the man. Let the Holy Spirit write the life of a saint, He records the sins and failures of that saint, and why? Because he exalts the grace of God. It is a blessed thing too, beloved, when we can use even our failures to exalt the grace of God. The Lord says of Moses, "Ye rebelled," "ye transgressed;" and yet we find, after all this, Moses speaking face to face with God in confidence, and in intimate intercourse. He tells Moses the reason why he cannot go over the Jordan; the desire to see the good land that is beyond is pleasing in His eyes, and He gives him a Pisgah-view of it. God is able to tell us how wisely He disciplines us. Nothing shall hinder the purpose of His grace concerning us. He is determined that nothing shall alter the thing that has gone out of His lips— "Whom He justified, them He also glorified;" but then, it is between justification and glorification that there comes in all this discipline.

Deuteronomy 34:1-7. "And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees unto Zoar. And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I swam unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go thither. So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the Word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day. And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated."

It is the Lord who buries Moses, and after a time He brings him out (as we have seen) in the glory of the Lord Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. We find there, not Joshua, the one who led Israel into the land, but Moses, the one to whom this was denied.

Beloved, let us remember that it was a little thing, an unadvised word that occasioned to Moses the loss of Canaan. And let us remember, moreover, that the governance of the tongue is more pressed upon us in the New Testament than almost anything else. "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (Matt. 12:37) Seeking to exalt ourselves is rebellion against God.

The Lord grant that we may see that we are exposed to a searching judgment to which the world is not exposed, because we are His saints; and that He may have to shut His ear to our prayer. He is "the only wise God," and He may be more wise in denying than in granting. May we be found walking before Him unto all well-pleasing.

When a man steps out of his own nothingness, he steps into it.

Zeal against the errors of others is no security against the wiles of the devil. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.

He that rides on a stumbler had need have his eye on the road before, and his bridle well in hand. And such is even the believer's heart.

Wherever you go, endeavor to carry with you a sense of God's presence, His holiness, and His love; it will preserve you from a thousand snares.

Have a word with God before you enter into conversation with any man. (James 1:5)

Satan tempts saints to unholy wrath (Luke 9:55), and they do not know, and little think, where they had their coal to so heat them from, until Christ tells them, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of."

It is as great a presumption to send our passions upon God's errands, as it is to palliate them with God's name. Zeal, in charity, is good; without it, good for nothing; for it devours all it comes near. They must first judge themselves, that presume to censure others; and such will not be apt to overshoot the mark.

Use a little of the bridle in the quantity of speech; incline a little rather to sparing than to using them lavishly; for "in many words there wants not sin." That flux of the tongue, that prattling and babbling disease, is very common; and hence so many impertinences, yea, so many of those worse ills, in their discourses, whispering about, and inquiring, and censuring this and that.

An unwholesome stomach turns the best meat it receives into that bad humor that abounds in it. Do not they thus, who observe what the Word says, that they may be the better enabled to discover the failings of others, and speak maliciously and uncharitably of them, and vent themselves as is too common? "This Word met well with such a one's fault, and this with another's." Is not this to feed these diseases of malice, "envy," and "evil speaking," with this "pure milk," and make them grow, instead of growing by it ourselves in grace and in holiness?

Divine truths are like a well-drawn picture, which looks particularly upon every one amongst the great multitude that look upon it.

A Word on Perfection

Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”

In saying that sin will remain in us until we either put off the body, or are changed (for we “wait for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body,” Rom. 8:23), it is not at all meant that we should walk according to that evil principle; on the contrary, we ought to walk in the Spirit, (so as not to “fulfill the lusts of the flesh,” Gal. 5:16), although the flesh’ still exists.

Nor is this a mere question about words. So soon as we assume that we can be perfect, and there be no longer sin in us, a multitude of things, which the Word of God calls sin, cease to be so in our estimation; the contrast between our own condition and that of Jesus Christ becomes less evident; we attenuate sin; true sanctification suffers in proportion; and the distinction between sin and sins is wholly lost sight of. It is not difference on a point of knowledge or speculation; the question involved is, What is sin?’ a question evidently fundamental, as also practically of the last importance.

But it may be well to anticipate here a possible difficulty. What is the flesh? asks the reader, What is there more in man than body, soul, and spirit? And the apostle tells Christians, to whom he is writing: “The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess. 5:23) And we reply that Adam before the fall had body, soul, and spirit; but that after the fall there was in him in addition a will in rebellion against God—sin (that which the Word of God calls the flesh’), a something which “lusteth (or struggleth) against the Spirit,” in the man in whom the Spirit of God dwells, and which “cannot be subject to the law of God.” (Rom. 8:7) It is certain that there are few words more frequently employed in the Word of God than the flesh, and no subject more often and carefully treated, bound up as it is with the whole doctrine of the ‘new man.’

The introduction of sin has completely altered the nature of our relationship with God. I could never more return to the condition of Adam before the fall; I now partake of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) by promises infinitely superior to anything enjoyed by Adam. God has not restored the first Adam, He has united us to the Second. Our glory consists not in ignorance of evil, but in the enjoyment of the results of a complete victory over it. The law (though in its essence the rule of every pure being before God) could no longer characterize our condition, for we are very far from being pure, according to its requirements. Grace does not exhibit the creature in its perfection; it is the introduction of the nature, goodness, and power of the Creator into the midst of the evil, over which His perfections are victorious. Grace therefore recognizes the evil over which it triumphs.

‘Sanctification’ is based upon our union with Christ, risen and glorified. A new life has been communicated, which through the Holy Spirit sees and occupies itself with Him (Phil. 3), and which knows that, “when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2) This life estimates everything according to the perfection of our state hereafter; it recognizes that we have not as yet obtained the redemption of our body, and judges the ‘old man,’ root, trunk,

and branches. Meanwhile, in walking according to this new life, the Christian “purifies himself as He is pure.”

Assured of the love of God, actuated by the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord, with joy and gladness of heart, he follows after the apprehension of that, for which also he is apprehended of Him. By the power of the Holy Spirit he is changed into the same image, from glory to glory. (2 Cor. 3:18) By faith he is already partaker of a perfection which in its fullness will be his when Jesus returns. “Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.”

If then God gives us strength to walk in His ways, that strength is given through a knowledge which at the same time makes us understand that we cannot ere below attain to that even which we know. Thus (instead of an end which we can attain), to encourage us, He sets before us that which hereafter shall assuredly be accomplished in us, but which preserves us ever in humility, ever in the sense that we are not all that we would be. But this very thing keeps us ever advancing towards our great end. The opposite principle, with a show of requiring only that which is right and suitable, is entirely at variance with the mind of God, and akin to self-righteousness; instead of holding fast, and being strong in His grace, it says, ‘I have attained.’

A full pardon, through grace, is ours at the very outset of our course, and, as its termination, a glory is set before us, the power of which is in us by the communication of the life of Christ; but the very nature and excellence of this glory make it evident to us that it is not a thing attainable here below. We “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:2) We are “saved by hope.” (Rom. 8:24) In the confidence of the certainty of God’s grace, we press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus. There shall we find ourselves in the presence of Him we have known,, as the friend of our weakness, and the glory of our strength.

A word in passing on the separate state. There is an immense difference between my condition whilst in this body, and that of the soul, after this life, when the body has been put off; as there is, likewise, between the latter state and that in which the redemption of our body shall be completed in resurrection. After death, the believer is “unclothed,” but not “clothed upon.” (2 Cor. 5) “Absent from the body,” he is “present with the Lord.” Though not perfected in the glory, he is, nevertheless, delivered from a body which had not as yet its portion in the resurrection (enjoyed, through the Holy Spirit, in the soul). This body, which caused him to groan whilst on earth (not, it is true, without consolation), and which makes all groan who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, has ceased to be a cause of groaning; that which held him bound (in fact, not in heart) to a creation still subject to the bondage of corruption, no longer binds; the link is severed.

If the goal of his hope is not reached, in dying he has at least laid aside a burden, a soiled garment, that he may, at once and unhinderedly, enjoy the presence of the Lord, its pure air and genial warmth penetrating his soul now freed from all obstruction. But death is not our Savior. Death finds the believer already saved by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is risen with Him: this is already accomplished as to the soul, which, through the Holy Spirit, experiences the blessed result, and triumphs in a hope that maketh not ashamed. The putting off of the body adds nothing to our title in the presence of God, for we are there, by faith, what Jesus

is there. We are merely stripped of a body which had not partaken of redemption, in order to be ushered into the presence of Jesus, awaiting that which remains, to wit, our being clothed with a body fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body.

We wait for perfection (there only to be found), when, mortality being swallowed up of life, we shall be made like unto the Second Adam-the accepted and glorified man, according to the purpose of God.

The Holy Spirit, which is given unto us, is "the seal "(not of fruits which He Himself produces, but) of our redemption in Christ Jesus, the "earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession unto the praise of His (God's) glory."

Man's Christianity works in order to obtain eternal life, not on the ground of eternal life being already ours, the free gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Again; to deny the existence of evil, in the sense in which we have been speaking, is to denaturalize grace in its essence, riches, counsels, and all its fullness. When the heart has got before it low views, in the belief that we have attained, our Christianity becomes debased and proud. It is the truth which sanctifies. All other sanctification, notwithstanding appearances, is not according to God.

If nothing is properly sin, except a voluntary violation of the law of God, it follows that the lusts, through which Paul was convinced of sin, (Rom. 7) were not such, and so with faults and sins of negligence. So that, when Paul says, "The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do," he was quite wrong in looking upon such things as sin, and still more so in being thus distressed about them. (What can be less voluntary than doing that which we would not'?) This definition absolutely denies the existence of sin in the flesh-sin which dwells in us, even when it is subdued by the Spirit. It is a definition which attenuates the idea of sin, to make us satisfied with ourselves, instead of adoring the grace and goodness of our God. Assuredly lust is sin; my failures in the discharge of the duties of love proceed from the sin which is in me. These things were not in Christ. He was without sin; He ever and perfectly waited on and did the will of God. He never acted, as I at times do, with precipitation. This zeal after the flesh. (even when I am doing good with all my heart) will not be imputed to me (not because it is not sinful, but) by reason of Christ's expiation of sin. These things result from a nature which is in me, and which was not in Christ. There is a principle at work in me, to bring forth evil fruit, which principle there was not in Him. I shall not be judged according to it; for Jesus has borne its guilt, and put it away; but it is precisely on that very account that I have to judge it.

Ignorance, error, and the like, are sometimes spoken of by us as distinct from sin. It is written: "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matt. 6:23); if, then, I am in error or darkness, the eye has been, in some respect, not single. There is but the alternative: "Thine eye is evil." A false judgment proceeds from wandering affections.

There is the confounding of sin with sins, that is to say, the confounding of that which we do in following our evil nature with that nature itself, and thus the denial of the very existence of sin in one who has put on Christ. 'We ought to walk after the Spirit,' and not 'after the flesh'; but, on the other hand, sin is in our nature. The injunctions not to walk after the flesh, 'not to make provision for the flesh,' show that it is a thing in itself evil; still the flesh is neither temptation nor Satan, but something in man which is not at all a sin actually committed.

Do we find anything about the flesh ceasing to exist? "The flesh lusteth," we are told, "against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." Paul had need of a "thorn in the flesh" (something sent by God to arrest the workings of sin, and to prevent its hindering the apostle's labors), lest he should be puffed up through the abundance of revelations. (2 Cor. 12) So that it is plain a man's being caught up to the third heaven had in no wise changed the nature and tendency of the flesh in its opposition and unthankfulness to God. The flesh is ever the same, and might have grown proud even of this exalted knowledge of God. The divine remedy did not consist in a change of the nature, but in some means of keeping under that nature, still evil. Again, Peter's was a humbling experience. Though "filled with the Spirit" (Acts 4:8), he ceased to eat with the Gentiles (Gal. 2), and walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel. And Paul, far from not regarding these things as sins, withstood him to the face, and reproveth him before them all.

The question opened in the book of Job is this: Is a man full of grace? Is a "perfect" man wholly without sin? Might such a one present himself before God as having it not? Or, on the contrary, is sin in him? And if through grace his walk has indeed been after a manner worthy of this vocation, should he not still, nay, only the rather, have the sense of, and search thoroughly into his state before God? Instead of becoming self-satisfied by reason of the grace accorded, ought he not to judge himself? Forgetting the things which are behind (his own past spiritual progress, save as in reference ever and alone to God), and reaching forth unto those things which are before, in a humility which, with the fullness of confidence in God, mistrusts itself, he should not merely watch, but judge himself, having before God the recognition on his soul of the nature that is there, although it may not act, which is in no wise necessary to our recognition of its existence.

Job is a man full of grace. "There is none like Him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil." (Job 1:8) He recounts his experience; and we at once perceive that his mind is taken up (not with the grace of God, or with the grace which is in God, but) with that which has been wrought in himself. He looks upon the manna placed in his hand; he keeps of it until the morning, and it breeds worms, and stinks. (Ex. 16:19-20) The flesh lays claim to the effects of grace, and Job's conscience and heart become in consequence less impressed with the abounding goodness and perfect holiness of God. Occupied with his own goodness, that of God is necessarily lost sight of in proportion. Contemplating his own holiness, that of God has by so much less hold on his conscience. But God in love sends him successive trials, in order to show him what is in his heart, to bring out thence the workings of sin, and lay them on his conscience. And thus he is called back to the contemplation of the goodness and perfection of God alone.

We learn from chapter 29 Job's feelings as to his own holiness and grace. "When the ear heard me," he says, "then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was a robe and a diadem," and so forth. In truth, Job was a man full of grace; but, alas! he perceived it, and his heart needed to be better instructed as to what he was before God.

Trials come. Job remains as exemplary in adversity as he had before been in prosperity. (The root of sin was not yet touched) He becomes even more remarkable for his patience than for his goodness; for Scripture bears this testimony of him: "Ye have heard of the patience of Job."

(James 5:11) But at length God permits his friends to visit him, and proffer consolation; and Job, so, noted for his patience, curses the day of his birth. What afflictions we can endure in secret! but no sooner do our friends become witnesses of them than our pride is stirred. Man's compassion excites impatience.

What is the after result of these trials, and of the lessons reaped by Job through them? Instead of repeating that the eye that saw him gave witness to him, no sooner does he discern the Lord than he exclaims, "Now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Such is the history of the perfect man' according to the Bible.

Is this a rejoicing in iniquity? The endeavor to draw a dark and unfavorable picture of some of the most eminent saints? With all these saints we rejoice in God, rather than in man, having learned with them that were we to justify ourselves, our own mouths would condemn us. In dwelling on the effect produced in ourselves, and not on the source in God, we manifest unconsciously the spirit of the Pharisee. The Pharisee (Luke 17) began by giving thanks—"I thank Thee, O God;" that which characterizes a pharisaic spirit is not the omitting to thank God for our blessings: its essence is this—in place of saying, 'I thank Thee for what Thou art,' it says, 'I thank Thee for what I am.' The Pharisee thinks of the grace given, and is lifted up, in place of thinking of the grace which gives, and which forgives.

It is worthy of notice here, that after Pentecost we do not find a single instance of a man's being spoken of as perfect. There is an important reason for this. The gift of the Holy Spirit has rendered us capable of discerning and judging the old man, through the full knowledge we have of the relation of the 'new man' to Jesus Christ. Under the former economy, one who, touching the commandments and ordinances of the law, walked blamelessly, might be said to be perfect. The distinction between the old man and the new was not then taught, as we know and are able to discern it.

The word perfect is used with reference to each of the three great revelations of God—the Almighty (to Abraham), Jehovah (to Israel), and Father (to the Christian).

First. God said to Abraham, "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1); which means that Abraham was to walk before God, ever confiding in His Almighty power. Abraham did not; he failed in respect of this; and lied (Gen. 20:2) precisely on that account. It was no question of sin in the fallen nature of Abraham; it had to do with his acting in confidence in the almighty power of God. As to fact, he still had sin, and fell.

Second. The Israelites were instructed: "Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord (Jehovah) thy God." (Deut. 48:13) This was in respect of their not imitating the abominations of the Canaanites in their idolatries, and not at all a question of sin, or the absence of it, in the heart of this or that Israelite. In the same book (chap. 29:4), Moses tells them, "Yet the Lord hath not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day." It referred solely to faithfulness to God in the rejection of every species of idolatry.

Third. In the sermon on the mount we read, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48) The Lord Jesus Himself explains it by what goes before. This perfection consists in acting in love, and not according to the law of retaliation ("an eye for an eye, and a

tooth for a tooth”); it is to act toward men on the principle of the divine conduct towards us, according to the grace of our heavenly Father. It does not say, Present to God such a character of perfection, that you may be accepted of, or be made well-pleasing to Him;’ but, ‘Ye are the children of your heavenly Father;’ show forth, therefore, His character toward the world; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. He acts in grace, and not according to law; you saved sinners, you are the proof; be the witnesses of it; the publicans love those who love them—your heavenly Father loves His enemies, acts by this rule; ‘be ye perfect,’ and so forth. There is no allusion to the root of sin in our nature; it is no question whether or not sin is in the flesh, but of the principle which ought to regulate the conduct of ‘children of God,’ in contrast with law, or with natural justice.

There are, however, several passages which, from being looked at apart from their context, or misunderstood as to their true sense or bearing, have, as experience proves, been the occasion of difficulty to sincere Christians. A few of them are here referred to, in the endeavor to establish their true meaning.

1. “I am crucified with Christ.” (Gal. 2:20) It is so far from true that the apostle (who without question was eminently faithful) is speaking only of himself, or of his own state of sanctification here, that he elsewhere affirms that all Christians are crucified with him. In this same epistle he asserts, that “they who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” (Gal. 5:24) It is no question of ‘the reception of Christ by certain souls for their sanctification,’ but that which is true of all Christians. This is plainly taught in the sixth chapter of the epistle to the Romans (from the first to the 11th verse), where he says: “So many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His death,” and so forth. Again, “Our old man has been crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin;” and again, “He that is dead is free from sin.” The apostle deduces hence this clear and simple conclusion (not, ‘you have therefore no more evil concupiscence;’ not, ‘you are therefore dead to all sinful inclination,’ but) “let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof”—a poor, miserable, and unintelligible conclusion to those who assert that sin no longer exists in one who is crucified with Christ. If sin no longer exist, weak is the inference, ‘Let it not, therefore, reign;’ and to say, ‘Let it not reign,’ is incompatible with the thought that it no longer exists. The conclusion drawn by the Holy Spirit here is continually that of the Word of God in similar passages elsewhere. Paul, for instance, writes to the Colossians: “Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God;” and tells them: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth,” and so forth. Col. 3) And would we know how the Christian is dead we have only to read the 11th, 12th, and 20th verses of the preceding chapter. To be dead is really true of all Christians, according to the mind of God. The same remarks apply to Romans 8:10-12.

2. “Being now made free from sin.” (Rom. 6:18,22) The apostle tells those to whom he writes, that he speaks to them “after the manner of men, because of the infirmity of their flesh.” The term “made free” is used by him in contradistinction to a state of slavery, and he adds, by way of marking the contrast, that they have become servants to God. It is a simple illustration of slaves and freedmen, introduced by the apostle to make himself better understood. Moreover, the condition spoken of is that of all Christians, without exception.

3. "As he (Christ) is, so are we in this world." (1 John 4:17) We are told in the preceding chapter: "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." What hope? That of being "like Him; for," it is added, "we shall see Him as He is." So that to be whilst "in this world" (and not merely when He comes) "as he is," is to be as Jesus is now in glory, and not as He was (that which is nowhere said in the Word). But it is certain that in our present state we are not in ourselves as He is. An attentive examination of the whole passage will show what it is the Holy Spirit designs to teach. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us," we are told. (vs. 9), "because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him;" and further (vs. 17), "Herein is love with us perfected, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world." Love perfected with us does not make us say, so that we may be this in ourselves, but that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. And what gives this boldness? God has manifested His love in sending His Son into the world, and so forth. He has completed (or perfected) this love in setting us before Himself in Christ. We are not (He is) personally in the glory; but we are perfectly as He is before God. Accepted in the Beloved; loved as He is loved; righteous as He is righteous; in principle and in hope we are made partakers of His glory. Our union with Him is a real thing; whoso touches us touches Him. He can say (speaking of us) as He did to Saul of Tarsus, "Why persecutest thou Me?" God in Christ manifested His love to man. Man in Christ is presented to God in the perfectness of Christ's acceptance, and has the enjoyment of this through the Holy Spirit in the new nature communicated, and by which we participate in it. This nature manifests itself in a walk according to its own principles. But the old man is not changed, though judged in thought and way.

4. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18). This refers to that thorough confidence in the love of God that sets the heart at liberty in His presence, and gives peace and joy in communion with Him. It has not anything to do with the absence of sin in the flesh. His love is shed abroad in our hearts— "not that we loved Him, but that He loved us." God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us. Made partakers of the divine nature, and filled with the Holy Spirit, we are filled with love (the consciousness of His love), and consequently we love after a divine manner. But it does not follow that the flesh is changed. The soul, filled with the Holy Spirit, thinks of the love which is in God, and not of the love we have for God.

5. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (1 John 3:9) The apostle, here and in similar passages of his epistle, predicates that which is true of all Christians (not of certain Christians who have attained 'perfection,' so that they no longer sin, while other Christians have not). It is those who are born of God. As a distinctive mark between them and the children of the devil, he brings forward the character of that nature which they have received from Christ, and consequently that of their life and conduct. "He that committeth sin is of the devil." (vs. 8) So that according to the idea refuted, every one who is not 'perfect' is of the devil. It may be replied that there are many scholars in one and the same class, who individually have made very different progress. But this is said of the entire class, and does not refer to the greater or less progress of particular scholars.

6. "Let us go on unto perfection." (Heb. 6:1) We find, on examining the passage, that this has no reference to the state of sanctification, but to advancing in knowledge. The apostle is contrasting "the principles of the doctrine of Christ" (as a believing Jew might have understood them before

Pentecost), and the knowledge, which the “Holy Spirit sent down from heaven” gives of the fullness of the glory of the Son of Man, exalted above all. The signification of the word perfect’ in several other passages is similar, and has no reference whatever to the presence or absence of sin.

7. “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.” (Phil. 3:15) Paul adds (vss. 12-13), “not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect... I count not myself to have apprehended.” Jesus Christ had apprehended him for the resurrection from the dead. Having learned the purpose of Jesus, he pressed towards the mark, and in so doing acknowledged the imperfection of his actual condition.

8. “Every one that is perfect shall be as his Master.” (Luke 6:40) This refers to the principles of the believer’s conduct, the complete reception of the principles of his Master. See the whole passage. There is here no allusion to the nature of the disciple, but to the light and principles which ought to guide him. We can admit of no example but the perfect walk of Jesus Christ Himself. But Christ in His nature was without sin, and we were shapen in iniquity; and, although I put off the old man, and put on the new, the work of God does not consist in restoring the first Adam here below, but in communicating the life of the Second, to whom I shall be made conformable when I see Him as He is; and never till then.

9. “There is no concord between Christ and Belial.” (2 Cor. 6:15) This is referred to here on the ground of its being sometimes made to affirm that Christ and Belial cannot dwell in the same temple. The saint’s body is not the temple of Belial, it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), although the root of sin still remains in us. Christ and Belial do subsist together. They were together in the world, of which Belial himself was ‘the prince,’ when Jesus was on the earth. To say that there is no concord’ between them is a totally different thing.

Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth. Do we find Paul turning back to rest upon his own feelings? His conscience bears him good witness— “I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified,” he says: “but He that judgeth me is the Lord.” (1 Cor. 4:4) in vain we search the whole Bible for a witness given by the Holy Spirit to our souls of our complete sanctification. We clearly see in Scripture that we are “children of God,” “heirs of God,” objects of His perfect love; that, in communion with Him, we have the enjoyment of His love, that we glory in Him. But as to entire sanctification, we find it not at all; it is a notion which can in no way be made to accord with the true perfection—that perfection which is ours, already enjoyed by us in hope, but which will be completed only in the resurrection. It is an error connected with a host of other errors, and destructive of some of the most precious truths and consolations of the gospel.

A knowledge of God’s perfect love through the Holy Spirit produces necessarily in us a reciprocity of love (feeble, doubtless, but real and pure). We manifest the divine nature. God dwells in us, and we in Him. The love with which He loves us is shed abroad in our hearts, and the consciousness we have of this shows itself in love towards Him; the brightness of His countenance beams on ours, and we reflect the mild and powerful rays. But as it is through the gift of the Holy Spirit that we know the love of God, so, by the same Spirit, the love of our hearts responds without effort to His love so known. If I am told that God demands this love, that He requires it as indispensable, you place me under law, and do away with the very principle of justification; grace is set aside, the grand gospel principle that God justifies the ungodly. (Rom. 4:5) In confounding this love, where it

exists, with perfect holiness and the extinction of sin, I evidence a deep ignorance of my own heart.

The soul set at liberty, and having tasted of this love, filled, absorbed with it, may suppose (the capacity of the heart being limited) that nothing else does or ought to exist in it. But sin exists ever in our nature, and more, it germinates at times, precisely because we stop at the effect of love instead of being occupied with the source. No sooner do we turn in upon self, and the effect grace has produced in us, than communion with the spring is interrupted, and the effects of grace become, through the deceitfulness of the heart, the incentive to sin, especially to falling into pride.

Vain are our efforts to derive fresh strength from the effects of grace; the conscience is never thus brought into exercise (not even in the most elevated spiritual state), which it always is where the soul has God before it; and, as liveliness of conscience in His presence is practically our safeguard, the moment I turn in upon self, to contemplate the grace that is in me, I am on the highroad to a fall. I am away from the source of my spiritual strength.

We must not confound conduct void of offense with the absence of all sin, that is to say with the extirpation of the germ of sin in our nature. Doubtless the Christian ought to maintain a thoroughly blameless conduct; he cannot justify his having, even for a moment, walked after the flesh. As to fact, "in many things we offend all" (James 3:2); but "God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able" (1 Cor. 10:13). I can never excuse myself by saying, It is the flesh which is still in me that caused me to fall,' that flesh ought to have been mortified. I must confess to my own want of watchfulness and prayer. Possibly I had not sufficiently got to the bottom of my heart, and this has been permitted, as with Job, for my instruction, to work in me a deepened apprehension of the exceeding riches of God's grace, who loves me, and can bring good out of evil, though he never justifies it. I am without excuse. The blood of Jesus Christ expiates the sin; but I have failed. If I go on to plead: I am but a child, I am yet so weak in the faith;' this alters not the case; for, had there been in me the fear and distrust of self which befit weakness, I should not have fallen. Sin (the principle of self-will) was at work.

Alas! how much of levity of heart there is in us all; the unholy levity of the world is not that of which we speak. What lightness, even in our best intercourse one with another! lightness of thought and lightness of speech, even about good things! We must remember that, if the flesh is in us, the Holy Spirit is in us too. It is our privilege, and might be our experience, to know the flesh only in the presence of God, only to know it as we learn it in communion with Him; and what it really is, is never so well known or so hated as when so learned. We shall be conscious of the workings of the flesh; but ought it ever to be allowed so to work in a saint as to get into his conscience, or to show itself before others? The way it should be detected is by abiding in the presence of God, and then we should not have the pain of learning its nature by its own workings, but through the Holy Spirit in judging it.

When we detect the flesh because we are in communion with God, it never either troubles our conscience before God, or dishonors our Master before men. And God is able to keep us from falling, both inwardly and outwardly. One who loves holiness knows if he gets into unholy thoughts even for a minute—a saint must feel that an unholy thought is a fall, as truly a fall as an open transgression, though not so manifest to others. We should bear in mind, that even these inward falls are not necessary; if the flesh were always by us judged, and thoroughly judged, in the

presence of God, we should find that He would thus keep us. When we are in communion with Him, when living as in His presence, are not sin and temptation powerless? Nor need these happy seasons be short; the more simplicity of heart and faith, the longer they will last.

This is not said to discourage. Let us not mistrust God, or feel less certainty that we can go to Him (as though He did not love us), because our attainments are low. It is not the Holy Spirit who would lead us away from God, even though we may be conscious of much failure and sin; it is Satan. It is always the work of the enemy, when distrust of God's love is the result of a sense of failure; though the consciousness of sin may be of the Holy Spirit. God shows us our failure to lead us on; but Satan seeks to spoil His work, by throwing in distrust. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," (1 John 2:1), and this that communion should not be interrupted.

Heaven in prospect, our being made like Jesus in glory, our being with Him, the joy of His presence, the absence of all evil, no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither any more pain; in a word, the presence, glory, and heavenly rest of our God, what incentives these to advance indefinitely in the career of holiness and piety! whilst we are made to feel by that which imparts to us fresh vigor, that we are still far from the goal which, through grace, we shall assuredly attain. How different this from the endeavor to make the whole revelation of the grace of God serve to set up afresh a species of Judaism! Paul, who, perhaps, stood foremost in the ranks of the soldiers of faith, has said: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). It was because he had received the first-fruits of the Spirit, that he groaned within himself (Rom. 8:23); that he ran not as uncertainly, that he fought not as one that beateth the air, that he kept under his body and brought it into subjection. (1 Cor. 9:26-27) This is not the rest that remaineth to the people of God. (Heb. 4:9) Are there no internal conflicts? or admitting that we have not any longer to struggle with an enemy indomitable and harassing us with all his might, is not continued watchfulness needed, for holding in one who, with malice and enmity unchanged, is ready at any moment to break out and do us hurt?

To love God, because He ought to be loved, and so to reflect His image in purity, is that which the law demanded.

Grace presents the love of God towards us, when we were undeserving of that love. It places us, in Christ, upon a new and unchangeable ground of eternal joy. It presents God Himself under an aspect unknown to Adam, and impossible under the law; for the law of necessity requires perfect love in Us; it cannot, it should not, spare the sinner.

By the regenerating power of the life of Christ we are renewed after the image of God; but we are renewed on the principle of an eternal gratitude, which alone puts GO in His right place with regard to the creature; and which puts the creature, fallen and made alive anew, in its place in relation to God.

A Question Proposed as a Subject for Consideration at a Christian Meeting

It is rather a solemn thing to say what a Christian is, especially when we think of what it is that made him one. God is acting, so as to glorify Himself. It is a solemn thing to be a revelation of that of which Christ is worthy—of the result of Christ's work, as it is said, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11). It does us good to think of this, because it makes us judge ourselves, to see how far we are really that. Not that we ever shall be the perfect display of it until we are "like Him" (1 John 3:2), until we see Him as He is, and are conformed unto His image in glory. Still, if we bear Christ's name, we should seek to present a fitting result of His work in the world.

That is what a Christian is. Hence it becomes a solemn thing to say what he is. Still, whilst it is a solemn question, it is a matter of grace. There is such a comfort in this thought. Whilst most solemn, it is always happy, because it is of grace—the free, full, and sovereign grace of God. This all helps us a little.

With regard to the question itself, there is a great difference between what a Christian is "now," and what he will be "hereafter." Not as regards the spring of life, redemption, and so forth, but—now, a Christian is the expression of the power of God in the midst of evil; hereafter, he will be the expression of the result of that power, which has put away the evil, when all the evil is put away.

Take us at our best estate now, a Christian is the expression of the power of God in the midst of the prevalence of evil. A Christian will not be that exactly hereafter; he will then be the expression of the result of God's power, in the highest sense, when the evil is put away.

As to the foundation in Christ's blood, and the power of His resurrection, and the love of God, this as much belongs to his state hereafter, as it is the basis of what he is now. God's love in Christ will be the spring of my joy then, as it is now.

One thing that gives such settledness of peace (as it regards his own soul's peace) to the Christian is, that it does not depend upon what he is now, or will be then, but upon that which is common to both states. The ground of it is the same now that it will be in heaven. The thing displayed may differ; but the ground of confidence is the same now as hereafter. As to the source and spring of it, in the love of God, His love is as true, and as perfect, and as complete, and as much manifested towards me now, as it will be when I am in glory; He cannot in His divine love go beyond the gift of His Son.

The life also that I have now is not another life to that I shall have then. No doubt the body hinders it. Its manifestation will be different; but the life is the same.

And the ground of peace changes not. That upon which I rest for eternity is just as much now as it will be then—the blood of Christ. (Heb. 9, 10) Whatever our conflicts, our conflicts (properly

speaking) spring from that ground being entirely settled. Whoever is in doubt as to that has not got to God, or, otherwise, has not understood the ground of his standing. Unsettlement of soul may arise from a man's not having seen the gospel simply; but as to the ground of his standing, it is just as much accepted now as it will be then. There is not another Christ to die—no fresh blood to be shed. Nor is there another revelation to be made. There is not a love to spring up in the heart of God that has not been told out. There may be a fuller apprehension of that which has been accomplished, but there is nothing new, either to be accomplished or revealed.

Whoever has not got upon that ground (has not had that question settled in his soul) has not got, as yet, upon simple Christian ground. God may be working in his soul; but I do not call having life the getting upon simple Christian ground. There may be life without the knowledge of what God is as for us (of the perfectness of His love towards us, and of what He has done for us in Christ). Life may make me anxious, and hope, and have desires after God, and long to be assured of His favor, and the like; but, when we speak of a "Christian," we speak of what a Christian is in Scripture, and Scripture always speaks of him—of a believer in any state—as to his standing. It is very necessary to see this.

We must not confound the exercises of a Christian with the standing of a Christian. The ground of his standing is God's work. In his exercises there comes in himself, his flesh, his ignorance, and many other things (alas!) may be working. But it is entirely to God's thoughts, and not according to my thoughts, that my standing is to be judged of. Moreover, the exercises of my own soul are never the same as God's judgment about them.

When I am thinking of these it is my actual state that occupies me; but, were God to take notice of my actual state, He must condemn me. What He has regard to is the work of Christ for me, and my union with Him, not, in this respect, my actual state at all. It is always important to recollect that, because my own judgment of myself ought to be as to my actual state.

Whatever his exercises, however these may vary, the Christian is, in one sense, just the same, because he is in God's sight as Christ. Christ being the perfectly accepted man at God's right hand, the Christian is looked at by God in the same position (Eph. 2:6), sitting in heavenly places "in Christ." In that sense, there cannot be any difference; and the ground of our acceptance cannot ever be imperfect. I repeat, we must not confound the movements of life with the ground of our acceptance. We can never have that too simple and clear. It does not make one despise the first actings of life, its first movings and breathings, however feeble and imperfect. I do not despise my child because he is not a man.

In the epistle to the Ephesians (where what a Christian is is fully brought out) men are viewed as the "children of wrath" in their very nature (necessarily heirs of wrath, because God is what He is, and man is what he is). Every other distinction is lost sight of, because, in his character of a sinner, man is brought fully into the light of God. But having thus told us what man is, the apostle does not stop with man, he turns around and begins at the other end; he now tells us what God is — that He is "rich in mercy," and (as the effect of this). that He has set us in heavenly places in Christ.

But when we come a little more to detail, I would recall the distinction that I made at first, that a Christian is now the expression of the power of divine life and the divine presence (divine life, I mean, aided by the power of God), in the midst of evil that he knows; but, hereafter, he will be the

blessed expression of the result of God's power when evil is put away. So with Christ (there was no evil, of course, in Him; yet, speaking abstractly, it was the same thing; in Him it was perfect) when here, He was what He was in the midst of evil. There cannot be any increase in it, in itself; but the manifestation of divine power in us is capable of an indefinite increase.

Redemption, however, precedes everything else. (I do not mean by this that it precedes the counsels of God) First, "Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present it to Himself a glorious church, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). Redemption precedes the washing. Washing may go on, but it comes after redemption. He makes her His, before He sets about making her what He would have her to be. There may not be a clear thought as to it; but the thing is done nevertheless.

Redemption being accomplished, the Lord sets about producing in us the effects and fruits of His grace in conformity to Himself.

The first effect of life in the midst of evil is not merely to see certain things, but to have the conscience exercised about certain things. The moment life begins to work, we get the consciousness of evil inside, as well as of evil outside; that is, it gives the judgment of evil in ourselves. Not that the instant Christ is presented to the soul in grace, the soul sees the evil plainly; it may see the grace and blessing, knowing evil in a general way, without being exercised about it through any definite application of what Christ is to the man within; there may be rather the loveliness of Christ attracting, than any deep work in the conscience. I can quite understand that. But then, before we get into a properly Christian state (the process may be longer or shorter), the necessary effect of life working is to give us the judgment of what man is, in the main bearing of his present condition, as looked at by the Holy Spirit.

It brings in the consciousness of what we are in the presence of what Christ is. Then we get the man brought down into the distinct consciousness that it is all over with him. And it is all over with him. I mean by this, not merely that he has sinned and there is condemnation, but that he has no right, or title, or claim, to anything, now that he has, either to the promises of God, or to anything else. Now that is the place the soul has to be brought to (so hard to come to), to find out what it is in God's presence. He may hope to get out of the scrape, if he thinks he has any right to the promises, because these may help him; but it is no use talking of God's promises, when God is talking of what I am and of judgment. If I am thinking about what I may be some time or other, promises have their place, they come in most beautifully; but if it is what I am, promises do not touch that. The Syro-phoenician woman (Matt. 15) will serve as an illustration. No promise could meet her condition; for, as a Gentile, she had not any claim to the promises. The Lord says, "I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." If you come to me as an Israelite, I may do something for you; otherwise, "it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto dogs." But, when she replies, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table," she in effect says, God is rich in mercy; and Christ cannot say He is not, that there is nothing in God for a poor sinner.

I do not believe that a person gets upon right Christian ground (one has to make allowance for ignorance, but there is no true, no solid ground, as to simple and abiding peace), until the soul has been brought to the consciousness that it has no claim whatever, or title, to promise.

Having been brought down to this by what goes on within, there may be attraction, but the first full effect is, that the man is judged, he sees what he is, and becomes entirely hopeless as to what he is, and is turned over entirely to the thought of what God is. We have only to say, "What hath God wrought?" I am now upon new ground, namely, upon that of what God is towards a sinner who is perfectly vile. If the sinner is perfectly vile, God is perfectly good.

And I come to see what He has done, because He is so. It is not that He has taken him out of the world; "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world," and so forth. He will do that by and by.

The first thing in this new life (inasmuch as it is all in Christ) is, that He is raised front the dead. We have to look at what God has done in Christ. I find Christ dead because of sins (our sins), and then I find the quickening, life-giving power of God coming in and raising Him from the dead. I should separate this entirely from the heavenly standing of the saints. We have all been too much accustomed to confound these two things (resurrection life and heavenly standing). What I see as the effect of resurrection-life is this, a man quickened and raised in Christ becomes a pilgrim down here. This is not the whole of a Christian. But it is the power of divine life in the new creature moving in a world that does not belong to him, and to which he does not belong. The Christian begotten by the resurrection of Christ, is a distinct thing to consider, from a Christian sitting in the heavenly places in Christ. Though the same individual is both, they are distinct things to consider.

In 1 Peter 1:3-5 we read: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath (not "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," as in the Ephesians; but) begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." I find here persons begotten unto a lively hope; and what is their hope Are they sitting in heaven? No; they are hoping for it. Therefore, the apostle says: (chap. 2:11), "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." It is the Christian on his pilgrimage that is contemplated. He is a stranger here. He has an inheritance in heaven; when he is in his inheritance, he will be no stranger; but he is not there, he is going towards heaven: He is a resurrection man on earth, walking through the world with new affections and feelings, going on towards his inheritance, but he is not there; an Israelite in the wilderness, redeemed from Egypt, and a stranger, but not in Canaan. And there comes in the trial of faith. The apostle goes on to say, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Where do I find the Christian in Ephesians? Not going a journey at all; he is sitting down, and where? "In heavenly places in Christ Jesus." That is what I am doing now; I am sitting in heaven, settled there. And, Christ being Heir of "all things," the inheritance is not heaven. The inheritance of Ephesians is different from that in Peter; it is all that Christ possesses (and, therefore, earth comes in). The inheritance of "all things" is the heavenly man's hope; but heaven is his home, his position. In Peter, heaven is his hope; he is going towards heaven as his home, and towards his inheritance which is in heaven. There I get a very different condition.

Both these things are true of the same person—both are true of the Christian. It is good to have the trial of faith (it supposes faith to be there), it is good to sit down with Christ where no trial is, and it is good to come down into trial. But these are different conditions. The place of Christ on the mount, when with Moses and Elias (Luke 9), was different, in the midst of the excellent glory, to that in which He stood when He came down from the mount and had to meet the crowd, and then cast out the devil. My true position, as a heavenly man, is to sit in heavenly places in Christ; but, on the other hand, as begotten to a new hope by the resurrection of Christ, it is simply going through the world, but it is through the world that I am going. Here I am, a new creature, quickened and raised up with Christ; and what a world am I in! So with regard to Christ's coming; if walking on earth, I am waiting for Christ; the hope of the coming of Christ is His appearing to set things right here; but, if sitting in heaven, I am there in Christ, and wait to be there with Christ actually, and there enjoy Christ fully. The Lord's coming is not spoken of in the Ephesians; the saints are viewed as sitting in heaven.

I get these two elements of a Christian's position; and, in one sense, I do not call one more important than the other. I may look at the Christian at the spring-head of peace, in full enjoyment of heavenly places, and in settled peace with God, and fighting for Him in conflict with Satan. But I cannot have him fighting for God in Canaan, till I get him into Canaan; I may have him in Egypt under the enemy's power, but that is not conflict with him. It needs redemption by God. But this places him in the wilderness, a second element of his Christian life.

A person acting under the consciousness, and in terror, of Satan's power, fearing he may be lost if left there, is sometimes more in earnest than when he has got peace; but I do not trust this energy. He has not learned what the flesh is, though he may have learned what Satan's tyranny is. It is when he has to say to God that he will find out what the flesh is. A man will always go fast enough, if he finds Satan behind him. The Israelites traveled faster when Pharaoh was at their back, than they did afterward in their stages in the wilderness. There was no murmuring because of the way when Pharaoh was behind them; but then it was afterward, in the wilderness, that they were put to the test. Then came the question, Is Christ sufficient, or is the manna "light food"? If a man is not spiritual, he must get something to satisfy his craving. All this is put to the test; not put to the test when a man is flying from Pharaoh, but when he is walking with God.

And there comes in the mediation of Christ. In this wilderness state, I get Christ between me and God—"If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; "but this is not union with Christ; I am looked at in myself; we get individualized. A man may be floundering about, through not having his eye simply fixed on Christ, not knowing how to get to the end; but he finds a thread let down from heaven to bring him to the place exactly where he ought to be, while he is only thinking of the mud, or judging himself for not having valued Christ enough. There are a thousand thoughts and feelings and affections brought out, and into play, as the result of our having resurrection-life. We get the constant loving care and tenderness of Christ brought home to the soul; and there is a necessary character of intercourse with Christ which heaven itself will not give.

This is one part of a Christian. He is a pilgrim and a stranger in the power of resurrection-life, with the mediation of Christ carried on not to procure for him life, but to maintain his intercourse and communion with God in the light on the footing of what Christ is there. On the footing of that,

himself imperfect, he is maintained in intercourse with a perfect God. Everything that the heart of man can be exercised about is met by the fullness of God, through the mediation of Him who is both God and man.

The other thing is this (where there is no question or trial at all), the Christian sitting in heavenly places. And there, let me say, it is not yet the church (though, in touching on it, we touch the Church's position). As resurrection-life did not take a man into heaven, so taking him into heaven does not in itself put him into the church. That is, it may be viewed as an individual thing. When I get into heaven, I am getting wonderfully close to the truth of the union of the church with Christ; still, I may look at myself, a single individual in heaven, without at all taking in the unity of the body which is the church. I can speak of the "children of God," and of "joint-heirs," without bringing in the idea of the body. I take the Christian sitting in heavenly places. As an individual Christian, I have done with conflicts when I get there; it is no longer the journey in exercise of heart. I shall still have conflicts with Satan, but these are for God. I may have, too, daily to judge my flesh in these conflicts; but judging the flesh is not conflict for God; it is a different thing to have conflict for God, and to be judging the flesh as hindering. When in heaven, I am in the result of God's work.

In the book of Joshua, before a single conflict, there was a table spread, and they had done with the manna. God had spread a table for them in the presence of their enemies. (Joshua 5) When they got across the Jordan, they sat down, and ate the "old corn of the land." The manna (the provision for the wilderness) had ceased, and they were eating the "old corn of the land" (they had Christ, looked at as the natural growth of heaven). It is not for my wants that I have Christ in heaven, I have no wants there, I have Him there to enjoy Him-to sit down at God's table and feed with everlasting delight upon what God delights in. It is the "old corn of the land" that I sit down to there. And mark the difference as regards the passover. They did not eat it with the blood upon the door-posts, as in Egypt; they were there enjoying the results of redemption in the consciousness of the quiet security of the land. The aspect of the blood in Egypt was that of keeping God away as a Judge. They were sitting down, too, in the plains of Jericho, in the presence of that great city, the type of all the power of the enemy, and there they ate the "old corn of the land" (Jericho's land, in a certain sense), before one bit of conflict began. So with the Christian.

And here comes in the connection between our sitting in heavenly places and our passage through the world. I should be manifesting distinctly what is heavenly here, and thus be practically a heavenly man in the midst of worldly men. I should be a heavenly man, as one that is there, and at home there, showing out what I have learned and enjoyed there. Christ was, while walking and acting on earth, "the Son of Man which is in heaven." He manifested towards the world the blessedness of the spirit, and tone, and character of heaven. He could not be Messiah for the Jews, without being the Son of God for men.

If a Christian man is not walking in the Spirit, if the flesh is not subdued, he cannot display to the world the temper, and spirit, and character of heaven; he is manifesting something else. But the conflicts of the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12) are not merely conflicts in the subduing of our flesh; they are conflicts carried on in realizing, and laying hold of, the things in Canaan that belong to ourselves and others. If Joshua and the Israelites took cities in Canaan, it was because they were in Canaan. Our enemies are there, and there it is we should meet them. There are things in which we have to be faithful on earth; but there are also things that belong to us because we are sitting

together in heavenly places in Christ. A man may be consistent in the one, without displaying the heavenly man. You may see some tolerably consistent on earth, whose souls are not seeking to realize what is theirs in Christ. Satan's effort is ever to hinder our doing that. We cannot carry into the heavenly conflict the flesh. If my flesh is not mortified, I cannot wield the weapons of that warfare. The flesh always brings in Satan's power; he has got a title against it; and God can never act with the flesh, or display His power for us against our enemies, where it is allowed. If we were walking as born of God, and as having on the whole armor of God, the flesh being habitually mortified, he could have no effect; we should be able to go on in the simplicity of our own service, and he could not come in with his wiles, as in the case of Achan (Josh. 7), and of the Gibeonites. (Josh. 9) The moment we get upon heavenly ground—as soon as Joshua is in Canaan, I see the Lord's sword drawn, and the question is, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" So with us, there is the drawn sword. The moment we get into heavenly places, the Canaanites are against us. The church of God should be seeking to realize by faith, whilst down here, all that belongs to it as sitting there in Christ. As soon as Joshua crossed the Jordan, it was Canaan, bat Canaan and conflict.

All this has the character of the power of God brought in where evil is.

As Christians we have to be pilgrims, in consistency with our condition in the wilderness. The Lord may give us palm trees and wells of water (Ex. 15:27), the ark may go before us to search out a resting-place (Num. 10:33); but if we are not prepared to go with the cloud whenever it moves, we are not pilgrims and strangers, and we in heart go back to Egypt. But the heavenly man, besides his being a man with resurrection-life and the pilgrim of faith, is to be the manifestation down here in the world of that which is heavenly. It may be in the power of hope, but the thing which he presents is that which is his now. He shows plainly and distinctly that he is in Canaan, and acts upon the ground of being there. If the land was not as yet cleared of its inhabitants, whose abominations defiled it, still Joshua knew what was suited to it; and therefore, when he had taken the kings and hanged them, he did not leave them there after the sun went down. (Josh. 10) He could not allow God's land to be defiled.

As to what the Christian is "hereafter." It may be said, he is a risen man still, a heavenly man still. Hereafter, as an individual, he will be the perfect result of the power of God, not in the midst of evil, but of the power of God that has put aside the evil. "There shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads." (Rev. 22:3-4) It is not another man, but the same man, in the perfect enjoyment of blessedness in the midst of good.

There are many points of view in which who and what is a Christian, now and hereafter, might be taken up. The question is far from being exhausted.

One branch of the subject, not touched upon as yet, divides itself into two parts—heirship and reigning with Christ.

He is an heir, as well as a child, an "heir of God" and a "joint-heir with Christ." (Rom. 8:17) Again, he will reign with Christ; and it may be of use to see what the corresponding part in our life here is, to that of reigning. The inheritance is connected with our being children "If children, then heirs," and so forth. (the moment I get a person in the position of a child, I get an heir). The reigning part

we find connected with suffering: "if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him." Both these things are, no doubt, spoken of the Christian; still this is the principle, "If we suffer with Him," and so forth.

Again, there is another character which this statement suggests to the mind, and that is his priestly character. I but refer to this now. We are kings and priests unto God. In taking up this, it would be interesting for us to see the present intercessional character of priesthood; for, in reigning, by and bye, it will be as a royal priesthood, rather than intercessional.

A Word on Spoilings and Beguiling

The Lord can bring good to His people out of any evil. These Christians at Colosse were in danger of not “holding the Head; “that is, of slipping away from the consciousness of being in Christ, through getting beguiled into subjection to ordinances. To meet this, the apostle urges them back, showing them how the believer has everything in Christ, and not anything out of Christ. In result, we get much precious teaching as to the fullness of the Head for the body, as well as solemn warning against a practical separation from our standing of union with the Head, through the allowance of religiousness in the flesh. Everything is based on union with Christ risen and glorified. But then, if here, as in the epistle to the Ephesians, we get this great truth as a basis, the Colossians are addressed on somewhat lower ground than the Ephesians, who were standing fast in the faith of it, and could profit by teaching which unfolded to them the whole extent of the church’s privileges, inasmuch as they have to be got up to the point from which the Christian’s thoughts and feelings should ever flow—his standing and privileges in Christ. The epistle to each is perfect in its place. The steadfastness of the one and the failure of the other have both been made to subserve the blessing of the church in all ages.

The moment we look to ordinances, as it regards position before God, we are slipping away from Christ; something is brought in between us and the Head. God’s thought of completeness is Christ; if, therefore, I have the thought of not having already all perfection, everything I need, in Him, I am leaving Christ. “Ye are” (it is not said ye shall be) “complete in Him.” (vs. 10) If there is anything for me to obtain, there comes in at once some means of obtaining it. If the body is united to the Head, or (which, in respect of the individual, is the same thing) if I am one with Christ, I have in Him all I need. I may have to be taught about it, and to seek grace to manifest it; but the moment I think I have to obtain what is in Christ, a subtle form of self-righteousness is at work -I must do something. No matter what shape this may assume, prayer, or works, or anything else, I am not “holding the Head.” One in possession of an estate may have to see about that estate, but were he to say, I must get possession of it, he would be all wrong.

Christ is revealed to the humble soul. Intellectual attainment is not in question here, it is no matter of great learning or of philosophy. “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” The “things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” The most transcendent mind could never discover the ways of God; we get effort, but never success in attaining to that which the simplest Christian knows (things “hidden from the wise and prudent,” but “revealed unto babes”)—the painful efforts of man in arriving at darkness. “What is truth?” asked Pilate, and crucified Christ. Christ is the Truth, and the humble, simple soul of a poor sinner taught of God has it perfectly; he may not have realized it, but he has it all there, “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Righteousness too; He is the righteous one, and we are made “the righteousness of God in him.” Life, “in Him is life,” and He is “our life.” As to all that is divine and eternal, there is not anything out of Christ.

At the commencement of the chapter, the apostle speaks of the great conflict he had had on behalf of these saints, that their “hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ,” and so forth. (vs. 2-10) God is about to gather together all things in Christ (Eph. 1:8-10), and the church is associated with Him who is this center. “And this I say,” he continues, “lest any man should beguile you with enticing words (pretending to bring you a mass of wisdom and knowledge in all manner of things that are not Christ). For though I am absent in the body, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.” (vss. 4-5) It is all well to have Christ for Christianity, he may come and say (alas! how often is this said!), but is there to be nothing else besides Christ? No, not anything. We cannot deal with the plants of this earth, without dealing with that which belongs to Christ; and if we deal with them without Christ, we sin.

We are exiled from paradise, and have forfeited everything. Forgetfulness of all that had taken place, thorough blinding of heart and hardening of conscience marked the way of Cain, till at last, when driven out from the presence of the Lord, he sought to make that world, into which God had sent him forth a fugitive and a vagabond, (the very name of the place in which he dwelt, “the land of Nod,” means “the land of a vagabond”) as agreeable an abode as practicable apart from God. And all that man is now doing, to inherit the earth without Christ, he is doing according to Cain, settling himself down as a poor sinner, in a world like this. The Christian acknowledges that he has forfeited everything; he cannot talk about “my rights,” in using anything for himself, he would be using it as a poor guilty rebel. He trusts in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; he eats his meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God; whatever he does, in word or in deed, he does all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by Him. To him there is not anything outside Christ, all belongs to Christ, and it is as a Christian that he enjoys it.

Let us not suppose that this “mystery of God” is some great knowledge. Where the heart has so owned itself a sinner and everything to be in Christ, it has owned Christ as center of all; it has received Him for forgiveness, and it has all in Him “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord,” he continues, “so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” (vss. 6-7) Everything I get, I get from God’s love.

“Beware lest any man spoil you—despoil or cheat you of your blessing—through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” The tradition of men is never faith—truth or error, it is never faith; it is natural, and belongs to man. Faith is the reception of a divine testimony by the soul, so that God Himself is believed; and further, it is founded on His testimony alone. Man may be the instrument of leading me into truth (a sign-post shows me my way), but I cannot believe man (that is, I cannot believe because man says it); I believe God. We have believed Satan when we were enjoying God’s blessings; now God calls upon us to believe Himself. Herein is the real return of the soul to God. If I believe because “the church” “has put its authority or its sanction on that which I believe, I am just simply saying that I do not believe God. The Bible is the Word of God; God has given a testimony carrying His authority with it, which testimony I am bound to believe, otherwise I despise God’s testimony. To believe because man says it, or because “the church” “says it, is to make God a liar; for when I had

only what God said, I did not believe. It is well to look this distinctly and definitely in the face. There are two things: 1st, that which I believe—the fullness, riches, and perfection of Christ; and second, the ground on which I believe it. Now as to the latter, if a person were to tell me something, in order really to believe that person's testimony I must receive what he said because he said it. If I cannot believe God, why is it? My eyes are holden; I cannot believe when God speaks; He has not failed in giving the testimony. The only rightness in regard of this is, to believe what God says because He says it; in other words, to believe God. To tell a person, "I will believe what you say when I get it sanctioned by another," is not to trust Him. To require "the church's" testimony to accredit God's Word is to disbelieve-to dishonor God. In doing this I am, as it respects moral position, infidel in regard of God.

But more: Christ is a heavenly Christ—He is not of this world; He was from heaven, and He has gone back to heaven. Hence all that is "after the rudiments of the world," beautifully suited though it be to human nature, and calculated to make man pious, is not "after Christ." That which has not been in heaven can only tell about heaven at second-hand; all that is not simply Christ's revelation of Himself does not belong to heaven. He says, "No man has ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven." Who else could? And therefore no matter what man tells me, or what man has said about heaven, be it what the ancients have said or what "the church" has said, I cannot believe it. That which is "after the rudiments of the world" is exactly opposed to heaven. The moment we get what is suited to the flesh, or makes a fair show in the flesh, it belongs to the world; it is not "after Christ."

"For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (vs. 9) There is here something exceedingly blessed; it is not a Pilate's "What is truth?" nor yet a seeking of the Lord, if haply we might feel after Him and find Him (Paul's expression in regard of the heathen), but (as John speaks, "that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life" (1 John 1:1), that which is brought home to the senses of men. In place of working up the feelings to seek after something, God has come down to us, poor wretched creatures that we are. But God is there. He has come down to us in our sins and miseries bodily. I do not get a heap of stories, patched up nobody knows how, to act on my senses, and work on my imagination; it is the God who saves me. But He will be always God. There is not a trouble, there is not a distress, there is not a feeling in the heart of man, that is not met in Christ (and, after all, we do want something to fill the heart, we are men, and we want what man wants), not as a doctrine merely, but bodily. We find in Him that which is to be found nowhere else. Let it be the most loving person possible, he has not loved me and died for me. But then I get, not simply the love of a gracious person, there is in Him "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." All flights of the imagination are checked, for I meet it in the Holy One, though I meet it in all my wants.

"And ye are complete in Him." (vs. 10) Not only have I all I want, but I am all I need to be, in Him. I must appear before God, I have to say to God, as a responsible being—looked at as to what I am in myself, I am lost; in Christ, I am complete, as complete as Christ is, for I am complete in Him. There are these two sides, if God is manifested to us, we must also be manifested before God. Blessed be God! I have not anything to seek out of Christ, as to completeness. And mark: it is not merely what there is, but what we have in Christ. Our hearts are so deceitful and treacherous, they do like to get in a little bit of their own. But, let it be humility, or what else it may, there is no room

found here for anything of self: In us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing. There is neither righteousness, nor holiness, nor humility out of Christ.

The Jews were looking to a variety of forms; we have all in Christ. A person talks to me about getting absolution from a priest, I do not want it, I had it years ago in Christ. Another says, 'You will receive the Holy Spirit in this or in that particular way,' I have received the Holy Spirit already. So, in regard of what the apostle speaks of here ("In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision of Christ made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." (vs. 11), we have done with sin, we are dead to it, in Christ. He goes on to show how: "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead." (vs. 12) We have done with the flesh, in Christ; it is not an effort to have done with it, we are dead. He does not say, 'Die to the flesh' (neither does Scripture anywhere speak thus), nor yet 'Die to sin.' Such an expression is in itself a clear proof that he who uses it does not know the gospel simply. But we do find it said, "Mortify your members which are upon the earth," and so forth (Chapter 3:1-5).

This supposes us to be dead, and to have our life hid with Christ in God. Elsewhere the apostle says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; 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" (Gal. 2:20). All that Christ is and all that Christ has done is mine in Him; has He been put to death, so have I; is He risen again, so am I; therefore I am able to "mortify," and so forth. We cannot mix these two things (in our minds we often do, and hence confusion); Christ's having died unto sin for me, is my power for being dead practically to sin. To make this still clearer, if need be, see the argument of Romans 6, "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He lived' unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body," and so forth. The moment the eye rests on Him, faith says, I am dead to sin.

And mark how this is brought in. The faith is not in my being risen, but in Christ's having been raised. This distinction is far from unimportant. Many a sincere soul is continually turning in upon itself to know if it be risen; but this is not "the faith of the operation of God." Peter says, "You, who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." (1 Peter 1:21) So Paul, "to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." My soul, knowing that all that is flesh is condemned, that there is no good thing in it, has given up seeking good from it; God has found plenty of evil, and I have done so too (He may have allowed me to struggle on in the hopeless endeavor to better it); but I look out of myself, and I see that God has raised Christ from the dead. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." (Rom. 8:3) My confidence is in this, that God has raised Christ from the dead, when He was there for me. But then, if this sets aside everything that I am in myself before God, it sets it aside for acceptance also. Am I saying, There is no good at all in my flesh, it must die, I cannot mend it; 'it is dead, the whole old thing gone, I am in heaven in Mill, who has been raised from the dead, and now I have to "mortify," and so forth.

“And you, who were dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (vs. 13). Here comes in another blessed truth. Instead of its being a question as to the flesh getting better, not only is it condemned already, but we have been quickened together with Christ. This is no mere doctrine; Christ is our life. I am in this new man before God. And what has become of all my sins? They are gone. They were put away on the cross, “He bore our sins in His own body on the tree,” when He rose again they were all gone. What can give me such a sense of the heinousness, the hatefulness of my sins, as seeing Christ bearing them! But they are gone.

“Blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” (vs. 14) He is not setting men to obtain righteousness through that which quickens sin and works condemnation. Am I saying, ‘I have not done this,’ or ‘I have not done that,’ where there is the obligation of some act and it is not fulfilled, there is condemnation. In taking up the Lord’s Supper—that sweet, and blessed, and holy memorial of Christ’s death, the joy of my heart, so as to put it between myself and Christ, I am not “holding the Head.” Christ has taken ordinances out of the way; it is the flesh that does them; let it be a penance, it is the flesh that does it; the same thing that put away sin, put away ordinances; the man who had the sin and was to do the ordinances is dead, because Christ has died. I am alive in Christ, who is alive again from the dead; He is my life. I do not need to obtain a standing before God through any ordinance. Had I to perform the smallest act, as that through which I needed to get completeness before God, it would be a denial of the perfectness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But more: those “principalities and powers,” with whom we have to contend (Eph. 6:12), have been “spoiled,” He has “made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (vs. 15). Does Satan come and accuse me; it is all true, but my sins are gone, God has said He will remember them no more. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Why flee? Because of having already met Christ. Is it temptation through the agreeable things of the world, or the sorrows and trials of life, or the power of death? he has been “spoiled,” his power is gone for faith (Heb. 2:14). Death, to the believer, is but a departing to be with Christ; all that it could be from Satan, or from the wrath of God, Christ has gone through for him; but He has gone through it, and He is now with God. Dead and risen with Christ, yet here in a dying body, if I put it off, “absent from the body,” I shall be “present with the Lord.”

And now, having shown us how we have everything in Christ, and not anything out of Him—completeness in the presence of God, and perfect deliverance from all that we are in ourselves, as also from all that is, or could be used, against us, as in ourselves, he goes on to say: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” (vss. 16-17) What perfect liberty! we need see that we use it holily, but it is a perfect liberty.

A “holy-day” (it is well to call it so, as indicative of its meaning) was one God had made to be esteemed above another; this and other things, the meats, and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances of Judaism, had their time and use; “the body is of Christ.” In Him we have that which they were designed to typify. If I take them up now, I take up the shadow and not the substance; it is a mere shadow, but, in setting it up again, I make it substantive, and deny Christ. This may be done through ignorance, still it ought to be treated as a thorough infirmity, the soul

has not the knowledge of what it is in Christ; whilst ignorance has to be borne with, the saint is beguiled of his reward.

“Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he has not Seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head.” (vs. 18) I may talk much about “saints and angels in heaven,” their glories, and the like, and call this humility; but it is not so, it is in reality the very opposite, a being puffed up in my fleshly mind. Whilst thus intruding into things I have not seen, I am losing knowledge needed by all saints. The weakest believer is as much one with Christ as an apostle, and as complete in Him. It might seem more humble to say, I am this, that, or the other thing; but can we do without Christ? Do you reply, I have not arrived at Such a position? then you are expecting to attain it—that is presumption. It is because we are lost, poor, and blind, and miserable, and naked, and have nothing in ourselves, we have this all in Christ.

The moment he has brought them there, left nothing between them and Christ, Now, he says (vs. 19), there is that which flows down from the Head, that which has to be manifested in the members. We have not a single grace, or thought of grace, until we are complete; we must be united to the Head. People are looking to that to make them complete which they cannot have until they are in that position. Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we have to do it all to the glory of God; let it be but the purchasing of some article of dress, I should do it for Christ, to please Him. This is our one rule, to do all for Christ; and both as to inward graces and outward manners, the more I realize what Christ is for me, the better shall I know what is pleasing to Him; here spirituality comes in. It is not man increasing in order to get to God, it is “increasing with the increase of God”—all flows down from Christ’s fullness.

In Christ I am not “living in the world;” I am “dead with Him to the rudiments of the world.” (vs. 20-23) If really dead to the flesh, I cannot be looking to ordinances to get the flesh bettered. But the tendency of our hearts is ever to this; and God has met that tendency. If the flesh must be labored to see if any good could be got out of it, He has taken it up, and proved that after all had been done for it that could be done there was no good in it; God could get no good from it. Still here is our danger; religiousness in the flesh is that against which there is this special warning. And with all its specious appearance, what does the apostle call it? “Will worship.” It may have a great character for humility, but it is the most positive and terrible pride before God; it does not look like this; it looks like mortifying the flesh and putting it down. The only thing that will deliver from it is, the knowledge of our completeness, and a walking in the power of a dead and risen Christ.

Here there is rest for the heart (there will be conflict still; we have not in that sense rest yet); my eye turned from myself, I rest in Christ; there I can delight, and there God delights; I have a common feeling with God. All that I see in Christ is mine; all that perfection that my soul delights in is my perfection before God.

There are these two truths: all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Christ, and we are complete in Him. My need is met.

God has come down to me in Christ. Am I troubled about my sins—where shall I find any so gracious to me as Christ? I can tell to Him what I dare not to another. Brethren may be kind and

sympathizing, but I can tell out my heart to Christ as to no one else. Well, it is to God, and He does not reproach me. All the infinitude of love is brought down to display itself in kindness to a poor sinner; I meet it by my wants, my sorrows, my failures, my sins. The poor woman of the city had not a mouth to tell it out; she was weeping at His feet about her sins; but she had found one who could so meet her in them as to give confidence to her heart, whilst conscience was awakened in the very deepest way. I never add to that fullness; all the majesty of God is there. On the other hand, conscience is awakened; God is a holy God, and how shall I appear before Him. The same Christ who is God towards man, is man before God for us. He has come down to meet me in my sins, and He has gone up to be my righteousness before God.

If we desire to manifest Him—the life of Christ in daily walk and conduct—it must flow out from Him; and for this, the flesh has to be mortified, and Satan resisted. “We are not our own, we are bought with a price; let us therefore glorify God with our bodies and spirits, which are His.” In doing anything for myself, I am a dishonest person; He bought me when I was the slave of Satan.

Reader, is your soul honoring God by resting thus in the completeness of Christ? or are you seeking to honor self in eking out a righteousness, it matters not how—by doings or by feelings? A child ought to have right feelings for its parent; but if that child is making a merit of its feelings, it is destroying the whole thing. Looking for feelings to make out righteousness through (while feelings are right), is just as bad as looking to works.

The Lord give us so to know that we are complete in Christ, that we may have blessed and happy liberty, loving and serving Him in love, because He has given us all we need, has loved us, saved us, and made us complete.

Forever With the Lord

I think I have had my mind more occupied of late than ever with the subject which your letter suggests—the being with the Lord. I am sure it is deeper, happier, fuller acquaintance with Himself that our hearts need; and then we should long, and desire, and pant after Him in such ways as nothing but His presence could satisfy. I know souls in this state; and yet it is not knowledge that gives it to them, but personal acquaintance with the blessed Savior, through the Holy Spirit.

I alighted, as by chance, the other day on some fervent thoughts of an old writer, in connection with this dear and precious subject. In substance they were as follows, and almost so in terms, only I have somewhat condensed them. “It is strange that we who have such continual use of God, and His bounties and mercies, and are so perpetually beholden to Him, should, after all, be so little acquainted with Him. And from hence it comes that we are so loath to think of our dissolution, and of our going to God. For, naturally, where we are not acquainted, we like not to hazard our welcome. We would rather spend our money at an inn, than turn in for a free lodging to an unknown host; whereas to an entire friend, with whom we have elsewhere familiarly conversed, we go as boldly and willingly as to our home, knowing that no hour can be unseasonable to such an one. I will not live upon God and His daily bounties without His acquaintance. By His grace I will not let one day pass without renewing my acquaintance with Him, giving Him some testimony of my love to Him, and getting from Him some sweet pledge of His constant favor towards me.”

Beautiful utterance this is. It expresses a character of mind which in this day of busy inquiry after knowledge we all need—personal longings after Christ. May the blessed Spirit in us give that direction to our hearts! It is a hard lesson for some of us to learn to reach enjoyments which lie beyond and above the provisions of nature. We are still prone to know Christ Himself “after the flesh,” and to desire to find Him in the midst of the relations and circumstances of human life, and there only.

But this is not our calling—this is not the risen, heavenly life. It is hard to get beyond this, I know, but our calling calls us beyond it. We like the home, and the respect, and the security, and all the delights of our human relationships and circumstances, and would have Christ in the midst of them; but to know Him, and to have Him in such a way as tells us that He is a stranger on earth, and that we are to be strangers with Him, “this is a hard saying” to our poor fond hearts.

In John’s gospel, I may say, among other things, the Lord sets Himself to teach us this lesson.

The disciples were sorry at the thought of losing Him in the flesh, losing Him as in their daily walk and conversation with Him. But He lets them know that it was expedient for them that they should lose Him in that character, in order that they might know Him through the Holy Spirit, and ere long be with Him in heavenly places. (Chapter 16)

And this is again perceived in chapter 20. Mary Magdalen would have known the Lord again, as she had already known Him; but this must not be; this must be denied her. “Touch me not,” the Lord says to her. This was painful, but it was expedient—good for her then (just as it had been

already good for the disciples in chapter 16) to know that she was to lose Christ in the flesh. For Mary is now taught that she was to have fellowship with Him in the more blessed place of His ascension.

So the company at Jerusalem in the same chapter. "They were glad, when they saw the Lord." But this gladness was human. It was the joy of having recovered, as they judged, the one whom they had lost, Christ in the flesh. But their Lord at once calls them away from that communion and knowledge of Him to the peace which his death had now made for them, and the life which His resurrection had now gained for them.

All this it is healthful for our souls to ponder, for we are prone to be satisfied with another order of things. The "sorrow that filled the hearts of the disciples" at the thought of their Lord going away—the "Rabboni" of Mary Magdalen—the disciples being "glad when they saw the Lord," show the disposedness of the heart to remain with Christ in the midst of human relationships and circumstances, and not to go with a risen Christ to heavenly places.

How slow some of us are to learn this. And yet our readiness of heart to learn it and to practice it is very much the measure of our readiness and desire to depart and be with Christ.

But all this I say to you as one that suggests a thought. Would that it were the experience of the soul! "But I desire to have it so."

Ruin and Redemption

What is man's real condition before God? He knows it not; but this is the great preliminary question ere he can be brought under the ministry of the grace of God.

The very ground necessarily assumed before preaching the gospel of God's grace is that every man is a lost and ruined sinner. God has asserted it. (Rom. 3:10-23) And if we come to practical Christianity, it is equally an axiom that the great ground of Christian action is redemption security.

The point at issue between God and every soul is whether man is as bad as God's testimony says he is; for the starting-post in preaching the gospel is God's declaration: "All flesh is grass." Take man in every state of moral and intellectual improvement, and he is grass. "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass" (the flower is a much more fleeting thing than the grass itself). The grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth away."

Job was a man remarkable for integrity and uprightness, according to God's own declaration: "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and eschewed evil?" But when he comes to stand before God it is, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Here Job learned that as flesh he was grass.

Whenever a plea is made for the flesh, for anything merely human, whether righteousness, wisdom, or strength, the plea cannot be established except by condemning God. The Lord had said, when speaking to Job out of the whirlwind, "Wilt thou condemn Me, that thou mayest be righteous?"

In seeking to bring the testimony concerning truth and grace before the conscience, I would not take the dregs of humanity to prove that all flesh is grass; here, in the first instance, you have righteous Job.

Again, Solomon was a remarkable specimen of a person blessed of God in various ways, but principally in having wisdom given to him-the gift of wisdom directly from God. (See 1 Kings 3-4)

"God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom." All his experience ended in this: "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." All vanity and vexation of spirit! "All flesh is grass!"

Again, as to the religious man. If any really think that religion consists in doing this, or doing that, the Pharisee was more religious than any of us. The era of our Lord's ministry on earth was a most religious era; and yet, when our Lord Jesus Christ came seeking fruit, He could not find any. He

was cast out and murdered because they maintained their religion.

Here we see that human righteousness, human wisdom, and human religion are all hindrances in the way of knowing God really as He is and ourselves as we are. One of the most genuine marks of real conversion to God is the utter and entire denial of any goodness in ourselves, or expectation from ourselves.

Man, as an intellectual and moral creature, is now putting forth all his powers to establish that concerning which God says it is grass. Modern philanthropists are seeking to raise and cultivate man's intellect. They may succeed above all their expectations, but no philanthropic society or effort for the amelioration of man, however honest the intention, can meet the ruin of the condition in which man is before God, because it falls short of the cross. It can do nothing but leave man as it found him, a ruined sinner, dead in trespasses and sins, unaltered before God, knowing nothing of Him, or what it is to have thoughts and desires in communion with Him, and in a world as ruined as himself.

Every man by nature is a lost and ruined sinner, and he is in a lost and ruined world. It is quite necessary to state these things together in order to know what salvation is.

What was salvation before the flood? It was to get into the ark, because the world was going to be judged.

What was salvation in the days of Lot? To get out of Sodom, because Sodom was going to be burned.

And what is salvation now? Not merely to be saved from hell, that it is; but it is also "deliverance from this present evil world."

Persons may be reformed, and yet not be converted. I do not like the expression, "a converted character;" conversion is the being turned from everything, whatever it may be, and brought to God.

What is God's testimony now to man, thus ruined himself and in a ruined world, but testimony unto His own grace, and His own power, to His own ability to meet him in these circumstances, in a way that nothing but His own grace could provide. The apostle says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." It is impossible to be the subject of God's power without effects following. Christ is "the power of God, and the wisdom of God." "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto us which are saved, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." This may be a puerility to the present age, as it was to the Greeks, to men who are seeking wisdom, a stumbling-block to those who are requiring a sign as the Jews; but unto those who believe, Christ is "the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

The same God that hath told us that "all flesh is grass," the same God who, after long experience of man, has said "flesh profiteth nothing," is now sending forth the testimony unto salvation through "the precious blood of Christ." He is not any longer testing man, beloved, and in that sense, it is not now a state of probation to ruined sinners. They have been tried under the best and most favorable circumstances in Israel, under the law, and found wanting. The Son of the living God has come, and found man to be "dead in trespasses and sins." Man, therefore, is pronounced as bad

as he can be—utterly ruined.

But grace would never be known as it is, if it could not meet a sinner “dead in trespasses and sins.” This was exhibited in the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ; He was the expression of grace and truth when here, and it was thrown in His teeth by the self-righteous Pharisee, that He was receiving publicans and sinners!

Man is more angry with God for meeting ruined sinners in grace, than for dealing with them in righteousness. Grace is the one thing he cannot understand. Human wisdom cannot grasp that word, it can understand law, but that God should be dealing in grace with poor lost sinners—the human understanding cannot grasp that. You will find, if you test your hearts, that you naturally hate grace a great deal more than you hate holiness. Well, grace meets the sinner just where he is, in all his misery and ruin: the love of God meets him there. Each one of us, who have received Christ into our own souls, can give our Amen to that. We were loved by God, not when we had improved ourselves, but when we were dead in trespasses and sins. “God commendeth His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”

What is it which enables God thus to have to do in grace with poor lost sinners? “The blood of the Lamb.” “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory: that your faith and hope might be in God.” It is the blood of the Lamb which enables the holy God to meet unholy sinners, it fills up the amazing gap between the throne of God and them, as lost and ruined sinners, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

And this after man had proved that there was no response in his heart to the love of God. Had there been a spark of good in him, it would have been called out by the Lord Jesus Christ. But no, the answer to all His love and grace was, “Away with Him! away with Him! crucify Him! crucify Him!”

Man has preferred a murderer to Jesus— “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Nay, God’s Son has been murdered! And now the ministry of reconciliation is granted to that world where He was murdered. God’s answer to all the hard thoughts of man’s heart is, “I have given you My Son.” His answer to all man’s pretensions, “You have crucified My Son.” It is always of strengthening power to my own soul, to see that when God begins, He begins with those who crucified His own Son! What a blessed thing to find, that from among the very murderers of Jesus a number were brought to know God’s love through the blood of His Son.

The gospel to us is the proclamation of the value, not only of the person of Jesus, but of the blood which has been shed. God’s controversy with man therefore is, What estimate have you of His Son, and of the blood that He has shed? You cannot be neutral: “he that is not with Me is against Me.” But it matters not what your thoughts are; God’s thoughts and the thoughts of all redeemed sinners is, that there is nothing so “precious” as the blood of God’s own Son.

The blood of Christ not only brings God down in grace to us, it brings us up to God. "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." A ruined sinner washed in the blood of Jesus, is immediately brought into the presence of God. All the great things of God are very simple. By one and the same blood a sinner who believes in Jesus is washed from his sins, justified and brought nigh to God! And in the glory the theme of the redeemed will be, "the blood of the Lamb." "Thou hast redeemed us unto God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

What becomes of a person so "washed from his sins," "redeemed," and "brought unto God"? Here we find the importance of his seeing his position in the Head. He is redeemed as he fell: he fell in one, he is redeemed in one, in a Head: "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." We are in Him as the Risen One, and derive from Him new life, a new nature conversant with a new sphere of things—new affections—a new world. The redeemed man is brought into a new creation with Jesus, and all those who are redeemed by Him unto God.

This is a remedy worthy of God. It is that which the apostles preached, "Jesus and the resurrection." Deny grace, and you deny the wisdom of God.

Were man redeemed merely to be brought into a moral system, then remedial associations might effect the object; but he is dead and wants life, and men are seeking the improvement of that world which is stained with the blood of Jesus, for which He will make inquisition by and bye. If I am giving myself to philanthropy, a thing which would be very well if man were to be improved for a social system here, I am denying his ruin and that of the world. In this we see the deceiving power of Satan. The church should not be deceived by him, he is the accuser of the brethren; but the deceiver of the whole world.

No More Conscience of Sin

The object of redemption is to bring us nigh to God. Jesus suffered “the just for the unjust to bring us to God,” yet it is impossible that we could be happy even then, were there still a thought of God’s being against us. There can be no happiness unless I have the perfect, settled assurance that I have no sin upon me before Him. God’s presence would be terrible if the conscience were not perfectly good; the sense of responsibility makes us unhappy where any question of sin stands against us. We see this in the case of a servant with his master, or of a child and its father—the conscience is miserable where there is the sense of anything upon it which will be judged; so if there is any happiness in God’s presence, it must be in the sense of His favor, and of the completeness with which we are brought back that He sees us without sin, the perfect assurance of the “worshipper once purged, having no more conscience of sin.” The condition of a believer is that his conscience is so purged once for all that he has “no more conscience of sin,” and the result of this “boldness to enter into the holiest.”

God speaks to us according to His estimate of our standing; it may not be our heart’s experience. There is a distinctness of the operation of the Spirit of God in bringing me unto Jesus, bearing witness to me of God’s love, of which Jesus was the manifestation, and of the efficacy of what Christ has done, and of His operation in my soul in producing in me the love of God. That which is the subject of experience is what is produced in my own soul, whereas that which gives me peace is His testimony to the work of Jesus. A Christian who doubts the Father’s love to him, and who looks for peace to that which passes in his own heart is doubting God’s truth.

The gospel is the revelation God has given of Himself; it displays the love of God towards us and what is in His heart. I can trust the declaration of what is in God’s heart, and not what I think of myself.

The apostle speaks of a due time: “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” It is almost always true that there is in us a terrible process of breaking the heart, in order that we may be brought to the ascertainment that we are lost and ruined sinners; but the gospel begins at the close of God’s experience of man’s heart, and calls us from that in order that we should have the joy and peace of the experience of what is in His heart. “God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Man left alone before the flood, put under the law in Canaan, indeed under all and every trial of his nature and tendency up to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, was just God’s putting to the test man’s power.

One would have thought, after Adam had been turned out of paradise for transgression, that would have been a sufficient warning; but his first-born became a murderer. We should have supposed that the flood, which swept off the workers of iniquity, would have repressed for a time at least by the terror of judgment, the outbreak of sins; but we find immediately afterward Noah getting drunk, and Ham dishonoring his father. The devouring fire of Sinai, which made even Moses fear and

quake, seemed sufficient to subdue the rebel heart and make it bow beneath God's hand. But the golden calf was the awful evidence that the heart of man was "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Again in Canaan a part of the world was tried to the utmost to be cultivated, but it would not do. A bad tree producing bad fruit was the only type by which God could set Israel forth. (See Isa. 5) He might dig about it and dung it, but after all these efforts it could only bring forth more bad fruit. At last He said, "I have yet one son, perhaps they will reverence my son;" but man preferred having the world for himself, and crucified Jesus. Looking to His cross, he said, "Now is the judgment of this world." (John 12) Man may brave the judgment of God, but a day is coming when God will settle that; all one day shall bow to the name of Jesus.

At the crucifixion of Jesus, the veil was rent, the holiest opened, and what God was within the veil was then shown out in all its fullness. When grace reveals this to me I get confidence. I see God holy and expecting holiness-true; but the peace of God is in knowing what He is to us, and not what we are to Him. He knows all the evil of our hearts. Nothing can be worse than the rejection of Jesus. Man's hatred is shown out there, and God's love, to the full. The wretched soldier who, in the cowardly impotence of the consciousness that he could with impunity insult the meek and lowly Jesus, pierced His side with a spear, let out, in that disgraceful act, the water and the blood, which was able to cleanse even such as he. Here God's heart was revealed, what He is to the sinner, and this is our salvation.

Death and judgment teach me redemption. God judged sin indeed in sacrificing His well-beloved Son to put it away. It must be punished, Jesus bore the blow-this rent the veil, and showed out what God really is. The very blow that let out the holiness of God, put away the sin which His holiness judged.

The perfect certainty of God's love, and the perfect cleansing of the conscience, are what the defiled and trembling sinner needs. "By the grace of God Jesus Christ tasted death." In Jesus, death is the consequence of grace. "Out of the eater cometh forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness." All sin is put out of sight by Jesus.

Faith always rests on God's estimate of the blood of Jesus as He has revealed it in His Word—faith rests on no experience. There is frequently the confounding of what faith produces and what it rests upon. Faith rests on God's estimate of the blood of Jesus as the Paschal Lamb. The Lord said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over." Could there be hesitation if we were in a house marked with the blood on the door-post? Should we not know that He would pass over?

In real communion the conscience must be purged: there can be no communion if the soul be not at peace. "By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." Jesus said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." "By the which will we are sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." It was the good will of God to do it; and the work is done to bring our souls back to Himself. Jesus said, "It is finished;" but there must be the knowledge of this in order for us to begin to act. You might have a person willing to pay your debts, and you might even have them paid; but if you did not know it, you would be just as miserable as before. We are not called upon to believe in a promise that Jesus should come to die and rise again. The work of Jesus is done— "He sat down on the right hand of God" "when He had purged our sins;" but that is not sufficient, I must know that the work is done, and therefore He sent down the Holy Spirit to be the witness that God was satisfied. He remembers my sins no more. Knowing perfectly their guilt and

amount, He has purged them all away; for “by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified, whereof the Holy Spirit is witness.” Faith rests on this— “God is true,” — “He that hath received His testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.” Faith is always divine certainty. On this ground we enter into the holiest.

If anyone were to demand of me a proof of God’s love, I could not give more than God has — His Son: none other could be so great. But then may not my sin affect it? No; the “blood cleanses from all sin;” God knows all, and He has provided for it.

God has found His rest in Jesus; our peace and joy depend upon knowing this. Were anything more necessary, it could not be His rest; God is not seeking for something else when at rest. None else could have afforded this. God looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God; they were all gone out of the way—there was none righteous; no, not one. But God bore witness unto Jesus, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” God is well pleased in Christ; God rests in His Son, not merely in His life, though that was holy and acceptable unto Him, but in His work on the cross. Jesus said, “Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” And that meets our need. When He shows His glory to the angels, He points to what has been done by man. In man was God glorified, as in man, the first Adam, He had been dishonored. Christ reversed all this. “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him;” which God recognizes in straightway glorifying Him. Righteousness cannot be looked for from the world, but the fruits of righteousness will; the thing itself is only in Christ.

God is not a grudging giver. Did Satan, tempting Eve, question this in the forbidden fruit? He has given His Son; He rests in Him. The sinner likewise rests there. What can man do for me? Nothing. If I were to come to him to deliver me from death, could he help me? He might till my hand with those perishing things which could only swell the triumph of death and decorate the tomb; but there his power ends.

In Jesus God has found His rest. This is mine also; I know it from the testimony of God’s truth. Have you found rest in God’s rest? If you say, I have not, will you say that God has not found His rest there? Will you look to your own heart? In that you can never find it; it is only in Jesus. Jesus said, “Come unto me, and I will give you rest.” Would that all knew the perfect rest to be found there!

The Hebrew Servant

I desire to consider a little the service of the saints of God. It is a blessed thing to serve God at all, for we are unable to do so naturally; if a thought of service ever enters our hearts, it is one of bondage—the service of a hard and austere master. This is one of the things which show how entirely man has departed from God. If we look at angels, those “angels who excel in strength,” they “do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His Word;” “are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” The highest angel is but in the place of a servant; yet it is a blessed thing to serve, and they bless God for it.

Every one has known how painful the thought of service is to the natural heart; and unless we see that service is connected with liberty, such will always be the thought. That which redemption shows us is that we are free, yet free to serve. This is the fruit of redemption, that we are free to be the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the saints, for His sake. If we did not know that we were free, we should only be seeking to serve ourselves. This will ever be the case until we know redemption, how God has saved us, and how Jesus is serving in heaven for us. The great thing for us to do is, to look how the Lord Jesus served.

These verses (Ex. 21:1-7) are not properly a part of the covenant, “Now these are the judgments that thou shalt set before them.” In Psalm 19:7-11, we get several distinct things mentioned—testimony, statutes, commandments, judgments; these last I apprehend, to be God’s decision on certain points. “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

The very first thing God has decided here, is a particular about service: “If thou buy an Hebrew servant.” If he were a captive, he would be in the power of his master; but this judgment is concerning one under the law, a Hebrew servant. The Gentiles were never under the law, and I do not find this judgment brought into the New Testament. The Apostle Paul only gives directions of unqualified submission to the master, whether a believing or an unbelieving one; this judgment applies to those who are under the law, and not to those who are not under the law.

The Lord Jesus Christ is presented to us as “made of a woman,” and “made under the law.” As “made under the law” He “magnified it, and made it honorable.” The law, that was “the letter which killeth” to all else, was not the letter that killeth to Him, it drew out the response from His heart, “I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea—Thy law is within my heart.” The application of the law to the heart of man only works out the enmity that is there; but there was no enmity in the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus having thus been made under the law, and fulfilled it entirely, shows that it was a most suitable thing for God to give; if there had been failure it was only in those to whom it was given, and not in the law itself; it was “weak through the flesh;” “before God could put it aside, He must show that He had not dispensed a bad thing. The law has been removed by Christ, and thus He has made a free passage for God’s love to come forth to us.

In another way I find the Lord Jesus presented as a faithful servant: “Behold My servant whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.” (Isa. 42:1) And again, “Listen O isles, unto Me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; and said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” (Isa. 49:1-3) He is here brought before us as the servant of Jehovah, and so He constantly speaks of Himself “I can of Mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me;” and that is just the servant’s place—the Lord Jesus Christ spoke as it were His Master’s Word.

“Being in the form of God, He thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” He humbled Himself to become a servant, and blessed was it that He did so; for if He had come in His native dignity, He never could have said, “I am among you as one that serveth.” He never could have washed our feet. His native dignity, it is true, broke forth every now and then; but the mystery of redemption is, that the eternal Son of the Father has become the servant of Jehovah, and the servant of our necessities. These are the things that angels desire to look into, that the prophets have inquired and searched diligently concerning “the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow.”

He was the “Hebrew servant,” and the faithful servant who had served His time unto Him, whose servant He came to be; and He might have said, now I can “go out free;” I have served my time, and I can “go out free” (vs. 2); and indeed He did say, “Father, I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.” But He might have acted on this judgment and gone out Himself.

All His service seemed in vain, as to any present result — “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for naught, and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.” (Isa. 49:4) But what is the answer? “And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” (vss. 5-6) All His service seemed to be thrown away. “Though he did so many miracles among them, yet they believed not.” They said He was Beelzebub—the friend of publicans and sinners—and at last crucified Him.

He “came in by Himself,” and he might have “gone out by Himself” (vs. 3) He was the only one who could ever have “entered into life” by keeping the commandments (I am speaking of Him now in His mediatorial character— “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”); He had a right to enter into life. Law knew nothing about saving a person, it promised life through obedience to it; “the man that doeth these things shall live in them.” The Lord Jesus Christ alone had earned life by obedience in every jot and tittle of the law, and He might have “gone out

free;" but He would not go out free for the reason here assigned. "If his master have given him a wife, and she have borne him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's and he shall go out by himself And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door-post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him forever." (vss. 4-6)

When Jesus, on His rejection by the chief priests and Pharisees (John 10-19), heard of the desire of the Greeks to see Him, He said, "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." He was the only grain of principal wheat. Had He not died He would have remained alone, precious in Himself, but He would have borne no fruit. He might have "gone out free," but it would have been by Himself. He might have "entered into life," but it would have been alone. He would not therefore, but He became obedient unto death, that He might "see of the travail of his soul;" that He might "bring many sons unto glory" that He might have His wife and children. This was a voluntary act-though free, He was free to serve; He is the one who has come and had His ear bored that He might serve forever.

I desire to look at this a little more. The Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Majesty on high, is there still as the servant and when coming out in glory by and bye, He will be still as the servant.

I need not tell you how that the Lord Jesus Christ speaks of Himself in a subject character, and that this is voluntary. He came not in His own name, but in the name of Him who sent. Him They would have taken Him by force, and made Him a king (John 6), but He would not be a king in their name or in His own. As Jehovah's servant, He was His king also; and as they would not own Him as coming from God, He would not be owned at all. We receive Him not, unless we receive Him as the Christ of God.

In verse 5 we read, "If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master." Oh, how plainly did He say it when He cried, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt!" The servant is one who does not his own will. It was the love that Jesus had to Him that sent Him, that brought Him down into death, as He says, "Therefore doth my Father love Me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father." Beloved, we are sanctified by His having clone the will of Him that sent Him. "By the which will we are sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." He said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will." I'll do His will, cost me what it may. He was free to go to "the glory which he had with the Father before the world was; "but He would not go out free. "I love my master, my wife, and my children," I will not go out free. It was love that actuated Jesus in His work on the cross.

I find in that aspect Jesus doing the will of Jehovah; in another place Jehovah's sword awaking "against the man his fellow." In one sense the death of Jesus on the cross is the "burnt-offering," a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savor; in another the "sin-offering" which was to be burnt outside the camp.

The heart of Jesus could not be satisfied unless He had His Bride and children with Him where He was, and therefore He must carry His service down into the depths of death: "If his master have given him a wife." The bride is given to Jesus, just as God gave Adam a wife. I can never separate

the love of the Father in this, the gift of the church by Him to Jesus, and the love of Jesus for the church in giving Himself for it. So it is with the sheep (John 10), they are the gift of the Father to Jesus; and Jesus, as the good Shepherd, has laid down His life for them. If He love His wife, He must serve for her. Well, Jacob served for a wife a long service; but the Lord Jesus serves forever; He is the constant minister unto the church, as He has won her, as He has died for her, so He serves her now.

And so with the children— “I love my children” — “Behold I and the children whom God hath given me.” Because He loved the Bride, because He loved the children, He serves forever.

In His personal service when here, He was the servant of everybody; He was always going about doing good, but ever so in the Father’s name. Shortly before going out of the world, we see (John 13) that “having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet.” We find Him doing the most servile act. It was the service of love, and how did His love make Him stoop!

If I were asked, Is Jesus serving now? Yes, washing His disciples’ feet. “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye ought also to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” The example of His own willing service to the church; a pattern indeed to us, but a specimen of what His service is now we are walking through this weary sinful world. We need to have our feet washed, and Christ does this by His priestly ministry for us. He still retains the place of ministry and service, to which He has bound Himself from love to His Master, love to His Bride, love to His children. But surely He is still our Lord and Master; we can call Him Lord, own Him as Lord, pray to Him as Lord, and thus, see that the one who “upholdeth all things by the word of his power” is the very one who daily ministers to our necessities. He has had His ear bored to the door-post; He is a servant forever. I find the Lord of glory is able to serve. He does not need to be served Himself; people always think that God needs to be served, instead of seeing the wondrous thing that He wishes to serve us.

In Luke 12 we find that still this service is carried on when the Lord Jesus Christ comes forth in glory. “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.” No one will be able to deny His Sonship then, His Godhead then; but even there He is still the servant; I do not mean to explain how; I only carry forward the thought of service. It will be our blessed place to serve Him; yet still it is our security to know that He will serve us. He still delights to sustain that character into which He voluntarily came.

We get from this decision of the LORD the principle of service. In this day, when many saints are awaking to a desire of service, there is a danger of getting off the ground of grace. We are all apt to make the connection between service and glory, instead of seeing that the connection is

between grace and glory. The blood is our title to glory, even as it has saved us, even as it has redeemed us. I see in the countless multitude who surround the throne, that they are there because of "the blood of the Lamb."

The servant always hides himself, puts himself aside, that the master may appear; the great danger in any service we are able to render is, lest the servant should appear. Simon Magus gave himself out as some great one; but if we serve according to God's judgment, it will be very unobtrusive service. Joshua was servant to Moses; he abode in the tabernacle outside the camp (Ex. 33:11); but how little prominently does he appear. Joshua is hid, and Moses is the actor.

Our place of service will ever be, in God's wisdom, the place of trial, though the place of comfort too. So was it with the Lord. He did always the things that pleased the Father, and thus proved His love; but He had to set His face like a flint. Our service is not occasional, but continuous. If we are in the place of servants, it is because we are sons. The ear is to be "opened morning by morning." Domestic duties are to be taken up as service to the Lord; He is to be glorified in them: the service we mostly fail in is domestic piety. Many would desire more time for serving the Lord. But why not make all we do service to Him. "Ye serve the Lord Christ."

The principle of our service is love to the Master. Paul says, "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all;" I may "go out free," but "I love my master," and therefore serve them. It is the service of love, and not obligation. "We are," it is true, "not our own; we are bought with a price; therefore let us glorify God with our bodies and spirits, which are his." But the Lord does not address us with that claim; He says, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." God loveth a cheerful giver, because He is a cheerful giver. Some persons say, Oh, I wish I could serve the Lord more! Well, let your soul enter more deeply into His love, and then you will serve Him. It is impossible to love Him and not to serve Him; but it may be a service of a kind which we do not like, because we too often serve to exalt ourselves. The Lord said, "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one toward another." "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not that liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." The moment I come with a claim, I damp the mainspring of service; it is by love we are to serve one another. I do believe that this ought to be my feeling; I am a debtor to every saint, because the Lord by His grace has made me free—free indeed.

When the saints are in glory by and bye, it will be still to serve, to minister to the world as well as to the Lord. "His servants shall serve Him." Just as angels serve now, so by and bye there will be the visible ministry of saints.

How blessedly has love been the servant to our necessities; how has God in His love given His Son for us; how has Jesus served us; how does He still serve us; how will He serve us by and bye! The active spring of service in the church ought to be love. May we trace in Jesus the exhibition of it! What a blessed thing it is to serve; may we serve not in self-will, but doing His will! Service in the church will never make us of any esteem among men; it did not make the perfect servant so; but still the word was, "He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high." (Isa. 52:13) And what a blessed thought, what a thought of grace, to hear one mourning over his unprofitableness and wretched service addressed in these words in the day of the glory, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

May the Lord grant us, beloved, deliverance from law service, and lead us to happy blessed service, according to this judgment of the Hebrew servant.

Growth Through the Truth

In one sense, as here taught us by the Spirit of God through the apostle, the healthful position of the saint is ever that of the “new-born babe;” whilst in another sense we are, of course, to be making progress so as to become young men and fathers in Christ. As to practical position of soul in receiving truth from God, it is that of the new-born babe—“as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.” This is the place in which, as believers, we are set by the Spirit, in order that we may grow up into Christ.

But if we are “to grow by the sincere milk of the Word,” it is not by the exercise of our minds upon the Word, nor yet even by great study of it merely. We need the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and in order to that there must be the exercising of ourselves unto godliness, “thus laying aside all malice, and all guile, and all hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,” so that the Holy Spirit be not grieved. Has the Christian envy, guile, hypocrisies, allowed to work in his heart, there can be no growth in the true knowledge of the things of God; therefore he is called upon to be ever a “new-born babe,” coming to receive, in the consciousness of his own weakness, littleness, and ignorance, and in simplicity of heart, food from the Word of God.

The Lord always keeps His simple; dependent ones thus: “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” But then the knowledge of God always humbles; the more we know of Him, the more shall we know of our own emptiness. “If any man think he knoweth anything, he, knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” Just as the babe is constantly receiving nourishment from the mother, so need we to be constantly receiving spiritual nourishment from the Word of God. When the word is received by us in faith; we become strengthened, we grow thereby in the knowledge of God, and of His grace. The Apostle Paul having heard of the faith of the Ephesians in the Lord Jesus, prays “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,” would “give unto them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: that the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, they might know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,” and so forth. Having “tasted that the Lord is gracious,” we come to His word, and receive from Him that which we need to comfort, nourish, and refresh our souls. The word always comes with savor from Himself. It is known as “the Word of His grace.” I may study the-word again and again, but unless I get into communion with Him by it, it will profit me nothing, at least at the time.

God reveals not His things “to the wise and prudent,” but unto “babes.” It is not the strength of man’s mind judging about “the things of God” that gets the blessing from Him; it is the spirit of the “babe desiring the sincere milk of the Word.” He says, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” The strongest mind must come to the Word of God as “the new-born babe.”

And so too in speaking of God’s truth; whenever we cannot “speak as the oracles of God,” through the power of communion, it is our business to be silent. We should be cautious not to trifle with unascertained truth; nothing hinders growth more than this-trifling with unascertained truth; we then act as masters and not as learners. Our position as regards the truth of God must be ever

that of “new-born babes desiring the sincere milk of the Word, that we may grow thereby.”

But there is nothing so hard for our hearts as to be humble, nothing so easy for them as to get out of this place of lowliness. It is not by precepts merely that we are either brought into this state, or preserved there, it is by “tasting that the Lord is gracious.” It is quite true that God is a God of judgment—that He will exercise vengeance on His enemies; but that is not the way in which He stands towards the Christian—He is made known unto us as “the God of all grace,” and the position in which we are set is that of “tasting that He is gracious.”

How hard is it for us to believe this—that the Lord is gracious! The natural feeling of our hearts is, “I know that thou art an austere man.” Are our wills thwarted, we quarrel with God’s ways, and are angry because we cannot have our own. It may be perhaps that this feeling is not manifested, but still at any rate there is the want in all of us naturally of the understanding of the grace of God—the inability to apprehend it. See the case of the poor prodigal in the gospel- the thought of the fullness of his father’s grace never entered into his mind when he set out on his return, and therefore he only reckoned on being received as a “hired servant.” But what does the father say? What are the feelings of his heart? “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” This is grace—free grace.

So too in the case of the woman of Samaria (the poor adulteress, ignorant of the character of Him who spake with her—“the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,” and therefore the suited one to meet her need), the Lord says to her, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” Hadst thou only understood what grace is, thou wouldest have asked, and I would have given.

It is not only when there is open rebellion against God, and utter carelessness and unconcern about salvation, that there is this darkness of understanding as to grace. Our natural heart has got so far away from God, that it will look to anything in the world, to the devil even, to get happiness anywhere but to the grace of God. Our consciences, when at all awakened to a sense of sin, and of its hatefulness in the sight of God, think that He cannot be gracious. Adam, had he known the grace of God, when he found himself naked, would at once have gone to God to cover him. But no, he was ignorant of it; he saw his state, and he sought to hide himself from God amongst the trees of the garden. And so is it with us. The consciousness of being naked before God, apart from the understanding of His grace, makes us flee from Him.

Nay, further, as believers in Jesus, when our consciences come to be exercised, and we feel that we must have to do with God in everything, we may not have the distinct sense of the Lord’s being gracious; and there will then be not only a deep sense of our responsibility, but at the same time the thought that we have to answer to God’s requirements, and shall be judged of Him according to the way in which we do so. There is a measure of truth in this, the requirements of God must be met; but then the wrongness is in thinking that if we do not find in ourselves what will please God, He will condemn us because of it.

On the other hand there is sometimes the thought that grace implies God’s passing by sin. But no, quite the contrary; grace supposes sin to be so horribly bad a thing, that God cannot tolerate it.

Were it in the power of man, after being unrighteous and evil, to patch up his ways, and mend himself so as to stand before God, there would then be no need of grace. The very fact of the Lord's being gracious shows sin to be so evil a thing, that man being a sinner, his state is utterly ruined and hopeless, and nothing but free grace will do for him—can meet his need.

A man may see sin to be a deadly thing, and he may see that nothing that defileth can enter into the presence of God: his conscience may be brought to a true conviction of sin; yet this is not “tasting that the Lord is gracious.” It is a very good thing to be brought even to that, for I am then tasting that the Lord is righteous, and it is needful for me to know it; but then I must not stop there, sin without grace, would put me in a hopeless state. Peter had not “tasted that the Lord was gracious” when he said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man O Lord!” and therefore he thought that his sin unfitted him for the presence of the Lord.

Such too was the thought of Simon the leper, respecting the poor woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Ah, if this man had been a prophet (if he had known the mind of God), he would have sent away this woman out of his presence, “for she is a sinner.” And why? Because he did not know that the Lord was gracious. He had a certain sense of the righteousness of God, but not the knowledge of His grace. I cannot say that God ought to be gracious, but I can (if ignorant of His grace) that He ought to cast me, as a sinner, away from His presence, because He is righteous.

Thus we see that we must learn what God is to us, not by our own thoughts, but by what He has revealed Himself to be and that is “the God of all grace.”

The moment I understand (as Peter did) that I am a sinful man, and, yet that it was because the Lord knew the full extent of my sin, and what its hatefulness was, that He came to me, ‘I understand what grace is. Faith makes me, see that God is greater than my sin, and not that my sin is greater than God. “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while, we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” As soon as I believe Jesus to be the Son of God, I see that God has come to me because I was a sinner and could not go to Him.

Man's ability to meet the requirements of the holiness of God has been fully tried: but the plainer the light came, the more did it show to man his darkness; and the stricter the rule, the more did it bring out his self-will. And then it was, “when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly”; “when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” This is grace.

God seeing the blood of His Son, is satisfied with it; and if I am satisfied with it, this is what glorifies God.

But the Lord that I have known as laying down His life for me, is the same Lord that I have to do with every day of my life; and all His dealings with me are on this same principle of grace. Do I want to learn what His love is, it is taught in the cross; but He gave Himself for me in order that all the fullness and joy that is in Him might be mine; I must be a learner of it still—a new-born babe “desiring the sincere milk of the Word that I may grow thereby.

The great secret of growth, is the looking up to the Lord as gracious. How precious, how strengthening is it, to know that Jesus is at this moment feeling and exercising the same love towards me, as when He died upon the cross for me. This is a truth that should be used by us in

most the common everyday circumstances of life. Suppose, for instance, I find an evil temper in myself, which I feel it difficult to overcome, let me bring it to Jesus as my friend, virtue goes out of Him for my need. Faith should be ever thus in exercise against temptation, and not simply my own effort; my own effort against it will never be sufficient; the source of real strength is in the sense of the Lord's being gracious.

But the natural man in us always disallows Christ as the only source of strength and of every blessing. Suppose my soul is out of communion, the natural heart says, I must correct the cause of this before I can come to Christ; but He is gracious, and knowing this, the way is to return to Him at once, just as we are, and then humble ourselves deeply before Him. It is only in Him and from Him that we shall find that which will restore our souls. Humbleness in His presence is the only real humbleness. If we own ourselves in His presence to be just what we are, we shall find that He will show us nothing but grace.

But though "disallowed indeed of men," of the natural heart in every one of us, who is this that says, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded"? It is God; He laid this corner stone, not man, and He says, this is what I think of Christ. By learning of God, through His teaching me by the Holy Spirit, I come to have the same thoughts about Jesus that He has. Here I find my strength, my comfort, my joy. That in which God delights and will delight forever, is now my joy also.

God says, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; "Mine elect in whom My soul delighteth"; and working these (His) thoughts into my soul, I too see Jesus to be precious, and find my delight in Him. Thus He who was crucified for me, who "bare my sins in his own body on the tree," is precious to God and precious to me.

God could find no rest save in Jesus. We may look throughout the world, we shall find nothing which can satisfy our hearts but Jesus. If God looked for truth, for righteousness, all He could desire He found in Jesus, and He found it in Him for us. Here is that which gives comfort to the soul. I see Jesus "now in the presence of God for us," and God is satisfied; God delights in Him.

It is Christ Himself in whom God rests, and will rest forever but then Jesus, having borne and blotted out my sins by His own blood, has united me to Himself in heaven. He descended from above, bringing God down to us here; He has ascended, taking up the church in union with Himself there. If God finds Jesus precious, He finds me (in Him) precious also.

Jesus, as man, has glorified God on the earth. God rests in that. As man, and "the head of his body the church," He "has passed into the heavens, now to appear in the presence of God for us;" it is this which gives abiding rest to our souls, and not what our thoughts about ourselves may be. Faith never thinks about that which is in ourselves as its ground of rest; it receives, loves, and apprehends what God has revealed, and what are God's thoughts about Jesus, in whom is His rest.

It is not by human knowledge or intellect that we attain to this. The poor ignorant sinner, when enlightened by the Spirit, can understand how precious Jesus is to the heart of God as well as the most intellectual. The poor dying thief could give a better account of the whole life of Jesus than all around him, saying, "This man has done nothing amiss;" he was taught by the Spirit.

Are we much in communion with God? Our faces will shine, and others will discover it though we may not be conscious of it ourselves. Moses, when he had been talking with God, wist not that the skin of his face shone; he forgot himself; he was absorbed in God. As knowing Jesus to be precious to our souls, our eyes and our hearts befog occupied with Him, they will be effectually prevented from being taken up with the vanity and sin around; and this too will be our strength against the sin and corruption of our own hearts. Whatever I see in myself that is not in Him is sin; but then it is not thinking upon my own sins—upon my own vileness—and being occupied with them, that will humble me; but thinking of the Lord Jesus, dwelling upon the excellencies in Him.

It is well to have done with ourselves, and to be taken up with Jesus. We are entitled to forget ourselves, we are entitled to forget our sins; we are entitled to forget all but Jesus. It is by looking unto Jesus that we can give up anything, that we can walk as obedient children; His love constrains us. Were it simply a command, we should have no power to obey.

The Lord give us thus to be learners of the fullness of grace which is in Jesus, the beloved and elect one of God, so that “we may be changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

May we, beloved, in searching into the truth of God, “having tasted that the Lord is gracious,” ever be found “as new-born babes desiring the sincere milk of the Word, that we may grow thereby.”

Christ and the Church

There is a depth, a fullness contained in the words “All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” A depth and fullness into the understanding of which our souls enter, as yet, at best, but scantily. It is our privilege to be daily learners through the teaching of the Holy Spirit now. It is the word of our God, that yet but “a little while” and we shall know even as we are known.

I would desire very briefly to touch upon some of the more prominent personal types presented to us in Old Testament narrative of the church and her glories through union with Jesus. The Lord give us, in thus meditating together, blessedly to have the joy of that word in the secret of our own souls, “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine.”

At the very commencement of the book of God we get presented the purpose of His love in the gift of the church to Jesus— “It is not good for man to be alone.” Blessed Word; blessed because of letting us into the deep secret of the ground, and showing us the eternal security of our own everlasting joy and glory. Our thoughts are raised out of and above ourselves, and we have to confess to the freeness of God’s love, the sovereignty of His grace.

“It is not good for the man to be alone.” Adam was set as God’s vicegerent, lord over the creation, which, coining forth perfect from His hand, He had pronounced “very good.” For a little moment there was that here which could afford a rest for God; He rested in the works of His hands. Sin had not entered, the power of death, and of the curse were as yet unknown; all bespoke the excellency of His wisdom; all showed forth His handy work. “The morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy.” All was in subjection, God’s principle of blessing. “The cattle, the fowl of the air, and the beasts of the field,” as brought before him by God, received their names from Adam. “Whatsoever he called the living creature, that was the name thereof.” Adam as yet in happy intercourse with God, obedient. How fair the picture! One thing was wanting, “No helpmeet was found for Adam;” none with whom to share this place of blessedness. “And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an helpmeet for him.” He who saw the need Himself supplied it; but how, beloved? “The LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

That little moment passed, how sad the contrast! Temptation comes, and sin. The rest of God is broken, and gone the scene of creature blessedness.

It has often been remarked that man, placed in responsibility of blessing, has ever failed in his trust; yet that this failure has only served to bring out the reserve of grace—fresh and higher

blessing from God, and the glory of the one unfailing man— “the man Christ Jesus.” The ruin of the first creation was laid in the “offense,” the “disobedience” of the “first man,” of him under whom it had been placed. All that was so fair and “very good,” now “subjected to vanity,” fell in him; creation “groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now; “the power of the curse is there” cursed is the ground for thy sake; and “death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” There is failure, utter ruin, stamped upon all that stands in the headship of the first Adam, “the type of him who was to come;” but all the deep failure of the “earthly” man, and the “abounding” sin of his race, has but given scope for the display of the super-abounding grace of God through that “one” of whom he was the “type,” the “second man,” “the Lord from heaven.”

He who “from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was,” was daily the delight of the Father, rejoicing always before Him—the eternal Son, “by whom all things were created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible,” and “for whom all things were made,” as born of a woman, the appointed heir of all things—the “Son of Man,” “the second man,” He too hath had an “helpmeet “provided for Him of God. The one unfailing man who, in the future manifested glory of the new creation (see Psa. 8 in connection with Heb. 2:6-9), shall hold “dominion” for God, in blessing, over “all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas,” when God shall again take delight in the works of His hands, and the “name of the LORD” be “excellent in all the earth,” will not be “alone,” but will share His glory and His joy with her who was taken from His side when in the deep sleep which the LORD GOD, in wondrous grace, caused to fall upon Him. For Christ Jesus, by the “grace of God,” has “tasted death.” It was, “Thou hast brought me into the dust of death.” Assuredly our souls here trace the shadowing out of that which the love of the Father, in the gift of the church to Jesus, had appointed to be done, and say “salvation is of the LORD!” Paul, when referring to it in writing to the Ephesians, says, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” But, oh, beloved, how blessed is the contrast between the type and the antitype, the unconscious sleep of Adam and the voluntary act of Jesus. Obedience, for He was the obedient one, led Him to say, “I come to do Thy will, O God!” but more than this, He “loved the church, and gave Himself for it.”

Yet a little while, and in the midst of the Paradise of God He shall say, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.” “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us unto Himself by Christ Jesus.” Whilst still in the midst of the old and groaning creation, they “who have the first-fruits of the Spirit,” and therefore “groan within themselves,” may take all the joy of that word, “We are members of his body, of His flesh, and of His bones,” “they two are one flesh,” and by faith forestall the time when they shall be “glorified together with Him.” How blessed thus to know the power of redemption in the midst of all that is unredeemed; to stand in the conscious result of “the one man’s obedience,” righteous, holy, and without blemish; the curse removed by His having been “made a curse for us;” death giving place to the reign of life; confidence and joy in God restored; we not simply brought back into the standing of creature blessedness which Adam lost, but made partakers of the divine nature, one with the sanctifier! What wondrous grace! “By grace ye are saved,” “the grace of God, and the gift by grace.”

In Genesis 24 we see the servant sent by Abraham to take a wife for Isaac, the Lord “prospering his way,” and Rebekah made willing to forsake her country, her kindred, and her father’s house, in

order that she may be led to Isaac, and share his place of love and exaltation. Here again I believe we get a little picture of the church, the bride of the true Isaac, the “son” and “seed” of Abraham; and that much to the comfort of our own souls. It is to her, as the “appointed” one of the Lord, that the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to glorify Jesus, to speak of Him, unfold His message of love, telling of His exaltation; that “unto Him “the Father “hath given all that He hath,” taking and revealing of the things of Jesus. Thus is she made willing to leave all dear to her by nature, all to which her heart would fondly cling, and traverse the weary journey as the sharer of the glory of which, through His testimony, she has heard. Such, beloved, is our portion. May we, as the chosen, the appointed for Isaac, that Isaac who was not merely “received from death in a figure,” but the “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore,” the risen, the exalted one, through the teaching of the Spirit know more of “the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all” May we “set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth,” and thus become practically dead to all which the flesh loves and clings to. Soon will the wilderness be crossed, and we safely brought home to Him “whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

Again: in “the daughter of Pharaoh, whom Solomon took to wife,” we have presented to us a type of her who shall share with Jesus the glory of the throne of David, when that glory is taken up in blessing by Him who is at the same time David’s “Son” and David’s “Lord.” “Black” she may be in her own eyes, yet oh how “comely” in his! “Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair.” “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” How has love here been tested I how has it stood the test! Surely it has passed through the deep waters of death; the billows and the waves have gone over it; for Christ has “loved the church, and given himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that he might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” And He says, “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.”

So too, though I would not attempt the interpretation of the type in detail, yet, in principle at least, we read her history in that of Ruth. The wondering inquiry, “Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?” is met by “The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust,” from Him who aptly performed the kinsman’s part. The field where she first became acquainted with and marveled at His grace, is made her own — “Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife.” The world “is yours,” “and ye are Christ’s.” The “kinsman” has redeemed the one who was a “stranger.” And is not the language of our hearts the same — “Why have I found grace in Thine eyes?”

These are but few of the foreshadowings of the church in personal narrative, and briefly glanced at, many others are left unnoticed: each presents some peculiar feature, and is, I believe, intended to teach us distinct truth respecting her on whom the heart’s love of Jesus has been set. Many and

varied are the glories of Jesus pointed out to us in the prophetic Scriptures, but in the enjoyment and in the display of each and all of them will she participate. Has He yet to be manifested as the Son of Man, the second Adam, the head of that new and blessed creation into which the taint of defilement, failure, and the curse, can never come? She, as we have seen, shall be there also, the “helpmeet” prepared for Him of God.

Is He, as the Son of Abraham, the true Isaac, to cause gladness, and be the center of unfailing blessing, according to that word, “In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,” when the son of the bond-woman shall have been cast out, and God been owned as the quickener of the dead, she who has had, through grace, the ear to hear the tale of love, as the called and appointed one of God, shall be then brought home. And thus with every other glory.

But how, beloved, is it that we can look forward with holy confidence to these things, and, with the fullest consciousness of what our own condition is, joy in them as ours? Because Jesus has “loved the church, and given Himself for it;” because He has “sanctified it by his own blood.” Whatever the brightness of the glory, whatever the as yet unthought of depth of joy, the one song amidst it all shall be — “Worthy is the Lamb!” “the Lamb that was slain.” “Thou hast redeemed us unto God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and nation, and people, and tongue.” Yes, whatever be the character of the glory, this gives us the secret of all her blessedness—she is the “Bride of the Lamb.”

Such, beloved, is our title, our alone title, and such our hope. The Lord give us to know more of its practical power! May we have our hearts’ affections centered in Him who has thus loved us, and be found more as “a chaste virgin espoused unto Christ.”

As we have noticed, the purpose of God in the election of the church, and her gift unto Jesus, is presented at the commencement of the Book; the concluding page unfolds her glory, with this blessed assurance of her Lord, “Behold, I come quickly.” “Yet, but a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” May our hearts be gladdened by the thought, and respond in longing anticipation, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!”

Jesus who entered heaven for us,

Will soon again descend:

Priest, prophet, king, our Lord and God,

Our bridegroom and our friend.

Then let us rise and trim our lamps,

And as they brightly burn

Be seen as those who longingly

Await their Lord’s return.

Moses in Egypt, and Moses in Madian

One great principle in all true service is the consciousness of being upheld therein by God. It was thus with the perfect Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Behold My servant, whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth." The grand feature in His service was, that He never acted of Himself: "I can of Mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." "When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things. And He that hath sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him." The moment a servant acts independently, he acts from himself, and out of character.

There is great danger of mistaking the busy activity mound us at the present day for true service to God. I believe that God intends to mark very distinctly what man's natural understanding and power can effect, and what the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit can effect. Our endowment, as Christians, is "the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, to make of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord."

Whenever we are living before men, instead of before God, there will be restlessness and disquiet. There may be the desire to do many things that are written in the Word, but they will not be done in quiet and peaceful joy. We are never really preserved from hypocrisy unless we are living before God. It is the very best possible cure for the over-weening conceit we have, all of us, naturally of ourselves.

But let us seek to gather a little instruction from the history of "Moses, the servant of God."

Moses was an eminent type of the Lord Jesus. And I would just notice, in passing, that they are the only two persons mentioned in Scripture whose course we are able to trace from their birth on to the glory.

It is worthy of remark that the life of Moses is divided into three distinct periods of forty years.

The first forty he spent in Egypt as the "son of Pharaoh's daughter."

The next forty in the wilderness tending the flock of his father-in-law. There, at the mount of God, he had a vision of glory, such as could never have been revealed to him in Egypt.

In the last forty we have the account of the sorrowful and trying course he had to run, as the servant of God and of His people Israel, in bearing the burden of that people.

The first portion of his life was spent in Egypt. And Stephen speaks of him as being "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and mighty in words and in deeds." (vs. 22) But this wisdom of Egypt was not anything that God could own. Doubtless, Moses knew that God was about to use him as the "deliverer" of His people; but that which had been acquired in Egypt could not deliver the

Lord's people from Egypt.

Moses' parents could but recognize the remarkableness of their child. (See Heb. 11:23)

And Moses himself, "by faith, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward." (Heb. 11:24-26)

"When he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel." (vs. 23) Whatever ease and comfort Moses might have enjoyed in Pharaoh's house—its luxury and its refinements, "the treasures in Egypt," were all his—his heart yearned over his brethren. He went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens.

"And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian" (vs. 24). "Mighty in deeds," on behalf, too, of the people of God, but acting in the energy of the flesh, not as sent of God (hence what followed), Moses was thinking how Moses was to deliver the people. "He supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them" (vs. 25). But no, "they understood not." Moses had another lesson to learn. God had to teach him that He would only be served by the power and strength that come from Himself, not by the strength or wisdom of Egypt. There cannot be two things more different than a person acting in the energy of the flesh, and one acting in the power of the Spirit. In the first case, there is always disappointment and surprise at the failure of our efforts.

When Moses had spent forty years in the wilderness, doing, as it were, nothing, we find him (Ex. 3) answering God's message, "Come now, therefore, and I will send thee," and so forth, thus, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" When he comes to be sent of God, there is the deep sense of the responsibility of it laid upon him, and he shrinks from it. Before, when going forth in the energy of the flesh, he was bitterly disappointed at the failure he met with; now, he has learned his own insignificance, and he says, "Who am I?" And it is ever thus. When a saint feels that he is sent of God on any mission, there is always the deepest prostration of spirit. This may be brought about by painful discipline of soul, but the end of God's training is to break down self-confidence, so that, when at last the person goes forth in service, it is with the feeling, "Who am I?" One great characteristic of the flesh we have acquired by being so long in "Egypt" is, the dislike to say, "Who am I?" But God must produce this frame of mind before He uses us. The most cultivated understanding, human wisdom, and research will not stand in any stead in the service of God.

"And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbor wrong, thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?" He only gets misunderstood by those whom he seeks to serve. When he would be the man of peace, his reward is the taunt, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?"

Mark this, beloved. I am speaking of Moses as one quickened, one knowing, in a sense, what communion with God was, but who had not learned as yet to throw off Egypt's strength and wisdom. We must fail when we go a warfare at our own charges.

Many a saint runs on for a while (just after his conversion, perhaps), in the eagerness and zeal of the flesh, doing right things, but not in the spirit of dependence on God; by and by his energy flags, and he feels as though he were entirely useless, as though God could never again employ him in His service. Now this is a profitable lesson, though a deeply humbling one. The Lord often trains an individual thus, for much after usefulness in the church.

Just so was it with Moses.

“Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian” (vs. 29).

These first forty years of Moses’ life are passed over very slightly by God. No doubt, had man written the history of them, we should have had given to us a wonderful account of all that Moses did and said in this land of wisdom. The Spirit of God is silent. And why, beloved? Because the wisdom of “Egypt” is foolishness with God, and the strength of “Egypt” weakness with God.

During the next forty years Moses is ‘lost to Egypt and to Israel. But then he is alone with God. In solitude (Ex. 3) the Lord meets him at Horeb—“the mount of God.” And I doubt not that Horeb is thus named because it was a place where Moses had enjoyed communion with God, and where he had learned a lesson which he never could have learned when in Egypt-dependence on God. In secret, he is being prepared for all those mighty achievements he was soon to be called on to perform before Pharaoh, and Egypt, and Israel.

It is in solitude that God chiefly teaches His people. The blessed Jesus sought for refreshment on this earth in being alone with God. And this is the place where the saint learns his own weakness and God’s strength. He enters into the depths of his own evil, but also into the depths of God’s grace. He learns to deny self, to subdue imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, He proves the necessity of the cross.

“And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.” (Ex. 2) “The time of the promise” (vs. 17) had at length come, and now we find Moses about to be prepared and sent forth as the “ruler and deliverer” of Israel.

One preparation had been forty years passed in solitude, in secret training with God, in the wilderness, but there was another thing needful—the manifestation of God’s glory.

“And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.” (vs. 30) There had never been aught like this seen in Egypt. Egypt was not the place for God to show His “great sight.” The wonders of nature were exhibited there, in the periodical inundation of the river, and the like. The wonders of art were also there. But here was something that Moses’ Egyptian wisdom failed in unraveling. “When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight” (vs. 31) for “the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.”

But unless we have wisdom to understand why the bush was not consumed, we have not the real wisdom of God. It is impossible in Egypt to see the glory of the living God. It is above all human thought or conception. It is something which man has no power of explaining. We may tell people

of the sight, but they will not credit us; man's wisdom is at fault. Where did Moses see the same glory? In the pillar of fire which accompanied Israel through their wanderings in the wilderness. When shall it be seen again? When the Lord shall be revealed in flaming fire which will burn up His adversaries.

"And as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold" (vss. 31-32). This "great sight" cannot be spoken of by Egyptian lips, it cannot be understood by Egyptian ears, and we must have the anointing of the eye-salve to see it.

In the poor, feeble, worthless bush, in the midst of which the fire burned without consuming it, we have a blessed emblem of that which, though weak and uncomely in itself, is encircled with the glory of God—the church. What Moses learned was this: that it was God's purpose to encircle Israel with His own glory. And how could this be (either with regard to Israel or the church) without its being consumed by that glory? It was to be encircled with God's salvation.

Until a person knows the security of the church—how precious it is to God, and that nothing shall prevail against it—he is not qualified to be the servant of God unto it. Salvation has God appointed for walls and bulwarks. One feels increasingly the importance of a deep sense of our own insignificance. All that is merely natural must wither before the glory of God.

What a marvelous thing that there should be a little weak bush, as it were, on this earth, with everything against it, and yet nothing able to prevail. Has God associated the church with His own holiness? And this is a deeply important truth. "Our God is a consuming fire." Well, we would not have it otherwise, for the bush in the fire is not consumed. He will not allow any sin connected with that church to come before Him He has judged it in the cross; sentence has not only been passed upon it, but executed. When once the cross is really understood, the very holiness of God is seen to be the guarantee of the security of the church.

"Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground." (vs. 33) We are brought by grace into the place of holiness, and to rejoice in God's holiness. There the soul learns its deepest lessons of what sin is; it sees not only its own nothingness, but its oppositeness to God. There it learns that salvation must be of grace from first to last. These things are only fully learned in the sanctuary. The moment we are rescued from the world we are brought to stand in the place of holiness, and God deals with us accordingly. The reason for His chastening and admonition is that we may be thereby partakers of "His holiness." He desires that we should be as near Him in spirit as we are in our head.

What must Moses' thoughts have been respecting all the glory of Egypt when he turned aside to see "this great sight"? And what would ours be, beloved, with regard to the world, were the eye always and steadily fixed on the glory? When Moses was engaged in solitarily feeding the flock in the wilderness there might have been some longings after the glory of Egypt; but these must have ceased when he had this manifestation made to him of the glory of God, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." So with ourselves. When we think of the true glory of the church, we are able to look at the glory of "Egypt" and feel ourselves weaned from it, as well as weaned from the wisdom and power of "Egypt." But if our souls are only looking at their own weakness, we shall very likely, be tempted to long after "Egypt" and the things of "Egypt."

Paul was qualified to serve the church by his apprehension of its being one with Jesus in the glory.

In Moses needing a spokesman (Ex. 4:10-16), we are taught that neither the wisdom nor the eloquence of "Egypt" will be of any avail in God's service.

Very often there may be busy activity in service, but not the quiet sitting at the feet of Jesus, drinking in from His lips our knowledge of truth and grace. We need much to realize that we have to do with God, even when we are serving others.

Mark what follows. "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of My people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. This same Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush." (vss. 34-35)

But God must bring Moses out of Egypt first. He could not make such a communication to him there. It was the bane of Abram to get into Egypt. Abram had no altar there. And so is it with us. When we get into the world it is the same thing. We cannot have our altar. Communion is interrupted.

In the first place, God reveals His name: "I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham," and so forth. (vs. 32) Secondly, His grace: "I have seen, I have seen the afflictions of My people," and so forth. (vs. 34) (How blessed to be assured that there is not one sorrow of His people, not one groan, but that He knows it altogether) Then we get the formal commission: "And now come, I WILL SEND THEE into Egypt."

"And Moses said unto God, Who am I?" and so forth. (Ex. 2) After he had worshipped God as an unshod worshipper, there was a shrinking from that which God had laid on him, though, forty years before, he had been most eager to enter upon the same sort of service. It is a most solemn thing to have to do with the people of God. The responsibility involved is that under which we must sink, if left to ourselves.

Moses now knew that he that would serve Israel must have a great deal of shame and obloquy to encounter. Hence the need of the training through which he had been put. So with regard to service in the church. If Paul is a "chosen vessel" "to bear His name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel," the Lord, in making this known to Ananias, says, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake." And what was Paul's after experience? "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches," and so forth; again, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved."

Paul had the flesh crushed at the outset, crushed again after he had been taken up into the third heavens, crushed all the way through. He never went on, in service, in the energy of the flesh, but as one who knew that it must be endurance to the very end.

How often does a young Christian think, 'I will tell others of the Lord's love, and they must believe me;' or, 'I will tell Christians of the security of the church, of the coming of the Lord, of the heavenly calling of the saints, and the like; and they must receive it.' But no! we need to learn that we cannot carry everything before us. Where there is the most ascertained mission from God, there is always the deepest humility. Paul, in speaking of his arduous service, says, "I labored more abundantly

than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

The preparation for active service is in secret with God, in learning ourselves in communion with Him There the battle is really fought. Power for active service is acquired not in active service, but in intercourse with God in secret.

Whatever we do in service we ought to do as worshippers. Our service would then be carried on in felt responsibility to God, and it would bring blessing to others and to our own souls.

I believe the saints often think that it is an easy thing to serve God. But no; it is a hard thing to serve Him in spirit and in truth. To serve God in the sense of our being nothing, and His being everything, is a hard thing. The place of the servant of God is to hide himself, and let God appear. Thus it was with THE perfect servant. The most splendid achievement, without this, is not service.

There would be much more profitable, happy, useful service if we only saw more of God's order. One delights to see activity in service; but, then, it should be connected with the being in secret with God, and the seeing His purpose with regard to the church. Thus we should serve happily and holily, not as though God needed our service, but as desiring to glorify Him in our bodies and spirits, which are His.

What grace, O Lord, and beauty shone

Around Thy steps below!

What patient love was seen in all

Thy life and death of woe!

Forever on Thy burdened heart

A weight of sorrow hung,

Yet no ungentle murmuring word

Escaped Thy silent tongue.

Thy foes might hate, despise, revile,

Thy friends unfaithful prove:

Unwearied in forgiveness still,

Thy heart could only love.

Oh, give us hearts to love like Thee!

Like Thee, O Lord, to grieve

Far more for others' sins than all

The wrongs that we receive.

One with Thyself, may every eye

In us, Thy brethren, see

That gentleness and grace that springs

From union, Lord, with Thee.

Hark to the Trump

Hark to the trump! behold it breaks
The sleep of ages now:
And lo! the light of glory shines
On many an aching brow.
Changed in a moment-raised to life,
The quick, the dead arise,
Responsive to the angel's voice,
That calls us to the skies.
Ascending through the crowded air,
On eagles' wings we soar,
To dwell in the full joy of love,
And sorrow there no more.
Undazzled by the glorious light
Of that beloved brow,
We see, without a single cloud,
We see the Savior now!
O Lord, the bright and blessed hope
That cheered us through the past,
Of full eternal rest in Thee,
Is all fulfilled at last.
The cry of sorrow here is hushed,
The voice of prayer is o'er;
'Tis needless now-for, Lord, we crave
Thy gracious help no more.
Praise, endless praise, alone becomes
This bright and blessed place,

Where every eye beholds unveiled

The mysteries of Thy grace.

Past conflict here, O Lord, 'tis ours,

Through everlasting days,

To sing our song of victory now,

And only live to praise.

E. Dennett

Carnal Confidence and the Confidence of Faith

"Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die: shall we be consumed with dying." When the children of Israel cried thus unto Moses, the feeling they expressed was not exactly dread of an unknown God, that which the sinner has naturally on his conscience when first awakened, but a dread resulting from haughtiness of spirit, the flesh having intruded itself into the presence of God. And this is what is constantly found where there has been a high bearing before God. The consequence of God showing Himself to one in this state of soul is to cast him down into despair. The fear of the natural conscience when first awakened, on the other hand, though painful, most painful, is still salutary.

Where there has been a going on altogether without God, I do not call that a high bearing before God, though it is so in another sense. We all know how many people go on carelessly day after day, and year after year, without troubling themselves about God; seeking joy and pleasure in the world, sunk in listlessness, oppressed with cares, or engrossed with business—a thousand things fill and occupy the natural heart, to the exclusion of God. Sometimes it does cross the conscience that there is a God; but so far from His being the object of their life, He is not their object at all; "God is not in all their thoughts." There may be these secret misgivings (God often works thus in the hearts of those whom He afterward calls to Himself, although not producing fruit through it at the time), and when the soul is converted the remembrance of such appeals aids in bringing to a consciousness of the total and entire perverseness of the will of man. Where there is open and notorious sin, it is an easier thing to reach the conscience; just as the Lord said to the Pharisees, the religious people of the day, "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Often, in the course of a comparatively blameless life, there have been these calls, and God, in the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, has been despised.

When conviction of sin comes, when the Spirit of God sets a man, in conscience, in God's presence, he finds out both what he has been doing and what he is. He finds out that he has been treasuring up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. And more than this. He finds out also that his natural condition is a condition of sin and rebellion against God, and that he cannot remedy it. Now, whilst this state of soul is ever painful (and it often drives a man nearly to despair), it is salutary, a blessed thing. Wherever there is a clear sense of our position, there is the desire to go to God, though with the consciousness of having no title to be there. Just as with the poor prodigal: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." So also with Peter, at the feet of Jesus: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" There is this consciousness of unworthiness before God because of having recognized His holiness, and that He ought to be holy; but there is also the desire to go to Him, a seeming inconsistency, but that which is really of the Spirit of God. It is very natural, where the Spirit works, to desire to go to God, because we feel He is needed by us, although conscience says we are unfit to be there. The heart is turned to God. It sees His holiness, sees that He ought to be holy, and so takes God's part against itself. There is no desire that He should be less holy, that it might, so to

speak, slip into heaven; and therefore it justifies God, instead of seeking to condemn Him that it may justify itself, that which many a poor sinner does, that which Adam did when he said, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Instead of justifying self, there is the justifying God and condemning self. Thus the heart is set right. It has not yet, it is true, learned redemption—what God has done for it in Christ; it is occupied with its state before God as a present thing. But that is salutary. There is not the peace that God does give, and will give; still the heart is set right.

In grace God had raised up priesthood to meet the need of His people. But there was assumption on the part of these Israelites, that because they were His people they could take a place before Him otherwise than on His ground. They had abused the privileges conferred upon them, murmured against God, made the golden calf, said it was better to go back to Egypt, despised the promises; there had been a long course of failure and rebellion, and at last it rises up to what is called the "gainsaying of Core." Whilst in this fleshly state, they assume that they can draw nigh to God. "And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" (See chap. 16). Here is haughtiness in the presence of God. And this is very apt to creep into our hearts—a taking up in the flesh the privileges of the children of God. It may not be manifested in the gross aspect of this scene; but is there not often the feeling of being able to come near to God because it is our privilege to do so? Now it is clearly our privilege—the privilege of all saints; but it is a sad thing if as a consequence of that nearness, when the soul has got out of His presence, it goes on haughtily and carelessly, still talking about its nearness.

We find another instance of haughtiness in the presence of God in the case of Cain. (Gen. 4) When God said to Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother?" he replied, "I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?" answering God flippantly. But the moment God showed Himself as God, saying, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth," in came despair. Wherever there is haughtiness of heart before God, and God shows Himself, there is despair; the language of the heart is, "Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish." We get here a great principle. Even in the man who is a Christian, there is no realized ground of confidence, and the heart sinks down in despair.

A Christian has always the ground of being perfectly happy before God, because he is perfectly saved. This is the right state of a Christian—that of confidence, not in the flesh (carnal confidence), but confidence and joy before God. A state of want of Confidence and of uncertainty as regards himself, is a state in which the Christian may be found; he may pass through it, and that even because of a certain work produced on the soul by the Holy Spirit, but it is not his proper state. What the Holy Spirit gives is certainty. Wherever there is uncertainty, it results from the working of our own hearts, even though in connection with (and in a sense grounded upon) what is really the work of the Spirit. I may believe that God is holy, and, seeing sin in myself, may begin to reason on my own worthiness, as to whether I can or cannot come to God; whether I can have anything to say to God. There may be the desire to go to Him, but then I do not know whether He will accept me. This is not faith; and yet it is constantly the state of soul in which Christians are found. It is not properly a Christian state—it is reasoning upon things known by faith, things found out through faith, but it is not faith. We find in the word of God, that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ

cleanseth us from all sin—that by the blood of the cross He has made peace—that our sins and iniquities are remembered no more—and, if faith is in exercise, we are happy, we get peace Faith is the simple-hearted reception of what God has said.

Unbelief is not a Christian state. It is, alas! that into which the Christian may fall, but it is not a Christian state. “Uncertainty cannot be therefore recognized as a proper position of the soul, admitting that it may pass through it, and, indeed, that it generally does. But then, Christian certainty is certainty in, and not out of, God’s presence. Inasmuch as it is certainty founded on faith in what He has said, it is always certainty in His presence. Faith is at rest there. All else that comforts, strengthens, gives us liberty in what we do in the world, is based on what we are in the presence of God. And because we know this, we can say that we are justified from all things, that it is impossible God can impute sin to us. The blood is before His eye, and not our sins.

But there is quite another state of soul to this, a confidence out of God’s presence. The soul may think and reason about the ground of Christian confidence, and Christian privilege, just as did these Israelites that they were owned of God. Theirs was a carnal confidence. It was just the taking up of general principles of truth as to God’s dealings with His people, and then going on in fleshly assumption. This brought them to murmur and rebel. They came up with confidence that the Lord was with them; but the Lord gave directions respecting Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and interfered in judgment upon their ungodliness. And then we read: “But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses, and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord” (vs. 41).

Now what is the remedy of the Lord for this? He sets up priesthood as the only ground on which He can go on with them. He says, as it were, I must have clear and plain evidence what my power is, in order to make cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel; but then, if I give this evidence of my power, it must be in grace; to deal with them on any other ground than that of grace, would be for destruction. And such must always be the case. If the Lord were simply to come by the power of His actual presence, it would bring confusion into the soul. Sometimes we see this on a death-bed for a little moment. In what the Lord thus does in bringing the soul into His presence, He puts it under a shade of the power of that which Christ went through—just a shade of it.

The truth is, that in the way in which many believers are occupied in daily life, they little realize the presence of God. It is not that they have not peace, but that they never fully estimate what the flesh is before God. One learns this from intercourse with Christians, and specially with those who have been long Christians. They know very little what it is to find themselves face to face with God. They may have been awakened under convictions of sin (perhaps terrible convictions), and have got peace to their souls; but since that there may have been the going on comfortably with certain things without a realizing of the presence of God, so that if it were to come on them, they too would be “consumed” with terror. It is well for us to remember that certainty as to salvation is the proper, the normal state of a Christian. I repeat that here just to show that what I am now saying is not meant to deny it at all; but still I say that if God were to meet such persons, real Christians though they were, in the present power of what He is as God, it would produce trouble and distress. This ought not so to be. It is quite clear that, if it is the case, we are not really living in His presence, and that is the place where we are privileged to be. There is a constant tendency in our hearts, when

out of it, to be taken up with certain things that are grounded upon what is truly our relationship to God, and to carry on these things without realizing His presence. Now, if confidence goes along with this, it is a most hardening thing. Confidence, I repeat, ought always to be the portion of the believer, the confidence of faith. God does not withdraw that, but we may lose it. Whilst there is a going on with confidence, and we are not walking in the presence of God, the conscience not being sincere, there exists that which is mining the very foundation. We may go on in joy, but if that joy is not joy in the presence of God, there will be a break-down sometime.

Now that is what I mean by “carnal confidence” —not the confidence of an unconverted person, there is that, but I do not mean it; I mean the confidence of one whose peace and hopes are rightly based, but maintained without walking in the presence of God. It is a right peace, right hopes, a thing rightly founded, that which is really his own (the proper condition of a Christian is always to have it), but still it assumes a carnal character in the heart when it is carried on without God, that is, when it is not continued in by walking in His presence. The consequence is, that the moment the Lord appears, no matter in what way, let it even be in grace, His presence comes to be terrible. These people had not realized the power of it in God’s presence, and therefore they broke down in despair, and said, “Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish.”

Now I do not say that it will come to this point in our hearts, but (the same thing in principle) it will be for discouragement, for loss of confidence, and for distrust of God. Suppose you, a real Christian, had been going on in carelessness, and carrying this carnal confidence along with it, and one were to speak to you even of the intercession of Jesus; if there was a sense of God’s presence, through this, to your soul, it would not be a cheering and strengthening, but rather a discouraging thing, and the soul would break down.

Our place with the Lord is to walk with joy, but it is joy in the Lord. Enoch “walked with God.” Can you say you are walking with God? I do not ask if you are doing that which is openly wrong, but would the presence of God alarm and distress you? Our confidence, if we have any, is a fleshly thing, when that is the case.

Do not rest in such a condition; it is not what God has called us to. He is all grace, grace to us according to our need; but it is with Him, and in His presence, that we find and enjoy His grace. Moses sang (Ex. 15:13), “Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation.” And that is what He has done for us. He has brought us home to Himself. And what then? He has put His Spirit into our hearts, that it may be our home. You know what it is to be “at home,” we act so differently there—no other place is like it. We are “at home” when the Spirit is working in our hearts, giving the joy of our portion in the presence of God. We may have to go forth into the world to labor, to exercise ourselves, and to be engaged in a thousand different ways; but when we get back again, how great the change! We only go out, to come back. There we are “at home.” How comforting, how establishing the thought! It is a terrible thing to be saying, instead of this, “Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die”—when God’s presence, in the place of being the home of our hearts, is terror and distress. I have no doubt that you will find hundreds of Christians who, instead of feeling away from home, when they have got out of God’s presence, are at ease.

But it is, I repeat, a terrible thing, not merely because it is a wrong thing, but because of God's grace. We are called to be "at home" with God. The Lord Jesus Christ, when about to go back to heaven, said to Mary, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father; and to My God and your God." We ought to be as much "at home" in spirit there as He. Was it not with joy, with confidence, that Jesus said He was going to the presence of His Father? He came forth from God's presence, to act in love in the midst of this ruined world, and He went back when He had finished the work that had been given Him to do. And was it not, in a certain sense, with the feeling of going home? But He says, "Unto My Father and your Father; to My God and your God." What a blessed thought! That is the church's place; we are called to be "at home" with our God and our Father—to the blessedness of His house. No matter what the world may be, we should be there at home—happy home! — as truly there, in spirit, and as happy there, as Christ.

If that is what is given us in Christ (and God gives nothing less), do our souls realize it? We may be measuring fitness, but God cannot measure fitness. If He receive at all, it is for Christ's sake; our title is based on what Christ has done. We may be going through many an experience; but God does not rest on our experience. Nay, He has not to do, in that sense, with our experience at all. If He receives us, it is for Christ's sake, it is as Christ, it is all Christ. It can be nothing less, and nothing short of that.

Having adverted to this, let us now turn to God's answer.

After all the murmurings of the people, after the rebellion and gainsaying of Korah, this is the manner in which the Lord takes away the murmurings by priesthood in grace. 'I must conduct them (He says) by Aaron's rod (not by the rod of Moses) to Canaan. This people have not only been found in bondage in Egypt, but in rebellion and sin in the wilderness, and therefore the only way in which I can deal with them is by priesthood.' There is no possible hope of leading us up into the heavenly Canaan except we are put under the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore it is said that Christ is a "Son over His own house."

It is "His house;" that is the first thing. How does He then deal with it? Suppose we find a house that is not ours to be a bad, dirty house, we may bear with it—not so if it is our own house. The way that Christ deals with that which is His house (it is His interest, so to speak, to do so) is to have it clean. We are put under the priesthood of Christ; this is God's arrangement for the purpose of dealing with us in the "house." "If any man sin"—a Christian, man—What then? He is guilty, and gets condemned? No such thing. That would be the reasoning of the heart where there had been "carnal confidence;" it would get alarmed and uneasy, and say, "We die, we perish"; but what is the truth? "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The sin sets Christ to work; that is the effect of it, not to leave it there, of that we are quite sure, but on the same principle, that if we find uncleanness in our house it would not make us reject the house but get rid of the uncleanness, so Christ is occupied in love in removing the sin. It is the priesthood of Christ that leads us up into the heavenly city.

But the next thing to be noticed is, we are priests in God's house; and the thing, therefore, which we have to bear, is the iniquity of the house. "And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood." This is true of all the church. We are God's

sanctuary—"the house of God." (1 Tim. 3:15) So of the individual saint, "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19) It was not allowed to have anything defiled in the camp, much less in the "sanctuary." We are brought now to dwell in the sanctuary of God—to minister in the priesthood of God. This involves responsibility. Thus have we to judge about sin; and not as though we were under law. This is where God has brought us—the position in which we stand towards God, and what we have to bear. It is no matter of attainment or of maturity in Christ; you may have been converted yesterday, or you may be a "father in Christ," and therefore able to understand it better, but that does not affect the question; there might have been a young priest or an old priest in the sanctuary, but the young priest would have to bear the iniquity of the sanctuary and of the priesthood, as much as the old one, as much as Aaron himself.

God, in the riches of His grace, has made us His "sanctuary;" our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit; we are priests in His house; and iniquity must therefore be judged of accordingly. If the sense of this does not produce joy in our hearts, we cannot be on our right ground. If we do not know what it is to be in the sanctuary of God, we do not know what it is to be a Christian. I do not say we are not Christians, but we do not fully know what Christian privileges are. If we do not know what it is to be priests unto God, we have never yet got into our proper place before God.

There is another remark. Suppose we have, through grace, the consciousness of being priests; I ask, is there not, as a necessary consequence of this (not the feeling, "Behold, we die, we perish," but that which takes the place of it), holy confidence—confidence before God! He says, I will not deal with those who come into my house as a judge, as though they were under law—it is "you and your sons," and so forth. If God has people in His house, He will have them there as priests. If we are saying, "Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die," we have got back under law. We are listening to the reasoning of our own hearts, and that is not faith. The moment we begin to reason thus, we are under law; faith is not in exercise, and, therefore, we must be under law. This, "Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh anything near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die"—is all law. Now, what is the Lord's word, or rather what is the silence of His Word about it? It does not know such a man as the one who is saying this; his doing so is just a proof that he is not a "priest" at all; he does not know what righteousness is, in coming into the presence of God; he does not know what grace is; he will neither come into the house, nor perish—he is not in a condition to do either.

If the Spirit of God is working in the heart, He produces a sense of dread in bringing out of that condition: but if we then distrust God, we shall never get into His presence on that ground. There is no answer to us, except that we are in a wrong and untrue condition altogether. God may bring us out of it, but He does not own us in it.

Let us remember that it was carnal confidence that had produced, as we have seen, the feeling here; and it may be that the same thing is working in our hearts. Where there is "carnal confidence," it takes from under the consciousness of grace, and puts us, for the time, under the power of law.

To conclude: We are brought, through wondrous grace, into the sanctuary of God, we are made priests unto God; and that is the way in which we are to judge of good and evil. We always judge

of good or evil, according to the condition in which a man is; we do not expect our servants, to be sons; neither our sons, to be servants. And if we are merely judging of good and of evil according to natural conscience, we are not going on Christian ground at all. This is the question we have to ask ourselves—What is it that becomes a man who is God's temple?—what is it that becomes a man who is God's priest?

Do we shrink from being set in this responsibility? If we cannot say that we like to be there; that we have such an interest in God's glory, that we desire it; if we are speaking about our weakness, we have not the confidence of grace, we are saying in a little degree, "Behold, we die, we perish." It is the same thing in principle; I speak not of the extent of it. Why is it that we are thus afraid? Just because our hearts are not strong in the full and simple confidence of grace—present grace: as it is said, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." Though Christ has died and put away our sin, yet we have not full confidence in God's grace, we think He is not all grace; that is what is meant by the "present grace." God loves us with the most perfect love; He cannot deal with us on any other ground; He loves us at this moment, just as much as when He gave Christ to die for our sins. He is love, and nothing else, to us. He is not double-hearted. What we are standing in, is grace. When the soul is confident of that, Oh, now (it says), let me have this holiness, let me enjoy this holiness of the sanctuary! If it is all grace, it does not say "we die, we perish,"—how can we die, where all is grace!

What we want is the full, blessed, clear apprehension that we stand in grace. Our hearts will then have joy and courage. That which will enable us to act aright is not what we have called "carnal confidence," the going on in the commonplace joy of certain truth, but the certainty and joy of God's presence. Do we know God's presence as the practical home of our hearts? Oh what joy is there in this! Of one thing be sure, coming to Him in the name of Jesus, you will find it to be the sure, blessed, secure home of your hearts.

Forever blessed be His name He has said, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

O LORD, Thy love's unbounded,

So sweet, so full, so free;

My soul is all transported,

Whene'er I think on Thee;

Yet, Lord, alas! what weakness

Within myself I find;

No infant's changing pleasure

Is like my wand'ring mind.

And yet Thy love 's unchanging,

And doth recall my heart

To joy in all its brightness,

The peace its beams impart.
Yet sure, if in Thy presence,
My soul still constant were,
Mine eye would more familiar
Its brighter glories bear.
And thus Thy deep perfections
Much better should I know,
And with adoring fervor
In this Thy nature grow.
Still sweet 'tis to discover,
If clouds have dimm'd my sight,
When passed, Eternal Lover,
Towards me, as e'er, Thou'rt bright.
Oh guard my soul then, Jesus,
Abiding still with Thee;
And if I wander, teach me,
Soon back to Thee to flee,
That all Thy gracious favor
May to my soul be known;
And versed in this Thy goodness,
My hopes Thyself shall crown.

Do I Lack Rest?

“Come unto me and I will give you rest.”

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me...and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Matt. 11).

Faith knows the Lord Jesus, exalted to the right hand of the majesty in the heavens, as the one in whom all fullness dwells, unto whom all power is given in heaven and earth, seated on the throne, the orderer of and ruler over all. There is He blessed, and blessed forever. But it is altogether another place in which we see Him stand in this chapter-despised and rejected of all those unto whom He had presented Himself in the name of Jehovah. And there, too, is He blessed, and blessed for us.

John the Baptist: “Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?”—even he seems doubting.

Israel: “Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented,”—equally displeased with John and with Jesus, content neither with law nor with grace. Men do not like righteousness, that is too strict for them; neither like they grace, that is too free: they would have part one and part the other.

Again. If we look at the “cities wherein most of His mighty works were done”—“Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which have been done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you” — we find them worse than any other. So that here we see the Lord Jesus rejected on every hand. It is a solemn thought, that we are “unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that perish,” as well as “in them that are saved.” His testimony rejected, the soul of Jesus finds its rest in God. He had done God’s will; the name of God had been glorified—there was all the full consciousness of this, and, therefore, what blessed repose of soul! Nowhere do we find the Lord Jesus rising more above the power of circumstances, rejoicing more in spirit than here. His soul, in the midst of this weary world, needed rest, needed repose, and it found that which it needed in submitting to the will of God.

“At that time”— after and amidst all the rejection, the Lord Jesus “answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight!” He bowed to the righteous sovereignty of God.

Now I believe this would ever be the position of soul in the saint when walking in communion with God. Assuredly it is the right spirit, because the recognition of God’s “ordering all things after the counsel of His own will.” But, then, how different from the petulance of many of us!

Jesus, when rejected, could still rest in the sovereignty of God. If we witness our testimony rejected; our wishes disappointed; our motives misunderstood; trial coming whence we least expected it, from Christians, perhaps from our own family, from those whom we have sought to serve; then is the time to bow to the righteous sovereignty of God, and to say, "I thank Thee, O Father: for so it seemeth good in Thy sight." Oh, dear friends, if our souls knew a little more of the marvelous mercy vouchsafed unto any of us, in God's having revealed Jesus, quickened us when dead in trespasses and sins, put forth the arm of His power on our behalf, we should not be wasting our time, as is now too frequently the case, in vain murmurings and regrets; but should be enabled to say, "I thank Thee, O Father: for so it seemeth good in Thy sight."

Beloved, this is most blessed; there is in it the recognition of the "good and acceptable and perfect will of God," there is no reasoning here. In Jeremiah we find complaint, cursing the day in which he was born; in Habakkuk, argument; in Job, self-vindication; but here there is nothing of the sort, it is simple subjection to the "will of God," as being the best thing possible. "Even so, Father: for so it seemeth good in Thy sight."

What "seemed good" in the Father's sight, was good in the sight of Jesus. It was ever so. "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." Now this is resignation. It is not resignation merely to bow to that which we cannot escape; true resignation recognizes a thing to be good and fitting, because the will of God, however trying, however painful to ourselves. "I thank Thee."

There is another blessed truth. When Jesus felt Himself to be rejected by all about Him, He said, "All things are delivered unto Me of My Father." Here the Lord Jesus stands so blessedly -in utter rejection by man; but "all things" given unto Him "of God."

Beloved, did you never find, when your own wills have been thwarted, when there has been self-denial, and the bowing of the will to God, something opened to the soul in blessing which it had never known before? It is habitually and practically true, that "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

As to matter of fact, Jesus is here the rejected one—rejected of the world; but, as the consequence of this, He is the exalted One of the Father. And now He can tell forth, "no man knoweth the Son but the Father." Although the world knew Him not, the Father knew Him; although the world delighted not in Him, the Father delighted in Him; although He was not precious to the world, He was precious to the Father.

Again: "Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." I find that the Lord Jesus Christ, by the knowledge of the Father in His own soul, was supported all through His rejection, and now He stands forth as able to "reveal" the Father's name to others. The Father is only known by the revelation of the Son. "O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee; but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me. And I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

If you are of the world, you will not want to know that name which Jesus came to manifest. If the world is your portion, you will not want to know that name which was the portion of Jesus when the world had rejected Him. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh,

and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”

But I would now speak a little on the last verses of this chapter, and endeavor to bring out some of the blessed truth contained in them.

There is a marked distinction between what is said here of Jesus giving rest and our finding rest, a distinction of much importance. He does not tell me to do anything in order that He might give me rest, it is simply “come unto Me;” but in order to my finding rest, He says, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.” Practical obedience is made necessary.

It is of great moment to see the connection these things have one with the other; the saints often lose the present practical enjoyment of the rest which Jesus has given them because of not taking heed to it.

In the consciousness of the possession of “all things” all things being delivered unto Him of the Father, all power given unto Him in heaven and earth, all judgment committed unto Him, everything (for there is not one single thing which the Father has not given into the hands of Jesus as the rejected one of the world) His — He says, “Come unto Me.”

What a most blessed connection is there then between Jesus receiving “all things” and His asking us to come unto Himself. He does not say “come unto Me” as the despised and rejected one merely; no, “come unto Me” as the one, “despised and rejected” indeed “of men,” yet having in Himself all that men eagerly seek after, all that they count estimable, everything that is an object of human ambition. “He is worthy to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, blessing.” There is in Him whom the world has rejected, not only everything that is suited to our need as sinners, but that also which can satisfy the utmost desire of our hearts, therefore it is, “Come.” This is most blessed; it shows forth the grace of the heart of Jesus. When we find Him as the “rejected” one turning round and saying “Come unto Me!” “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” we learn grace indeed!

Coming unto Him, believing on His name, is all the great secret of the rest He offers. The self-righteous multitude, the scribes, the Pharisees, the lawyers, had rejected Him, but Jesus knew that there were some standing around weary, heavy-laden ones, trying to get rid of their burden of guilt in vain. The law could never give them relief; the law could never take away their sin. To these He turns, “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.” Again: there were those who had had the experience of trying to find rest in society, in friends, in the world, and to them He says, “Come unto Me.” Rest, true rest, is received in simply coming to Jesus. What is it that my soul wants “Come unto Me” is the invitation; all that it needs is in the hands of Jesus—pardon of sin, eternal life, rest, whatever it may desire, all is provided for it there.

I will here notice the order in which these things are presented. The Lord Jesus does not tell us to find rest until He has first given us rest. I believe many have inverted this order, and have sought to take the yoke before they were bidden. He knows exactly what the sinner needs (as also did the Father who has delivered all things into His hands)—needs simply as a gift, not to be earned, not to be deserved, but to meet him at once—a free gift. I do press this—until there is simple rest to the soul by coming unto Jesus, in any way to act as a Christian, whether it be in worship or in service, will be bondage; for they that are in the flesh cannot please God. We must be set at rest about ourselves before we can think of acting for God. I must have rest in my soul before I can act

as a saint, before I can take upon me “the yoke” of Christ. Ere I can bear His “burden” I must have got rid of my own, I must have left it with Him. When not coming to Jesus to receive at His hands rest—a free gift, I come to Him as a task-master, and thus only get a double burden, instead of finding that blessed rest for my soul, wherein I, a pardoned sinner, can rest and delight, and God, a holy God, can delight also.

Jesus is the true sabbath wherein God hath infinite delight. And He is the soul’s most blessed sabbath also. He has been the obedient one— “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Man has crucified Jesus, but God has raised Him from the dead, and now God publishes His name as the only name given under heaven whereby men can be saved. He has done God’s will, therefore all things are delivered unto Him of the Father, and He says, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Beloved friends, I again repeat it, Jesus does not ask us to take His “yoke” or His “burden” upon us until we have laid aside our own. Until I am free in spirit through the knowledge of the work of Jesus on the cross, I am not able to serve aright.

Whatever we may be in our own estimation or in the estimation of others, though despised and rejected of all around, still, as having come to Jesus, “all things are ours,” not one thing withheld from us. For Jesus is the great gift of God, and in Him is treasured up every other gift, righteousness, life, peace, everything.

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” Jesus had borne the “burden,” Jesus had borne the “yoke” Himself, and therefore He could say, “Learn of Me.” I am not speaking about the burden of our sins; the Lord Jesus came also to “learn obedience by the things that He suffered.” Jesus was the one who had found out all the bitterness of rejection and scorn, and yet could say, “Even so, Father”; therefore it is, “Learn of Me.” In Isaiah 1 we read, “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.” “He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned;” therefore has He “the tongue of the learned, that He should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” He can tell us how He has borne the yoke Himself, going lower and lower, and He can say, “My yoke is easy, and My burden light.”

Beloved, if Christ Jesus found the yoke to be easy, and the burden light; if He could say, I have overcome, how was it?—by bowing to the yoke. And how do we overcome? always by enduring; never by endeavoring to alter circumstances; never by seeking rest here. Every man naturally thinks to overcome circumstances of trial by altering them, but this is not the way with the disciple of Jesus. When the soul of the saint complains of being ill at ease, and he is seeking practical peace and rest by endeavoring to alter the circumstances in which he is placed, he is not having that peace in Jesus which Himself has promised— “In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me peace.” We often speak very foolishly one to another, and seem to think that change of circumstances will afford peace. But change of circumstances merely does not affect the peace of

the soul at all. Let us listen to that word—"Learn of me." Jesus did not alter circumstances; the cup did not pass from Him. No! He bowed, and said, "Not My will, but Thine be done."

There are but two ways in which to act; we must either fight our way through the world, or endure. Now I read, "God will render to every man according to his deeds—unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish;" and, on the contrary, "to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, eternal life." Here I learn that patient continuance in well-doing—endurance is the great characteristic of the saint. That is the path of glory and virtue; that is the path that Jesus trod; that is the "yoke" He bore— He endured, and He found it most blessed so to do. Jesus overcame by patient continuance in well-doing, and He says, "Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Not the rest of the fretful, impatient saint, who is always trying to alter the circumstances around, but the rest of Jesus—"Even so, Father; for so it seemeth good in Thy sight."

I come to Jesus as a heavy-laden sinner, He gives me rest, and He does not take away that which He has given—rest is my everlasting portion. But then I find myself here, still in the midst of a trying world, exposed to the temptations and wiles of the devil, and having an evil heart of unbelief myself. Now we would desire that all in us and about us were already as it will be by and by when Satan is chained, but it is not so. We may fret and be angry and disappointed because it is not; but if God does not choose to alter the character of either the flesh, the devil, or the world, it is no use to fret. "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Faith says, "This is the path God has chosen for me to tread." Rest is found in the denial of my own will, in the taking up of my cross daily, and in following Jesus, not in seeking to alter the circumstances, but in bowing the head and saying, "Even so, Father; for so it seemeth good in Thy sight." The Lord Jesus Himself found this second character of rest in becoming obedient unto the "yoke," in bearing the "yoke" put upon Him, and then, as one who had had the experience of it, I hear Him saying, "Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall, find rest unto your souls."

This "rest" is a complete contrast to the restlessness which characterizes the walk of some saints. And wherefore? There is perhaps, from a desire for prominence, the going out into a public path of service, instead of living in that of home duties, where God would have them to Alcorn the doctrine they profess; hence this constant restlessness. They get uneasy, disappointed, discouraged, not settled here, not settled there, but ever disquiet.

A Christian should go on, unaffected by circumstances, in the path of practical obedience to the will of God. There, and therein alone, is practical rest found (for it is practical, experimental rest of which I am now speaking); when I am trying to have my own will and to go my own way, I do not find this rest.

The two things act and react one upon the other; very often we find that a saint has lost peace of soul—the blessed joy he had in knowing his sins put away forever by the blood of Jesus, and the possession of eternal life—and what is the cause? In many cases because he has not been bearing the burden of Christ, but walking in the path of fleshly activity and restlessness. His peace has thus become disturbed, and he is even tempted to doubt whether or not he be a child of God. They do act and react in a manner and to a degree of which we are little aware. It is very wretched

for a saint of God to be always questioning whether he indeed be a saint, instead of walking on in the path of healthy service.

There is still another thing that I would desire to notice briefly, and that is the great basis of Christian humility. I mean that humility which a saint has because he is a saint, and not because he is a sinner. A sinner saved by grace ought indeed to be humble; but the humility which a saint has because he is a saint and an heir of glory is of a much deeper kind than that which is occasioned by the discovery of sin. There is nothing will bring a soul so low, and make him willing to serve another in the meanest of service, as the consciousness of his standing before God. Mark the Lord Jesus Christ here: He stands forth in conscious possession of all things— “All things are delivered unto Me of My Father.” And yet He says, “Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.” Can you put these two together? I believe you can; the soul of the really instructed saint discerns their needful connection. The Lord Jesus, in conscious possession of all things, could afford to humble Himself. What was it that enabled Him to do so but His real greatness, because God was caring for Him— “Which thing is true in Him and in you.” Nothing enables us to go and wash the saints’ feet, to lay ourselves down to be trampled on, but the knowledge of our real greatness: we can then afford to be humbled; we can then afford to come down and minister unto others, instead of wanting others to minister unto us. A child of God needs not anything to add to his dignity, because of the dignity which is given him of God; he has all dignity, “all things” in Christ. This is the real power of truly humbling ourselves to serve others. That which will enable us to put ourselves lower than anything is the consciousness that “all things are ours; for we are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”

Well, I believe we shall find this real and abiding peace and rest to our souls in taking the “yoke” of Christ, in not “minding high things, but condescending to men of low estate,” in willingness to serve all saints—“If any man will be great among you, let him become the servant of all.” “Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

It is one of the happiest of things to be thus a learner in the school of Christ.

The Holy Spirit, whose office and delight it is to bring before the soul the Lord Jesus as our example, never does so without grounding us first in the faith of the work that He has done for us on the cross. But if there be a place of real blessing for the servant, it is that of being put in the place of his Master. He is what he is in himself; we are what we are in Him.

Beloved, remember if there is restlessness instead of rest, I would say, “Is not something of your will, your own will, at work, and not the ‘Even so, Father; for so it seemeth good in Thy sight’?”

The Walk With God

We find in the beginning of Genesis 5 a marked distinction between the likeness in which Adam was originally created, and that of his offspring as they came from him: “In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him;” as Genesis 1:26, “Let us make man in our image.” We know that Adam abode not in this estate, and in the third verse of this chapter we find, “he begat a son in his own likeness [after his image].”

In the 2nd and 3rd verses we have the account of the blessedness in which Adam originally stood—“in the image of God”—in the garden which the Lord God planted, surrounded with the tokens of His love and wisdom, lord of all; and that nothing should be lacking, “I will make him an help-meet for him;” but there was a blessedness beyond all this, his first and highest, he walked with God in holy, happy intimacy. This we learn from the whole narrative. (Chapter 2:16-19, 22) They stood in the presence of God. God spake to them, and they were not ashamed nor afraid; for sin had not yet entered.

We observe that God, with whom they were here visibly conversant, was the Son, the Word, or, as we usually speak, the second person. God in essence, no man hath seen at any time; the Son reveals Him; and all the manifestations of God in the old time, whether in creation or otherwise, were in the person of the Son, the Word. (John 1:1,3,18) Even Him whom we know as Jesus, the Christ, our Lord and our God.

But to return to Adam. We see the blessedness in which God placed him; he abode not in it, he lost this blessedness: and how did he lose it? by want of subjection to God—by willfulness—he would follow his own will, rather than God’s will, and he reaped the bitter fruit of it.

It was God’s will that put Adam in the garden, in the midst of all the blessing; it was his own will that put him out of the garden, in the midst of all the curse; and so it ever has been, and ever will be. Look at the apostasies of which we read in the Scriptures, and you will find self-will in one shape or other the bitter root of each and all of them.

After his apostasy, we find Adam not walking with God. The Lord God, as He was wont, comes down into the garden and calls unto Adam; but that voice and presence, once his chiefest joy and highest honor, has no joy for him now; he hides himself from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden; he has no communion with God now—he cannot walk with Him. God is here as He was before, but Adam’s confidence to approach Him is gone—it is broken down by his self-will; willfulness has come in, and confidence is gone out, and so it ever must be; and now we see Adam, still indeed in the garden of God, in the midst of all its beauty, but what a poor conscience-stricken, wretched sinner!—striving to hide his guilty head from Him whom he has only known in love. How has the fine gold become dim! What a contrast does he herein afford to the faithful servant of God, who could say, “What wilt Thou have me to do?” the one in the midst of circumstances of blessing, but wretched, because willful; the other in the midst of circumstances of trial and sorrow, but blessed, because obedient—tribulation abounding, but consolation also

abounding by Christ—such is the portion of the subject dependent spirit, to rise above the power of circumstances.

In Genesis 5:22, we see that restored which Adam had lost. “Enoch walked with God.”

Again we find the communion issuing in the walk, and to him is the distinct testimony given that “he pleased God,” and further “he was not, for God took him”; here he seems to be the type of the living saints who shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air when He cometh.

We thus find in Enoch what Adam lost, and possibly we learn (but on this I insist not) what Adam's portion would have been had he not fallen—assuredly he would not have died; death is not God's work, it is the wages of sin it is the power of the devil—the power which man's self-will has given him, and death we should never have known from God.

In connection with the testimony to Enoch, we are reminded of Paul's word to the Colossians, “We do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.” And again to the Thessalonians, “Ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God.”

Enoch walked with God—he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

In the next chapter we have the testimony to Noah. “Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.” In the preceding verse we have, I believe, the secret of this blessed testimony, “he found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” In Hebrews 11 we find the principle of his walk; it was faith, not sight, as we see in the apostasy, Genesis 6:2, and also Genesis 3:6; it was faith working holy obedience, “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.” How simple, how blessed, and how opposite to the walk by sense and sight, leading us in willfulness to do the very thing that God commanded not to be done.

There is one very blessed and beautiful principle of the walk with God mentioned of Noah in the epistle to the Hebrews—he moved with fear; it is indeed an essential ingredient of the walk with God, and the very opposite to the rashness of self-will; it is what the saints at this present day may more especially stand in need of. The very obedience, if the term may be allowed, of a saint may be more allied with self-will than holy fear, and therefore lose its savor before God. This can never be said of that which is obedience in spirit and truth; but is, I think, the character of a great part of the obedience of the day. And it is important that the saints should well consider this. At the present time we see on the one hand ordinances and blind subjection, but, what I believe is worse, upon the other hand, self-will and man's right; and on the border of this latter do those stand who, through God's grace, have been led to see the opposite evil and would escape it. It is humiliating to think how near to error we may stand in truth, when we lapse from the spirit into the flesh; and, alas! how easy is the transition, then are we in it, when we stand in the pride of our knowledge or acquirement, or in the assertion of our right. It is plain that self and not God is exalted, and then are we falling into the greater error of the two—let us be watchful herein.

Obedience may be the bowing of the intellect—honest, intelligent to abstract truth; it may be the proud assertion of right in one who sees error and truth, to forsake the one and to bow to the other. True obedience is the result of subjection to God—it is meek and holy, and therefore free from that

offensive independent bearing which is so frequently met with, and which is so sad and grievous to the Spirit.

Holy fear will ever be allied with holy love; as one should be the constraining motive to service, so the other should be the jealous guardian of our whole conversation, that we grieve not the heart of God, nor hinder His Holy Spirit. Adam failed in the fear of the Lord, and therefore he failed to walk with God. Noah was moved with fear, and therefore he failed not to walk with God.

We proceed a few chapters, and in Genesis 17 we find God saying to Abraham, “I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect;” and I observe that when God thus calls upon Abraham it is just before the fullest opening of the covenant which God makes with him; this covenant we find in the 12th, 13th, 15th, and 22nd chapters, but here we have it more enlarged, and sealed by the token of circumcision; here Isaac was promised and named, and here we find Abraham in the confidence of friendship, pleading for Ishmael, as in the next chapter for Sodom, and in the 20th chapter for Abimelech; but previous to all this, and, as it were, the preparation fitting for it, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect.” Abraham might have replied, But, Lord, how can I—who is sufficient for these things? The answer is, “I am the Almighty God,” even as it is afterward the strength for difficult requirement.’ (2 Cor. 6:14-18) This is God’s first revelation of Himself under this name. Abraham’s obedience we find in chapter 22 and again in his direction to his servant in getting a wife for Isaac, chapter 29:40, “The Lord, before whom I walk, will send His angel with thee and prosper thy way.” Thus do we see how Abraham, the friend of God, walked; not after his own will, he believed in the Lord, and He “counted it to him for righteousness:” he obeyed the voice of the Lord, and “by Myself have I sworn, faith, the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven.” Whenever he followed his own will it was only to go astray.

Thus do we see God’s will with His people; it is that they walk with Him.

It was His oft-repeated word to Israel, that they walked contrary to Him, and hence their misery. God knoweth that it is here that the happiness and holiness of His people are secured, and that a way of their own will ever be a way of misery in the end; and God says, even now, after all the blessed revelations that He has made of Himself in Jesus, even now He says unto faith, “Walk before Me.”

With man there has been the measure of obedience or rebellion, according to the spirit that was in him; but in Jesus we find the full and blessed response to this call of our God. He could say of the days of His flesh, “I have set the Lord always before me:” here was his moving principle doing everything in reference to the will of Him that sent Him; and this is just what the gospel history exhibits (specially John’s), the SENT ONE doing the will of Him that sent him—the contrast in this to the first Adam. His life is the history of full, perfect, willing subjection to God; even in prospect of the cross, and all its shame and suffering, His Word is still, “I delight to do Thy will, O my God.” We get a measure of this in the saints; but the one who is brought into the nearest and dearest communion with God will probably be the one most conscious of failure; for he is the one brought to measure himself by the stature of the Lord, and to see himself in the full shining of His light: here he will learn the true measure of human attainment, and yet without one despairing thought; for he learns it in the blessed consciousness of his acceptance in the beloved, in the

consciousness that his title to the glory is in the perfect work of Him by whose side he feels the short-coming and failure of his holiest things. Doubtless Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and a countless multitude beside, have set the Lord before them; but one only could say, "I have set the Lord always before me;" in Him was the perfect, continual, unfailing obedience, that nothing could turn from its object.

Enoch walked with God, and pleased Him: in Jesus this was perfect. "I do always the things that please-Him." "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Noah walked with God, and moved with fear: this we see perfect in Jesus, "He was heard in that He feared" (the very same word as of Noah), "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him."

Abraham walked before the Lord,: again we see the pattern of what was perfect in the beloved, "I have set the Lord always before me;" and indeed the little features of grace and beauty which we see scattered through the family of God, are but the faint traces of what we see in their fullness and perfection in God's beloved Son, who is the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person; and just in the proportion that we are in communion with the Father and the Son, not only will our joy be full, but it will be manifested that we walk with God, and please Him, that we move in fear, setting the Lord before us.

This is testimony; this is what God requires at our hands; not as the demand, of a task-master, but as an offering of love; this is what really tells on the conscience for God: it is of practical value, and nice words without it are but as counterfeit coin, which looks well, but is worth nothing.,

It is comparatively easy to get knowledge, and to increase it; but, ah, it is hard to walk with God-it is one coming out of self and walking in the power of communion with another. The natural way is to follow our own will; it is the natural way since Adam fell: he begat a son in his own likeness. The bent of the will may often to man's eye be innocent or rational— "The tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise." Our first parents would be wise, but it was wisdom by their own will; they turned from the tree of life, and this was God's wisdom. (Prov. 3:13-17) Their will was to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and this was Satan's suggestion, and whenever there is not subjection to God there is the old apostasy that turned Adam out of paradise, and gave Satan his power in the world.

Beloved, the object of our life should be testimony for God; with the apostle this seemed the object in life and death (Phil. 1:20); but we cannot truly testify save as we walk with God-but as we are in communion. How important then to keep this communion uninterrupted. The provision for this we find in 1 John 2:12; it is the advocacy in the power which the blood gives, which the blood alone gives, for this alone can answer Satan; he could find failure enough in the most perfect holiness of the saint whereof to accuse him; there is none in the blood of the Lamb, and this it is that opens and keeps open communion to us. Here let us take our stand, and in the spirit of adoption, crying Abba, Father, see that we witness for Jesus from the power of communion.

One thing I would observe, there is much, very much, called testimony that after all is not testimony-it is a word now much used. In true testimony our object should be, "by manifestation of the truth" both in word and life, "to commend ourselves to men's consciences in the sight of God."

If this be so, whatever our lot be with men we shall please God, and that is enough. Let us keep this in view; there may be great intellectual power at work on the things of God, and yet no testimony. God may use the intellect which originally is of Him, and then have we cause to bless Him for it; but let us see that it is so used; let us see that it is brought down in humbleness and teachableness under the power of God's Spirit—without this the greater the intellect the greater the power of evil.

It is perfectly fearful to see man's mere mind at work on God's Word, in proud independence—venturing on the depths which no human line can fathom—driving along in the assertion of a power in himself, without reference to that power without which no man knoweth the things of God; and hence the flippancy we see in some in speaking of the things of God, that manifests but the mere intimacy of the flesh. Where the Spirit is present there will be the holy fear, the meekness and lowliness which mark the unction of the Holy One, and come indeed with power to our souls: this will be the fruit of communion, and will manifest the walk with God.

One case to which testimony very specially belongs, and where we often see the power of communion, is in evangelizing. We may see one go out to preach the gospel, and make his statements with much truth and clearness, and yet there may be little or no testimony to the conscience, or acknowledgment of God in it. How is this? It is from the want of the manifestation of God. God is love; and if in communion with God you can show God's love to the soul of the poor sinner, there is testimony: that is what he wants. Man's mind may be amused with abstract truth, but the poor miserable sinner wants rest for his soul, and where can he get this but in the knowledge that "God is love," and the provision which that love hath made for him? and therefore the true power of an evangelist, his special qualification, should be a heart overflowing with the love of God, and telling out of its fullness of that love which is all to him; and therefore again you will find many and many a one, not with any high power of mind, or capability of great clearness of statement, acknowledged of God abundantly in His simple message of love, while others possessing these things are without testimony herein. Love is God's great instrument in effecting His work. "God is love;" and if we walk in love we walk in God; our joy is in love. Love is a holy, happy thing; we know it now in communion, we shall know it in perfection in the glory. Oh, how happy is the communion and confidence of love. This would be true testimony, the manifestation of love; this is what God would acknowledge, for it is of Himself; and this is the testimony that we should give in the world in all our conversation. There will be but little in bare abstract truth, except it be for our own opinions. This is not the way that God gives us truth; He clothes it in love, He manifests it in the gift of His only-begotten Son. "Herein is the love."

Another point in which we fail in testimony, is the making it to consist in things in which it properly does not consist, which are but circumstantial, with or without which the testimony may be. Thus in the little peculiarities, personal and domestic, for which many are jealous, and on which they lay great stress as testimony for God, their very eccentricities, and the exact order or disorder of their service, are matters of testimony with them, and consequently it is in general but a waste of strength. What is worse? There is often a proneness to judge others who cannot see with them in these things; but where there is walking with God, there will be but little of judgment, save on ourselves; in truth the judgment of open sin in the believer will be sorrowful work to us, as we are walking with God. As to these matters of private observance, let everyone be satisfied before God, and cease to judge his brother; let each one see that in what he does, as well as what he does not,

it is unto the Lord; but let us carefully watch herein against willfulness in our doings, that it is not our will or pleasure, but the good-will of our God that is set up. When we differ as to this, we have indeed cause to be humbled; but let us bear with one another, even as God with us, and be very watchful, as every difference opens a door to the enemy.

I notice these things to warn the saints against them, as not in the Spirit or after the example of our Lord and Master. What freedom from everything eccentric in Him His peculiarity was that alone of entire subjection to His Father's will.

The saint is called into liberty and not into bondage; the religion of the flesh genders to bondage. Let us stand in our blessed liberty, but watch that it is not made a cover for any evil or desire of the flesh in ourselves, or a stumbling-block to others. I can quite recognize the liberty which allows of a saint doing many things which I cannot do; we should in love watch that we offend not one another; but our liberty is not to be judged or regulated by each other's conscience, but by God's Word.

Again: I can value any little sacrifice that is made to the Lord, and not to the poor consistency of our own notions. I believe indeed that there is nothing, however little it be, which is done unto our God that will be lost; the cup of cold water shall have its reward. Man may forget, but "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love," and so forth. How gracious, how wonderfully gracious! that God, so to speak, should tax his own righteousness for the remembrance of our little doings, mixed up as they are with so much of self and unworthiness, but "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob." He accepts us in the beloved.

The remedy when we fail is in communion, for the remedy for every evil is with God; and in communion we abide with Him. Thence is the walk, and herein is our testimony; there will be power in our words and life—not a power of man, but the power of the unction of the Holy One.

We are instructed as to our inquiries into the will of the Lord, by the question of the apostles. Peter and Paul. Peter, in the mere inquisitiveness of his heart, and it may be in the anxiety for his friend, but without any respect for God's glory, asks, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" and he is met by the reproof, "What is that to thee? follow thou Me." Here is what is of practical moment to the disciple, "follow thou Me;" and on this should all his knowledge and attainment bear. When Paul, on the contrary, is struck to the ground on his journey to Damascus, what is his first word? "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Here is no inquisitiveness, and hence no reproof; here is the true and earnest desire to know the Lord's will, and consequently it is met with the gracious reply, "It shall be told thee what thou shalt do." And so it is virtually at this present day with ourselves. Though there be no manifestation, or audible voice as of old, yet is the same principle true to us. If our search after truth be merely to gratify the inquisitiveness of our mind; if it be in the wrong spirit that would lay everything under contribution to minister to our knowledge, not that we may follow the Lord more truly, but to feed the pride or inquisitiveness of our hearts, then shall we know the reproof of the Lord, in our souls we shall feel it, "What is that to thee?" There will be amid all the leanness within. But if we ask in trueness of heart, if our object be not in any way to minister to the flesh, but to know our Lord's will, that we may do it, assuredly "it shall be told us." Dispensations may change, but God does not change; and we shall ever find Him true to them that are true to Him. If in our walk we acknowledge Him, then He will acknowledge us; but if while His name be on our lips, some form of evil be in our hearts, what have we to expect but the rebuke of the Lord? To

man we may seem to gather, and we may gather something whereof to talk or make a fair show in the flesh, but we do not gather blessing to our own souls.

If we would walk with God amid the abounding evil, then must we be on our watch-tower against the deceitfulness of our hearts and the devices of the enemy; we must see that God be our object, that we set the Lord before us in all we put our hand to. Specially must we watch against the self-will that is native to our hearts, that leads us away from God, that would fight against Him; but a single act of self-will, if it was not for God's mercy, would forever exclude us from His presence, would lead us into the depths of misery and darkness. The subjection of a poor blind papist, evil as it is, is not so evil a thing as the assertion of right and self-will in those possessing knowledge, or making high pretensions to it. The one is superstitious, and this is bad enough; the other is rebellion, and this is worse. Who is it that has the knowledge of Satan? But it is knowledge in the rebellion of self-will against God.

In fine, let us walk with God; and that we do so, let us watch that our communion be not hindered; if it be, we have seen the remedy—the blood, the advocate—and let us renew it again in this provision which His love has made. This is in fact the very sum and substance of our religion, that we walk with God; this is the manifestation of our secret communion. Everything will be right with us in spirit while we do so; but unto this we need to walk circumspectly. How many things daily arise to hinder our walk? We must be sober, watchful, circumspect. This is hard work, and it is bitter to the flesh; yes, but the fruit will be sweet. When we mortify the flesh as we discover it, then is the mind subject to God, and then we make way for the Holy Spirit; but it is hard—true, everything good is hard—self-will has made it so; but our God has laid nothing upon us for which He does not supply the help. The cross is hard, but Jesus bore it before us; and as we now know the power of the cross, it is that we get above the self-will, that we get into the subjection which is the door of blessing. Self-will is the unholy root of all the evil, and there is no remedy for it but the cross.

If we feel these things, if we are made to groan under them, let us look to Jesus: see Him in full sympathy with human sorrow at the grave of Lazarus—"Jesus wept." Here is the opening of His heart to us, here He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but follow Him a little further, and mark His first words in resurrection, "Woman, why weepest thou?" It is now no longer weeping over human misery, but the drying up of those tears which human misery had caused to flow; self-will had brought forth its plentiful harvest of sin and sorrow; unto the woman He saith (Gen. 3), "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow," but now unto the woman, "Why weepest thou?" Sorrow hath taken the place of joy in this world, for self-will has come in, and death has followed it: but now the old things have passed away, it is no longer self-will, and sin, and death. One has been found to pass through this world always doing God's will, and this was the one to bear our sin, and sorrow, and death; and now it is the new thing, death hath given place to resurrection. "I am He that liveth, and was dead, and am alive for evermore." Here is the drying of the woman's tears, "Why weepest thou?" Oh, what a word of blessedness! oh, what a return of love, after all our self-will and rebellion!—"Why weepest thou?" The old things have passed away, death has given place unto life, and sorrow to joy, and the joy of the Lord is our strength. Here is our provision, our strength to walk with the Lord in holy communion—it is in the power of a new, a risen life—what do we want more, but more truth of heart, more faith to prove these things? Oh, may we know them, not only by the hearing of the ear, not as having thoughts about them, but in deep and happy exercise of

soul as taught by God's Spirit! The dearest saint when out of communion may be doing Satan's work; aye, more than an unconverted man. I have even felt more of difficulty in dealing with saints in the flesh than with the unconverted, in those points where they will have their way, or where one consideration or another will hinder their subjection to God.

Let us see, dear brethren, that there be no reserve, that in everything; self-will be brought down, whatever it may cost us. Could we but see what blessing it hinders, and what power it gives the enemy, it would, I believe, terrify us to think that it has any place, however little, in our hearts. If we walk out of communion, whatever show of service there may be (and in such cases there, is often doing, doing to try and satisfy the conscience), there is no true testimony for Him. It is in communion there is testimony-it is in communion that we can say in blessed consciousness of its truth, "We have the mind of Christ;" it is when in communion with God we can look down upon the world, and can afford to lose it, or be nothing in it; for in communion we know Jesus in the power of His resurrection. God give us more to prove these things, and day by day, as we pass along and work out His holy will, to rise in the power of the Spirit of Him "who was dead, but is alive again;" to be obedient, to what He has taught us, to be doers of His will and not of our own.

May we learn more earnestly to please God, more simply to walk with Him, and thus give testimony to the truth in our day and generation.

Obedience, the Saint's Liberty

The spirit of obedience is the great secret of all godliness. The spring of all evil from the beginning has been independence of will. Obedience is the only rightful state of the creature, or God would cease to be supreme—would cease to be God. Wherever there is independence, there there is always sin.

This rule, if remembered, would wonderfully help us in guiding our conduct.

There is no case whatever in which we ought to do our own will; for then we have not the capacity, either of judging rightly about our conduct or of bringing it before God. I may be called upon to act independently of the highest authority in the world, but it ought never to be on the principle that I am doing my own will.

The liberty of the saint is not license to do his own will. If anything could have taken away the liberty of the Lord Jesus, it would have been the hindering Him in being always obedient to the will of God. All that moves in the sphere of man's will is sin. Christianity pronounces the assertion of its exercise to be the principle of sin. We are sanctified unto obedience (1 Peter 1:2). The essence of sanctification is the having no will of our own. If I were as wise (so to speak) as Lucifer, and it ministered to my own will, all my wisdom would come to be folly. True slavery is the being enslaved by our own will; and true liberty consists in our having our own wills entirely set aside. When we are doing our own wills, self is our center.

The Lord Jesus "took upon Himself the form of a servant," and, "being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8). When man became a sinner, he ceased to be a servant, though he is, in sin and rebellion, the slave of a mightier rebel than himself. When we are sanctified, we are brought into the place of servants, as well as that of sons.

The spirit of Sonship just manifested itself in Jesus, in coming to do the Father's will. Satan sought to make His Sonship at variance with unqualified obedience to God; but the Lord Jesus would never do anything, from the beginning to the end of His life, but the Father's will.

In this chapter, the spirit of obedience is enforced towards those who rule in the church—"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves." (vs. 17) It is for our profit, in everything, to seek after this spirit. "They watch for your souls," says the Apostle, "as they that must give account." Those whom the Lord puts into service, He makes responsible to Himself. That is the real secret of all true service. It should not be right that guides, either those who rule, or those who obey. They are servants, and that is their responsibility. Woe unto them if they do not guide, direct, rebuke, and so forth; if they do not do it, "the Lord" will require it of them. On the other hand, those counseled become directly responsible to "the Lord" for obedience.

The great guardian principle of all conduct in the church of God is personal responsibility to "the Lord."

No guidance of another can ever come in between an individual's conscience and God. In popery, this individual responsibility to God is taken away. Those who are spoken of in this chapter, as having the rule in the church, had to "give account" of their own conduct, and not of souls which were committed to them. There is no such thing as giving an account of other peoples' souls; "every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). Individual responsibility always secures the maintenance of God's authority. If those who watched for their souls had been faithful in their service, they would not have to give account "with grief;" so far as they were concerned; but still, it might be very "unprofitable" for the others, if they acted disobediently.

Wherever the principle of obedience is not in our hearts, all is wrong, there is nothing but sin. The principle which actuates us in our conduct should never be, "I must do what I think right;" but, "I ought to obey God." (Acts 5:29)

The Apostle then says, "Pray for us for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly." (vs. 18) It is always the snare of those who are occupied with the things of God continually, not to have a "good conscience." No person is so liable to a fall, as one who is continually ministering the truth of God, if he be not careful to maintain a "good conscience." The continually talking about truth, and the being occupied about other people, has a tendency to harden the conscience. The Apostle does not say, 'Pray for us, for we are laboring hard and the like; but that which gives him confidence in asking their prayers is, that he has a "good conscience." We see the same principle spoken of in 1 Timothy 1:19, "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck." Where there is not diligence in seeking to maintain a "good conscience," Satan comes in and destroys confidence between the soul and God, or we get into false confidence. Where there is the sense of the presence of God, there is the spirit of lowly obedience. The moment that a person is very active in service, or has much knowledge and is put forward in any way in the church, there is the danger of not having a good conscience.

It is blessed to see the way in which, in verses 20, 21, the Apostle returns, after all his exercise and trial of spirit, to the thought of God's being "the God of peace." He was taken from them, and was in bondage and trial himself; he enters, moreover, into all the troubles of these saints, and is extremely anxious, evidently, about them; and yet he is able to turn quietly to God, as "the God of peace."

We are called unto peace. Paul closes his second epistle to the Thessalonians with "Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means." There is nothing that the soul of the believer is more brought to feel than that he has "need of patience" (Heb. 10:36); but if he is hindered by anything from finding God to be "the God of peace," if sorrow and trial hinder this, there is the will of the flesh at work. There cannot be the quiet doing of God's will, if the mind be troubled and fluttered. It is completely our privilege, to walk and to be settled in peace; to have no uneasiness with God, but to be quietly seeking His will. It is impossible to have holy clearness of mind, unless God be known as "the God of peace." When everything was removed out of God's sight but Christ, God was "the God of peace." Suppose then that I find out that I am an utterly worthless sinner, but see the Lord Jesus standing in the presence of God, I have perfect peace. This sense of peace becomes distracted when we are looking at the difficulties by the way; for, when the charge and care of anything rests on our minds, God ceases, practically, to be "the God

of peace.”

There are three steps.

1. The knowledge that God has “made peace through the blood of the cross” (Col. 1:20). This gives us “peace with God” (Rom. 5:1).
2. As it regards all our cares and troubles, the promise is, that, if we cast them on God, “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (See Phil. 4:6,7) God burdens Himself about everything for us, yet He is never disturbed or troubled, and, it is said, that His peace shall “keep our hearts and minds.” If Jesus walked on the troubled sea, He was just as much at peace, as ever; He was far above the waves and billows.
3. There is a further step, namely, He, who is “the God of peace,” being with us, and working in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure (See verses 20-21). The holy power of God is here described as keeping the soul in those things which are well pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ.

There was war—war with Satan, and in our own consciences. That met its crisis on the cross of the Lord Jesus. The moment that He was raised from the dead, God was made known, fully, as “the God of peace.” He could not leave His Son in the grave; the whole power of the enemy was exercised to its fullest extent; and God brought the Lord Jesus into the place of peace, and us, also, who believe on Him, and became nothing less than “the God of peace.”

He is “the God of peace,” both as regards our sins, and as regards our circumstances. But it is only in His presence that there is settled peace. The moment we get into human thoughts and reasonings about circumstances, we get troubled. Not only has peace been made for us by the atonement, but it rests upon the power of Him who raised up Jesus again from the dead; and therefore we know Him as “the God of peace.”

The blessing of the saint does not depend upon the old covenant, to which man was a party, and which might, therefore, fail; but upon that God, who, through all the trouble and the power of Satan, “brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,” and thus secured “eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12) All that God Himself had pronounced as to judgment against sin, and all the wicked power of Satan, rested on Jesus, on the cross; and God Himself has raised Him from the dead. Here, then, we have full comfort and confidence of soul. “Nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,” argues faith (see Rom. 8:31-39), “for, when all our sins had been laid upon Jesus, God in mighty power, brought again from the dead that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.” The blood was as much the proof and witness of the love of God to the sinner, as it was, of the justice and majesty of God against sin. This covenant is founded on the truth and holiness of the eternal God having been fully met, and answered, in the cross of the Lord Jesus. His precious blood has met every claim of God. If God be not “the God of peace,” He must be asserting the insufficiency of the blood of His dear Son. And this, we know, is impossible. God rests in it as a sweet savor.

Then, as to the effect of all this on the life of the saint, the knowledge of it produces fellowship with God, and delight in doing His will. He “works in us,” as it is said here, “that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.”

The only thing that ought to make any hesitation in the saint's mind about departing to be with Christ, is the doing God's will here. We may suppose such an one thinking of the joy of being with Christ, and then being arrested by the desire of doing God's will here. (See Phil. 1:20-25) That assumes confidence in God, as "the God of peace," and confidence in His sustaining power whilst here. If the soul is laboring in the turmoil of its own mind, it cannot have the blessing of knowing God as "the God of peace."

The flesh is so easily aroused, that there is often the need of the word of exhortation, "I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation." (vs. 22) The spirit of obedience is the only spirit of holiness.

The Lord give us grace to walk in His ways.

The Rejected Man

It is a good thing, seeing the great levity of our hearts, that we should, all of us, sometimes look at our origin, at what we were, and at the actual corruption of the stock whence we are derived. Thus shall we see what God has done, and the revelation He has made of Himself, in what we are.

The Israelite was instructed to remember the day that he came out of Egypt all the days of his life (Deut. 16:2); and the confession made by him, when presenting his basket of the first-fruits of the land, was this, "A Syrian ready to perish was [not I, but] my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: and the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: and when we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression: and the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: and He hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey" (Deut. 26:5-10).

Our first father hath sinned. Thus the fountain was defiled. Evil has abounded, and sin has taken its free, full course.

We learn, in all this scene in the garden, what has distorted the natural conscience, in circumstances so plain, that we can say what they are. Now, it is hard to learn what we are, because that which has made us sinners in heart, has made us sinners in understanding also. As the conscience is affected and renewed by the Holy Spirit, so is it perverted by sin. There may be a false standard of good and evil, and thus blindness through that (as a law of darkness), as well as corruption of heart. Paul says, "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, which thing I also did," and so forth (Acts 26:9-11). And the time was to come, the Lord forewarns, when those that killed the disciples would "think they did God service" (John 16:2).

The book of Genesis gives us, in the first dealings of God with man, the first grand elements of truth with exceeding freshness and energy.

All that was said by Satan to Eve, except, "Ye shall not surely die," (vs. 4) was, in a certain sense true. That was not true. And this is the way he deceives. He does not present evil in its own hideous garb; in a plausible insinuating manner. He can tell truth, if it subserve sin—much attractive truth, so that he win attention by it; but he never uses it to lead to obedience. Both that which was spoken by Adam and Eve, and that which was spoken by Satan, shows the exceeding deceitfulness of sin. Where God has not His place in the soul, in the assertion of our independence, our weakness and inconsistency open the way to the guile of the enemy, and the mind does not see its departure from truth. "I said in my haste, all men are liars." (Psa. 116:11) So again, Micah 7 (where there is every kind of corruption), "The best of them is as a briar: the most upright is as a thorn hedge Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the

doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom,” and so forth. They had departed from God. To learn what sin is to any purpose, is to learn the source from which we have departed. We have departed from God.

Notice, the first thing introduced here, is the subtlety of Satan. It was not flagrant, open sin and wickedness, when Eve replied to it; it is not, ‘I am the devil come to deceive you;’ he puts the present pleasantness of the thing, and with subtlety inquires, “Yea hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” The Holy Spirit does not say, The devil was wicked, but He says, “Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said into the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”

The woman entered into conversation with him, and she was clean gone.

This questioning what God had done, was a calling in question of His goodness and love, just the temptation to mistrust God. ‘Hath God said so and so?’ is, in effect, ‘Well do not believe Him, He has kept back something worth the having.’ The moment Eve entered into the discussion, and parleyed with the serpent, God was altogether gone from her; and all was gone.

She ought to have said, ‘Why ask me? Surely He hath done whatsoever it hath pleased Him to do.’ A right mind would have rejected the temptation at once; a true heart would have fallen back upon God. “He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18). Satan “touched” Eve. He had got his question into her mind and she had departed from her strength, for God had lost His place in her soul. When Eve began questioning God’s goodness and answering Satan’s question, she was putting herself above God, and judging God, and thus putting herself into the hands of Satan. Had Eve been worshipping God, Satan could not have “touched” her; but, judging God, she took the place of independence, and thus Satan had power over her, and, being wiser than she, he deceived her.

We cannot judge God’s ways without judging God; we may adore Him in His ways, but the moment we, judge or question that which He has revealed, we make ourselves gods, and put God in the place of the creature, as subject to us. This brings our souls under the power of every one that is more clever than ourselves; we are in their hands, and they can do what they please with us. Now the devil is more clever than we are (the woman was no match for him), therefore we ought to keep God ever in His place of God in our souls, lest Satan should set us judging God Himself. If God be displaced, we get into the place of those who are irresponsible, and, as creatures, become the prey of any more cunning than ourselves.

The soul, when first awakened, finds its place before God. It may not, all at once, have peace or joy; but this, at any rate, it learns; to submit to God, and to be willing to be taken up anyhow, so that God will but have it at all. Now, does God keep this, His place, in our souls? because it is the constant aim of Satan, to slip in between God and our souls. In order to meet Satan, we must get into the place of entire responsibility to God. God did not hold His place in Eve’s mind or she would not have been questioning His love, and judging Him; there was the want of submission. And may it not be that there is the want of submission in us, that our minds are questioning and judging and not submitting to God’s righteousness?

Notice, also, that Eve was in full recognition of God’s command. “And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the

midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (vss. 2-3). There was the clear and definite knowledge of what God had said to her. So with ourselves. We have all heard about God and about his way of salvation; yes, many of us have before our minds much of scriptural knowledge. But this did not put Eve beyond the power of Satan. Neither will it us; it may, only the more immediately, put us into the hands of Satan. We all know what God has said about our sins (we may not believe it, perhaps, that is another thing), that "there is none righteous, no not one;" we all know that Christ came to save the lost; but then, if we do not know that we are lost, this knowledge, remaining without faith, does not take us out of the hands of Satan, but really gives Satan power over us. We must have delivering power from God, before we can be out of Satan's power. We must have conviction of sin, before we are off the ground of sin.

The very moment that Satan got Eve to listen to one breath of his suggestions, that moment he took God's place in her soul. You cannot suppose she would have parleyed with the devil, and listened to him, as to somebody speaking to her as her friend, if she had not had confidence in him. So that she did trust in Satan. The truth is, she held not with God, but with Satan. She looked upon Satan as a better friend than God.

Eve was not content. Now the enemy of our souls may not be met by the simplicity of truth, because of the want of simplicity of our minds. Her reply was truth, but it was truth not held in communion with God. She thought God had kept back something that was competent to make her happy. It was not a settled thing with her, that God knew, and had provided all that was needed for her happiness. And have we no desires for anything not actually given to us? There was distrust that God had power in Himself to make her happy, and, therefore, she was desiring, and seeking, it somewhere else. This was the beginning of it all. This led to man's willingly subjecting himself to the dominion of Satan. And now we see the world bent on providing itself with pleasures apart from God.

And how is it with you, dear friends? Let me ask, is this your case? Are you wanting something that God will not allow you to have? Man naturally does not believe that God is competent to make him happy, and, therefore, he desires the things of the world, supposing that they can make him happy. This, to the end, is the subtle state of the flesh, even in God's children, not trusting God to make it happy. It is a mercy, in a certain sense, that man must earn his bread with the sweat of his brow (for God is not mocked; and when he said, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, and so forth," what a store of accompanying sorrow and toil came in, as the result of man's disobedience), since that prevents the giving up of our poor race to the unbounded gratification of their desires away from God.

When the soul is distressed or cast down, that is not in itself sin. But sin comes in when there is distrust of God. Satan gets entrance for his full power in the soul, the moment there is a shade of distrust of God. God will be trusted in the confidence of His love. Eve had the highest place in the world; she was surrounded by blessing, and possessed of actual happiness (man's state in Eden was one of actual happiness, though not of spiritual power such as the saints now have); but the very moment she felt distrust in God's competency to make her happy, it was all gone. Distrust in God is the positive condition of every natural man; all are seeking their happiness in something or other, if they are not trusting in God to make them happy. It is a solemn thought that one half of the world is employed in providing means of pleasure for the other half.

Satan was trusted by Eve. If God is not trusted, Satan most certainly will be. Man, standing alone in his independence, is not independent, but the slave of every man, the slave of sin and Satan. Like Eve, he trusts Satan rather than God. She hoped, on his authority, that there was a doubt about the fulfillment of God's threatenings. God had said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (chap. 2:17)-he said, "Ye shall not surely die," impugning the truth of God's Word. And so he says now. Men say in their hearts that sin will not bear the consequences God has said it will—"the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). No man could go on if he believed what God said, instead of believing Satan. The happiness of man is faith in Satan's lie in this respect. They are proceeding in the same course, listening to that old detected lie of Satan. But God has said, "You shall surely die," and there is an end of all pleasure. So that all the devil can do is to hide the consequences of sin. He could not keep men going on, if he did not keep out of their sight that truth, "Ye shall surely die." It is not, that the terror of it would change their hearts; but, if they did really believe it, they would not have one happy day here. Where is the earthly happiness these words will not blast—"Ye shall surely die?" But men believe what Satan says, and disbelieve what God says. "The lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life," have present enjoyment connected with them-man rushes to take the bait, willingly selling himself to Satan, though, in so doing, he is morally conscious that he is not acting according to the commandments of God. Observe, I am not here speaking of gross sin, but of disbelief in God Himself.

Let us see the next step. God has lost His character in the heart of man; all man's confidence in God is gone; and Satan the liar and arch-deceiver is believed. Now, the devil can say whatever he likes, he having the confidence of the heart, instead of God.—"God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (vs. 5). He began by insinuating that God knew the fruit would make her happy, but grudged to give it; then, he questioned the truthfulness of God; now, he adds, "ye shall be as gods," tempting man to assume the privileges of God Himself.

How entirely had Eve forgotten every thought of God! Her soul should have recoiled with horror from the proposition. "What, I account myself as God! I take this glory to myself, and cast off God! Am I to set about being a thief—to take from God His glory, and become like Him—I, a creature, and indebted to Him for everything!" How different the way of Him, who, "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant!" and so forth. (Phil. 2:6) But, when we are once away from God, we have no spiritual sense of sin at all. Eve had no sense of the sin of leaving God out, and making herself the center. And this is ever the result of exalting man, of looking at God's ways through man's telescope. Dependence is true exaltation in a creature, when the object of it is right. It looks up, and is exalted above itself. See David (Psa. 8), the greatest philosopher. But Eve was so willing to get rid of God, she sought by robbery to make herself equal with God. She may not have known the extent of the presumption of her confidence in Satan's lie: but the secret of it all was this, that she had forgotten God, and thought only of herself-she had got self as a center, and God was not in all her thoughts. When God is not our center, all that by which we can exalt ourselves becomes the motive and principle of our hearts.

"The man is become as one of us, knowing good and evil." This is God's account of fallen man; Satan never deceives by a mere abstract lie. But, supposing Eve could have known that it was the truth, it would have been only an added deception, because it would not have been the truth in

power in the conscience. Her heart having departed from God, her then seeing it to be truth would only have added to her darkness. I am doubly blind if the truth does not lead my heart towards God, and put me under God.

Eve goes on in the way of sin. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat" -in positive and known disobedience to God's command, acting on the present enjoyment, without any regard to consequences. And now she becomes the active instrument of sin— "and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (vs. 6). The man was not deceived (1 Tim. 2:14), but more shame to him in following the woman (who was deceived) contrary to the truth of God. Natural affection often becomes the means of drawing the heart away from God.

"And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked: and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (vs. 7). Here we find conscience at work; not conscience towards God, but that of shame, the conscience that drove out the accusers of the adulterous woman (John 8). The guilty pair have the sense of the shame of their nakedness, and they seek to hide it the one from the other. The divine work in enlightening the conscience gives a man to see the guilt of sin, the exceeding sinfulness of sin; but sin has its shame, as well as its guilt, and the natural conscience always seeks to hide the shame of its sin with some fig-leaf covering.

This is no proof of conversion. It is only the main proof that man has got into a bad conscience and cannot get out of it. Adam and Eve dare not look at each other, nor yet to God. They cannot bear the condition they have got into, and they cannot change it, therefore they hide it. But do not mistake this for repentance. Shame merely drives them to hide from, and excuse themselves to, God. And so with ourselves. As long as the shame of sin continues, we try to hide it, to get away from it, but it only drives us further and further from God. It is not a divinely-taught conscience, because we are more concerned about the shame before men, than the sinfulness before God. Until God has the place which man now occupies in our hearts, there is no conversion, the soul is not looking to God. We may be able to reason about the tender love and grace of God, but our sense of the guilt of sin should ever be deeper than that of its shame. When the conscience is before God, guilt brings sorrow, and yet we can, as sinners, reckon upon the love and kindness of God.

And now the dreadful moment arrives when they hear the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. "And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (vs. 8).

The Lord comes not with a fiery sword, in judgment, as yet; but still He comes as an "adversary," in some wise.

Thus Jesus came seeking an account of the fruit produced. "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him." Christ was saying, "I am yet in the way with you, this is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation." The ax was laid to the root of the tree (Luke 3:9), therefore the only thing to be done, was to agree with Him who had the right against them, "lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou

be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.”

“And the Lord called unto Adam, and said unto him, ‘Where art thou?’ (vs. 9) How came you not to be with Me?” “Enoch walked with God.” (Gen. vs. 22) God had no occasion to say to him, ‘Where art thou?’

“And he (Adam) said, ‘I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’” (vs. 10) If the Lord were here, those who are ignorant of His grace would go out one by one, like the accusers of the poor adulterous woman. When Christ spoke to their conscience in those words, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,” they walked out from His presence one by one (not all together, lest it should be noticed that they were sinners). They were careful of their character before men, but not before God. Had they been willing to confess their sin and to submit themselves to God’s righteousness, they would have staid.

The Lord used no reproach to those Pharisees, but fixed the sin on their consciences. So God merely says here to Adam, How comes it that you are not with me? And how comes it, dear friends, that you have found bitterness and sorrow in the world You will say, perhaps, it is because sin is in the world, but it is sin you have got into. You talk of a good conscience—the best conscience of a sinner only leads him to get as far away as he can from the presence of God. Do you call it a good conscience here in Adam, getting away from God, and then judging, for himself, about his state “I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself.” And it is thus even with the saint, if he gets into sin; there is darkness in the sin, and fear in the conscience after the sin; and when he is convinced he must get back again into the presence of God and there is not unreserved confession, he seeks to excuse himself. You will always find conscience, where the heart is wrong, tends to the invention of deceit. What did Adam say? I am guilty, pardon me, O Lord? No, he practices deceit.

“And He (the Lord) said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast, thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, [not my wife—in seeking to excuse himself, he casts the blame in reality upon God—It was Thou who gavest me this woman, and] she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (vss. 11-12).

God takes no notice of this. He turns to the woman. “And the Lord said, What is this that thou hast done?”

Eve now learns her lesson from Adam, as Adam had learned his of her before—“And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.” (vs. 13)

And this is the truth, but conscience is not before God.

God, when he comes to deal with them about their sin, at once takes them up on the ground of their own excuses. “And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee,” “and so forth (vs. 17-19). The very excuse he gave was the very height of sin, and the very thing by which God condemned him. So also with the woman Out

of their own mouths were they judged. The plea of temptation was only, in fact, saying that they preferred their own lusts to God, that they listened to the devil's word more than to God's commandments.

Still God says nothing about this, at first. But what does He? He brings in grace. When He does take up the question, the man had already departed from Him. As a sinner, he had departed from Him, before God came to judge him for the sin-and the effect of conscience is to drive away from God. Why does the infidel delight in infidelity? Because he dislikes God. God therefore takes up man in grace, and brings in promise. But He pronounces judgment upon what they have done. He does not take up grace, and pass lightly over sin. Man always begins with what he will do, but God begins with what he has done. The truth always looks at what I am in the sight of God.

Having traced up the evil to its source, God goes at once to the serpent, as the author of it, but, in pronouncing sentence, He deals with Adam as lost (already the condition of man was that he was lost: God comes to no question about goodness, and there is no promise made to Adam, as in the flesh), and sets up the Second Adam. "And the Lord said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (vss. 14-15).

There is where grace comes in. There is the root of the evil, and there is the sole remedy to set aside what man and the devil had done. He sets up the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, "the seed of the woman," as the bruiser of the serpent's head. What is the meaning of the term "probation," as applied to our present state? "To save the lost," settles that. Grace brings out man's misery and sin in the presence of God, and brings Christ in. Man is under the power of Satan decent or indecent. The decent, moral, unconverted man is only the more deceived, but the decent slave of Satan, God takes up the full power of the evil, and sets up His power for remedy in the Lord Jesus Christ. Man is not mended in his condition. God deals with him as already set aside and lost, and, without any proposition of mending the evil, brings in and sets up the Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, as the Destroyer of the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8)

And where was He to be found? Where does God bring in His glory? The grand fact is that it is "the seed of the woman." The spring of the evil was in the woman, and out of her was to come the deliverer; there is the glory of divine grace. Out of the eater cometh; forth meat, and out of the strong, sweetness. (Judg. 14:14) The poor wretched woman was to give birth to the Savior of the world. God does not slur over sin, but brings out all its vileness, and sets up Christ as the Second Adam in the very place of sin: His birth-place was in the death that sin had brought into the world. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin had reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5:20-21)

And mark the perfect contrast of the obedience of Christ! Not as the first Adam (from the place of the creature exalting Himself to be as God), He, from a high place, takes a low. "Being in the form of God, He thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the

cross.” (Phil. 2:6-8) He lays not the burden on the weak one, but bears her sin. Instead of saying, “The woman that thou gavest me,” and so forth. (vs. 12) He loved the church, and gave Himself for it, took her sins upon Himself, and came into the depths of her sins. “He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all things,” and so forth. (Eph. 4:10), that in His blessed grace the greatest, the chief of sinners, might be able to find a resting-place, not in their own wretched excuses, but in His divine love.

The Accepted Man

There are two ways in which we may approach the judgment of man. We may judge of where man is (of the condition in which he is looked at by God), by taking the Word of God and applying it to the condition of man in himself, to his state as an actual sinner. Thus, for instance, in Genesis 3, in the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden, we see the character of evil against God Himself; in Genesis 4, in Cain's sin the character of evil against man's neighbor. Here, then, is direct opposition to the requirement of God, in both its parts. (Luke 10:27)

But there is another thing of which Scripture is full—THE ACCEPTED MAN, the Lord Jesus. We get in Him a precious, living, divine picture of what that Man is whom God does accept, of the Man after God's own heart.

If we find in Christ the accepted Man, whatever any other man's thoughts may be about himself, it is evident he is not this, because he is not like Christ (I speak not now as to divine power) In the glory, Christ is the accepted and the acceptable Man before God. As the pattern for the saint, He is the exhibitor not of divine power in grace toward man, but of manhood such as God can accept. Now no man can, at any rate lay claim to being this. The unconverted man, though he cannot comprehend the Man after God's own heart, can plainly see he is not this. A blind man may not be able to tell what I mean, when I speak to him about light and color, because he has no perception of these things, he is blind; but he knows that the things I am talking about, he lacks the knowledge of; so, when Christ is spoken of, the natural man is in a state of forgetfulness, or rather ignorance, as to who and what Christ is (whether looked at in relation, to God, or to the sinner) and, therefore, as to the real dissimilarity between himself and Christ; but he is perfectly aware that there are things which others know about Christ that he does not know. He may say he knows them, but he does not; and, moreover, he must be conscious that he does not know that which he professes to know. The blind man may hear me speak, or be listening to sweet music, and, in a certain sense, lose nothing through his blindness (in the present enjoyment of what he hears, he may forget his inability to see); but let him attempt to walk across the room towards me, and he will be reminded of it, for, unless one lead him, he will run up against that which stands in his way. The blind man may get used to his blindness. So with the sinner. When the natural man hears the Word of God read, or when Christ is spoken of, he is blind, ignorant (as was said before) of who and what Christ is; but he is ignorant of the depth of his ignorance; his mind is so occupied with other things, that he does not think about it, and he gets used to his ignorance. When the truth is put before him, he cannot see it; yet he must know that he knows nothing about it. If he looks into the Scriptures, he does not apprehend Him, of whom they speak. He is entirely ignorant of the motives that actuated Christ in His path through this world; yet, if his attention be at all called to what Christ was, he must have the consciousness that he is not like that, that he is not and has not the thing spoken of.

If it be true that this is the acceptable Man, the Man in whom God delights, acceptable in His spirit, and ways, and character, it must be evident to the natural man that he cannot be. He may have many amiable qualities (in nature there is much that is engaging and beautiful, we see it even in

the animals) but nothing that is acceptable to God. Morally, we do not find one single motive that governed Christ, governing man, as man. It is evident, therefore, that, if Christ's were acceptable motives, his are not.

Now, being accepted is a great thing. It is impossible to think of a day of blessing, or of a day of judgment, without immediately having thoughts arise in the soul, as to how it will be with us, whether we shall stand accepted in that day, whether we shall escape that judgment.

A man of the world must own that he has nothing in common with Christ, except, indeed, that he is a man and Christ was a man; he eats, drinks, sleeps; and Christ, ate, drank, slept; but there is sin in every man, and Christ was "without sin"—sin in the place of godliness, malice in the place of love. As regards the moral motives of the soul, he has not any of Christ's, and Christ had not one of his. The world would cease, if its conduct were regulated by the motives which actuated Christ; it could not go on an hour. There may be the outward imitation of that which was found in Christ, but God is not mocked. "But," it may be said, and many do say it, "God does not expect us to be like Christ in everything." Now the fact is God does expect us to be like Christ. It is impossible for God to accept one thing as that which is agreeable to Himself and then accept or be satisfied with the directly opposite. If the man of the world is the very opposite of what Christ was, God cannot accept him. He cannot deny Himself.

We shall see how God does bring into the very same place as Christ those who are accepted in Him. You cannot have a third man; you must either have the place of the first man, rejected, turned out into the world, in the place of ruin, or that of the second Man, accepted, brought out of the world as God. There is no third man offering an indefinite acceptance, in some unknown condition.

What, then, is the Christian? We read here of two things as characterizing him:—he is an "epistle of Christ"—he has "liberty."

What is the "liberty?" You will find this a characteristic of man, as man, he has not liberty with God, and (though he has not liberty from Satan) he has liberty with Satan. He is afraid of God; but he is not afraid of Satan. He would not like to be with Satan in hell, it is true, he is horrified at the thought of that; but he is not horrified at walking with him every day. He is at liberty with Satan, walking at his ease with him in the earth; but of walking with God he has a perfect terror. Now do you, find yourselves at liberty with God?—I know, that, in heaven, by and bye, you would like to be with God; but do you, covet this nearness now? that is the question,—do you feel at home with God? would you like Him to take you, just such as you are? Taking you just such as you are, could you trust yourselves with God? You hope, perhaps, that when the day of judgment comes, all will be well with you, you have no thought but that you will be able to stand in the judgment then; but if God were about to take you, just such as you are at this moment, is there not something you would be afraid of?

What is there so terrible in thinking about God, that you should be afraid of God, that you would not like to trust God with your present condition? -you are not afraid to trust Satan. Satan is "the god" (2 Cor. 4:4) and "the prince" (John 12:31;14:30) "of this world," yet men are not afraid of making their way through a world, where the Lord tells His disciples to have their loins girded about, and their lamps burning, to watch and pray lest they enter into temptation, to be armed at all

points. Men are not afraid there. Is not this strange? In Satan's world they are at ease; but with God they are not at ease. They go readily into places of temptation, where Christ is sure not to be; and into the place where Christ could honor God, they are ill at ease. They go to seek their pleasures where Christ could not have found His; and they are not afraid of Satan, though they know he is there. They are afraid where the light is; but they are not afraid of the darkness. Darkness is their element, light their fear. Now that is a terrible thing! "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all;" Satan is the prince of "the rulers of the darkness of this world" (Eph. 6:12), "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience," and so forth. (Eph. 2:2-3)

Man can compare himself with the reprobate sinner, and take credit in his own eyes for the difference between himself and the sinner, when God is not in the conscience; but he puts away the judgment of God concerning himself, he never compares himself with Christ, "neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds be reproved." (John 3:20-21) Now let us look at Christ, as to this judgment of man about himself. We find Christ scorning what man delights in, passing by those who could thus compare themselves amongst themselves, and becoming the friend of the profligate and the abandoned. When he met with a publican, or a person of bad character, making no pretense to be anything but a sinner, He was at home with the sinner. Of such were His companions. He came in grace to sinners, as sinners. He saw into the heart, and therefore detected the hollowness of all man's pretended righteousness. He did not come from heaven to this earth to look for righteousness; that is the last thing He would have taken the journey for; He came to seek sinners.

Again, you read a person's character in his letter. Now the Christian is Christ's letter to the world. In verse 3, the Apostle speaks of him as "the epistle of Christ," written by the Spirit of the living God in the fleshy tables of the heart, and contrasts him with the law written on tables of stone. A Christian is, therefore, a person upon whose heart the Spirit of God has engraved Christ, just as truly as God wrote and engraved the law upon the tables of stone, so that the world may read Christ in the man, as an Israelite might read the law on the stones. Now, how far can we, according to this definition, call ourselves Christians? We come short, I doubt not, we have blotted the letter; but I speak of the thing in principle.

Oh the folly of man! he has taken for granted, from the Scriptures, that there is a heaven, and then set out about getting to that heaven his own way. How does he know that there is a heaven at all to go to—it is impossible that he should know it except upon the authority of God. 'I learn it from the Scriptures,' he says; 'It is in the Scriptures and therefore it must be true'—yes, doubtless, it is in the Scriptures; but, having taken for granted just that, he does not go to God to know who are to be there, or how he is to get there.

The very idea, floating as it is, he possesses of heaven, renders the assumption of his being there less pardonable than would have been his utter ignorance about it. A man would be less wrong, supposing he did not know anything about a regal palace, a savage fit only for the woods, than a person who knew what the palace was, and had some idea of the requirements of the place, and yet thought to go and live there. The unconverted man acts and thinks more apart from God in thinking he ought to go to heaven, than if he thought there was no such place at all; he is expecting to get into the presence of a Holy God, in a state of sin.

One thing impressed my own mind most peculiarly, when the Lord was first opening my eyes,-I never found Christ doing a single thing for Himself. Here is an immense principle. There was not one act in all Christ's life, done to serve or to please Himself. An unbroken stream of blessed, perfect, unfailing love flowed from Him, no matter what the contradiction of sinners, one amazing and unwavering testimony of love, and sympathy, and help, but it was ever others, and not Himself, that were comforted, and nothing could weary it, nothing turn it aside. Now the world's whole principle is self-doing well for itself. (Psa. 49:18) Men know that it is upon the energy of selfishness they have to depend. Everyone knows this that knows anything at all of the world. Without it, the world could not go on. What is the world's honor? self. What is wealth? self. What is advancement in the world? self. They are but so many forms of the same thing; the principle that animates the individual man in each, is the spirit of self-seeking. The business of the world is the seeking of self, and the pleasures of the world are selfish pleasures. They are troublesome pleasures, too; for we cannot escape from a world where God has said, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground," and so forth. Toil for self is irksome; but suppose a man finds out at length, that the busy seeking of self is trouble and weariness, and, having procured the means of living without it, gives it up, what then? He just adopts another form of the same spirit of self, and turns to selfish ease.

I am not now speaking of vice and gross sin (of course, everyone will allow that to be opposite to the Spirit of Christ); but of the whole course of the world. Take the world's decent, moral man, and is he an "epistle of Christ?" Is there in him a single motive like Christ's? He may do the same things; he may be a carpenter, as Christ was (Mark 6:3); but he has not one thought in common with Christ. As to the outside, the world goes on with its religion and its philanthropy; it does good, builds its hospitals, feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and the like, but its inward springs of action are not Christ's. Every motive that governed Christ all the way along is not that which governs men; and the motives which keep the world going are not those which were found in Christ at all.

The infidel owns Christ's moral beauty, and selfishness can take pleasure in unselfishness; but the Christian is to "put on Christ." He went about doing good all the day long; there was not a moment but He was ready as the servant in grace of the need of others. And do not let us suppose that this cost Him nothing. He had not where to lay His head; He hungered, and was wearied; and when He sat down, where was it? under the scorching sun, at the well's mouth, whilst His disciples went into the city to buy bread. And what then? He was as ready for the poor vile sinner who came to Him, as if He had not hungered, neither was faint and weary, (John 4), He was never at ease. He was in all the trials and troubles that man is in, as the consequences of sin, and see how He walked. He made bread for others; but He would not touch a stone to turn it into bread for Himself. As to the moral motives of the soul, the man of the world has no one principle in common with Christ. If, then, the world is to read the character of Christ, it is evident that cannot be read in him; he is not a Christian; he is not in the road to heaven at all, and every step he takes, only conducts him further and further from the object in view. When a man is in a wrong road, the further he goes in it, the more he is astray.

There is another terrible thing: we find men agreeing to take the commandments of God as their rule and guide, as Christ took them. "We take His directions," they say, "all that God says about what we ought to be, and what we ought to do, we are not going our own way." Well, granted; but

you must take the law, such as it is, and with its consequences. If man says, I accept the law to be judged by, I take this as my guide, he makes himself the responsible party, that is, he has to answer for himself. And mark how God began with the law. What does the law say about him? It says, he is “cursed” already. This law that he is taking to get to heaven by, is the very thing that pronounces judgment against him—“cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10). Suppose I bring a right and true measure to a man who is in the habit of using a wrong measure, what do I do it for? Not to make him honest, but to prove his dishonesty. It is in vain for him to say, I will change my character, the thing is already done. The question is, has he a character and he is proved to be a dishonest man. Now the law was given “that the offense might abound” (Rom. 5:20). The right, perfect, holy law of God, was given as a rule; but if that rule be given to a sinner who cannot keep it, and if it be applied with all the searching power of the holiness of God, he is a judged person, and brought in under its curse. He hopes, perhaps, to be better; he has some vague thoughts about the mercy of God; but it is no use to talk about what he will be, judgment is already pronounced against him.

But more than this, as a matter of fact, the law tells man, not so much what he is to do, as what he is not to do. If we look at the ten commandments, we shall find, that they do not tell him to do anything, except to honor his father and his mother. That is the only positive precept. All the rest are, Thou shalt not do this, and thou shalt not do that.’ How comes it, then, that such a form is employed? This of itself is a sufficient proof of evil tendencies in those addressed. Men care not to make laws for a country to prohibit that which nobody thinks of doing; and so God’s law forbids people to do certain things because they have a tendency to do those very things; it touches the motives and dispositions of men’s hearts as they are known by God.

The law is given, most surely, as a rule; but it is given to a sinner who already needs amendment. The first thing it does, therefore, is to prove sin, condemning the inward disposition, as well as the outward evil. Paul’s experience of it (Rom. 7) is proof enough of this. He could say he was pure, so far as concerned outward compliance with its requirements, “touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless.” (Phil. 3:6) “Alive, without the law once,” “when the commandment came, sin revived,” and he “died.” “I had not known sin,” he says, “but by the law, for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet; but sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence; for without the law sin was dead.” “When the commandment came,” he found he was a condemned sinner. The law being the righteous demand of God from man, and applying itself to those who are already sinners, must; necessarily, work condemnation and death. It is “the ministration of death” (vs. 7), and of “condemnation” (vs. 9).

But, again, there are not only wrong motives in man, but a very strong, independent will. Man likes to have his own way. Now, what is the effect of putting anything in the way of a person, who wants to go his own road? That he will push it out of the way, if he can. Thus, the will of man, if the man be resting on the law, as such, and yet liking to have his own way in a single thing, proves him to be a breaker of all the commandments. The will of the man being contrary to God, if opposed, would push aside the whole law. This is what is meant by “whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all,” and so forth. (James 2:10,11) The authority of God is attached to His law; and therefore, if, when the authority of God, meets the lust of man, he is guilty of the breach of that law in one thing, he has overthrown the claim of the authority of God,

and, thus, broken the whole law. If he commit not adultery, yet if he kill, he sets aside the authority of Him who made the law that says “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” for He that said, “Do not commit adultery,” said also, “Do not kill.” Suppose you had forbidden your child to do three things, and he was not disposed to do two of the three, or lacked the opportunity, would his not having done two of these three things make you hold him guiltless? No; you would say that he was not disposed to do them, or he would have done them, had he found the occasion. Having set aside your authority in the one instance, your authority was not his restraint.

‘How hard it is,’ you may be ready to say, ‘that man, when a sinner, should have a law given him to keep which he cannot keep, and which, therefore, after all, instead of helping him, only works death and condemnation.’ These are man’s thoughts and not God’s. God never intended to save man by the law, that was not His purpose in giving it; He never meant to save any other way than by Christ. Bounds were set about the mount (Ex. 19:12,13)—it is a barrier from God; and Moses required to have a vail put on his face when he spoke to the people. (Ex. 34:33-35)

People have taken heaven out of the Scriptures, and then they have taken their own way to it. But they are trying to go to heaven by the very thing God has given as the ministration of death and condemnation; and they expect to get there by the very thing God says pronounces them “cursed.”

The first principle of Christianity, whilst recognizing in the most solemn manner man’s responsibility to answer for himself, puts the Christian on other, and entirely different, ground. This is the first principle and basis of all Christian truth, that there is a Mediator, a third person, between man and God. Another has implicated himself, and, because man could not come to God, has taken up the cause of man, and suffered to bring him to God. (1 Peter 3:18)

Two things (already noticed) are brought out here, as the result of this. “Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,” the liberty of grace. And we become the “epistles of Christ” (blotted ones, no doubt, in ourselves, but we are not epistles of ourselves), transcripts of Christ “written with the Spirit of the living God” (2 Cor. 3:1-3). This we are, not merely we ought to be. Though in ourselves most imperfect and failing; the definition given by the Spirit of God of a Christian is, that he is a transcript of Christ.

Now the natural thought of many a soul is this, Well, if that be true, I do not know what to think of myself; I do not see this transcript in myself! No, and you ought not to see it. Moses did not see his own face shine, Moses saw God’s face shine, and others saw Moses’ face shine.

The glory of the Lord, as seen in Moses’ face, alarmed the people. They could not bear that glory. But we see it now with “open,” unveiled “face,” in Christ (vs. 18), and yet are not in the least afraid; we find liberty, comfort, and joy in looking at it; we gaze on it, and, instead of fearing, ‘rejoice. How comes this immense difference? It is “the ministration of the Spirit” (vs. 8), and “of righteousness” (vs. 9).

It is Christ alive in the glory that I see, not Christ down here (sweet as that was); Christ at the right hand of God. Yet though that glory is in the heavens, I can steadfastly behold it. All that glory, and He is in the midst of the glory and majesty of the throne of God itself, does not affright me, because this wonderful truth comes in, that that glory of God is in the face of a man who has put away my sins, and who is there in proof of it. (Heb. 1:3) I should have been afraid to hear His voice, and have said, with the children of Israel (Ex. 20:19), ‘Let not God speak with me,’ or, like

Adam, with a guilty conscience, have sought to hide myself away (Gen. 3:8); but I do not say so now; no, let me hear His voice. I cannot see the glory of Christ now, without knowing that I am saved. How comes He there? He is a man who has been down here mixing with publicans and sinners, the friend of such, choosing such as His companions. He is a man who has borne the wrath of God on account of sin; He is a man who has borne my sins in His own body on the tree (I speak the language of faith); He is there, as having been down here amidst the circumstances, and under the imputation of sin; and yet it is in His face I see the glory of God. I see Him there, consequent upon the putting away of my sin, because He has accomplished my redemption. I could not see Christ in the glory, if there was one spot or stain of sin not put away. The more I see of the glory, the more I see the perfectness of the work that Christ has wrought, and of the righteousness wherein I am accepted; every ray of that glory is seen in the face of one who has confessed my sins as His own, and died for them on the cross; of one who has glorified God in the earth, and finished the work that the Father had given Him to do. The glory that I see is the glory of redemption, Having glorified God about the sin—"I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do"—God has glorified Him with Himself there. (John 17)

When I see Him in that glory, instead of seeing my sins, I see that they are gone. I have seen my sins laid on the Mediator. I have seen my sins confessed on the head of the scape-goat, and they have been borne away. (Lev. 16) So much has God been glorified about my sins (that is, in respect of what Christ has done on account of my sins), that this is the title of Christ to be there at the right hand of God. I am not afraid to look at Christ there. Where are my sins now? where are they to be found, in heaven or on earth? I see Christ in the glory—once they were found upon the head of that blessed one; but they are gone, never more to be found. Were it a dead Christ, so to speak, that I saw, I might fear that my sins would be found again; but with Christ alive in the glory, the search is in vain. He who bore them all has been received up to the throne of God, and no sin can be there.

As a practical consequence of this, I am changed into His likeness—"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, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." It is the Holy Spirit taking of the things of Christ and revealing them to the soul, that is the power of present practical conformity to Christ. I delight in Christ, I feast upon Christ, I love Christ. It is the very model and forming of my soul according to Christ, by the Holy Spirit, this His revelation of Christ. I not only get to love the glory; it is Christ Himself that I love, Christ that I admire, Christ that I care for, Christ whose flesh I eat, and whose blood I drink—what wonder if I am like Christ. The Christian thus becomes the epistle of Christ; he speaks for Christ, owns Christ, acts for Christ. He does not want to be rich, he has riches in Christ, unsearchable riches. He does not want the pleasures of the world, he has pleasures at God's right hand for evermore.

Does the heart still say, 'Oh, but I do not, and cannot, see this transcript in myself?' No, but you see Christ; and is not that better? It is not my looking at myself; but it is my looking at Christ, that is God's appointed means for my growing in the likeness of Christ. If I would copy the work of some great artist, is it by fixing my eyes on the imitation, and being taken up with regrets about my failing attempt, that I shall be likely to succeed? No, but by looking at my model, by fixing my eyes there, tracing the various points and getting into the spirit of the thing. Mark the comfort of this! The Holy Spirit having revealed to my soul Christ in the glory, as the assurance of my acceptance, I can look

without fear, and therefore, steadfastly, full at that glory, and rejoice at the measure of its brightness. Stephen (Acts 7), full of the Holy Spirit, could look up steadfastly into heaven (doubtless in his case it was with more than ordinary power), and see the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and his face shone as the face of an angel. And look at his death. Just like his Master, he prays for his very murderers. Stephen died saying, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;' Christ had died saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' In him there was the expression of Christ's love for his enemies. By the Holy Spirit he was changed, and that in a very blessed way too, into the same image.

The soul, at perfect liberty with God, looks peacefully and happily at the glory of God as seen in the face of Jesus Christ; and because it sees that glory and knows its expression, it walks before God in holy confidence. Instead of being happy and at liberty with Satan, in Satan's world, the Christian dreads Satan because he knows himself. At ease in the presence of God, he there drinks into the spirit of that which befits the presence of God, and becomes the "epistle of Christ" to the world, showing out to all that he has been there.

Well, what a difference! May we more and more make our boast in Him, in whose face all this glory is displayed-the Lamb, who has died for us, and cleansed away our sins by His own most precious blood.

The Lord give us hearts freed by Himself, whilst still in the midst of this poor world that is walking in a vain show.

The Father's Love

What I want to press on you, my brethren, is the distinct present blessing, which it is our privilege to enjoy, resulting from the knowledge of the love wherewith the Father loves the Son. Well might it make the soul stagger, to hear that the love wherewith the saints are loved of God is according to that with which He loves Jesus—"as Thou hast loved me." Our companionship with the Lord in glory will be the manifestation of this—then, even the world shall know it; but, without waiting for that day of manifestation, Jesus speaks here of ministering to us, by the Spirit, the present joy and comfort of it.

How is the love of the Father towards us shown, my brethren? In giving His Son to be "the propitiation for our sins." Who amongst us does not know this? But it is quite true that we can go on further, and speak of the Spirit's enabling us to believe on and prize the Son. Who is there would set so little value on the power of believing in the Son, as to say that it could arise from the human heart? It is not in the capacity that at all belongs to "the spirit of a man" to appreciate that best and blessed gift of God—"the Son." We little prize as we ought the grace which has led us to believe. But let us go on further still. All of us know that this was not of human origin, that it came from whence Jesus came—it followed the gift; but are we not accustomed to stop there? I would speak to you of that love of the Father to the Son, in which we partake through union with the Son. My brethren, let us recollect that the grace which led us to receive the Son has only put us on ground where we have to learn more of the fullness and depth of love. The special love of the Father is ours. I am not speaking now of Christ being ours, but of that which is Christ's being ours.

Observe John 17:25,26. Is there not here a love spoken of as resting upon us because we have believed on, and love Jesus? We all acknowledge, of course, that we could not love the Lord Jesus but by the Spirit; but when we have met Him as our Savior, when we see that beauty in Him in which the Father can rest with delight and favor—the heart that rests thus on Jesus meets the full love of the Father. My brethren, have you thought of this—that resting on the Lord Jesus you are to expect a fuller manifestation of the Father's love.

We read (John 16) "I say not that I will pray the FATHER for you: for the FATHER Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God." What is the meaning of this? Is it to take from us the comfort of the intercession of Jesus on our behalf? No; but it is intended to remove from the heart the feeling that the Lord Jesus is the originating cause of the Father's love. He has only given liberty to that love—made the way for it to flow out. It is a most mistaken, a most mischievous notion, that the standing of the Lord Jesus towards us, is that of averting the judgment of an angry God. The love of God could not, it is true, flow out fully till the work of the Son was perfected; but the gift of the Son originated in the love of God.

Again, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My FATHER will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him." Here we see communion with the Father and the Son connected with obedience; a further joy of the Father's love consequent upon obedience. Obedience itself must be the result of love, but, then, it introduces us into a fuller sense of the

Father's love. Now was not this the particular kind of love in which Jesus Himself dwelt when here?—as He says, "I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love." What is this but the plainest announcement that we likewise, by virtue of union with Him, may so walk, as to enjoy this full manifestation of the Father's love? But then the question might naturally arise in the mind, what amount of disobedience will hinder? and I would say, that I believe this manifestation of the Father and the Son unto our souls will be just in proportion to our obedience. The realization of our union with Jesus at the right hand of God will work obedience in us. Then every step that we take, every act of love, every expression of love in intercession for others, makes way for this further manifestation of the Father's love. The soul urged forward by love to Him who has loved it with such a love, is introduced into a further enjoyment of love. It is one act of God's grace to urge forward the soul to obedience, another act of the same grace to meet and bless it in obedience.

We see that the burden of the commandments of Jesus Christ is, that we should love one another. What then is the character of that love which we are now to manifest towards one another?—that of the love of Jesus—self-denial, self-sacrifice—becoming poor to enrich others—forsaking things not merely that are criminal, but, it may be, even those that are in themselves most innocent. The happy, holy course of a Christian, is to forsake anything and everything, if, by the denial of it to himself, he can minister life, or strength, or obedience, or blessing to another—this is the course in which alone he can expect that which met Jesus (the manifested love of the Father) to meet him. You will not mistake me when I say, that it was here that the blessed Son of God learned what He never could have learned so fully elsewhere—he love of the Father. It was here, in circumstances of weakness, and trial, and suffering, He learned it so, as He never could have done at the right hand of the throne of God.

And it is here, too, in the midst of the storm and trial, that we are called upon to learn the peculiar character of the Father's love. Do you think that a man that is standing alone, who judges the course of the saint to be one merely of uprightness and blamelessness, and not of self-sacrifice, do you think he will be learning the love of the Father? No! it was in the death, the sorrow of heart, the self-sacrifice of the Lord Jesus that He learned this peculiar love of the Father; and it is only as we, through grace, are led along in His path that the soul can understand and know experimentally the peculiarity of the love which rested upon Him. It is just so long as we forget ourselves, speak not of ourselves, are willing to be weak that others may be strong, to die for others, to be despised for others, that the way to the deeper understanding of the Father's love opens to us.

But how is it possible that our souls can be happy in trial, if not along with Christ in the trial? And do not our trials, beloved, often arise from the lack of that which should result from communion with Christ? If so, they are not those in which we shall be enabled to look up and expect the Father's approval of love.

My brethren, the amount of the joy which our souls should crave, is nothing short of the full shining of the Father's love which rested upon Christ. (See John 17:23)

The Whole Armor of God Part 1

The Lord never loses sight of His thoughts as to the place of the church, of what it is in Christ. In all the minute detail as to the conduct of the saint (1 Cor. 1:2) contained in the Word, the highest principles are ever advanced. What the Lord looks for from the believer is consistency with the place wherein he is set, the “adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.” How different this from the thought of the natural man, that is ever—do such and such a thing, and you shall be put in this place. We know that He “hath, raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6), and having the knowledge of it, are addressed accordingly. This gives a very holy character to each direction; for inconsistency in the smallest circumstance is as unsuitable to the place in which the Christian is set as it would be in the greatest.

So far as regards our present position, there is, and must be, continual conflict; and it is only according to the measure of victory we attain that the character which the Lord Jesus Himself exhibited when here will be seen in us. “Of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.” There is not a single grace in the Lord Jesus but what is suitable for its exhibition in us as united to Him. Union with Christ sets the believer where Christ is; and through union we have the fullness of all that is in Him as our “Head.” The “growing up” into this is a matter of attainment.

The putting on the “WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD” supposes the person to be saved, to be united to Christ, to have the Spirit dwelling in him. The very effect of all this blessedness is to place him in conflict with the powers of darkness, the “rulers of the darkness of this world;” but then it is with “God for him,” against them all. God is pleased through him to display His victory over the snares and devices of Satan, and to bear witness that He has a heavenly, and a heavenly-minded people, who have no portion here on earth. The character of “the men of the world” is, that they “have their portion in this life.” But not so the child of God. He says, “As for me, I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness.” Nothing short of that will answer the desire of his heart: he “presses toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

There are two things that the saint has to be watchful about; the one that, as tempted on earth, he should not be led away after the flesh; the other, his portion being in “heavenly places,” that he should set his affections there: (Col. 3:2)

Israel were redeemed out of Egypt; so are we from this present evil world. They had seen their enemies lying dead on the seashore. If we look at the value of our redemption, we can say our enemies whom we saw are gone, we “shall see them no more forever.” We are brought into the wilderness, and that which we see the Israelites called to in their journey through the wilderness is patient faith, to walk as trusting in God when there were no supplies of food in the way. But it is in their after history in connection with Joshua that we get blessed and minute instruction as to what is our conflict with the enemies of the church of God.

The apostle in this exhortation speaks of being on our guard against the “wiles of the devil,” not of deliverance from his power. Whilst persons are unconverted, that is, altogether in the flesh (Rom. 8:8,9), Satan governs them by their pride, their ambition, their skill, and so forth, although even then the Lord oftentimes exercises a providential care over them, as we see in the case of the poor man possessed of “Legion.” The Lord never let Satan carry him beyond the region of his power; yet the moment the devils departed from him, and entered into the swine, “the swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished.”

Naturally we are in the world of which Satan is the prince. He guides and rules it, exercising an influence and power over the heart of the unbeliever; as it is said, “The spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience” (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2).

Moreover, outward quietness and order make not the least difference as to this. Whether it be by the quiet regular order of the world, or by that which is more outrageous and openly evil in its character, if Christ be shut out from the heart, it matters not, it is all the same. The quiet Gadarenes besought Christ “to depart from their coasts” as much as did the poor demoniac, as we should call him. Satan would “keep his goods in peace” if he could. It is still his world; they are still under his power. Such is our state naturally. As quickened of the Spirit, drawn unto Christ by the gracious things which presents, we are “delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son.”

Our experience ought to be of that which we are already in Christ. Our place, in point of fact, is at present in the wilderness; but faith would ever realize union with Jesus in resurrection—“our sitting together in heavenly places in Him.” And hence comes the conflict. There are two things very distinct, yet constantly confounded together by the saints—bondage to Satan, and conflict with him. Israel were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but conquerors of the Canaanites. The question of the soul’s redemption is a settled one. The work is “finished,” all done for us in Christ. The Egyptians whom Israel had “seen, they were to see no more forever.” But then, after the knowledge of the fullness and finishedness of our redemption, there comes in another class of experience as to the power of Satan, and that consequent upon redemption. The moment we see death and judgment met for us on the cross, there is deliverance from bondage to Satan. Resurrection takes us clean out of it; it is no longer a question as to Egypt and bondage at all. Faith knows death and judgment passed on Jesus, and our portion in the “heavenlies.” There is our conflict. “The Canaanite is still in the land.” God “has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;” but Satan would seek to hinder our enjoyment of these blessings. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places.”

The first thing we are taught here is, that “flesh and blood,” that is, all the skill, wisdom, and strength of man, cannot resist or avail in this conflict with “principalities and powers, and wicked spirits in heavenly places,” one bit. Flesh and blood may be the scene where Satan tempts; but the moment it begins to exercise its energy, the conflict is an unequal one, and Satan gains the victory. The enemies with whom Israel had to contend were enemies of flesh and blood, men like themselves; but we wrestle not with such, our enemies are brought before us here in fearful array, and we have no power in ourselves to stand against them; hence the word, “Wherefore take unto you the WHOLE Armor Of GOD, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done

all, to stand.”

We have to “stand against the wiles of the devil,” the deceit of his subtleties. He is our tempter as regards the old nature, and works by presenting something that is pleasing to the flesh. Religion in many ways may be in the flesh (2 Tim. 3:5), as it is said, “Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect in the flesh?” Satan can “transform himself into an angel of light,” can put on holiness, if that holiness be disconnected from redemption, or speak of redemption apart from holiness. The Spirit of God giving a new nature, and revealing to us all Christ is, as the object of our desire, practically sanctifies us. The moment that we know our title to be in “heavenly places,” and our hearts and our treasure are there, the Lord alone can be exalted; the flesh is made nothing of. On the contrary, the very minute we begin to linger in the wilderness, our hearts go after Egypt. It is our privilege not merely that Satan should not lead us into sin here, but that we should not be earthly but spiritually-minded. (Rom. 8:6)

The “church of God” is just the witness of deliverance from the power of him who rules the world, the “prince of this world.” “The carnal mind” is one thing that is “enmity against God;” but James tells us that “the friendship of the world” is also “enmity with God,” and that “whosoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God.” Whenever a man seeks enjoyment in and from the world, that man is the “enemy of God.” He may be ensnared by it, but whenever he has enjoyment and pleasure in it, he is the “enemy of God!” Again, those “who mind earthly things” are said to be “the enemies of the cross of Christ!”

The apostle tells us that this is an “evil world,” and this an “evil day;” that what we have to do is to “stand.” He supposes us to be in the place where, having our portion in Christ, we must necessarily be in conflict with Satan. The season of conflict is not the time for putting on the armor. If I am trying merely to grasp and get at Christ when in conflict, I cannot have blessed peace of soul; and then there will be no power “to withstand in the evil day.” It is a great thing to enter into the battle as a soldier on the right side, to know God “for us,” to be “taking unto us the WHOLE Armor OF GOD,” and thus to be ready when the “evil day” comes to resist—to “stand.” You never will hold conflict with Satan in energy so long as you are feeling, “Am I on the Lord’s side or not?” “Is God for or against me?” “Oh, if I could but be sure that I had an interest in Christ!” The word is, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might;” “Take unto you the WHOLE Armor OF GOD.” And that which is first spoken of in the description of this armor is— “Stand therefore, HAVING YOUR LOINS GIRT ABOUT WITH TRUTH.” What is here assumed at once is the knowledge that as saints of God we are redeemed. We can never have our “loins” really “girt” until we know that we are redeemed. What is meant by “having the loins girt”? It supposes a person not to be at ease, but prepared for actual exertion. The children of Israel were to eat the passover with their “loins girded,” their “staves in their hands,” and their “shoes on their feet.” Why? The Lord had redeemed them out of Egypt; they were strangers and travelers; and so the exhortation here supposes those addressed to be strangers, and passing as strangers through the wilderness on to the rest.

Now, until a believer knows that he is redeemed, it is as though he had lost one place, and has nowhere else to go. We cannot give up this world really until we have the simple and blessed assurance that we have another; until we understand what our hope is—glory, and the ground of our hope—redemption through the blood of Jesus. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are

of all men most miserable;" for we are called to hate our lives in this world, to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Christ. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself." "Himself," that is a big word. It is not said that he is to deny himself in one thing or another, in this or in that; but wherever "himself" comes in he is to deny it. Again, he is to "take up his cross," not once or twice, it is "daily." But Canaan belongs to him, and he is on his journey to it.

The root of the thing-that which enables us to conflict with Satan-is that blessed truth, that we are redeemed and called to eternal glory, to an incorruptible, and undefiled, and enduring inheritance. Redemption is Christ's having given Himself for our sins, that He might "deliver us from this present evil world according to the will of God and our Father." The apostle tells us not merely to hold the truth, but to have our loins "girt about" with it. Whenever the full meaning of "redemption" is understood, it makes us know that heaven is ours, and that earth is not ours. Nothing but this truth can "deliver us out of this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4). Consequently we resist Satan; we "stand against the wiles of the devil," by having the affections of our heart so knit to Jesus, and to heavenly things, as to make us strangers here, because heaven is ours.

I could not be praising God (my proper engagement as a believer) unless the song of praise were put into my mouth on the ground of redemption. In Psalm 40 we read, "He brought me up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God." Christ begins this song after redemption has been wrought. There was a time when "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." When the world was created all was very good, but sin has come in and spoiled that; and now Christ takes up the song of redemption, and thus the saints can sing it too, as it is said, "A song of praise unto our God;" but they cannot sing it until they know redemption.

Satan is met by our having our "LOINS GIRT ABOUT WITH TRUTH." The secret of a holy and unworldly walk is the being filled with the "truth," the inward man feeding upon Christ, and the better and enduring substance laid up for us in Him. If Satan comes and says to us, "You had better enjoy the world," the man who has his "LOINS GIRT ABOUT WITH TRUTH" can answer him, "No, I have got another world." If he says, "But how do you know this?" "It is very presumptuous of you to think so." He can answer, "No; for the Son of God hath died, and God hath given to us eternal life, and an inheritance in another world to all those who believe on Him." "He may then say, "Then why not enjoy yourself in this world if you are assured of your safety?" "No," the soul can reply, "He died to redeem me out of this present evil world." Thus Satan is foiled in all his attacks.

But though the knowledge of redemption be thus blessed, the blaze of divine love, as it were to my soul, it is all truth with which the loins should be "girt." We can never say that any one truth may not be the very one by which we may resist Satan the next time he comes to tempt us.

In order to this "girding of the loins" truth must be got from the Lord, we must be taught it by the Holy Spirit, then there is power in it; otherwise, resting in the understanding, it serves only to puff up. For instance, that which relates to the second appearing and kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, most blessed as it is, if our "loins" be not "girt" with it, is but speculative truth. If it does not draw me out of the world, make me dead to it, and like unto a "servant waiting for his lord," the study of it will be only the gratification of the "desires of the mind." In like manner, if I know the

blessed truth of union with the Lord Jesus risen, why is it but that I should bring forth much fruit, that my affections should be heavenly, and that I should have communion with Christ by abiding in Him, and He in me? If I know that I am safe in Christ, what should I seek for but the power of living communion with Him, the joy that I have will then be in heavenly things. If the truth that we have is not held practically it is of no avail; it is just as much of the flesh as active sin.

The flesh can be shown about truth, as much as about anything else; indeed it is by partial statements of truth, not by a direct lie, that Satan generally tries to deceive men. This is most strikingly shown in his mode of tempting both the first and the second Adam. We read that he whispered in the garden, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Adam listened to him. What did God say? "The man is become as one of us, knowing good and evil." But then Satan told him the truth in order to lead him to disobedience, not to obedience. Thus, it was also that He tried to tempt our blessed Lord; it was a real promise he presented, but by it he sought to lead Jesus into disobedience to the Father. He is willing to use the most blessed truths if he can but, by doing so, lead the heart away from God. It is against the "wiles of the devil" that we are called to stand; he does not show himself in his true character. The hook is hidden by the bait. We should seek to know the truth in holiness, in fellowship with God. The object of our search after truth should ever be, that we might know God.

Those who minister the truth to others have specially to watch lest they should only have an intellectual acquaintance with truth, not experiencing it to be spirit and life in their own souls; otherwise they are but as the pipe that carries the water to others, themselves not drinking in, themselves remaining unrefreshed.

It is never safe for us to think that we have enough truth, if we know that we are the Lord's; we have to resist the "wiles of the devil." He will not always use one way of tempting us. He will employ every artifice, and by his craft and subtlety seek to entrap us. He may try to deceive me by bringing a promise before me, and if I do not know the meaning of that promise, I may easily be deceived by it. We need "all truth." Our Lord prayed, "Sanctify them through Thy truth." Satan knows that it is by truth that we shall be sanctified and separated from the world. Though he cannot pluck us out of the Father's hand, yet he can scatter all the blessing, and comfort and strength of the saints, and make them trip in the way; let us "stand therefore, having OUR LOINS GIRT ABOUT WITH TRUTH."

The next thing that we find mentioned is, "THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS"—"having on the breastplate of righteousness." Christ is "our righteousness," and, until this is known simply, Satan constantly uses the conscience of a believer to distract him. Where there is not simple rest in Christ, there will be perpetual distraction and distress of soul.

But then, again, as to practical righteousness, a saint should be watchful in not allowing himself in those things which he feels to be wrong. If not so, he gives Satan a handle whereby to distress him. Although he knows that he has no righteousness but in Christ, yet as regards his walk, and in conflict with Satan, he feels that "if his heart condemn him, God is greater than his heart, and knoweth all things." If we are in conflict with Satan, and the flesh gets the better of us, Satan comes in, and we are laid low; and then, although safe as to our souls, all our comfort is lost, and the Lord is dishonored by us.

The apostle “exercised” himself to “maintain a conscience void of offense towards God and man,” although we know that he counted all his righteousness to be as “dross and dung,” as regarded his acceptance with God. Before God I forget myself, and Christ is everything; but in conflict with Satan, I have to stand for Christ against him who is His enemy. Whenever we are not walking in holiness we have not confidence in conflict; we are not “quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord;” we slip, and get into the power of Satan. If you would have strength against the world, you must have on the “BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,” otherwise Satan will try to make you forget that God is on your side. This is the greatest and most fearful exercise of his power. We read in Peter of those who, through their carelessness, could not “see afar off,” and had “forgotten that they had been purged from their old sins.” This is the only case in which the Scriptures recognize the Christian as not having peace. The saint, through lacking diligence in adding to his faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity, getting “blind,” and “forgetting that he was purged from his old sins,” he is then in a more miserable state than the ungodly, the unconverted man.

If we are walking as those who have on “the breastplate of righteousness,” it will make a great difference in the power and energy of our prayers (1 John 3:12,22); we shall be asking heavenly things for ourselves and for the church; but if we are not walking thus, it will be confession and mourning.

Again, truth ever gets lowered when the conscience is lowered. Men are ashamed generally to profess principles which they do not practice, and therefore they try to lower them. But we have need of watchfulness even here against the “wiles of the devil.” Satan would seek to turn all this into self-righteousness. Am I trying to do it before men, it would become such; before God it cannot. The closer our souls get to God, the more do they grow in the detection of the subtle forms of evil that arise in our own hearts, and we are kept in the dust. It is “approving ourselves to every man’s conscience, as in the sight of God.” Though we are called on to “please every man his neighbor, for his good to edification;” it is not that they may please us again (the world’s motive for pleasing each other); the example presented to us is “Christ, who pleased not Himself,” who set God ever before Him.

More saints have fallen into error, into sin, from want of watchfulness in keeping “a good conscience,” than in any other way. From self-seeking, or pride, or vanity, the Spirit of God has been grieved, and no matter what it is that grieves the Holy Spirit, it weakens us in our conflict with Satan. We see a memorable instance of this in the taking of Ai by the Israelites. Achan had taken of “the accursed thing.” They were called to conflict. It was a very little city, and they thought that a few men could take it. They went up, but they were smitten. Why? Because of the “accursed thing.” The same Lord that was at Jericho was at Ai; but He had been dishonored, and they fought not with His strength. We have no strength in ourselves at all. It is, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.” It is God’s “Armor” we have to put on. “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

Again: “And your FEET SHOD with the PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE.” The effect of the gospel is to carry the soul into the presence of God, not in disturbance or doubt, but in perfect and settled peace, to carry up our hearts into the thoughts and mind of “the God of peace.”

We have this peace as our portion through Christ having died and risen again, carrying us up in spirit where nothing can disturb our peace. Here, if the least thing is out of order, or where our wills would not have it, that is sufficient to disturb our peace. The place of peace is the presence of God. There we have the unclouded, settled light of God's peace in our souls. Our past sins and present failures humble us, but they do not break in on this peace, yet our joy may be interrupted for a time; their end is seen in the cross, and we have passed into that place where they come not. If we see them at all, we see them in God's presence, where they come to be the measure of the extent of God's love to us; we see them in the perfect peace in which God has set us free from them all. "The gospel of peace" carries us into rest with God, as it is said, "We which have believed, do enter into rest," we are "brought to God." Sin cannot enter there. When there we are undisturbed by the conscience of sin; there is "no more conscience of sin."

Neither do troubles reach that place, that world to come whereof we speak, a bit more than sin. All is calmness around the throne of God. When we get to God there is an end of troubles. It was in this calmness and peace that Jesus always walked when on earth. Though He had the fullest consciousness of the suffering and shame that awaited Him there, He "set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem." His "feet" were "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." When His disciples asked Him, "Master, wilt thou that we call down fire from heaven, as Elias did?" His answer was, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And He went into another city." All the day long was He tried by the wickedness of men, who sought to entangle Him in His talk; but this only brought out more of the perfectness and grace of that place from whence He spoke. He was emphatically "the Son of Man who is in heaven."

This is the way in which we are called to walk; but until we have rest of soul we cannot draw from God the grace we need for this end. If our souls are at rest in their heavenly inheritance, the insults and scorn of men will not disturb our peace in God. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy presence from the pride of men: Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues."

How far, beloved, in intercourse with others, do you pass through circumstances in peace, not letting their power come in between you and peace? When Jesus came into the midst of trouble, it was as oil on the troubled sea—all was calmed. The God of peace is our God; our portion, as believers, is to dwell in God's presence in sure and unclouded peace.

It is true that, through the weakness of the flesh, this peace may be disturbed; but I am showing what God's "Armor," not what our FLESH is. It is abiding thus in the happy realized consciousness, that "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" that peace has been spoken to us who were afar off—eternal, accomplished peace, "through the blood of the cross." It is this that makes the spirit of peace overflow and flow forth from our hearts, quelling the spirit that naturally dwelleth in us, of which the "scripture saith not in vain" that it "lusteth to envy," and making of us messengers, and ministers, and men of peace. Knowing that we are predestinated to dwell together in the ceaseless harmony of heaven, we now, in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil, in the power of Him who worketh in us, "endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

Such is part of the “Armor” provided for us of our God, that “strong” in Him and “in the power of His might,” we may in this “evil day” “stand against the wiles of the devil”—“resist,” and we know him to flee from us. It is only in communion that we shall be able to do this.

Fleshly weapons will not avail, and this is of vast importance. I may gain the advantage over another in confuting error by truth, but suppose I lose my temper in doing this, though I may have gained the victory over the man, Satan through his “wiles” has gained the victory over me. Our strength must ever be “in the Lord.”

The Whole Armor of God Part 2

It is of great importance to remember, that that of which the apostle here speaks has nothing to do with the ground of our acceptance with God, but is connected with that prayer of Jesus for His disciples, "I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me," and so forth. We are still "in the world," the flesh is unaltered, and the devil, though triumphed over by Jesus, not removed, but going about as a "roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; "nay, what is worse, as the wily and seducing serpent. We, exposed to his devices and his wiles, have no strength in ourselves to stand against them. Jesus has prayed, "Keep them from the evil;" and the word to us is, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might; take unto you THE WHOLE Armor OF GOD."

Satan aims his temptations at different parts in different saints. While the natural constitution of a person is of little matter as far as the Spirit of God is concerned, it is of much as to Satan. The Spirit of God strengthens that which is weak, and brings down that which is high in a man; but Satan suits his temptations to the natural character, so far as close observation and the subtlety of the creature (for after all he is but a creature) can enable him to. It needs the "WHOLE Armor" to meet him, and that is ever ours.

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." "The fiery darts of the wicked one" are suggestions of unbelief whispered by Satan, and can alone be met and quenched by faith in the Son of God. (Gal. 2:20)

It is necessary for us to learn the good-for-nothingness of the flesh; but when, through our folly, we do so in failure, in the presence of Satan, he immediately says to us, "This is not walking in the Spirit;" "You are not a spiritual person, not a saint at all"; "You have sinned beyond remedy," and the like. He would seek by every artifice (through our sins or otherwise) to persuade that God is not for us. If he succeed, our confidence is gone; in conflict we have no longer any energy, and as regards service, our hands hang down, and our knees become feeble. See the case of Jeremiah. He said, "O Lord, thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed I will not make mention of the Lord, nor speak any more in His name. For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it." The spring of service was gone. Not so afterward, then could he go on amidst all opposition, because consciously "strong in the Lord." "The Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail; they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper!" and so forth.

It may be through our own folly (as we have just seen) that Satan is permitted to assail us, but again we are sometimes brought into trial for the sake of others. (2 Cor. 1:3-11) Paul speaks of having been "pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that he despaired even of life." He might have reasoned, "God cannot be for me;" but was it so? No; he took the "SHIELD OF FAITH," and said, "Suppose that Satan were even to kill, it would not prove that God was against me; for He can raise me from the dead. God had an object in it all." "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raised the dead," and he was

enabled to comfort others with the comfort wherewith he himself had been comforted of God. Paul was delivered from so great a death. God was for His dear Son, yet He suffered Him to be taken with wicked hands “to be crucified and slain.

Again, Satan was permitted to buffet Paul in a peculiar manner, through “the thorn in the flesh.” Whatever that “thorn” might be, it was evidently something, the effect of which was to make him despised of man; for in writing to the Galatians, he says, “My temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God.” Such a “temptation” was most disheartening to one sent of Christ “to minister, and bear His name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.” But then what was God’s object in it? That their “faith might not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.” And what the effect of it on his own soul? He thereby learned that his Lord’s grace was sufficient for him; that his strength must be in God. “When I am weak, then am I strong.”

Thus, we see that the “SHIELD OF FAITH” turns all Satan’s weapons for instead of against us.

This “taking THE SHIELD OF FAITH” denotes constant affiance of heart to God, and is a fruit of the Spirit. An unconverted person cannot take the “SHIELD OF FAITH” against Satan; the shield which he uses is that of unbelief against the darts of God. Satan put it into the heart of Cain to limit the pardoning mercy of God, saying, “My sin is greater than it can be forgiven!” So, he himself goes out from the presence of God, the place of peace, and plunges as a hopeless, desperate one, into the vortex of the world. If we have not up our “SHIELD OF FAITH,” the smallest sin is able to cast us down as to our portion. But the Lord, we know, will not let the faith of any of His children fail utterly; this we learn in the case of Peter. Jesus had prayed for him that his faith might not fail. How has he prayed for us? (John 17)

Whatever abomination a saint may through unwatchfulness be suffered to fall into, let us beware of adding to it the wickedness of saying they have sinned “beyond remedy.” This would be asserting that the blood of Jesus Christ does not cleanse from all sin. There is no sin, however great, which is not met by that word all, that is not by that precious blood put entirely away from before God’s eyes. The way Satan tempted man at first was by occasioning distrust of the goodness of God respecting the forbidden fruit, and thus he still seeks to “devour” those that have believed, darting into our hearts the thought that God’s mercy was never for such a wretch as I, that God is not still for me. The word is, “Whom resist steadfast in the faith.” If Satan know so much of my evil, and I know myself to be “the chief of sinners,” what must God’s knowledge and thoughts about my wickedness be! Why so bad that nothing short of the cursed and ignominious death on the tree of His own blessed Son could adequately express or measure the sense of it. And yet knowing it all, He has not spared His Son, but given Him up for me, “the just for the unjust.”

The case of fallen man was truly a desperate one. The law, in itself “holy, just, and good,” only served to bring out more clearly his ruin. The question was, Could God deal with it, and how? “What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” Here then is the conclusion in which faith can peaceably rest forever—that God has condemned sin in the flesh in the cross of Christ. Jesus has had laid on Him our iniquities. Is that the truth! Nay, not that only, far more than that! My very nature has been judged, condemned, and executed by God in the person of Jesus,

my representative on the cross, and I am now a “new creature!” “born of God!” brought into a new kingdom, the kingdom of God’s dear Son, where sin can never find a place! where the cursed can never come! “God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace are ye saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

There are two ways in which Satan works: the one, by seeking to make us have some fancied sense of uprightness in ourselves; the other, by leading us away from the path of uprightness, and, through that, terrifying us and disturbing our peace. What we need in each case is simple trust and confidence in Christ—the “SHIELD OF FAITH.” In the presence of God all thoughts of any righteousness of our own are laid low, and we feel that God is entirely, infinitely for us in all His love and righteousness. The “fiery darts” of Satan will then be spent, as it were, on God; will fall harmless and be “quenched.” When we know that the “Lord is our righteousness,” what do we want with any other?

But there may be many an idol in the heart of the saint which prevents, his thus practically gaining the victory over Satan. Where is his strength but in God? Still he knows, that were God to come in He would detect his double-mindedness, would show out the hidden chambers of imagery that are in his heart, and this he dreads. Thus Satan gains advantages. “If our eye be single, our whole body will be full of light.” All the fullness of unhindered blessing is in God, and He is for us. “Let us then hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of hope firm unto the end.” Let us take “the SHIELD OF FAITH, whereby we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.”

“And take the HELMET OF SALVATION.” We get a similar exhortation to this in 1 Thessalonians 5:8: “Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on ... for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” The two take in the whole standing and expectation of the believer; “the hope” denoting confidence of the glory in which the fullness of salvation will be exhibited, that spoken of here, the settled knowledge and intelligence of the character of God in Christ as “our Savior GOD.”

The apostle speaks to those who are saved, and know it; who have this “HELMET” and can put it on, to shelter and shield them from the strokes of Satan, who would ever lead us to be occupied with what we are, to be looking into our own hearts, and thus to become bowed down with despair.

The thought of the unconverted man is this: he looks at himself as responsible to God, and then tries to meet that responsibility in himself. It is quite true that we are responsible to God, that God shall judge the secrets of men’s hearts, and so forth; but our knowledge of God does not stop here, otherwise it would bring in utter ruin. God is revealed to us in the gospel as a “Savior GOD.” This title supposes us to need salvation, and salvation to be of God. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,” and so forth. As looked at on the ground of responsibility, we are lost; but God has met responsibility by His grace. (Titus 2:11-14)

Looking at God as a JUDGE, we know that “the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; His countenance Both behold the upright.” The only way in which the unbeliever looks at God is as a JUDGE; and looking at Him thus, he must ever be afraid of Him. The natural conscience tells the man all is not right; but so far from this “bringing salvation,” it is just the proof of his being a sinner; for he got into this conscience of evil by disobedience in the garden. Adam, when he had eaten of the fruit, and had the “knowledge of good and evil,” went and hid himself away from God amidst

the trees of the garden; and this is what the natural man would always seek to do—hide himself from God because conscious that all is not right.

Here was just where Job's friends were: they saw that God loved righteousness and hated iniquity, and that Job was in affliction. What was the conclusion they drew from the whole matter?—that if Job had been a righteous person, God would have accepted him—they were altogether on the wrong ground. It is quite true, blessedly true, that God loves righteousness, and so forth, but then the fallacy is in the notion that a man can righteous with God. The effect of such a thought must ever produce either self-righteousness or despair and misery.

Where there is alarm of conscience after a person has been quickened, the distress and anxiety of soul may be very deep, but there will be a clinging and flying to God after all.

God does not deal with us, as regards the acceptance of our persons, in the character of a JUDGE at all. He may do so, looking at us as children, already accepted ones, as it is said, "If we call on the Father, who, without respect of person, judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear," but not as to acceptance. So long as we have the thought of God as a JUDGE before us, our souls can never have rest; we shall be always feeling our unanswered responsibility. The very way that God deals with us is, as knowing and estimating fully our responsibility to Him, judging us as lost, and then assuming altogether a new character towards us—"the Savior of those who are lost!"

We have God especially thus brought before us as "our Savior GOD," in the epistles to Timothy and Titus. In 2 Timothy 1:9, we read, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began," and so forth. And Titus 3:4-5: "After that the kindness and love of GOD OUR Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which ere have done, but according to His mercy He saved us," and so forth. There is no mingling up here of the question of responsibility, and then seeking to meet that responsibility by what is in us. "Salvation, is of the Lord"—all of grace.

Suppose I present to God the fruits which even His Spirit has wrought in me as the ground of acceptance; this would be coming to Him as a JUDGE, and not as a "SAVIOR." Of course, one man judges of another by the fruits of the Spirit which he sees manifest in him, but the craft of Satan is shown by his taking the thing which is true in itself, and putting it in the wrong place. The Spirit is, in truth, the witness to us of Christ. He glorifies Christ, not Himself, giving strength to our hearts by showing us Jesus "in the presence of God for us." We are taken off the ground of standing in our own righteousness, and made to rest simply on that which Christ has done, for acceptance with God, "accepted in the beloved." Satan would lead the soul to look at the fruit of the Spirit in itself for the assurance of acceptance, instead of the offering of Christ. (Heb. 10:14) It is the work of the Spirit of God to make us see the evil of our hearts, to detect our inconsistencies. Whenever He reveals to us the holiness of God, He thereby reveals to us our want of holiness, and consequently makes us know our shortcomings.

Where there is real conviction of sin, we can never have assurance from thus looking into ourselves; we shall be saying, "Oh, I do not see the fruit I ought to see I have not that joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness," and so forth, which are spoken of in God's Word. If I could see more

fruit in myself, then I might have this assurance! "All this is not looking at God as a "Savior," but as a JUDGE. The feeling, that if we had more of that which could meet His judgment we should get peace, shows that we do not know God as a "SAVIOR GOD," and that we have not peace because the practical work which God sees needful is not carried far enough in us. Much of the flesh has perhaps been undetected, which Satan might use to hinder the depth of our communion with God. We may frequently see a humble, distressed believer, who, the more he loves holiness, the more he feels his own want of holiness, and is thus kept in bondage: he has not as yet seen the fullness of Christ's work; he knows not God as a "SAVIOR GOD."

The soul is often ready to say, "I have turned away from God; I have done so and so; these are not the works of the Spirit" (nor are they). But there is not here the simple recognition of God as a "Savior." The evil of the flesh has not been thoroughly searched out; and it may be through great trial, perhaps, that this comes to be done. If the "works of the flesh" have been produced in the least conceivable degree, and God is looked at as a JUDGE, conscience will accuse the person of having apostatized from God, though the very anxiety of his mind is a proof that he has not done so. He owns God to be righteous, and justifies Him in all His dealing's; that which he needs is to apprehend Him as a "Savior."

The flesh never looks at God as a "Savior." The only way in which the natural man thinks that he can meet God is by making out a sufficient righteousness in which to stand before Him as a JUDGE; and if God is not satisfied with that, he will not bow to God.

Salvation is suited to us in our weakness. Suppose a person were to say, "I see the Christian's high calling, but I cannot walk according to it; I am ungodly, and I have no strength to get out of my present state." You can answer, "This was just the way God commended His love toward us; when we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly." The more we feel that in ourselves we have no strength, in ourselves we are ungodly, the more shall we look in simplicity to God as a "Savior."

If we were not sinners, or if God could allow of sin, we should have no need of a Savior; but as God could not allow of sin, and yet loved us as sinners, He must needs assume towards us the character of a Savior, "a just God and a Savior."

Thus, in conflict with Satan we are called upon to "take for an HELMET THE HOPE OF SALVATION." We are led on by the energy of God's Spirit in confident hope—hope of entering into rest. Our "hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know them?" We are not capable of reaching the bottom of our hearts; and Satan is so subtle that he will often suggest a thought of sin, and then put us under the guilt of it, even because we hated it; or again, with Job we may have complacency in our very guilelessness. When we look at God as a JUDGE, we cannot tell whether we have peace or not; but the moment we look at Him as a "Savior," we can say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Our sins are the very things we need God for. Oh, wondrous grace! Instead of entering into judgment with us as sinners, He says, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgression for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins!" He could not bear to have the sins of His people in His sight, and therefore what has He done? "Put them all away," "cast them behind His back," "drowned them in the depth of the sea." A man can never hate sin till he is cleansed from it. The believer hates sin because God hates it, not

because he has been ruined by it; it is hateful to God, and therefore to him. All this springs from one simple, blessed truth—our God is a “SAVIOR GOD.”

The soul can say, “If God be for us, who can be against us? 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? I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, and so forth, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!” The knowledge of this love is our “HELMET” in the day of battle. We are now in trouble and conflict. True, but “if we are reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” We know that though “we which are in this body do groan, being burdened,” the price of its redemption has been paid; Christ has power over the body as well as over the soul, and because Christ lives we shall live also. In this is the hope of the church. In John 3 we read, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The Son of Man was “lifted up” to meet the judgment of God. Again, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here it is the love of God in the gift of His Son. In both cases does the Holy Spirit repeat the words “should not perish.”

Nay, more; when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again in glory, it will be for salvation to us, though for judgment to the world. (Heb. 9:27-28) God never varies the thing, the church is dealt with in this present life, and then, on this one and the same ground of salvation, “Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” All believers have received the salvation of their souls, and are waiting for the salvation (or redemption) of their bodies. (1 Peter 1:9; Rom. 8:23)

“Take for an HELMET the HOPE OF SALVATION.” The Lord charges and presses on us the assurance that we are saved; simple faith cannot but believe it. The Holy Spirit reveals to us the holiness of God, and that in ourselves we are lost, and then He testifies of Christ as God’s salvation, and the moment we believe on Him we are saved. The two great points for us to see are, that Christ has finished the work for us, and that the church has this “hope” set before her, that “when He shall appear, we shall be like Him.” What a spring, dear friends, should this blessed “hope” be to us; we have nothing short of the glory of Jesus to look forward to, no hesitation in assuming it as ours.

Have you this confidence in God as a “Savior GOD” Has He not given, beloved, a sure ground whereon to rest Do you live in the power of it? It should not be, “I trust I will be saved by and by,” but living with God now, sitting now in heavenly places. “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world.” “He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself so to walk, even as He walked.” If I can claim this blessed privilege, if I have this righteousness which can sit on the throne, because one with Jesus, then I ought “to walk even as He walked.” Nothing can meet the subtlety of Satan, but the revelation of the glory of Jesus as ours. The saint knows that his inheritance is not here, but that God is his portion, and therefore he is dead to this world. Were any to present to us as the object of our “hope” that which is short of being in the glory with Christ, it would be too low a hope.

This “HELMET” empowers me to lift up my head confident in the grace wherein I stand, and rejoicing in hope of His return, who shall, at His coming, change our vile bodies into the likeness of

His own glorious body! Thus, the spirit of fear and doubt is cast out, and we have the spirit of a sound mind to withstand the “wiles of the devil.” Our God is a “SAVIOR GOD.”

“And the SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, which is the WORD OF GOD.” The Lord uses this Word, which “is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.” in searching our hearts, discerning their thoughts and intents, convincing us of sin, and laying low our pride; but here we find he says to the saint, “Do you take this SWORD as part of the ‘Armor’ to be used by you in conflict with Satan.” This can only be done efficiently in the Spirit; if the flesh uses it, there may be rebuke taken where there ought to be comfort, or encouragement where reproof is needed. This “weapon of our warfare” is “mighty,” not through man’s intellectual use of it, but through an honest, humble dependence on God the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that abideth in us, who is “greater than he that is in the world” (Satan). But it is only as being on the opposite side to Satan that we can use it aright. It is not with, “Such a thing is expedient,” and so forth, that we have to meet Satan, but with, “God says so; “It is written.”

Would Satan present us something better than that which God has given (the way in which he tempted Adam), we are “sanctified unto obedience,” and have this assurance, “If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” Our Lord might have prayed the Father, and He would have given Him twelve legions of angels. He need not have suffered; but He came “to do the will of Him that sent Him.” By doing that will He has saved us. What is the place wherein we are set? That of Christ when in the world-obedience. The great thing to be sought after is practical conformity unto Christ. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

The place of sanctification is ours, and that “unto obedience.” It is in this way that the “Word of God” has its power over us.

If we are not walking in the Spirit, we shall not have the fitting scripture to meet any difficulty in which we may be placed, or those who may oppose themselves. Hence the value of diligence in communion. Whilst it is true that at any time (as far as concerns God’s ear being open to us) we may lift up our hearts, it is also true that if not spiritually-minded we shall not be inclined to do so in the time of need. There must be practical diligence in seeking God’s face in order to meet Satan in recollectedness of Spirit. “The diligent soul shall be made fat.”

If we would baffle the craft of Satan, the WORD must be taken as God uses it, and this we can only do by the Holy Spirit. Suppose I know many things of God, true to faith, I may apply a quantity of Scripture to that to which it does not at all refer, and when placed in the circumstances in which it does apply, in which God would profit me by it, I have it not. Thus we often see people meager and contracted in their views, because shut up in one truth.

If you are unable to see the meaning of a text, wait: do not be giving your sense to Scripture, but get God’s sense of it. God has a sense in every Scripture. The Word is the only weapon that we have to use offensively against Satan. Take it as GOD’S WORD, in holy acknowledgment of God as its author. We are told to “receive with meekness the engrafted WORD.” I would earnestly press on you thorough: dependence on the “WORD,” and, at the same time, that it cannot be used efficiently except as by the Spirit. It was by this that the Lord baffled all the subtleties of Satan, meeting him at every turn with “It is written.” When speaking, He ever showed the consequence

He would have attached to the written word. "If ye believe not Moses' writings, neither will ye believe My words." We are told to "have these things always in remembrance," that "they are written for our instruction." If we know anything of the state of the church, we know what great power Satan has had in scattering and worrying the sheep of Christ, by drawing them away from the "WORD OF GOD," and turning them, instead thereof, unto the "traditions of men."

With the "SWORD OF THE SPIRIT," then, may we cut through every specious entanglement whereby Satan would still detain our feet in "this present evil world"—his own kingdom. Pull down the strongholds of lust and self-will, "cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

The Whole Armor of God Part 3

In this last direction given us by the apostle—"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am and ambassador in bonds that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak"—we are cast back again simply on God, in entire abiding dependence.

That which is ever the result of conflict and exercise of soul before the Lord in standing against Satan, whether learned through the display of his power or the grace of Jesus, is the knowledge of our own emptiness and the Lord's fullness. It is not merely that we gain the victory over Satan, but that in all our conflicts we are continually learners of what the fullness of the grace of God is, through finding out our own emptiness and weakness. The more thoroughly we know this, the more we feel our own nothingness, that we have no strength at all in ourselves, the more simply and entirely we lean for all our strength on God. "My grace is sufficient for thee." There is nothing so weak that His strength cannot give it might; nothing so empty that His fullness cannot fill. And yet how slow we are to reckon thus upon His grace; how prone to trust to something of our own. Is it not so? Notwithstanding oft-repeated proofs of mercy and loving-kindness, are not our souls still apt, even in the very least thing, to doubt His love?

In conflict we find out practically what is our own nothingness, nay, our worse than nothingness; but, whilst learning this, are brought also to see what is the patience of God's love toward us, what the riches and fullness of His grace. It is of vast importance that we should thus know God. The character in which, during this present dispensation, we have specially to learn and to do with Him, is that of "the God of all grace."

Redemption teaches this; for there He deals with us, not as an angry God (though having many things to be angry about), not in exercising judgment against us as sinners, but as "the God of all grace." The cross, whilst it meets and shows out the righteousness of God, is at the same time the testimony unto His unbounded grace. How infinite the love of God seen there in coming down to meet us in all our wretchedness and sin! "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." But when there was not one thing in us pleasing unto God; when we were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and insulting God, despising His mercy, loving anything in the world rather than Him; then, even then, His love reached us! and how? not only in pitying us, but in giving His Son unto condemnation and wrath for our sakes. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners CHRIST DIED FOR US!"

Here we learn grace—grace which distances all our thoughts, grace before which we can alone be silent. Here we learn love. "God is love." "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." We might as well, and much better too, talk of darkness at noonday, as of God's wrath being toward us, when Jesus died for us as sinners.

But there can never be any self-exaltation in the reception of infinite grace. We are debtors to mercy alone. The blessed place in which we are set, when we know God as love, is that of "vessels of mercy." The manifest wisdom of God is displayed and made known unto principalities and powers in heavenly places by His grace toward us. We have the reception and enjoyment of that grace in ourselves. Thus, we come to have fellowship and communion with God. The special mark of the saint is, that he has "known and believed" the love that God has to Him. (1 John 4:16) God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love [love with us, margin] made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world." Jesus has stood in our place, has borne all that we should have had of judgment, and we have all the acceptance He has in the presence of the Father, even whilst here "in this world."

Jesus said to His disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation "(and is it not true, that in our measure we have this now?): "but," He added, "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." This dispensation teaches us grace, the next glory. Present grace is that which we need, all that is in Christ for us. We read, "The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;" and that, "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." We are brought into fellowship and communion with this grace; we have not merely to know of its existence, but to learn its breadth, and length, and depth, and height. It is as full as the glory, though not the same thing. Through grace the believer sees all his sins removed away; Christ standing between himself and them; therefore as regards them he has rest; but then, whilst here waiting for the Lord, he finds continual conflict and difficulty in his way, and he has to learn all the fullness of the grace that is in God, applying itself to the circumstances in which he is, and about which he is exercised.

We have before spoken of the "Armor" which is provided of God for our use, and of "the weapons of our warfare," now we come to notice that which will alone give us power to use them aright.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." This kind of prayer denotes confidence in God. It is not the cry which, as to a judge, the poor sinner would make under conviction of sin, but the appeal of a child in trial and difficulty unto the known love of its father; the prayer of those who are spiritual, and who find themselves to be in a condition wherein they are thrown simply on God. Again, it is not the seeking to gain strength, in order merely to know that our strength is there, but that we may practically learn what God is, by the power which He exercises toward us and for us.

This "praying always" supposes the person not to be fainting, but to be using the "Armor" in connection with it; "having the loins girt about with truth;" for instance, the soul not resting vaguely on God, but whilst casting itself on Him, reckoning on an answer according to the mind of God as revealed in His word. The saint may not always get a direct answer to his petition. Paul, we know, prayed that the "thorn in the flesh "might depart from him. What was the Lord's answer? Was it removed? No! "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness;" that is to say, "It is better for thee to know the sufficiency of My grace, than to have the thorn taken away." He got the victory over it, but he did not lose it. He was able to say, "Most gladly therefore will I

rather glory in infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” It was not sin in which he gloried. People often call their sins, the spirit of unbelief, and the like, infirmities. The things wherein he gloried were—affliction, persecutions, distresses for Christ’s sake, and so forth; for through them he learned the sufficiency of the Lord’s grace.

John says, “This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.” Now how are we to know the Lord’s will from our own fancies and imaginations? By His Word. If I go and pray for a thing not founded on the knowledge of the Lord’s will as revealed in His Word, I cannot have confidence about it. Were He to grant me what I desire, He might very likely only be answering my own foolish, corrupt will. If my flesh is at work, and my soul is not brought into obedience and subjection to the word, I cannot be “praying in the Spirit.” The first thing the Spirit would do would be to humble me by the word into a sense of the condition in which my soul is. Supposing, for instance, I am walking carelessly and inconsistently, and yet am beginning to ask, as a very great Christian, for things only suited to the state of such an one; if the Lord were to answer my petition, it would only tend to make me a hypocrite. The first thing the Spirit would do in such a case would be to make me humble under a sense of my real need. Prayer in the Spirit is always from a humble sense of need; then be it but a sigh or a groan, it is prayer in the Spirit. If we know our spiritual need, and cry to the Lord under the sense of it, we may always reckon on an answer. If our desires are according to God, they cannot be according to the flesh. The very thing the Lord would ever have us to learn is our real need; and He would have us do this in order that we might draw out of His fullness for its supply.

In Jude 20-21, we read, “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” We do this, “pray in the Holy Spirit,” when in putting up our petitions we are conscious of His presence, and conscious too that we are acting according to His will, even though our understanding may not be able fully to unfold to us what we need. When Jesus came to the grave of Lazarus He wept and groaned within Himself. This was not merely because Lazarus was dead, but because of the power of Satan which was there displayed. Then lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And when He had thus spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.” Here was the full answer—power and victory exhibited over death. If we at all rightly estimate the condition of misery in which man is, the way sin is abounding, and Satan triumphing, the dishonor done to the name of God; if our eye is fixed on the glory into which ourselves and creation around us will shortly be brought, and we then look at the groaning and travailing in which it all is now, we too must “groan within ourselves.” But then we shall often “know not what to pray for as we ought;” there will be that felt by us which we have not the capacity to express; this is taken up and expressed by that blessed Spirit which dwelleth in us (Rom. 8:26, 27); He “helpeth our infirmities He maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to God.” This groaning is not the cry of the wounded spirit (though God’s ear is ever most open to that), but groanings against the evil within and around us, yearnings for the day of the glory of Jesus, and of the manifestation of the sons of God, which is the only

possible remedy for all that evil through which the name of God is now dishonored.

If I am standing myself in truth, without guile of heart, having no hidden sin, I can look to God in intercession for others. Just accordingly as the Word of God is used by us in self-judgment, can we pray with the confidence of being heard and answered. (1 John 3:21,22) In Hebrews 4 we read, "The Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart," and so forth. Here we first see the Word searching the heart, then, in the discernment of what we are, we are brought in truthfulness before God, and then, Jesus being our High Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmities, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Just so far as we rightly understand what is our own place and the place of the church by the Word can we "pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Nothing short of this is "prayer in the Holy Spirit."

But let not this weaken our sense of the liberty we have to bring all our desires, our every request, to God in prayer. Whilst we can look for a definite answer to our prayers, if acquainted with the mind and will of God, yet we know that it is according to His will that we should "cast all our care upon Him." Have we a care or an anxiety about anything, remember that He bids us "be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." However foolish our "requests" may seem, let us not demur on that account to draw nigh, but in childlike confidence bring them unto Him. He will grant them if it would be good for us, and if not, if they be foolish or wrong, He will teach us better. He says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." Your very difficulty may be darkness and uncertainty of mind. Go and tell God that you do not know what to ask for; this is your need, and your need is the very thing to be carried to God. He will meet you there; "it shall be given him." God loves the confidence and seeking to Him of His children. We should ourselves like our children to tell us all their wishes, all their wants, leaving it to us to act as we saw right about them. He has all the feelings of the father's heart towards His little ones. But "praying in the Spirit" is our privilege, and the more blessed when in full understanding also.

This "praying always" is that which meets the tendency there is ever in us to faint. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." How can I wield effectually the "SWORD OF THE SPIRIT" "unless my arm is strong, or hold up the "SHIELD OF FAITH" "if I am weary? We are cast in the use of these things entirely upon God. As the poor widow mentioned in Luke 18:1-5, our refuge is "always to pray, and not to faint." There must be the sense of continual, abiding dependence upon God. This is the place which our blessed Lord took, and it is ours. Where Satan seeks to come in is just here, as to communion between us and God. His effort is to weaken our actual power of communion. He does not try all at once to destroy a person's faith, but he saps the source of it as well as he can. Thus was it with the church of Ephesus, "Thou hast left thy first love." There was still found in it the work, the labor, the patience; but the power of communion there had once been was gone, and therefore the message, "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent." The way by which Satan ever gets in is by giving some little satisfaction in self, thus weakening the "praying always," the very thing which sustains

practical righteousness; then he draws on the soul further and further, till at last he makes it doubt whether it has ever prayed at all. The sense, of God's love gets weakened, and then the world becomes more attractive. Communion with God maintains two things—the sense of blessedness in His presence, and separation from the world.

“And watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” Watching unto prayer is the continual, the habitual exercise of the priestly function; the taking up every matter that falls within our cognizance in the power of fellowship with God—so using persons and circumstances as to make them matter of communication with God.

We do not sufficiently seek to have the Lord with us in the prospect of suffering. How was it with Jesus? Our blessed Lord, when the hour of His conflict was coming on, when, in the garden of Gethsemane, He was entering by anticipation into the bitterness of death, spent the whole night in watchings and prayer. “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me. And He went a little farther, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” Coming to His disciples, He finds them “sleeping for sorrow:” they sank under it. He says to Peter, “What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Jesus prays yet more earnestly, and is strengthened for “this hour”—so that when the “great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people,” come to take Him, He steps calmly, firmly forward, saying, “Whom seek ye?”—“I am He.” Then “they (the disciples) all forsook Him, and fled.”

Christian, when you feel or fear any trial approaching, go at once with it to the Lord; pass through the trial in spirit with your God; and then, when you have actually to pass through it, He will give you strength to bear it, He will be with you in it; and, like the children passing through the fire, you will lose nothing but your bands, or you may even find that the Lord has put the trial away.

This watchfulness of the Spirit is ever contrary to the flesh; but remember the words, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.” When in this state of watching unto prayer I see Satan's hook under the bait, I detect him who laid the snare, and then “in vain is the snare spread in the sight of any bird.” “He that is spiritual judgeth all things.” When I am watchful, everything turns to prayer. I can “put on the WHOLE Armor of God,” and am “able to stand against the wiles of the devil;” but, on the contrary, when walking in the flesh, my prayers are turned into confession and self-reproach, and my life will be a life of sorrow. Watchfulness sees the host, but looks to the Lord against the host; it sees the evil before it is brought out, but remembers the word, “Greater is He that is for us, than all that can be against us.”

The real anxiety of Paul—the watchfulness and caring for the church—brought him into very much difficulty and conflict. (See 2 Cor. 6 and 11) He passed many a sleepless night because he so cared for it, and where this is found in its measure in us there will also be “in watchings often” for “all saints.” There can be no true energy of love in the Spirit in us towards one saint apart from the rest; we shall find ourselves to be connected with all saints. Christ loves all saints: when we shut up our love to one or even to so many saints, it matters not what the number, we shut up ourselves in narrowness of spirit, we lose part of the comprehensiveness of Christian love; Christ intercedes for all saints. The blessed place in which we are set (as brought before us here), is that of intercession with Christ for all saints—“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,

and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for ALL SAINTS.”

When the deacons were chosen (Acts 6), why was it? That the apostles might give themselves “to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word.” The very first thing they thought of was recognized dependence upon Him from whom all the ability to minister in the Word came. And this was not merely a casual circumstance. The way in which Christ has knit the members of His church together is, in making them dependent one on another; the greatest minister that ever lived was dependent on the weakest saint for power in his ministry “And FOR ME, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.” When Paul was sent forth of God anywhere, he went dependent on the prayers of the saints—“Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified.” Whilst he had a great gift of ministry for the comfort and edification of the saints, he felt his dependence on their prayers for the profitable exercise of it. Whether he was “afflicted,” or whether he was “comforted,” it was for their sakes, for their “consolation and salvation,” and they in turn were “helping together by prayer” for him. (See 2 Cor. 1) Just as the eye, the ear, the foot, the hand, are all necessary (1 Cor. 12:14-26) in the natural body, so we read of the church, the body of Christ, that “fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, it maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4). Thus the very feeblest saint has his place in the church as well as the most highly gifted; but the blessing that each is practically to it depends on personal communion, not on gift. We cannot have light without oil. It is quite true that God gives as He sees fit, “dividing to every man severally as He will”; but it is only as we are kept in humble dependence on Him that there is real profit in anything.

“Praying always,” and so forth. If we are not walking in the Spirit, Satan will turn even our very cares and duties into occasions of sin, by making us do them in the wrong time or in the wrong way. He will seek to make our duties and our prayers conflict, because he knows that it is only as they are done in a prayerful spirit that we shall have blessing in them. If otherwise there may be much busy activity, it will but deaden the soul. If you say, “I cannot pray, I cannot find God’s presence now,” it is just the very time you need to pray. Where will you find strength? In staying away? No. When people say they cannot find God’s presence, the truth is very generally that they have found it, and that it has discovered to them the evil, careless, unprofitable state in which they were before, though they did not know it then because they were not in His presence. There may be distraction of thought, but let not that hinder your “praying;” it is the very thing which shows you have a need to be supplied. Why is there this distraction? Because your mind has become occupied with other things beside the Lord. Go to Him. You may, whilst in this state, have less freedom in your prayers. The joy you would otherwise have had may be denied, yet you will return with profit, and more power of communion.

You will be humbled, and is there no profit in being humbled? Yes, very great; for grace, whilst it humbles, always encourages.

The Lord is ever “a sanctuary,” a “hiding-place for His children;” but in order habitually to realize this there must be the “praying always,” the “watching thereunto.” We hear people say continually, “I am able to look up to God in the midst of my work.” This may be very true, but can you say that

you are thus able to look up to God at any time in the midst of distraction of mind? No; it is only by carrying the presence of God with you into your work that you can do so. It is true that the grace of God often abounds over our carelessness, but it is by the habitual power of communion that we can fly to God at any time. We never can tell in the beginning of the day when and how a difficulty may arise during the course of it. It is only by having the presence of God with us to suggest right thoughts and words, by living in the power of communion, that we shall be able to meet it when it occurs. Then in every place, in every company, we may "hide" in the secret of His presence from the strife of tongues around. Better never enter into company at all, even with Christians, if we do not take our hiding-place with us.

Accordingly, as we are filled with the Holy Spirit shall we be able to look up steadfastly into heaven. We may go on carelessly, return back to God, and find grace. He may quicken, refresh, and stir up our souls; but it will not be with us as if we had walked in the strength and power of communion.

The presence of the Holy Spirit ever makes us find out fresh short-comings, some dark shade unknown before; but then Jesus is now in the presence of God for us, and thus, whilst we learn our own emptiness, we practically learn what is the fullness, the riches of the grace of God.

Is there no joy in having fellowship with the Spirit of Christ in the things His heart is occupied about here? Yes, great joy! Then "pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints," and so forth; but let us remember that it is only by being rooted and grounded, and made to stand in grace, that we can do this.

Heaven is to us the place of grace. I could never have looked to God at all but for grace; and it is only as our hearts are "established with grace" that they are set at liberty in the wide field of love, to embrace and supplicate for "all saints." May we learn more of the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of that grace, knowing that "nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord;" "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature." May we practically be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

It is very hard for us to see ourselves and Satan to be as nothing, and God to be everything. The moment we get out of dependence on God we find out our own weakness. We may perhaps think that one good battle with Satan, and all will be over; but no such thing; we have the security of victory, but no cessation from conflict till the Lord comes. Then Satan will be bound, and then we shall have the full result of victory; but now we are called to unceasing dependence, moment by moment to be reckoning on the grace and strength of God. Where there is not this dependence there is not blessing, joy, and comfort. The tendency of the flesh is ever to get out of it, and then we have not strength with us in the battle, but have to learn our need of grace through weakness and failure, instead of in joy and confidence in God.

The Parables of the Two Sons, the Vineyard, and the Marriage Supper

If all things were not entirely out of course, if every principle of human nature were not astray from God, there would be no need on His part for all the painstaking of which we read in these chapters—no need for these varied and assiduous efforts to recall people to Himself, which result, after all, in a manner so strange, so sorrowful. We might have supposed, as we sometimes see in the self-willed child on hearing the father's voice of love and entreaty, that instant obedience would be the result of God's bringing to mind the relationship that exists. But no: these constant efforts, this "changing of the voice" (as Paul has it), serve but to show that all sense of relationship between man and God is gone. That voice touches no spring, there is not a chord upon which it can act -the echo of the heart is gone.

In these three parables the Lord recounts, in a very full and distinct manner, God's successive dealings with man, and their result. He brings before us what God has done in righteousness -thereby placing man under responsibility, as well as what He has done in grace. The instruction is of the simplest and clearest kind, being addressed to the conscience of man just as he is.

We read "When He was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto Him as He was teaching, and said, By what authority doest Thou these things? and who gave Thee this authority" (21:23) God comes into the world to do good, and man demands His authority! Jesus had previously been showing power in healing the blind and lame, and in cleansing the temple, but now He is quietly teaching there; and this entangling question is put by those who find their veil of hypocrisy drawn aside, their authority endangered, their unrighteous gains disturbed by that act wherewith Jesus sought to remove from God's house the reproach of merchandise, and to restore its character as "the house of prayer." The Lord might have replied by appealing to His many miracles; but He has another object in view— "Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven, He will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? (for John bore testimony to Jesus). But if we shall say, Of men, we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet." That is, He at once, by means of the question which in divine wisdom He puts to them, brings out the real state of their conscience. The embarrassment into which they thought to throw Him falls on themselves. "They answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And He said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things."

Thus, at the very outset, the Lord puts this great truth before all: the conscience of man is bad in not submitting to the righteousness of God. And such is the case always. Man cannot deny that things come from heaven; but he will not believe. He may bring forth his hard questions, like those of old, but with no real desire after the truth. That which his conscience cannot deny, he will neither allow nor act upon. If pressed to the utmost (look at the extreme case of infidelity), men love darkness rather than light, just as it is said: "Even as they did not like to retain God in their

knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind” (Rom. 1).

Having thus put to silence these men, the Lord now proceeds to depict their ways and thoughts in parables, which their conscience, already stirred, could not fail to interpret, even when an application was not directly made to them.

“But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of these twain did the will of his father? They say unto Him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.”

In this first parable the Lord makes most apparent the difference between formal righteousness and self-will followed by repentance; between the person who goes through the world decently, desiring to make a fair show, and the one who, acting against all the dictates of natural conscience, sins deliberately, but afterward repents.

We see described in the second son the general character of “decent” people. They go on quietly and in outward order, professing to own the will of God, and to serve God: they say, “I go, sir;” but after all, from morning to night, and from night to morning, they do their own will, and nothing else.

In the other son there is avowed determination to disobey; just, alas! the description of the thorough willfulness of the human heart. With “I will not,” he delights in breaking through all the righteousness of filial relationship; but withal he is conscious of the violation, and afterward owns it with repentance.

There was no regard in the self-righteous Jew, notwithstanding all his profession, for the righteousness of God, of which John bare witness, and therefore he believed him not. But the publicans and harlots, who had no regard for the ordinances of God, or for the commonest morality, on hearing the testimony of John, believed and repented. The Pharisee made clean the outside; owned God in ordinances, but not in heart and conscience. These openly and outrageously sinned against God, but “repented and went.” And their repentance was such as God owns: it consisted not merely in acknowledging acts of sin, but in recognizing HIM as the one sinned against; thus it touched the root of all sin. Their condition necessitated this conclusion, that if God spoke, there was nothing they could say, nothing they could do, except, indeed, adopt Job’s confession, “I am vile,” and then lay their hand upon their mouth. Such was their course, while the scribes and Pharisees, seeing it all, remained alike insensible to God’s Word and to God’s grace in its full operation.

Insensibility to truth when heard is a most hardening thing, and the Lord’s caution, “Take heed now ye hear,” needs to be insisted upon again and again. For have we not now in abundance, lip profession and routine observance—the “I go, sir,” and a certain amount of eye service—while the heart is cold, the conscience is stifled, and the desires of the flesh or of the mind have their sway? There was no greater enemy to the truth—and therefore to Christ—than the Pharisee; and though the name is lost, the type remains in endless variety.

Having concluded this first aspect of God's dealings with man, the Lord passes on to another phase, characterized specially by responsibility. His language is as strikingly simple and as calm, though, under the guise of a parable, He is foretelling His own rejection and cruel death! "Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husband-men, and went into a far country: and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it." We have here, not merely the obligations flowing relationship; that is, men are not left to the light of natural conscience, as we saw in the former case, but God has done something more, through which additional responsibility is incurred. It is HE who planted the vineyard—hedged it round about digged the winepress and built the towers—and then entrusted it to husbandmen. Thus are represented His care and labor, in return for which He looks for fruit.

As to general principles, the parable may be applied to all who have heard of Christ, and have refused to believe in Him; but, undoubtedly, its primary application is to the Jews, as they must well have understood. In Isaiah 5 the same figure and very similar language are used regarding them; and, as showing that He had taken the greatest possible pains, God there makes this appeal: "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" They utterly failed then to meet His just demands; and, in addition, maltreated or killed the prophets, who were commissioned to make them. "And the husbandmen took His servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise." After such forbearance, they certainly could expect nothing more. They still were the same in heart, as shown by the emphatic words, "Ye are the children of them which killed the prophets." (23:31) Yet we know that God had still one resource, of which He availed Himself. "Last of all, He sent them His Son, saying, They will reverence my Son." (Our Lord is represented here as sent for fruit, like the prophets; this was one, though not the ultimate purpose of His coming to the vineyard) We all know, also, how the just expectation of God regarding His Son was met. "When the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him." The end of responsibility, and of all this patient dealing of God with the Jewish people on that ground, was that they were glad of the occasion to kill the Heir, in order that they might seize upon the inheritance "When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto these husbandmen?" Righteous judgment is so loudly called for, that those who hear the parable can at once pronounce it: "They say unto Him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men."

Here then, again, we mark this great principle, that in whatever way God looks for response from man, He finds none. There is such a thing as God's looking for fruit from that which He has planted and nurtured in the world; but there is no fruit to be found from man towards God. The husbandmen's will was entirely and absolutely wrong. They did not recognize the authority of God in His vineyard. They liked to have it for themselves; and to gratify their desires, they would go to any lengths in unrighteousness. The parable in its most important feature, alas! had its accomplishment; and its perfect truthfulness was but too manifest at the time in the spirit of those who ultimately brought, it to pass: "When the chief priests and Pharisees had heard His parables, they perceived that He spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the

multitude, because they took Him for a prophet.”

Thus, the effect of the ordinances God had given was only to bring out the enmity and hatred of those to whom He had entrusted. His vineyard man placed in a certain religious position, patiently instructed, and blessed with external advantages, instead of rendering fruit to God, consummates the crowning act of iniquity. Religious man kills the Prince of Life! How solemn a warning to those who would be zealous for God, but who know Him not, because they know not and love not His Son. That religion which has not Christ as foundation and top-stone is worse than none at all.

But there are not a few persons of a different spirit, who, failing to see the result of this trial of man, are still dealing with God as though He were looking for fruit. They feel that God has given them certain spiritual advantages, opportunities of hearing, and the like, and that therefore they ought to return fruit to Him. And so they ought. But then, although such are not in a condition of soul answerable to that of the husbandmen who killed the heir, they have mistaken, and that altogether, the ground on which God is now dealing. And further, Christ Himself may be only thought of as seeking fruit—only looked at in the same light as the prophets! Where there is honesty and sincerity of heart, and the conscience is touched, deep impressions may result from considering the magnitude of God's love in the gift of His Son, and of that Son's love in coming from heaven to suffer on the cross; but yet these vast manifestations of love may be regarded solely as the strongest possible claims for fruit.

Such assuredly they are; but, as the parable shows, and above all its fulfillment proves, claim produces no fruit. Individual experience confirms this too. For one who sees in the love of God only a claim, in the perfectness of Christ only a claim, is soon convinced that no adequate return is rendered, and may conclude that there is no hope! Great exercise of soul may thus end in nothing but the sense of deserved condemnation. If God be still dealing with us on the ground of requirement, we must be brought in guilty, and judgment must follow the unsatisfied claim. Thus the love of God in Christ is made a severer and more terrible law than that given by Moses. When this love is put in the place of the law, the more the love is magnified, the greater the guilt in not fulfilling its demands. The more we elevate the claim of God, the more we aggravate our own condemnation.

In such cases, the word of God has at least not been read or heard unheeded (as, alas! it so often is), though discrimination may have been wanting. The difficulty lies in not seeing that God has abandoned, as useless, the efforts to seek fruit from man. He has tried everything—“Last of all, He sent His Son;” and His cross is conclusive. Man is ungodly; but further, he is “without strength,” The neat parable (following so significantly that of “the vineyard”) tells how fully God has provided for our actual need.

“Jesus spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding.” Observe, at the outset, how different is the character of the parable. It is not God's dealing with natural conscience, nor His looking for fruit as the owner of the vineyard; but it is the king purposing to honor his son out of the riches of his own house. Clearly the king is not presenting claims; he is giving—he is inviting. His desire is to glorify his well-beloved son, to have everything worthy of so joyful an occasion as the marriage of his son. He who gives a feast—especially if he be the king—provides everything. The guests are not expected to bring

anything; nor is any return looked for. On the contrary, to think of such a thing, would be to insult the king—to despise his preparation or his intention. Moreover the king presents the wedding garments by which the guests are distinguished. If any rich man sought to come in raiment as costly as he could provide, he would only offend the king, just as would a poor man who wished to sit down in rags. There must be nothing which the king does not give—his bounty will richly supply everything.

The king is not merely making a feast for the pleasure of those invited; but the object of their being invited is, that his son may be honored. Still, while his chief thought is to show his regard for his son, he would have the guests to enter heartily into his joy. He desires that there may be full blessing at his table—happy faces around it—hearts without a care or shade of anxiety, free from every suspicion of his love. Such must be the accompaniments of the marriage supper of the King's son.

How simple and evident is the application of all this, in the light of what has gone before. Man has altogether failed. He does not own God's claim, or if he does, he cannot meet it, and must fall into despair. But God has it in purpose, through man, to glorify His Son, and His resources will avail to effect this, notwithstanding man's ruin. It is not within the scope of the parable to show how this apparently insuperable difficulty is overcome, consistently with God's holiness; but the fact of His offering such an invitation proves alike His benevolence, and the removal of the difficulty.

We have to consider the treatment of the invitation by those to whom it was first sent, and then God's further counsels. One design of the parable is to bring fully out the implacable enmity of the carnal mind against God, in the face of the utmost advances of His love; but this, happily, is not the main design.

God's invitation to the marriage-supper of His Son is first given to those who had "the promises"—to those who had received so many proofs of His forgiving love—to those who were called, and professed to be "His own"—to the Jews. "And they would not come!" Under such circumstances, we should not be inclined to repeat the offer; but God does repeat it. As before, fresh messengers are sent again to bid them; and to remove all doubts, the preparations are detailed: "Tell them, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fallings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways." They deliberately despised the invitation of God—they had other and more important things of their own to attend to. They went, "one to his farm, another to his merchandise." Yet more strange, but awfully conclusive as to man's hatred of the grace of God, when his conscience has not submitted to His righteousness— "The remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them!" However far the goodness and patience of God extend, the same evil results are met with continually from man.

The counterpart of all this is to be found in the Acts of the Apostles. The message of the apostles after the crucifixion was—"All things are ready"; nothing remains to be done. Abounding grace offered pardon to those even who had killed the Prince of Life. What estimate was formed of such glad tidings is to be found in the language of one who, through the grace of God, afterward so fully and so widely proclaimed those very tidings: "Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being

exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.” As a nation, the Jews heard the gospel only to reject it, as they had rejected Him who was the living expression of it. The conduct of individuals may have varied, but in principle it was the same. The evil heart was seen in disowning the claim of God, but more especially in despising His marvelous grace. The carelessness that would make a sinner slight the King’s invitation to the feast is precisely the same in kind that would lead him to kill his messengers, or even his son. Man’s “own way” may produce any of these results.

Whether opposition to God’s authority is evinced by the neglect, contempt, or rebellion of a nation or of an individual, His righteous judgments must surely follow, though for a season they may be delayed. So in this instance, “When the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.”

But now we come to a most blessed truth. God has not given up aught of the fullness of His love, or of His purpose regarding His Son. He must have people around Him, and happy in being so. His house must be filled to honor His Son’s marriage. Fresh guests must be found. “Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.” Here we evidently see the sending out of the invitation to those who were without the privileges and promises of the Jews—to those who had no hope, and who were without God in the world—to the Gentiles. The special characteristic of God’s present action is seen in the command, “Go ye forth into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” The distinguishing principle is the full outflow of grace—the activity of God’s love going out into the world and bringing in to partake of the blessings which Himself has provided. His love goes out in simple grace to find “good or bad” to partake of the goodness of His house. Such is the principle God is acting on in the gospel. It is quite clear that He provides everything. He is not claiming fruit, but ministering blessing.

The effect of rightly understanding that God is glorifying His Son Jesus, is to make us put aside every thought but that. Let us be the most vile and wretched sinners in ourselves (as Paul says, “of whom I am chief”), all anxiety will be taken from our hearts, everything of uneasiness and uncertainty, because of the invitation. It is God’s invitation, and for those to whom it is offered He provides everything that is needed. A poor man, thinking of himself, might say, “Oh, that cannot be for me, a poor man!” or if this doubt were dispelled, “I cannot enter the King’s presence; my garments are not fit.” In other words, “Can the invitation be for a sinner such as I know myself to be—besides, how can I appear before a holy God?” Thoughts like these may arise in the mind, and may continue until confidence is placed in the terms of the invitation, or rather in Him who gives it. The moment this is simply done, all fear and hesitation will be removed. The King’s Word will be counted on for everything.

But ought not the conscience to be thoroughly set at rest by that which God has done for us? Assuredly; He knows full well our unworthiness, our need, our guilt, and He has fully met them. He has given up His Son, He has sent Him into the place of our sin and misery to bear upon the cross that wrath which was our due; and if, taking the estimate of ourselves which all this implies, we receive, as lost, helpless sinners, God’s testimony to the work of Christ for sinners, what room is

there for doubt or dread? Christ has tasted death, has gone down under the power of Satan under the wrath of God, has taken our place; but God has raised Him from the dead, and has seated Him in power and glory at His own right hand, thus showing the perfect sufficiency of His sacrifice for sin. God has been perfectly glorified in the earth by His own Son, the man Christ Jesus, and sin has been expiated by the death of the sinless one. These have been done altogether apart from us; therefore God can say, "All things are ready; come to the feast."

If we speak one word or have a thought about right to stand in the presence of God, it destroys the whole ground upon which God is acting in fullness of grace. It is quite clear that anyone who allows for a moment the idea that he has to provide his share in the feast, or to compensate for it, can have no sense of the king's honor, or of his own real inability. God does not offer salvation at a price, or for a return. There is no stipulation, no covenant, no vow; but a GIFT is offered which cannot be accepted otherwise than as a gift. When it is received as such (and not before) fruit is produced—the fruit of gratitude, issuing in thanksgiving (Heb. 13:15) and life-service. (Rom. 12:1)

Any hesitation to accept God's invitation is to cast dishonor, to that extent, on His power or on His love. The invitation is our sole title, and, coming from one who knows us so well, it merits our entire confidence. It is for all in "the highways," whether it meets us as beggars or princes, so to speak. "The servants gathered together all, as many as they found." No exception was made; none were to be passed by uninvited. The king's command is clear—"As many as ye shall find bid to the marriage." The only real question for those who hear the gospel invitation is, "Has the conscience submitted to the righteousness of God? Is the invitation accepted as one of the purest grace?" If so, it is theirs to cast aside all the anxieties that sin occasions, and to enter into the joy of the king, in the happy assurance that their place is to sit at his table. Blessing is secure through His sufficiency and His grace.

There is a sad incident, which must not be overlooked. "When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how tamest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless." Grace had been mocked at by this man; for he had not obtained the indispensable wedding robe, doubtless thinking, by foolish comparison, his own good enough. The instruction from this is evident. God has, at infinite cost, provided for us whose robes are all sin-stained a spotless garment, such as is alone suited to His holy presence; and great indeed is the presumption that, with the pretense of accepting, virtually despises this gracious provision. "And he was speechless." With memory quickened, conscience fully awake, sin seen in its true colors, and the majesty of God apprehended, who shall dare utter a word! Judgment proportionate to guilt shall follow, and heavy surely it will be in the cases of which this is an example. "Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

On the other hand, if, acknowledging our guilt and incapacity, we accept that which God vouchsafes to give, our fears will vanish, and our lips will be opened to render to Him the glory, and to rejoice in honoring His Son. Are our hearts thus in the spirit of the wedding? Are our thoughts in unison with those of God regarding Christ? If not, however near to Him we may think ourselves, we have nothing to do with the wedding. The principle of the whole matter is in question—"How tamest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?"

God's heart is set upon the glory of Christ, and that glory is connected with the joy and blessing of those who have submitted to His righteousness and welcomed the riches of His grace. If our hearts are occupied with the glory of Christ, we shall not be thinking, in one sense, of what we are, or of what we were; our thoughts will dwell upon the Blessor, and upon the blessedness into which we have been brought.

The Pleasant Land Despised

Beloved, do our hearts indeed say, "We are on our way to God"?

Do we believe, that with the innumerable throng of the redeemed we shall soon sing the everlasting anthem of praise to the Lamb? It is astonishing the simplicity of heart there is, when we believe that "we are on our way to God." Whenever the soul has really got hold of this, believing in God, knowing His love, that He has brought us out of Egypt, and that we are on our way to Canaan, there is a spring of heart that surmounts everything. There may be a great many things by the way to exercise our hearts and thoughts; but if this feeling predominates, they only come in by the way. If my mind be fixed on present circumstances, and present difficulties, and on God's helping me in them, there will not at all be the same spring of joy; for then I make God to be simply the servant of my necessities. The heart rests and centers there; and God sinks down into a mere help in time of trouble. It is quite true that "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble" (Psa. 46:1); but to bring Him down to be only this, changes the whole aspect of things. Himself, as our portion, is infallibly ours. If our hearts are fixed on being with Jesus in His rest and glory, on being in the "Father's house," our own present difficulties have the character of difficulties by the way; we can then rise over trouble, however felt, and our thoughts about God are not merely that He will help us in the circumstances in which we are: our hearts being fixed on Him, we live in the freedom that arises from the constant certainty, that all that is Christ's is ours.

It is important for us to have our minds fixed on the hope of glory which is set before us.

One form which unbelief takes, is the not having this hope fresh on the mind. Supposing I had to live twenty years, the next thing to my heart ought to be the glory. In the children of Israel, unbelief took many forms; one character of it was, that "they despised the pleasant land" (Chapter 14:31; Psa. 106:24). Now, very often, there is in our hearts, practically, though not willfully, the despising of the pleasant land. I am not speaking of any doubtfulness as to the land being ours. If there were something that a friend had given me as a great treasure, and I was sure of its being mine, and yet I looked at it but seldom, and cared to think of it but seldom, this would be a proof (not of uncertainty respecting its being mine, but) that I despised the thing, that I had no real value for it. This is very often the way we treat the heavenly glory that belongs to us. We do not question the truth of the promises; but, when our souls are not dwelling upon, and delighting in the glory that is set before us, there is a "despising of the pleasant land." It is too much the case with the saints. And no occupation with present things-with present duties even, can make up for the loss of peace and comfort there is to the soul in not dwelling upon the things which God has laid up in store for them that love Him (1 Cor. 2:9) as its own things. Instead of God's being the strength and fullness of our present joy, in the midst of present tribulation, as it is said, "We joy in God" (Rom. 5:11), we only make Him a help in time of trouble. There is weakness and infirmity, instead of rejoicing in God. The heart being brought down here, and kept down, it brings down God after it (so gracious is He, that He will even come down), instead of rising above present circumstances up to God.

Of course, this character of unbelief will not be manifested in the hearts of the saints, as it was in the children of Israel; but, in measure, it is the same thing. The “spies” (Num. 13 and 14) had been sent by Moses, at the command of the Lord, to search out the land of Canaan, “which,” the Lord said, “I give unto the children of Israel,” and to bring of the fruit thereof. The Spirit of God, personally dwelling in present witness in us, takes of the glory of the Lord Jesus, of the things of the land of promise (that true Canaan, of which faith says, my land), and thus shows us of our portion.

“So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob And they came unto the brook of Eschol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs. The place was called the brook Eschol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence. And they returned from searching of the land after forty days. And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it” (vss. 21, 23-27). There was no gainsaying the report of the spies; these grapes told of the goodness of the land. It was a land that produced such fruit. So when the Holy Spirit brings the earnest to us of our joy and glory, who would gainsay? Who does not feel that it is worth anything by the way to get there? The earnest is so sweet!

“When our prospect is dimmed, we become careless about it and profane; when bright, we need naught but manna, and the water, and patience for the wilderness, longing rest, submitting to the will of God concerning it. And when our souls are really dwelling as in the glory, when the grapes of Eschol really fill our souls, there is deadness to all save the savor and brightness of the hope. What is heavenly is heavenly to us, for we are heavenly-minded. We see the glory of the Lord; and it is a place where His eyes are continually—a land not watered by foot, but by rivers that run among hills and valleys, the very dwelling-place of the Father’s kingdom. The Spirit in the revelation of God (for it is God) causes us thus to dwell in the fullness of God, and from hence we estimate the inheritance, the fellowship with Christ in it, and the glory. We dwell in it, in the sweet savor of divine delight in Jesus, who fills all things, and will in very deed do so, and is now revealed to us by the Spirit.”

“NEVERTHELESS,” said the spies, “the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains,” and so forth. When the people heard that there were difficulties, there began to be restlessness and uneasiness amongst them.

“And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (vs. 30).

“But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And

there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (vss. 30-33). That is, they get hold of the thought of the people in unbelief, and venture to deny all that they had previously said when they see that their report was not received. The first thing they told Moses was the simple truth-that it was a very good land; but when they see this unbelief at work in the minds of the people their judgment respecting it is quite different, and they say it is a very bad land. The whole sense of the goodness of the Lord in giving them the land is gone, and consequently they break down in despair when looking at the difficulties by the way. There is not merely distrust about their overcoming these enemies; they lose the sense of the goodness of the land, and then they have no encouragement in their difficulties: their faith becomes weakness. Just so with the Christian. If I lose the joy of the glory, the difficulties I meet with by the way are insurmountable, for my heart does not know what it has to contend for.

"And all the congregation lifted up their voices, and cried; and the people wept that night," and so forth. When in the first freshness of their setting out their sin had manifested itself (bad as it was), they did not lay the blame upon God, they said, "This Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 33). But the moment this unbelief gets hold of their hearts, the desert becomes thoroughly and insupportably painful to them, and they say, "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in the wilderness! And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make us a captain, and let us return into Egypt." See what a miserably wicked state of unbelief they had got into, so as to attribute to the Lord Himself their trials and difficulties. This is a snare to which even Christians are exposed. We are conscious that it is the Lord that has brought us up out of Egypt; and hence, when trials come upon us, our hearts are apt to say, "This comes of my being a Christian;" the Lord has brought me into these difficulties. Now, had Canaan been on the hearts of the children of Israel, they would have, said, "Thank God that we are thus far on our way to Canaan." Let the difficulties be what they might if they had felt, "By the word of the Lord we have been brought here," there would have been thanksgiving and not murmuring. But they stopped at the point where they were, instead of looking at it as but a step on the way to the glorious land before them. There was the pretense of thoughtfulness for others-their wives and children, though in reality it was only selfishness.

Verses 6-9. Joshua and Caleb speak of the exceeding goodness of the land, and add, "If the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not."

"But all the congregation bade stone them with stones." The moment that was spoken which should have cheered the people it brought out positive hostility.

Verses 13-19. The intercession of Moses comes in based on the testimony the Lord had given of Himself. (Compare Ex. 34:6-7) The principle of it is this, the perfect identification of the Lord with His people. He presses on the Lord that His own glory is bound up with the preservation and blessing of His people inseparable from them. Two things result. The Lord acts according to the faith of Moses, as He ever does according to the faith that is in us (vs. 20); but He sends the

children of Israel into the desert, to remain there until all the men that came up out of Egypt fell.

There is another thing also to notice; when the children of Israel will not go up in faith, into the promised land, the Lord sends them a long way round the desert. Two things accompany this, one as the result of it, the other pure grace. If they have to march round the desert, the Lord cannot leave them alone; He must go round with them, guiding them by His pillar of fire and of cloud, all the way. His grace abounds over sin. Secondly, Caleb and Joshua must go the long way round, too. They had not gone with the people in the evil; but as to the pain and trial of the march, which the unbelief of the others had caused, they are obliged to go along with the people, and to bear a part of it. This is what we must make up our minds to. If the church has failed, we must make up our minds to accompany it in its course of sorrow, though not in its course of sin. As far as Caleb and Joshua were concerned, there was the exercise of grace, and patience, and love. It was blessing to them, for God was faithful in keeping them, whilst the rest fell in the wilderness. Caleb is able to say, at the end of the forty years, that he is as strong for war as at the beginning, "both to go out, and to come in." (Josh. 14) But the faithful, though they had the consciousness that God was with them, were obliged to accompany the unfaithful in their course of sorrow, arising from the position into which they had brought themselves.

This is our place. In the spirit of love, of patience, and of humiliation, we have always to take the place of those who have sinned. See Daniel. Though himself personally righteous, Daniel confesses the people's sin as his own, saying, "O Lord we have sinned, and have committed iniquity" "to us belongeth confusion of face," and so forth. (Dan. 9) The sin and evil of those who have sinned should be confessed by the remnant; who, though not partakers of the sin, must yet be partakers of the consequences of it, suffering in all the affliction with true sympathy and fellowship.

In applying this practically to ourselves, what was it that led to the very need of their having the Lord with them on the march? The soul not being set on (their not having their affections occupied with) the blessings of the promised land. And that which we have to seek is, that our souls may "abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit, dwelling in us, becomes the earnest of those better things in our hearts; and reveals to us that it is the Lord's land, the land which He has given us, that He is bringing us into. If we are able to say, This is the fruit of the land which the Lord has given us,' if our hearts' affections are dwelling on the land, all the strength of the Anakims is as nothing. No matter, then, as to preventing us from getting there, what may be the trial and difficulty by the way. But the moment we lose the consciousness of what is ours, the moment we forget that the Lord has given us the land, difficulties and trials occupy our mind, and become too great for us; we fall under the power of them. This results from our losing sight of what belongs to us in hope. We cannot have our hearts fixed on Canaan without being conscious that the Lord's strength is with us.

If I rest in circumstances, I am apt to blame the Lord for bringing me there. Nobody ever thought of the blessedness of being with Jesus in the glory, and of being like Him there; no one ever entered in spirit really there, without being conscious that it was the Lord's strength that would bring him there. Then all in the way is a mere circumstance.

What I desire for you and for myself, beloved, is, that we may avoid "despising the pleasant land." And do not let us say that we are not "despising" it, if we are not thinking often about it. If we are

not thinking of Jesus where He is, and of being with Him there, we are “despising the pleasant land.” May we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

We must not suppose that the Scriptures do not supply to the new man the details of the glory that belongs to us. But they are details known only to faith. It is only just so far as we are in present communion with the Lord, that we shall understand and enjoy them. Memory will not do. There is no possibility of exercising memory about the objects of hope. We must be filled with the Spirit. That which will fill up our joy is Christ Himself. We find a fund of detail about the glory, when we know, by the power of the Holy Spirit, what Christ is for us—Christ glorified. Just as the poor thief (taught of the Holy Spirit) could state the whole life of Christ, though he had never known Him before, as if he had been His intimate friend, saying to his companion, “This man has done nothing amiss;” so the soul, when taught by the Holy Spirit, has as the object of its affections, and knows and realizes it, Jesus. The mind then becomes occupied with the object of its hope in glory, and the individual is able to say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” All the circumstances which happen to us only come in by the way. Instead of having the thoughts down here in the trouble, bringing God down into it, we are lifted clean out of it into glory.

This sets us on our “high places,” when otherwise there would be the feeling in the heart—“Why hath the Lord brought us into this land to fall by the sword?” and so forth. The Holy Spirit delights to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. (John 16:13-15)

The Lord give us, in realizing the fullness of Jesus, to have our souls in the sweet savor of divine delight in Him, dwelling by faith in the promised land, that we may know what our hope is, as well as what is the ground of our hope. And ever let us remember that it is not by any effort of memory, but by the power of communion in the Holy Spirit, that we can have the present consciousness and enjoyment of those things “which God hath prepared for them that love Him.”

The Counsel of Peace

This chapter, Zechariah 6, written after the return of the Jews from Babylon, and when they were seeking to rebuild the temple, was intended to encourage them in that work. It speaks therefore of Joshua, Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah (those which had come from Babylon) by name. But “no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation,” and although some event previously to take place may occupy the chief part of it, the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is looked forward to as the ultimate point, the true consummation. So here, after an allusion to the history of God’s providence in the four great monarchies, and to the judgment of Babylon, the prophet comforts the hearts of those who were returned thence with a direct prophecy of Christ.

Christ is the great object of the love of God, and the Spirit of God in Scripture always looks on to Him. No matter what the substance of the prophecy, no matter what the circumstances of those addressed, He looks forward, seeing all things as they concern Christ, and His future glory. The Jews, for instance, had many deliverers raised up for them of God in times of need— “saviors, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies” (Neh. 9:27); but the moment the Holy Spirit begins to speak of these many “saviors,” He looks onward; they were but types of the “Savior.” When Adam fell, and judgment came in, Christ is promised—the woman’s seed, as the bruiser of the head of the serpent. After the trial of Abraham’s faith in Isaac, the promise is made unto his seed, “which seed is Christ.” (Gal. 3:16) Again, “Out of Egypt have I called my son,” we are taught, referred to Christ. (Hos. 11:1) And so here: “He shall build the temple of the Lord: even He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne.” It is the “man whose name is The BRANCH” who shall do all this. Zerubbabel is merely a type. (Zech. 6:12) Nothing is spoken casually, but all with a view to the ultimate purpose of the glory of God in Christ. Whether it affect the destinies of man, of Israel, or of the church, all center in Jesus. God’s thoughts about Jesus are marked on all.

It must have been a great comfort to the saints of old to have future glories thus opened to them; for whenever the Holy Spirit had awakened spiritual desires in any heart, those desires could not be satisfied with anything then seen of temporal deliverance or blessing. (John 8:56) Much had they to thank the Lord for—to sing His praise for what He had done; but there was always either the actual presence of evil, or the fear of danger and evil still. In the days of Josiah, when there was so great a returning to the ways of the Lord, and such a passover kept that the like of it had not been since the days of Samuel the prophet, yet even then was Jeremiah uttering denunciations against the evil of the people, and the Spirit of God, in denouncing their sin, ever referred to the new covenant, holding out the Lord Jesus as the one in whom alone the fullness of blessing was to center.

And so with the church now. We have indeed greater blessings and clearer revelations, but still there is evil; for we are yet in the body. In times of the greatest revival, there has ever been that mixed with them which tended to evil. We have surely much cause to thank God and rejoice; yet we must still be looking onward to the future blessings in Christ. Never, till He appears, will the full

desires of our hearts be given us; never, until we “awake in His likeness,” shall we really be “satisfied” (Psa. 17:15). Nothing less will suffice, because the Spirit of Christ is in us. Constant dissatisfaction and constant thanksgiving meanwhile; for if we know Jesus risen, nothing short of the full power of His resurrection can content. (Phil. 3:10-16) Our hopes run on to God’s ultimate purpose of complete blessing.

And here we have union of hope with the Jews. They indeed are looking for earthly glory—their city and temple being rebuilt, and so forth—that part of the future blessing (Zech. 14:8-11; Ezek. 4:1) which Psalm 72 speaks of; and we also look forward to see the earth “filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,” whilst our own immediate portion in the heavenly glory is our peculiar hope. Both earthly and heavenly glories meet in Jesus, and will be manifested when He comes. He is the Head of both. “The counsel of peace” is between Jehovah and Jesus.

But where is Jesus now? As “the man whose name is The BRANCH,” the “priest upon His throne,” an earthly throne He does not yet rule. Peace is not yet established upon the earth; for Satan is yet exercising his power. But there is a throne upon which He does sit. He has sat down upon the “Father’s throne,” “at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” and that “when He had by Himself purged our sins;” there He is as the High Priest of His people. And thus is given to us a plain revelation of “the counsel of peace.” Peace is our portion even now. We are set in the exercise of faith, by which we know and have this peace in our souls whilst waiting for its establishment on the earth and the time of the manifested glory.

There is a “counsel of peace” which belongs to us—an assured peace; peace indeed in the midst of present trouble, but still God’s peace. If it were not God’s peace, it would be good for nothing. I may, it is true, have my spirit much disturbed and know trial of heart, but still I have a title to perfect peace amidst it all, not only peace with God, but “the peace of God” to rule my heart in. every trial. (Phil. 4:6,7)

Had not man been in rebellion against God, there would have been no need for “the counsel of peace.” Adam in paradise needed it not. But man has rebelled; and though its modifications may be various, rebellion against God is still the characteristic of the unconverted heart. Such was his rebellion that peace between man and God seemed impossible; but now—wondrous grace!—we see that there is not only peace, but a “counsel of peace”—thoughts of God concerning peace, thoughts which Jesus alone could meet: “Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.”

Supposing God had made peace with Adam, the peace could not have lasted; the enmity in the heart of man, or that produced by the power of circumstances thwarting his will, would very soon have broken it again. Look at Israel. They were placed in outward peace with God, owned as His people, favored in every way, and yet what was the result? Continual murmuring on their part; constant rebellion. As to moral peace with God, they had scarcely undertaken to keep His law than they set up a golden calf to worship, and thus failed directly. And it would always be the same: it must be so; for the very will of man is altogether wrong. “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

But now “the counsel of peace” is between God and Jesus, instead of man, and hence security. It is not merely peace, but “the counsel of peace.” The word “counsel” implies deliberate purpose. What solidity must there be in that peace which God had a “counsel” about, and all the

engagements of which the mind of Jesus fully entered into and accomplished!

I have said that peace is our proper portion as the children of God—peace both as to sin and as to circumstances. Now it is true that the latter we have not outwardly yet; but God is taking up all that concerns us, and has taken upon Himself to make “all things work together for our good;” and the knowledge of this gives peace (if we will use our privilege) in all circumstances; be they even those of trial, perplexity, and sorrow. Was it not so with Jesus? Who can be so tried as He? (“Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”) yet He had always peace. And so might we. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.”

But then it is most important to see that the “counsel of peace” is entirely between God and Jesus. The moment we begin to rest our peace on anything in ourselves we lose it. And this is why so many saints have not settled peace. Nothing can be lasting that is not built on God alone. How can you have settled peace? Only by having it in God’s own way. By not resting it on anything, even the Spirit’s work, within yourselves, but on what Christ has done entirely without you. Then you will know peace, conscious unworthiness; but yet peace. In Christ alone God finds that in which He can rest, and so is it with His saints. The more you see the extent and nature of the evil that is within, as well as that without and around, the more you will find that what Jesus is, and what Jesus did, is the only ground at all on which you can rest.

God could no more rest in anything here than Noah’s dove could find a rest for her foot amidst destruction that deluged the world. But Jesus comes in, and here on this earth, where honor to God was wanting—here He glorified God. When God’s eye rested upon Jesus, He was perfectly satisfied. Till that moment God hath not seen anything in this earth of which He could say, as of itself, “in this I am well pleased.” He had gone on, it is true, dealing with man in love and grace, but He could find nothing wherein to rest. “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one,” and so forth, was what God saw when He “looked down from heaven.” But when Jesus was searched throughout, nothing was found but perfect love and perfect devotedness to God; even when forsaken of God, He still justifies Him, “But thou art holy” (Psa. 22:3).

Had it ended there, had it been only Christ’s own perfectness, all the result would have been to show out the more clearly our sinfulness and ruin by the contrast. But according to “the counsel of peace,” He gave Himself a sacrifice to “make peace.” There was no need of making peace for Himself, it was ever His; it was for us that He “made peace by the blood of the cross,” and thus is He unto God a “sweet savor of rest” for us.

Our peace is established in what He did, and “the counsel of peace” is “between them both.” Jesus has accomplished that which God purposed towards us.

In order to this, it was needful that He should “bear our sins” (1 Peter 2:24), and this He did as the “sin-offering.” “He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

In the sacrifices, when the offerer laid his hand upon the head of the victim, there was in that act the complete identification of himself with the victim. Now there are two great characters in the sacrifice of Christ, the one that of the burnt-offering; the other, that of the sin-offering. We lay our

hands on Him as the “burnt-offering,” thus identifying ourselves with Him “Accepted in the beloved,” all His perfectness, all His “sweet savor” unto God is ours. But then as to the “sin-offering,” it is just the reverse, the hand laid upon the victim, it became identified with my sins, charged with my guilt.

Well, beloved, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus had this double character. He has completely accomplished the purpose of God, all that which was in “the counsel of peace.” This “counsel of peace” was not between me and God, though I have, as the fruit of it, the enjoyment of the peace. I had not to do with it in any sense; it was “between them both.” All is done, and Jesus, both the accomplisher and the accomplishment, has sat down, in proof that all is finished, on the throne of God. (Heb. 10:12-14)

But, perhaps, it may be asked, “Why, if the work is perfectly accomplished, is He yet a priest upon the throne?”

He is not there at all as a priest to work out righteousness for us; He is our righteousness, and we are the righteousness of God in Him. (1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 5:21) “This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God.” His sitting down is the proof that He has nothing more to do in that way for His friends, and now He only waits “till His enemies be made His footstool.”

But then in order that we may have the enjoyment of these things, He is acting in another way as priest. Having the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us we consequently see many things in ourselves contrary to Him—many things that would hinder fellowship with God. Now here it is that the present ministry of Christ comes in. We need His priesthood in order to maintain our communion with God: we need Him daily, as it is said, “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” We need the presence of perfect righteousness on our behalf before God, and He has ever before His eyes, and that “for us,” the accomplisher of “the counsel of peace”—“Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Here, then, is “the counsel of peace” which was purposed between God and Jesus. Here, and here only, have we peace. If ever our souls have any idea of rest except in that which is the perfect rest of God, if ever we are looking for peace anywhere else, be it where it may, we have got out of God’s way of accomplishing peace, off the ground of this “counsel of peace.” He has not called us into “the counsel;” it is that which is entirely independent of ourselves—“between them both”—accomplished and everlastingly sure. Nothing can ever touch it. God has publicly owned His acceptance of Christ’s work, by seating Him at His own right hand. The Holy Spirit is sent to witness to us that Jesus is now “on the throne of God,” having “by one offering perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14).

We may have a great deal of trial (we know we shall), trial from circumstances around, trial from within, exercise of conscience, and the like; but still, we have the perfect certainty of God’s favor, “and if God be for us, who can be against us?” With Paul we may reckon, because of his having given Jesus for us, along with Jesus upon everything. This is the true way to reckon upon his kindness. “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Observe, he says “the peace of God.”

Again, the word is, "Be careful for nothing." If one single thing were excepted, God would not be God. Well, if exercised, and troubled in spirit, tempted to be "careful," let us go to God about it. Our wishes may possibly be foolish wishes, still let us go and present them to God; if they are so, we shall very soon be ashamed of them.

We have need of this "counsel of peace," because all that we are in ourselves is enmity against God. I cannot go out of this "counsel" to look at my own heart for a moment; it is "between them both." Is the Christian to make Christ's cross less complete? On that alone his peace can rest. The moment we come to establish its perfectness, the moment we seek to add a single thing, we are adding, or rather taking away, something from the perfectness of "the counsel of peace."

Who or what shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord? Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, these things shall, as means for mortifying the flesh, only minister to Christ's glory. Shall death? it will only bring us into His presence. Shall life? it is that by which we enjoy His favor. "Nothing shall separate!" He is "on the throne" as the eternal witness of peace accomplished, and thence He ministers it to us. (Rom. 8:28-39)

The Lord give us grace to look at Him alone!

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