

J.C. Philpot

Sermons

Volume 4

1844 to 1845

Strict and Particular Baptists Minister

For 26 years

He held a joint pastorate at Stamford (Lines) and Oakham (Rutland) Strict and Particular Baptists

Was the Joint editor of the Gospel Standard Magazine, launched in 1835, with John Mackenzie, till 1849 when he became the sole editor.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph Charles Philpot (1802 – 1869) was known as “The Se-ceder”. He resigned from the Church of England in 1835 and became a Strict & Particular Baptist minister.



J C Philpot

While with the Church of England he was a Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford. After becoming a Strict and Particular Baptist he became the Editor of the Gospel Standard magazine and served in that capacity for twenty years.

Educated at Oxford University, he was elected a fellow of Worcester College, and appeared to have a brilliant scholastic career before him. But he was brought into solemn concern spiritually and the Lord led him into the ministry. He first preached in the Established Church at Stadhampton (Oxfordshire). In 1835, however, he was constrained, for the truth's sake, to sever his connection with the Church of England and to resign his curacy and his fellowship. The letter to the provost stating his reasons was published and went into several editions.

The same year, he was baptized by John Warburton at Allington (Wilts). The rest of his life was spent ministering among the Strict Baptists. For 26 years, he held a joint pastorate at Stamford (Lines) and Oakham (Rutland). In addition for over twenty years, he was

editor of "The Gospel Standard", where many of his sermons first appeared.

"My desire is to exalt the grace of God; to proclaim salvation alone through Jesus Christ; to declare the sinfulness, helplessness and hopelessness of man in a state of nature; to describe the living experience of the children of God in their trials, temptations, sorrows, consolations and blessings."

J. C. Philpot.

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58 The Day of Power

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Allie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning,
July 7, 1844

“And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.”

Isaiah 29:18, 19

What a picture does the Holy Ghost draw in this chapter (Isaiah 29) of a professing church “having a form of godliness, and denying the power thereof!” And with what a solemn woe does it open: “Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt!” Ariel means “the light of God,” and is the name given to Jerusalem, as being the place where the Lord specially manifested himself; for “out of Zion went forth the law, and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:3.) But the Lord saw into what an awful state Jerusalem had fallen; and therefore, though the Holy Ghost still calls her by the name of Ariel, “the light of God,” viewing her according to the position in which he had originally placed her, yet he pronounces a woe on her, because that light was become dim, and burnt not as brightly as when David dwelt there. He therefore says, “Add ye year to year”—go on still in your dead and lifeless profession; “let them kill sacrifices”—let all the forms still be observed, but think not that these things are acceptable in my holy eyes, or that I can be satisfied with the form while the power is wanting.

The former part of this chapter is obscure, and probably contains much that remains to be fulfilled; but the latter part is sufficiently plain. God the Spirit files in it an awful bill of charges against the professing church. Let us see what they are.

We read, then, of a general sleep. (v. 10.) “The Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes:

the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered:” and the effect of this general slumber, which the Lord thus solemnly declared to have proceeded from himself in a way of judgment, was, that neither the learned nor the unlearned knew the power of God's truth. “And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I cannot, for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I am not learned.” The learned could not read the book, for it was “sealed;” and the unlearned could not, because they were “not learned:” and thus, secondly, the effect of general sleep, was general ignorance.

The third charge which the Holy Ghost files against the professing church, is general hypocrisy. “This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me; but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.” The first step then, in the apostasy of the professing church, was judicial sleep; the second, as its effect, general ignorance; and the third, as the fruit of general ignorance, was general hypocrisy; they drew near to God with their lips, while their hearts were far from him; and their fear was not the godly, filial fear which is a fruit of the Spirit, but a base counterfeit, taught by the precept of men.

The fourth charge is general perversion and confusion: “Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay.” Right and wrong, bitter and sweet, good and evil, light and darkness, were all confounded; truth was perverted, and error substituted for it; and thus universal confusion prevailed.

The fifth charge is that of general rebellion. “For shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, he hath no understanding?” The creature dared to arraign God's power, “He made me not;” “My own will and power made me a Christian;” and to doubt God's wisdom, “He

hath no understanding;” “Man’s wisdom outshines the Lord’s.”

See, then, what an awful bill of charges the Holy Ghost here files against Ariel, the professing church of God—general slumber, general ignorance, general hypocrisy, general perversion, and general rebellion. Can we find a counterpart to this picture? Do you think that any church ever existed since that time resembling the one which the Holy Ghost has here described? Yes: the professing church of the day in which we live presents a perfect counterpart to the picture here given; nor could we have a portrait of it more minute in all the details, or a more graphic, vivid, or powerful description of what the professing church is in the day and generation in which our lot is cast. Are not the five marks I have mentioned now so plainly stamped on its forehead, that he who runs may read?

Has God, then, abandoned his people? Has he forsaken his church? Is his mercy clean gone forever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?” No: he has reserved to himself “a remnant.” Therefore we read in the text, “In that day,” (that day of general slumber, general ignorance, general hypocrisy, general perversion, and general rebellion), “in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.” We see here a gleam of sunshine breaking through the black cloud that overspreads the earth; the Lord still appears on behalf of his people, whom, that they may not be here mistaken, he here describes by peculiar marks.

If we look, then, at the words of the text, we see four characters mentioned in it—the deaf, the blind, the meek, and the poor; and we find certain promises addressed to each and all of them: the “deaf shall hear,” the “blind shall see,” the “meek shall increase their joy in the Lord,” and “the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.”

In speaking, therefore, from these words, I shall attempt to trace

out, as far as the Lord shall enable me, the characters mentioned, and the promises addressed to them. And as it might create confusion if I were to separate the character too far from the promise, I shall endeavour to take up the text as it lies before me, and, following God’s order, examine the separate clauses as the Spirit has here revealed them. And may he give me “the tongue of the learned,” and you the ear of the wise, and crown the whole with his special savour and blessing to my and your consciences.

I.—The text commences, “In that day.” It cannot have escaped your observation, if you are an attentive reader of the Scriptures, that the phrase, “in that day,” is much made use of by the prophets, and especially by Isaiah, and that great and glorious things are usually connected with this day. Now, if you will look carefully to the connection where the phrase, “in that day,” is used, you will find, for the most part, that two distinct things are spoken of as taking place in it; and that it is either a day of trouble, or a day of joy. For instance, we read (Isa. 2:11), “The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day, for the day of the Lord of Hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low.” This day, we read, is to be “upon all the towering cedars of Lebanon, the lofty oaks of Bashan, the proud ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures;” and the effect of that day is, that “the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low.” Again, we read (Jer. 30:7), “Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it; it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.” We read also of “the day of the Lord” sometimes as a day of darkness, as Amos 5:18-20, “Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?” But, in other places, we find “the day of the Lord” spoken of as a day of deliverance, and therefore connected with joy, praise, and thanksgiving. “In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah.” (Isaiah 26:1.) “In that day thou

shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wert angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.” (Isaiah 12:1.) But some might ask, “How comes it to pass, that the same expression, “that day,” can refer to things so opposite? Why does the Holy Ghost speak of one day, when the things that occur in it are so completely different? How can darkness and light, sorrow and joy, affliction and consolation, all happen in the same day?” It is not so. That is not the meaning of the Holy Ghost. But by the expression he means a day of power. It is not the same day as to time, but as to operation; “the day of the Lord” is different from every other day; for it is the day in which the Lord stretches out his hand, makes bare his arm, and conspicuously appears. The same expression is therefore used when the Lord lays low, or when he raises up; when he makes poor, or when he makes rich; when he condemns by the law, or justifies by the gospel. Each is “the day of the Lord,” because it is a day of power; either power to kill, or power to heal; power to pull down, or power to build up. When, therefore, we find the expression, “in that day,” or “the day of the Lord,” we may assign to it this meaning—a day of power, because it is a day which the Lord calls his own.

But which of these two meanings does it bear in the text? Evidently a day of deliverance—a day of mercy for the church of God. “In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book.”

II.—We come, then, at once to one of the characters before hinted at as descriptive of a living soul, and to a promise suitable to such. But what are we to understand by the expression, “deaf?” Whom does it represent? I think it describes the elect of God in two points of view—what they are before, and what they are after the quickening work of God the Spirit on their consciences. The elect, in common with all men, before God gives them spiritual life, have no ears to hear what the Lord speaks; are utterly inattentive to all he has declared in his word of truth, are deaf to his providences, promises, warnings, and precepts. But the promise runs, “In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book.” “The ears

of the deaf shall be unstopped” (Isaiah 35:5); and then, and not till then, have they ears to hear what God speaks.

But there is another sense, and that which I think the Holy Ghost means here, in which a person is called “deaf,” and that is feelingly and experimentally so, according to those words, (and striking words they are,) “Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears.” (Isaiah 43:8.) What a strange people must these be. Blind people that have eyes, and deaf people that have ears. And they are to be brought forth conspicuously as a strange and peculiar people, that they may be “men wondered at.” Naturally it would be a contradiction, and they would be monsters; but spiritually, no contradiction exists, for they feel their blindness and yet see, and feel their deafness and yet hear.

Now, it is with us spiritually, as it was with Paul literally and actually—the first entrance of light makes us feel blind. Did not the light from heaven which shined round about him as he was journeying to Damascus blind him and was he not three days without sight? So spiritually, we never feel ourselves blind till we begin to see: as long as we think we have light, we are in darkness, but immediately that we begin to see, we begin to feel blind; and when we begin to hear, we begin to feel deaf. The reason of this is, that a new faculty is given us to see and hear with; and this faculty being as yet weak and feeble, and yet we being able to see and hear with no other, are made to feel how blind we as yet are to the blessed truths of the gospel, and how deaf to hear anything for our peace, joy, and comfort.

Now, the Lord says, “In that day,” the day of power, when he stretches forth his hand, to do his own work, “shall the deaf” the feelingly and experimentally deaf, “hear the words of the book.” What is “the book” here mentioned? It is the book on which I now lay my hand, the sacred Scriptures, the revelation of God’s mind and will to the children of men. In this book are “words;” and those words the experimentally deaf are brought to hear, “in that day” when God the Spirit unstops their ears. But what are the words

which the deaf hear? The expression “words” has a very comprehensive signification; for in God’s book are words of thunder, and words of a still small voice; words that terrify and alarm, and words that comfort and console; words from Mount Sinai, and words from Mount Zion; words like a two-edged sword, and words that drop like the dew and rain into the parched soil. “The deaf shall hear the words of the book.” And the first words which they hear are from Mount Sinai; those words which when the people heard them, they “entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more, for they could not endure that which was commanded; the words that manifest the spirituality of God’s law, the holiness of God’s character, the sinfulness of sin, and the vengeance due to the transgressor.” These words of the book the deaf hear “in that day” when the Lord puts forth his hand, and unstops their ears. And they find, as king Josiah did, when the book of the law was discovered in the temple, that they are “quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword;” and have a power “to pull down and to destroy,” according to one branch of Jeremiah’s commission. (Jer. 1:10.) But the words of the book which the deaf hear “in that day” are for the most part comfortable words: for they are usually quick enough to hear all that makes against them, but are deaf to what makes for them. The words, therefore, which they want to hear are those which bring peace, pardon, love, and salvation into their conscience; and because they cannot hear these words of the book to their soul’s comfort, they feel to be deaf. How often has the case of the poor, tried child of God been described from the pulpit, and yet he could not receive the testimony to his soul’s comfort! How often have the very invitations and promises suitable to his case been laid before him, and yet he could not hear them for himself, because he felt his need of the power of God to apply them to his conscience.

But, “in that day,” the day in which the Lord speaks, “shall the deaf hear the words of the book;” the book of divine revelation, that shews forth the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; the

book where God has unfolded his love in the Person and work of Jesus; the book gemmed and studded with promises, like the stars in the midnight sky; the book written for the consolation and edification of God’s living family. “In that day,” that day of general profession and darkness to the church, but of power to God’s people, “in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book.” And when they hear the words of the book, so as to have them sealed on their conscience and applied to their heart, they find a new Bible, a new God, a new heaven, and a new salvation. To “hear the words of the book,” coming with divine power into their souls from the lips of God becomes all their desire. It is not eloquence, nor wisdom, nor learning that they care to hear, but the words of the book sealed with a divine power. Let God only speak out of the book, it is enough, for “where the word of a King is there is power.” A promise is sweet, if he but speak it; a rebuke is felt, if he but apply it; a precept is obeyed, if he but lay it on the conscience; and every truth is precious, if he but make it known.

III.—But another character is spoken of in the text, and another promise is connected with that character, “The eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.” What a strange thing it is, that, according to the Lord’s words, “those who see not shall see, and those who see are made blind.” (John 9:39.) What a strange display of God’s sovereignty that all professors nearly think themselves right but the people of God, many of whom are harassed with fears lest they be wrong altogether. What a strange display of divine sovereignty, that many who think themselves going to heaven are going to hell, and many who fear they are going to hell are going to heaven; that many who think themselves wise and in the light are in ignorance and darkness, while many who feel themselves ignorant and foolish have true knowledge and wisdom.

But what a painful thing it is to feel ourselves blind; to want to see, and find a vail over our eyes; to walk in darkness, and not see those things which we most desire to behold. How the soul at times groans under felt darkness and blindness. How it longs to

look into, and thus realize the precious things of Jesus. Now those who thus groan and sigh under a sense of felt darkness and blindness, are the people to whom the promise is applicable, "The eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness."

You observe two expressions here made use of, "obscurity" and "darkness." Some of God's people are in "obscurity," and some are in "darkness;" "darkness" being a deeper shade of "obscurity," and "obscurity" a lighter shade of "darkness." Thus, some of God's people are as if in early twilight, or the first faint dawn of day; others "walk in darkness, and have no light;" they have not yet reached obscurity, that being a midway term between light and darkness, the breaking up of the night, the first symptom of the morning.

But what do those in "obscurity" see? After God the Spirit has made them feel their lost and ruined state, the first thing which they see is, the way of salvation through a crucified Saviour; how God can "be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." After they have seen "light in God's light," so as to feel and know the thorough wreck and ruin of creature righteousness and false religion, they see out of obscurity, in the light of the Spirit, the Person of Christ, as the Intercessor between God and man, "the Mediator of the new covenant," and, flowing out to him, they see "the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." But these views are at present feeble and dim, enough to break the darkness, but little beyond; enough to draw on, but not to satisfy; to see where the sun is, but not sun-rise. Many of God's people are here; they have seen and felt a sweetness and suitability in the blood and righteousness, love and grace of Jesus; but these have been like objects seen in the twilight, not perceived clearly and distinctly, the eyes being still in obscurity. Others, again, of God's people are in darkness, so as not yet to know and feel the way of escape from the wrath to come, or how God can be just, and yet save their souls. But the promise is given to each; their eyes (and if they have eyes they cannot be blind) shall see "out of obscurity," and "out of darkness." As God the Spirit brings the precious

things of Christ near, and drops a savour of these eternal realities into the soul, the eyes see, and the heart tastes the sweetness of the things presented to the sight. And what a wonderful thing it is to see, in the light of the Spirit, the way of escape from the wrath to come, pardon for the guilty, and righteousness for the sinner. What a glorious sight, when the eyes of the blind are first opened to see the way of salvation through the intercession of the Son of God. It is indeed at first "out of obscurity;" they see dimly but truly, the glorious Person of Christ, in whom all the perfections of Jehovah harmonize; the blood of Jesus, as the blood of the Son of God, atoning for the most aggravated offences; his glorious righteousness, which is "unto all and upon all them that believe;" and they see that those who are accepted in his Person, washed in his blood, and clothed in his righteousness, shall assuredly escape from the wrath to come. These things they see not in their judgment, or by the exercise of their natural intellect, but in the light and teaching of God's Spirit, making it known to their consciences. Now this is the only light that can satisfy a man who feels himself blind. Thus the sensation of blindness makes him prize spiritual eye-salve; the feeling of ignorance makes him value spiritual knowledge; groaning under darkness makes him prize the least gleam of spiritual light. And thus, in God's mysterious dealings, previous darkness and obscurity make the light dear to the eyes, and the things presented in that light sweet and precious to the soul.

How suitable are such promises to those who stand in need of them. Do I feel myself a poor deaf creature that can hear nothing to my soul's comfort but what God speaks with power? Do I find all that drops from the mouth of man to be utterly powerless to do my soul good? Do I want the Lord to preach his own gospel to my heart, and proclaim his own mercy, grace, and truth to my soul? If I were not often thus deaf; if I could hear every voice, listen to every word, grasp every promise, close in with every invitation, I should not want God to speak. It is, then, because we feel our deafness, that we want a supernatural voice to speak to us; and

we thus learn to prize the words of the book, when God the Spirit is pleased to speak them home to the heart. Again, should I want spiritual eye-salve, to have my eyes opened, to feel the veil taken off, if I did not often feel blind? If I never walked in darkness, if I had no obscurity; if I could see what I pleased and when I pleased, what interest could I have, what interest could I wish to have in a promise like this? Is it not, then, worth being deaf to have an interest in such a promise? Is it not worth not hearing a single word for years, if God speak at the last? Is it not worth groping for the wall like the blind for months together, if at the end God fulfil the promise, and give the blind to see out of obscurity and darkness? These lessons, my friends, we cannot learn from man but from the special teachings and leadings of God; and that is one grand reason why the Lord permits his dear people so often to feel deaf and blind, that he may have all the honour of giving them ears and eyes; for he will not give his honour to man; he will not share his glory with the creature; he will have it all his own, for he is “a jealous God.” Is not this the reason why you so seldom hear with power? Is it not to teach you what power is? Why do we often painfully feel ourselves to be such blind ignorant wretches? Is it not because we are deaf to every voice but his, and blind to every sight but the light of his countenance, and the revelation of his blessed Spirit? It is very profitable, then, to feel thus deaf and blind. There are some here perhaps who have been hearing ministers for years, and yet have never heard to their soul’s joy. But is not this far better than to hear any body and every body? Now you cry to God, “Speak, Lord, to my heart through thy servant, or him whom thou shalt send; let the whole earth be still, and thou alone speak; do speak, Lord, for thou knowest my case.” And perhaps, there are some here that have been sighing and groaning day after day for months, who feel there are none that can exceed them in ignorance and folly; and of all who have made a profession for years, they think none can have made so little progress in divine things as themselves. But these painful exercises make us prize the Lord’s light; and what a sweet

and cheering thing light is, when it comes with divine power into the conscience!

IV.—But we pass on to the next verse of the text, “The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.” There is a very sweet and experimental connection between the two verses of the text: “the meek” and “the poor” are closely connected with, and in fact are the same people as “the deaf” and “the blind.” But what is it to be meek? It is not to be meek by nature (for such there are), but to be meekened by God’s grace, by the dealings of the Spirit in the conscience. To be meek, a man must be brought down in his spirit, made humble, broken, and contrite before God; his proud thoughts must come down, his towering spirit be laid low in the dust, and his heart be softened by the grace of God. Two things work together to make a man spiritually meek—a knowledge of God, and a knowledge of himself; a sense of his own deafness, and God making him to hear “the words of the book;” a feeling of his own blindness, and the Lord enabling him to see “out of obscurity,” and “out of darkness.” Do you think there is a greater pride to be found anywhere than the pride of knowledge in one, and the pride of profession in another part of the outward church? You may find greater heights of worldly pride, but not more towering castles, not stronger bulwarks, than those of dead religious profession. But until these two castles are laid low in the dust, we shall be proud of our understanding, and of our attainments; of our gifts, or of our profession; and the more we walk in this path, the prouder we get. In order, then, to meeken us, this pride must be abased; and how better can this be done, than by being made to feel how deaf we are when God does not speak, and how blind we are when he does not give light? Suppose I, or any other minister, could always go into the pulpit with light and life, power and feeling, thoughts and words at our command, would it not make us proud? How humbling, then, are barren and unfruitful seasons! But when the Lord gives light to see out of obscurity and darkness the things that do our souls good,

this enlarges and strengthens our hearts. Do not, then, these alterations and changes meeken the soul? Can pride live in such an atmosphere? Can the pride of profession, of knowledge, of piety, and so on, those great sins of the professing church, live and reign in the heart where deafness and blindness are felt alternately with God's power? If these things are but known in the conscience—our deafness, and God speaking in that deafness,—our blindness, and God giving us light in that darkness,—they lay the pride of profession and of knowledge low.

But what a blessed grace the grace of meekness is—to feel meek and soft in spirit before God. There are many persons towering I know not where, above all darkness and ignorance, but do we find meekness in them? The Lord give you and me meekness before him, for he delighteth in such: let them enjoy their vain confidence, “He dwelleth with the lowly.” But what a great deal of discipline it takes to bring down our towering pride, and at all meeken our heart. What a series of sorrows, trials, temptations, and afflictions do we need to break us down. What a succession of spiritual dealings is necessary to bring true meekness into a man's conscience, to soften and humble his spirit before God. Now you will observe these meek have their peculiar joy, “the meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord.” We know nothing of joy in the Lord, till we know this; for what communion can there be between a proud professor and a broken-hearted Jesus? or what fellowship between unhumiliated, uncircumcised hearts, and the “Man of sorrows” groaning in Gethsemane's garden? There can be no communion with him, no participation of his spirit, till we are brought down in meekness and contrition to his feet; and then there will be a sacred joy in the Lord, which we can know nothing of till we are meek, humble, and broken-hearted, and till we feel that we have nothing and are nothing. Until we feel ourselves the vilest of the vile, and as such creep to his cross, and lie humbly there, we can know no “joy in the Lord.” We may joy in our knowledge, in our profession, in our attainments, in our vain-confidence; but we can have no “joy in the

Lord” till he reveals himself, manifests his love, discovers his glorious perfections, and makes known his atoning blood. And until we are meekened, we are not fit for it; the vessel must first be emptied of its poisonous contents, its venomous ingredients, before the real wine of God's grace can be poured in. So that the meek who “joy in the Lord,” can only joy in him as they are brought down into a resemblance to him. They must be meekened before they can feel his presence, taste his love, or know the power of his resurrection; and in proportion as they are thus meekened, do they enter into these things, and realize their sweetness and blessedness. And it is observable, that these meek and broken-hearted ones, who have some joy in the Lord, (it is not defined how much) are connected with, and indeed are the same persons as those who are deaf, and yet hear the words of the book, and the blind who see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.

But it is said that “the meek shall increase their joy in the Lord.” They may not have much joy, but if they have any at all, it is “in the Lord:” it may be little, but it is real. Now you know, if we are honest men naturally, we would rather have one real piece of gold, one sovereign from the mint, than a thousand counterfeits. So our “joy in the Lord” may be feeble and weak, but we cannot take up with any base imitation of it, can rejoice in nothing else, cannot take pleasure in sin, or in having a name to live while dead. If we ever have any joy, any sweet sensations, any meltings of heart, any thing to comfort or encourage our souls, it is “in the Lord,” and not in ourselves; in what he has done for us, and not what we have done for him.

V.—“And the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.” What a strange expression is this,—“the poor among men.” How can I better illustrate it than by what is now before me? Here is a congregation of people; but all here present are not poor, naturally or spiritually; yet there are poor among them. So “the poor among men” point to a remnant out of a multitude, a few berries on the top of the uttermost bough. The professing church,

as a body, is buried, as I before observed, in general slumber, ignorance, hypocrisy, perversion, and rebellion; and among these “men” the poor seem scarcely worth a thought; among those heroes and giants in their own opinion, what room is their for the “poor,” who are nothing and have nothing in themselves but felt guilt, ruin, and wretchedness? But the Lord has promised, that “the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.” And who is this “Holy One of Israel” but the Lord Jesus, for he is “the Holy One chosen out of Israel,” the Holy One who died for Israel, the Holy One in whom all Israel is justified and shall glory. “The poor among men” cannot rejoice in themselves, for they have nothing to rejoice in; and having nothing in themselves to rejoice in, they rejoice in “the Holy One of Israel,” who of God is made unto them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Until men are made experimentally poor, they will never rejoice in “the Holy One of Israel.” Take it naturally. The wealthy man rejoices in his wealth, in the luxuries and pleasures that wealth procures; and the more wealth he has, the more scope there is for all that money commands. But the poor man cannot rejoice in these things; he has no luxuries, for he can scarcely get necessaries, and therefore he cannot rejoice in what he has not. So spiritually; some professors rejoice in their great knowledge, but “the poor among men” have none: others in their consistency, but these cannot glory in theirs, for they find sin tarnishing every thought, word, and action; others rejoice in a long course of good deeds, and active exertions; but these cannot, for alas, alas, they are poverty-stricken, they have never done anything that they can call good, and they can no more rejoice in their poverty than a poor man naturally can rejoice in the want of all the necessaries of life. But when the Lord is presented to their view, in all his glorious offices and covenant characters, as “mighty to save;” when they see Jesus by the eye of faith, and can embrace him in the arms of affection, feel a clinging to him and a looking up to him; if they rejoice at all, it is in such a Friend, such a Mediator, such an Advocate, such an Intercessor. But till they are

made to feel themselves poor, they will rejoice in every thing but him; nor can they rejoice in him till they have ceased to rejoice in themselves. See then how intimately these characters are bound up together in the bundle of life, with the Lord the Lamb. The Lord give you and me to feel that we are spiritually such.

Let me, then, by way of summing up, notice, that these characters, the deaf, the blind, the meek, and the poor, all meet in one person; and if God be our Teacher, we shall have the feelings of these characters internally and experimentally wrought in us. We shall be often “deaf,” yet sometimes hear the words of the book with power in our conscience; sometimes we shall feel the reality and weight, and at others the sweetness of the words of truth; and shall only want the Lord to speak to hear glorious and comforting words that shall raise us up, revive our heart, draw up our affections, and advance us heavenward. Can we find we are this character? Then we shall find the next also in our heart, for they all meet in one person, and we shall be “the blind” brought to “see out of darkness and obscurity.” Are our evidences, then, often obscure, and have we “to grope for the wall like the blind,” not seeing our paths plain or clear, and yet sometimes have sweet views of Jesus as the only way of salvation; see his outstretched arm, his atoning blood, dying love, and something of his preciousness, beauty and glory? And what as to “meekness?” What do we know of that? It is a part of meekness to feel and mourn over our pride, for the proud do not know it, nor are grieved about it. Are there, then, any seasons when we feel broken down, meekened, and softened before the Lord? And as to the fourth character, “the poor among men,” surely we can come in there. If the Lord be our Teacher, he has certainly brought us there, to know that we are poor and needy, having nothing and being nothing, and can find nothing to rest upon or boast in, but “the Holy One of Israel.” Do we not sometimes feel a solemn joy and sweetness in looking to the “Holy One of Israel?” Are we wholly destitute of love towards him? Is there any joy in our souls that he should be the “Holy One of Israel?” Would we wish

him to be any other than Holy, and love his holiness, though we are all polluted and filthy?

These, then, are the characters exempted from the general woe, "Woe to Ariel, woe to Ariel, the city where David dwelt," the woe pronounced in God's word against the professing church which is wrapped up in general slumber, ignorance, hypocrisy, perversion, and rebellion.

If the Lord has done this much for us, given us ears to hear when deaf, eyes to see when blind, meekened our spirit, and given us to rejoice in the "Holy One of Israel," he pronounces no woe against us; he has exempted us from the threatenings denounced against the professing church; he has made us a peculiar people, and promised us every blessing that we truly need, though utterly undeserving of them. And what he has promised, will he not make good?

59 The Lord's Invitation To The Ends Of The Earth

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening,
July 7, 1844

"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."

Isaiah 45:22

When in a solemn moment of spiritual meditation, (and such, through mercy, we sometimes have) we take a review of what has passed through our hearts, dropped from our lips, or occupied our minds, during any space of time, say, the last week, what little genuine religion do we seem to find in our souls. When we separate from the Spirit's work all the doctrines we have learned in the flesh, all the practice we have performed through fear of man, and all the false experience that Satan has deceived us with; and, in a solemn moment, weigh up in the balances of the sanctuary what God has given and taught us, and done in and for us, how small the amount appears. But what a mercy it is to come to this conclusion! What a

mercy to feel to have so little religion! But some may say, "I do not understand what you mean by that expression, that it is a mercy to feel to have so little religion; I cannot agree with you there; for I feel it to be no mercy at all, as my desire is to have a great deal more than I seem to possess." But suppose that you and I had all the religion which we wish to have, would there not be a great danger of our setting up that religion in the place of Jesus Christ; and instead of coming poor and needy, empty and bare to the Lord, as we are now obliged to come, having nothing and being nothing in ourselves, should we not be rather disposed to come to him with our religion as something to rest upon, and recommend us to his favour? Is it not, then, really a mercy to find and feel we have so little religion, if it bring us poor and needy, empty and bare, to receive out of Christ's fulness, and grace for grace? For the less we feel to have, the more we want to possess; the more empty we find ourselves, the more we desire to be filled, as well as have a greater capacity to receive; the more weak we are, the more we want Christ's strength to be made perfect in our weakness; the more foolish we feel, the more we need God's teaching, as well as the more is God's wisdom magnified in our foolishness; and the more helpless we are, the more we need help from the Lord. So that, instead of its being a sad and deplorable thing to feel that we have so little religion, when we come, under a sense of our emptiness, to receive supplies out of Christ's fulness, it is our mercy to be sensible how little we have. We then come, not under the description of the rich whom the Lord "sends empty away," but of "the poor" whom he filleth with "good things;" and instead of being among the "mighty" whom he putteth down from their seats, we are found among the humble and meek whom the Lord exalts to honour, "setting them among princes," and "making them to inherit the throne of glory."

Now, if we look at the Lord's invitations in the Scriptures, to whom are they addressed? Are they not spoken to those who are poor and needy, hungry and thirsty, wearied and heavy laden? Are not these the very characters whom the Lord enriches, feeds, re-

freshes, and blesses? Look, for instance, at the words of the text. There is an invitation in it; for the Lord speaks and says, "Look unto me." But to whom are the words addressed? "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." He does not, then, speak to those who are near, but to those who are afar off, the ends of the earth, and to them he addresses this gracious invitation.

I.—In examining these words, let us, First, look at the characters to whom this invitation is addressed, "The ends of the earth."

II.—Secondly, at what the Lord says to them, "Look unto me, and be ye saved."

III.—And Thirdly, at the gracious reason why they should look to him, and why they are saved by looking, "For I am God, and there is none else."

I.—"Look unto me all the ends of the earth." To all the ends of the earth, then, the Lord here speaks. Now he cannot mean the literal, or natural earth, for that has no ears to hear, being nothing but so much gross, inanimate matter; he must, therefore, certainly speak to the inhabitants of the earth, to those who dwell in the ends of the earth, and not to the earth itself. But what characters, experimentally and spiritually, are here called "the ends of the earth," to whom the Lord thus addresses himself? An expression in Psalm 61:2, throws a light upon the question. "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I." "The ends of the earth," then, represent characters at the farthest possible distance from God in their feelings, at the remotest bounds of creation, and separated by all this wide interval from that God whom they desire to fear, and in whose approving smile they long to bask.

1. But let us see, with God's blessing, what it is that brings the soul to feel itself to be in this spot, for it is soul feeling here spoken of. Let us see how a vessel of mercy gets to the ends of the earth; because he must come spiritually into that place to feel the suitability and enjoy the application of the promise. Before the Lord, then,

quicken our soul into spiritual life, we can draw near with our lips when our heart is far from him; are full of presumption, pride, and ignorance; and can come into the presence of the Majesty of the Most High without one check in our conscience, one conviction in our soul, or one sense of brokenness before him. But no sooner do light and life enter together into the soul, than the character of God is made known in the conscience, and our own character too, as standing naked and guilty before his great tribunal; and when we thus see and feel the purity of Jehovah, and our own impurity and vileness, and are spiritually shown what wretches we are by nature and practice, a sense of guilt falls upon the conscience, and by that sense of guilt we are driven out from the presence of the Lord. It was so with our forefather Adam; when sin lay upon his conscience, he hid himself from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden; and so it is with every sensible sinner—he departs from the presence of the Lord, because it is too terrible for him to bear. Like Jonah, he will flee unto Tarshish, or the remotest parts of the earth, to get from the presence of the Most High. Guilt, then, charged upon a man's conscience, will drive him out to "the ends of the earth," and place a barrier between the Lord God and his soul. And if a man has never felt guilt, and experimentally known distance and separation from God in consequence, the promise does not belong to him, nor does the Lord speak to him in the text.

2. But again. Not guilt only, but shame also and confusion of face join to drive the soul to "the ends of the earth." We never know the filthiness of sin till it is opened up in our conscience; we may know indeed something of its guilt, and what sinful wretches we have been; we may fear too the punishment of sin; but we can never know its filthiness, till, in the light of the Spirit, we see God's purity and holiness, and then shame drives us out from the presence of a holy God. Till Adam knew sin he knew not shame.

3. Darkness of mind also—an experience we are utterly unacquainted with till light and life make it manifest—darkness coining

upon our soul, such as fell upon Abraham, when the sun was going down (Gen. 15:12), drives us from him who is pure light, to the very ends of the earth, where the rays of the sun seem no more to shine.

4. If the Lord has ever brought us near to himself, and we have basely departed from him, backslidden from his gracious ways, been overcome by the world, been entangled in Satan's snares, or our own vile lusts and passions; if we have done things unbecoming and inconsistent with our profession (and who here can hold up his head, and say he has not so done?) these things bring guilt on our conscience, and banish us in soul feeling to the ends of the earth far away from the presence of God.

But when, in soul feeling, we are thus at the ends of the earth, we learn lessons there which cannot be taught us in any other place. There we learn what it is to be at a distance from God, with a desire to be brought nigh; there we are brought to know the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and there begin to learn the value of the blood of Christ to purge the conscience; there we become clothed with shame and confusion of face; there we are taught to feel our thorough helplessness and complete inability to bring ourselves spiritually and experimentally nigh, and feel what it is to wander in confusion without being able to get near the source of light, life, and truth, or feel access of soul to God. Thus, to be at "the ends of the earth," is a painful but a profitable place; for there we learn lessons which we could not learn anywhere else, and are taught to feel something of the purity of Jehovah, and of our own defilement before him.

Now, it is to those who thus feel themselves to be at "the ends of the earth," that the Lord speaks in the text. He will never encourage presumptuous professors, those I mean who daringly rush on without his sanction, leadings, or drawings. It is better to tarry at "the ends of the earth" all our lives long, than to rush unbidden into the sanctuary, or advance presumptuously into the presence of the Most High. For there is a day coming when the Lord will

"thoroughly purge his floor" and then how many presumptuous intruders into his sanctuary, how many burners of false fire, and offerers of unclean sacrifices, will be detected, and driven out! If the will of God be so, it is better to be poor, condemned criminals at "the ends of the earth," waiting in humility for a smile, pleading in sincerity for a promise, than rush presumptuously on, and claim his gifts as our right and due.

II.—It is, then, to these poor sinners, these self-condemned wretches, these guilty criminals, who have no hope but in God's sovereign mercy, that the Lord speaks in the text, "Look unto me." They are the only persons that will look, the only characters that need so gracious an invitation; others can save, comfort and deliver themselves; but these poor wretched outcasts cannot move a step without the Lord's drawings. The Lord, therefore, takes them in hand, for being in these desperate circumstances, they require the high and out-stretched hand of God himself to pluck them from deserved ruin. And as the more they look at themselves, the worse they get, he says, "Look unto me, and, be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else."

But the invitation must be spoken to the heart that with the promise power may come; and when power comes with the invitation, then the scales drop from the eyes, the veil is taken from off the heart, and strength is given to do that which the text invites; they "look unto him," though it be from "the ends of the earth," and as they look, they are "lightened, and their faces are not ashamed." The grace of Jesus shines in the invitation (for he is the speaker here); and as this comes into the conscience, they "see the King in his beauty, and behold the land that is very far off." "Look unto me," says the Mediator and Advocate, the Friend of sinners, the Saviour of the lost! At his word they look, and what do they see in him?

1. They behold, first, his glorious Person, that divine mystery couched in the words, "I am God!" And O, what a subject for contemplation is this! What a sight for living faith to behold! The glorious Person of the Son of God! This is "the great mystery of god-

liness, God manifest in the flesh!" And what does faith see in the glorious Person of Christ, but the Mediator, the Intercessor, the High Priest, the Advocate betwixt an avenging God and a guilty soul? But till, in soul feeling, we are at "the ends of the earth," we have no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no hearts to feel what a glorious Mediator there is at the right hand of the Father. But being, in our experience, at this distance from God, we are led to see and feel that he who alone can bring us near, must himself be God, for we are confident that none but an almighty arm can pluck us from "the ends of the earth," and bring us near to the Most High. Our own righteousness, our tears, prayers, promises, resolutions, cannot, we feel, bring us near unto God; and we learn the meaning of those words, "And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh; for through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." Thus the more we feel to be at "the ends of the earth," the deeper is our need of him; and as the Spirit unfolds the mystery of the glorious Person of Christ, and reveals his beauty, the more does he become the object of the soul's admiration and adoration. And O, what a Mediator is held out in the word of truth to living faith! What a subject for spiritual faith to look to, for a lively hope to anchor in, and for divine love to embrace! That the Son of God, who lay in the bosom of the Father from all eternity, equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost, the second Person in the glorious Trinity, should condescend to take upon him our nature, that he might groan, suffer, bleed, and die for guilty wretches, who, if permitted, would have ruined their souls a thousand times a day—what a wonder of wonders! But we cannot enter into, nor feel the power of this mystery till we are reduced to such circumstances, that none but such a Saviour can save our souls. Can we do anything to save ourselves? Then we want not help from that mighty One on whom God has laid help; and we secretly reject him. Can we heal ourself? Then we want not the good Physician. But when our eyes are opened to see our own thorough ruin and helplessness, and to view the glorious Person

of the Son of God, faith is drawn out to flee to and rest upon that glorious Object.

2. But in looking at his glorious Person from "the ends of the earth," a glimpse is caught of his atoning blood; for that blood is seen to derive all its efficacy from his glorious Person; it is seen as the blood of the Son of God, and, Deity giving efficacy to the blood of the humanity, it is seen to have a divine virtue to purge a guilty conscience, and speak pardon and peace to a broken heart. This meritorious blood of the only propitiating sacrifice is that which is held up to the eye of the poor sinner at "the ends of the earth," to the guilty wretch, to the self condemned criminal; and God the Holy Ghost testifies of it as speaking "better things than the blood of Abel." The eyes of the understanding are enlightened to see the nature and efficacy of this precious blood, and there is a looking to and resting upon it, as speaking peace to the guilty conscience, as the only propitiation for sin, as reconciling enemies, as pardoning rebels, as justifying the ungodly.

3. But in inviting the soul to look to him, the Lord invites it also to look to his glorious righteousness. Now what do we know, what can we know, of Christ's glorious righteousness, except we are brought to feel how naked, how needy, how undone we are without it? But when a soul lies at the "ends of the earth," naked and trembling, fearing to meet a never-ending eternity, terrified in his conscience at a thousand crimes presenting themselves to view, if the Lord does but speak with power, "Look unto me;" and spreads out that glorious robe of righteousness, which is "unto and upon all them that believe," how it encourages the poor soul, lying at "the ends of the earth," to shelter himself under this garment of glory and beauty, and take refuge under the skirt of this heavenly Boaz.

4. But in saying, "Look unto me," he also says, "Look at my dying love, at its heights, lengths, depths, and breadths, which pass knowledge. Look unto me in all my suffering circumstances, my agony, my bloody sweat, and all that I endured for poor sinners." He invites those at "the ends of the earth" to look unto him as

suffering for them; and when they are enabled to see and feel his dying love, a measure of peace flows into the conscience, and the poor soul at the very "ends of the earth," is encouraged and enabled to draw near to the Father.

III.—But he says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved." There is salvation then in a look. There is no need, in order to be saved, to heap up numerous treasures of our own righteousness, to accumulate a vast store of good deeds, to make up a certain amount of piety, or to work up ourselves into the heights of creature holiness. A look of faith is all that is needed, an eye opened by divine teaching to see who and what Jesus is. He therefore calls upon "the ends of the earth" to look to his Person, his blood, his righteousness, his love; and to see in him all that we need, and all that we desire. And when we look unto him, as he invites and as he enables, and see who he is, and what a sufficiency for every want, we desire no other salvation and no other Saviour.

Now how often we seem not to have any real religion, or enjoy any solid comfort! How often are our evidences obscured and beclouded, and our minds covered with deep darkness! How often does the Lord hide himself, so that we cannot behold him, nor get near to him; and how often the ground on which we thought we stood is cut from under our feet, and we have no firm standing! What a painful path is this to walk in, but how profitable! When we are reduced to poverty and beggary, we learn to value Christ's glorious riches; the worse opinion we have of our own heart, and the more deceitful and desperately wicked that we find it, the more we put our trust in his faithfulness; and the more black we are in our esteem, the more beautiful and comely does he appear in our eyes. As we sink, Jesus rises; as we become feeble, he puts forth his strength; as we come into danger, he brings deliverance; as we get into temptation, he breaks the snare; and as we are shut up in darkness and obscurity, he causes the light of his countenance to shine. Now it is by being led in this way, and walking in these paths, that we come rightly to know who Jesus is, and to see and

feel how suitable and precious such a Saviour is to our undone souls. We are needy, he has in himself all riches; we are hungry, he is the bread of life; we are thirsty, he says, "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink;" we are naked, and he has clothing to bestow; we are fools, and he has wisdom to grant; we are lost, and he speaks, "Look unto me, and be ye saved." Thus, so far from our misery shutting us out from God's mercy, it is only the requisite for it; so far from our guilt excluding his pardon, it is the only thing needful for it; so far from our helplessness ruining our souls, it is the needful preparation for the manifestation of his power in our weakness; we cannot heal our own wounds and sores; that is the very reason why he should stretch forth his arm. It is because there is no salvation in ourselves, or in any other creature, that he says, "Look unto me, for I am God, and there is none else."

1. That he is God, is the very foundation of his salvation; for it is his eternal Godhead that gives virtue, efficacy, and dignity to all that as Man he did and suffered for his chosen people. If he were not God, God and Man in one glorious Person, what hope would there be for our guilty souls? Could his blood atone for our sins, unless Deity gave it efficacy? Could his righteousness justify our persons, unless Deity imparted merit and value to all the doings and sufferings of his humanity? Could his loving heart sympathize with and deliver us, unless, "as God over all," he saw and knew all that passes within us, and had all power, as well as all compassion, to exert on our behalf? We are continually in circumstances where no man can do us the least good, and where we cannot help or deliver ourselves; we are in snares, and cannot break them; we are in temptations, and cannot deliver ourselves out of them; we are in trouble, and cannot comfort ourselves; are wandering sheep, and cannot find the way back to the fold; we are continually roving after idols, and hewing out "broken cisterns," and cannot return to "the fountain of living waters." How suitable, then, and sweet it is, to those who are thus exercised, to see that there is a gracious Immanuel at the right hand of the Father, whose heart is filled with

love, and whose bowels move with compassion; who has shed his own precious blood that they might live, who has wrought out a glorious righteousness, and "is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him."

He says, therefore, to his people, who are at the very "ends of the earth," who fear to draw nigh, that he is the Mediator between God and man. He says to the guilty, "I am your pardon;" to the naked, "I am your clothing;" to the ungodly, "I am your righteousness;" to the defiled, "I am your sanctification." Being at "the ends of the earth," the purity of God would keep them there for ever; but there being a divine Mediator, a glorious Intercessor, an almighty Advocate, an Immanuel, God and man in one glorious person, though at "the ends of the earth," they may draw nigh through him, for they are blessed and accepted in him. They are indeed at "the ends of the earth," and through guilt and shame dare not draw near; but let Jesus give them one glance, or put forth one touch, and their poor, needy, naked souls will leap forward, spring into his embrace, and find nearness of access to the Father; for by that glance they see there is a Mediator between God and them, an Intercessor and Advocate sitting for them upon a throne of mercy and grace.

Now, if they had never been at "the ends of the earth," never been cast out in their feelings, never known themselves to be filthy and vile creatures, they would never have felt what a suitable and precious Saviour there is at the right hand of God. They would have been swollen with pride, swallowed up in business, satisfied with a form of godliness, contented with being Satan's servants and doing his work, or have been buried in their sins and lusts. If they had never felt themselves shut out from God's presence, and driven to "the ends of the earth," they would never have longed to be reconciled, pardoned, and brought near. But when they are there, and the Lord does but speak with power to their souls, "Look unto me," all the distance is removed, the barriers fall down, the separation is at an end, and they draw nigh unto God, and they see how "God can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."

To, this spot, "the ends of the earth," sin and shame may drive them again and again; and repeatedly may they have to feel many cutting sensations, and learn many humbling lessons; they may fear again and again that they may die, and never see him whom their souls long to see and love; and yet when the Lord again speaks, "Look unto me," the barrier is broken down, and they can again draw near through the propitiation that the Son of God has made for sin.

2. He says, therefore, to such, "I am God, and there is none else." You may look at your own righteousness, it is but filthy rags; at your own resolutions, they are but cobwebs; at your promises, they will be broken before night comes on; at your consistency, it is but a tangled and defiled web; at yourselves out of me, and what are you but a mass of filth and sin? He says, therefore, "I am God, and there is none else." You may go to every other physician, try every other remedy, and look to every other quarter; but all will leave you unpardoned, unaccepted, and unjustified; "for I am God, and there is none else." "Look unto me," he says to all "the ends of the earth;" and when he speaks (for with the word of a king there is power), strength is given unto the soul to look, and be saved.

Now, I dare say, some of you here know what it is in your feelings to be at "the ends of the earth." You cannot get near unto God, cannot feel his presence, cannot see the light of his countenance, cannot taste his love. Sin darkens your mind, burdens your conscience, and oppresses your soul; so that you cannot feel pardon, reconciliation, acceptance, nearness, and peace. There is a distance, a barrier, a separation between God and your soul, and you cannot draw near with holy boldness. How suitable then, how encouraging it is to such sensible sinners, to see that you may draw near under such circumstances. Have I said or done things unbecoming or inconsistent? Has guilt come on my conscience, and despondency filled my heart? Am I therefore to stay at "the ends of the earth?" The Lord says, "Look unto me," that my guilt may disappear. Am I a poor backsliding wretch, roaming after every base idol? Am I

to stay therefore at the broken cisterns? The Lord says, "Look to me," that the poor idolater may come back to the fountain of living waters.

When we take a solemn survey of what we are daily and hourly—of what we have been, say, through the past week—what vile thoughts, sinful desires, and base lusts—what vanity, inconsistency, engrossment in business, love of the world—in a word, what base workings of a depraved nature we have had, must we not plead guilty? Perhaps the guilt of these things now lies on the conscience; but shall they operate as insuperable, impassable barriers? When the Lord says, "Look unto me, all the ends of the earth," and the soul is enabled to do as the Lord invites, does it not see Jesus as its wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption? and does not this bring comfort to the poor, guilty backslider once more? Does not this encourage him once more to draw nigh? Does not this break the heart of the most stubborn, and draw, as with a cord of love, the poor wretch who can see nothing in himself but a mass of defilement? If we know, then, by painful experience what it is to be at "the ends of the earth," the Lord does not say, "Heal yourselves, make yourselves better." He does not give us a long list of duties to be performed, or of observances to be attended to; and when we have done this, and performed that, and made up the tale of bricks in full number and weight, he will look upon us. But the Lord speaks to us in our sad condition: "Here you poor, guilty, wretched backsliders; you that have nothing but sin and guilt; you that cannot bless, save, or comfort yourselves; look unto me." He does not say, "Do this, and then I will appear; help yourselves a little, and then I will come down to help you;" but he says to us, as we are in our filth, guilt, and shame, "Look unto me;" and as he speaks, he gives the power. And no sooner do we look, than we are saved by the look, blessed by the look, healed by the look. So that all we have to do is to look to him, as he speaks. It is true, indeed, that he himself gives power to do it, for "without him we can do nothing." And to behold by the eye of faith his glorious Person,

atoning blood, justifying righteousness, and dying love, will do us more good, and bring into our hearts more true peace, than we could get elsewhere in a thousand years.

Now, to know these mysteries by divine teaching, is to know what vital godliness is. What is vital godliness? To make myself good and holy; to make myself religious and serious, and a decidedly pious character? Such husks may satisfy swine, but they will not satisfy a living soul. What must I do, then, to make myself better? Nothing. Can I, by any exertion of creature will or power, change my Ethiopian skin, or wash out my leopard spots? But when the soul lies at "the ends of the earth," and the Lord says to it, "Look unto me," "thou art complete in me, saved in me, holy in me, and accepted in me;" all the barriers betwixt God and the guilty conscience fall, the darkness flies away, the distance is removed, and the soul, black in itself, is manifested as comely and acceptable in the sight of God. To be spiritually led into this mystery, to go on increasing in the knowledge of it, and to feel day by day less and less in self; to become more foolish, weak, and powerless; and yet, as poor, needy, weak, and helpless, to be drawing supplies out of Christ's fulness, and to live a life of faith on the Son of God—to know something of this, is to know something of what true religion is; and to know a little of this, will make a man more outwardly and inwardly holy than all the good works or pious resolutions in the world.

Perhaps there may be present here some of these poor wretches at "the ends of the earth;" doubting, fearing, and almost at times despairing, whether mercy can ever reach their souls. Now are you not secretly looking to find something good or holy in yourselves? Is there not some dim hope and expectation of becoming by and by a little better and holier? All this secret leaven of self-righteousness must be purged out; and you may have, under this operation, to sink lower, and yet deeper and deeper into the slough and filth of your vile nature. But there is this comfort for those who feel they can do nothing, that all that is to be done is what the Lord

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does in us; all that is to be felt, is what he works by his Spirit in us. This is the sum and substance of all salvation and all holiness; "Look unto me, and be ye saved, by what I have done and suffered." There is no other way for health, salvation, pardon, peace, and deliverance to come into our souls; for he is God, and there is none else. There is no other salvation, no other Saviour; no other way of escape from the wrath to come, but by looking unto him as he enables us, believing on him as he empowers us, and leaning upon him as he works in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight. And though you may now seem to yourselves to be at the very "ends of the earth," the Lord sees you there; and he says unto such, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Ye are not out of the reach of mine arm, nor the sight of mine eye, "for I am God, and there is none else." And thus, sooner or later, are all the elect manifestly saved, and experience the sweet testimony and blessed revelation of it in the heart and conscience.

And is it not a mercy to be weaned, emptied, and purged from creature righteousness, natural piety, and a long list of creature duties, not one of which we can properly or acceptably do? Is it not a mercy to have nothing at all to do, except simply what the Lord does in us and for us, and to look to him in whom salvation is, and from whom salvation comes? O what a rest and respite for a poor guilty wretch, labouring at doings and duties, and by them all only increasing his guilt, to feel and find that all is done for him, and that he has nothing to do but take it; that the feast is provided, and all he has to do is to banquet at it; that atoning blood has been shed, and all he has to do is to feel the power of it; that salvation is finished, that all that is to be done is done already; and all this is freely given "without money, and without price;" freely communicated and brought into the conscience by the operation of God, that he may have all the glory first, and all the glory last, that we may have all the profit and comfort that he can bestow. What a sweet and blessed way of salvation this is to a poor wretched sinner! How much is contained in those words, "It is finished!" Every

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thing, then, needful for a sinner's salvation is already done for him; the whole work is accomplished, and everlasting salvation brought in; all that remains to be done (and the Lord does that, or it never would be done at all), is, for the sinner to receive it into his heart, and live under the blessed unction and power of it.

May this be our soul's happy experience. May we, even from "the ends of the earth," then be enabled to look unto him, and know that he is God, and none else. And thus may we continually come to him, believe in him, and rest on him, as all our salvation, and all our desire.

60 The Sin-Sick Soul And The Great Physician

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday evening,

July 11, 1844

"They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

Matthew 9:12

The way in which the Lord, in the days of His flesh, dealt with cavillers and critics is very remarkable. He did not convert, but confound them. He did not appeal to anything spiritual in them; for they had no spiritual understanding in the things of God; but He silenced them by addressing Himself to their natural consciences.

We have one or two remarkable examples of this nature. On one occasion, for instance, we read, that the "Pharisees took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man; for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us, therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" Here was a snare laid for His feet, a dilemma in which they thought they had placed Him. Now, suppose He had said, "It was not lawful to pay tribute unto Caesar," then they would have accused Him to the Roman governor as preaching high treason.

And suppose He had said, "It was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar;" then they would have asked, "How He, as a Jew, and professing obedience to the law, could command subservience to a foreign prince? when Moses had expressly commanded, 'One from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.'" De 17:15.

But how did the Lord meet this cavil, and extricate Himself from this dilemma? He asked them to show Him the tribute-money; and when they had brought it unto Him, He said, "Whose is this image and superscription?" They were compelled to answer 'Caesar's.' "Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Mt 22:16-21 The very fact of the money, bearing Caesar's image and superscription, circulating among them, was an unanswerable proof of their subjection to the Roman yoke, and that therefore it was lawful to pay tribute.

Again, on another occasion Joh 8:3, we read, that "the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery;" and they tried to entangle Him by enquiring what was to be done with her. "Master," paying Him all due respect, said they, "Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou?" Here was a dilemma they thought to place the Lord in. Suppose He had said, "The woman ought to be stoned;" then they would have accused Him before the Roman governor of setting up the Jewish in opposition to the Roman law; the power of life and death being in the hands of the Roman governor only. And if He had said, "She ought not to be stoned;" they would have directly asked Him, "How could this be consistent with the law given by Moses?" But how wisely He met this difficulty, and took "the wise in their own craftiness," by saying, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Joh 8:7 By thus appealing to their natural consciences, He caught them in their own net, and overwhelmed them with confusion.

The text, and the verses connected with it, afford another in-

stance of the same nature. "And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" These self-righteous Pharisees were always on the watch to find, if possible, something to condemn the Lord with. And here they professed their pious astonishment, that so holy a man as He claimed to be, could associate with such vile, ungodly wretches. "For do we not judge," they would insinuate, "of a man by the company that he keeps? And must not a man love and practice sin who keeps company with sinners?" But how did the Lord disentangle Himself from this net that they were seeking to spread for his feet? He met their cavil thus, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." He appealed to their own sense and reason, and to their natural consciences. It was as though He had said, "Where should a physician be? Is it not with the sick in the hospital? Are not the sick wards his peculiar place and province, and are not diseased patients the very persons he is called to associate with and take care of? Is the physician necessarily contaminated by the disease that he cures? How can he heal the sickness, if he do not visit the sick?" By thus appealing to their reason and conscience, He silenced and confounded them. Now, this is an example well worthy of our imitation.

We are sometimes thrown into the way of scoffers, and of persons who will cavil even at the great foundation truths of divine revelation. With such persons there is no use attempting to argue the question on spiritual grounds; for they have no spiritual ears to hear, no spiritual eyes to see, no spiritual heart to fall under the power of truth. To do so is to throw pearls before swine. If the Lord enable us, the best way is to appeal to their natural consciences; and, as shortly as possible, without entering into the details of truth, to silence them by putting before them something which they themselves cannot deny.

But the words of the text have a much higher sense than a mere

appeal to natural conscience or human reason. They contain a gospel truth, far deeper and higher than reason can comprehend, and one that will last as long as the world endures. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

We find, in the text, two characters spoken of, and these put in a distinct opposition to, and contrast with, each other the "whole," and the "sick." And as the two characters are distinct in themselves, so their case is distinct also; the case of the one being that he "needs not," and the ease of the other that he needs "a physician." And thus, if the Lord enable me by His blessed Spirit experimentally to trace out this evening who are "the whole," and who are "the sick;" and shew why the one "needs not," and why the other needs "a physician," it may be for our profit, and may also, if God so grant, be to His own glory.

I.—Let us look, then, at the character pointed out in the text by the expression, "the whole." I need scarcely say, that the word naturally means a person healthy, strong, and vigorous; one untainted by sickness or disease; one in all the enjoyment of robust health, without any constitutional ailment or bodily affliction. Now it is a truth, naturally, that such persons, "need not a physician." They are not in circumstances to require such aid; their vigorous health, their robust constitution, their freedom from all disease, give them perfect liberty to dispense with the services of medical skill. From this comparison we may easily gather who are "the whole," in a spiritual sense. Those who have never received any wound in their conscience, who have never felt sick unto death, who have never groaned and suffered under the disease of sin.

But who are these hearty and healthy people? All men in a state of unregeneracy; all in whose hearts the Spirit of God has not begun His quickening work. These are called "whole," not as really and actually free from taint or infection; for in the sight of God they are one mass of disease; but they are called "whole" in the text, because they feel and know nothing, spiritually and experimentally, of sickness. They are not healthy in the sight of God, but in their

own sight; for "their eyes stand out with fatness," and they are not "plagued with sickness like other men." Ps 73:5,7

If we look a little more closely at these characters, we shall find them divided into two grand classes: those dead in sin, and those dead in a profession. As never plagued with the sickness of sin, both of these characters may be said to be "whole."

Look, for instance, at men generally; say, those you have daily to associate with, whose conscience God has not touched with His finger. Is there any sigh, any cry, any groan, any sorrow for sin ever manifested by them? Are they not light, trifling, and frivolous; or, if staid and sober, altogether buried in the things of time and sense? Do you ever witness anything in them that shews they have the least concern for their immortal souls? Are they not evidently dead in sin—so dead as not to have one thought for the future, one solemn feeling of eternity? And is there not a large class of professors, who are as dead in formality as the others in transgression, though they may have a name to live? But what is the grand distinguishing mark of both? Is it not that they are "whole?" They have never felt any inward sickness or running sore; they have never been wounded by the arrows of God shot into their conscience; they have never had the ill-conditioned ulcers and deep abscesses of human nature laid open by the keen dissecting knife of the great Anatomist; nor have they ever been brought down to sigh and groan under a body of sin and death. "Their strength is firm." Their "face is covered with fatness, and the collops of fat are on their flanks;" their "breasts are full of milk, and their bones are moistened with marrow." Ps 73:4 Job 15:27 Job 21:24

Now, however heady, high-minded, presumptuous persons may despise the groans and sighs of God's sin-sick people, and the feeling acquaintance that each rightly-taught man has with his own sore, and his own grief; or whatever ridicule may be poured out upon the trials which God's children experience when the internal plague of corruption is felt, it is a solemn truth, in spite of all contempt or ridicule, that "the whole need not a physician." And

it is equally true, let them speak of Christ as much as they may, that there can be no spiritual communion with the great Physician, Jehovah-raphi, unless there be some inward wound or sickness of soul felt, so as to make them desire healing from His blessed hands. "The whole need not a physician;" they want no visits from Jesus, no smile from His loving countenance, no balm from His tender hands, no cure from His gracious lips. They may know from the Bible that there is such a Person as Christ, just as a healthy man may know that some celebrated physician lives in such a street; but as to any personal application to Him, any sighing at His gracious footstool, any shewing before Him their sickness, any laying down their broken bones or bruised consciences at His door, they can know nothing of it, because they are "whole." Still less can they know the efficacy of His balmy blood sprinkled on their conscience; still less the spiritual experience contained in those words, "He maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole" Job 5:18; "Who healeth all thy diseases." Ps 103:3 And how can those who despise or ridicule all experience, know any thing spiritually of Jesus? For they are "whole;" and being "whole" they "need not a physician." Now you that make a profession, do look at this matter; it concerns your immortal souls. Did you ever feel sickness of heart and wounds in your conscience? Did you ever groan under the felt malady of sin? Did you ever apply to, and tell out your wants before the great Physician? Did you ever look to and hang upon His balmy blood as cleansing from all sin? And have you ever felt His hands dealing gently with you, binding up your wounds, and pouring into them the healing wine and oil of gospel grace?

Now, I am sure of this, if you have walked in this path, you will never ridicule the experience of God's people, stigmatize it as "corruption," and heap upon it all the contempt which enmity can devise. You will never despise the groans of God's people, if you were ever in the same situation, or if your soul ever passed through a similar experience.

Let me illustrate this by appealing to your natural feeling. Suppose that some years back you had gone through some operation, say, the amputation of a limb; and as you pass by the hospital, in which you yourself once had been, you were to hear the piercing shriek of some poor sufferer stretched on the operating table: would you ridicule and laugh at his cries? Would you not remember that you yourself once lay there in agony? Or, suppose that the Lord had afflicted you in times past with insanity, and afterwards mercifully delivered you from the asylum. But should you pass by St. Luke's, and hear the ravings and shoutings of some unhappy inmate, would you laugh and jeer, or would you pity and sympathize? So spiritually, if a man has ever known an inward wound made in his conscience by the entrance of the two-edged sword, and afterwards enjoyed health and cure, will he pour contempt on those who are walking in the same path in which he himself once travelled? Depend upon it, when a man ridicules and despises the afflictions of God's people, it is a bad sign, a black mark against him; it strongly looks as though he had never himself passed through the same experience, and had never known similar exercises.

1. No one, as I before observed, knows anything spiritually and experimentally of soul sickness, until God the Spirit quickens him from a death in sin. Then for the first time a wound is made in his conscience by an arrow shot from the bow of the Almighty. Now spiritually, as well as naturally, when a man is groaning and languishing under a wound, will he not anxiously desire a surgeon to bind it up? Let a man meet with what is called an accident; let him fall from a ladder, or be run over by a carriage. Will not the bystanders gather together in a moment, and take him off to a hospital? And even the poor man himself, if he retain his senses, is glad to be taken thither as soon as possible. But what has made the labourer, who just before was standing careless upon the scaffold, now all pale and trembling upon a shutter, crying to be taken to the surgeon? Is it not the broken rib or fractured limb that in a moment has produced the change? So spiritually, there was a time

when the vessel of mercy ridiculed spiritual things, cared for neither heaven nor hell, nor had one pang of concern about his immortal state; but the wound came, the bones were broken, distress of mind followed, and the soul pined and languished away, fearing the “second death.” But no sooner was this felt, than a Physician was wanted, one able and willing to heal. At first, perhaps, through ignorance, he looked out and sought after “physicians of no value,” running hither and thither for ease, and not seeking only to the Lord. But, sooner or later, being baffled in all his attempts to find relief from human help, he is brought to apply to “Jehovah that healeth thee” Ex 15:26; and finds there is “balm in Gilead,” and a “physician there.”

2. But the Lord’s people are not merely wounded by the arrows of God sticking in their conscience; they have also to be led into the deep depravity of their fallen nature, the desperate wickedness of their evil heart. We may class spiritual patients under two heads; those that are wounded and need the surgeon, and those that are sick and need the physician. And generally speaking, we need the first before the second, and have to go to the surgery before we go to the dispensary. Thus usually, we know but little of our dreadful depravity, when the Lord first takes us in hand; the fountains of the great deep are not then broken up; the desperate unbelief, enmity, rebellion, perverseness, pride, hypocrisy, uncleanness, and all the other vile corruptions of our heart are not at first opened up and brought to light. But as the Lord leads the soul on, He opens up by degrees the desperate corruption and depravity of our nature, and unfolds the hidden evils of our heart, which before were covered from our view. It is with us as it was with the Prophet. The Lord led him into one chamber after another; and when his astonishment increased at what he saw there, He said unto him, “Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these.” Eze 8:15 But as the Lord leads us into a knowledge of our depravity, He makes us to feel sick at heart, and thus we come into the state of feeling described by the prophet Isaiah: “The whole head is sick,

and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and purifying sores.” Isa 1:5,6 And as we are led into a knowledge of our sinfulness, and groan under it, we feel more and more a burden of shame and sorrow on account of it; and the more deeply and daily that this is felt, the more deeply and daily do we find our need of the great Physician.

All the Lord’s dealings with our souls are that He may exalt His dear Son in our hearts, that we may have all the shame, and Jesus all the glory; and therefore, all this deep and daily discovery of our depravity is eventually to bring greater glory to the Son of God. The deeper we sink into shame and guilt, under the knowledge of the depravity of our nature, the more do we seek unto, feel the power, and prize the love, blood, grace, and preciousness of the Lord Jesus. Every fresh discovery of our vile nature, when the Lord is pleased to bring the savour of Jesus’ name, like the ointment poured forth, into the conscience, serves only instrumentally to increase our faith and affection towards Him; and thus the deeper we sink in self, the higher the Lord Jesus rises in our soul’s admiration and adoration.

3. But to make us more and more dependent upon Jesus, the Lord, by His teachings, leads us usually into a knowledge of our backsliding and idolatrous nature. And O, what a backsliding and idolatrous heart do we carry in our bosom, and how perpetually does it make us sigh and groan! Is there anything too vile for our depraved nature not to lust after? Is there anything too base which our hearts will not imagine? Are there any puddles, which, if God left us to ourselves, we should not grovel in? As we are brought more to feel the workings of this base backsliding heart, and have the burden of it more laid upon our conscience, the more sick are we at heart, and the more is the disease felt to be in the very vitals. We sigh and groan because we are so vile: for we would be far otherwise. In our right mind, we would be in the fear of the Lord all the day long, and would never do a single thing inconsistent with

the precepts of the gospel; we would never say a word that the Lord would disapprove of; would always walk in faith, hope, and love; and would continually be spiritual and heavenly-minded. But alas, this is what we cannot attain unto. Our eye is caught by every passing vanity, our carnal minds rove after forbidden things, and our vile heart will still commit villainy. And as the conscience is made tender and if it be not so, the fear of God is not there, and as the soul is led into a deeper acquaintance with the spirituality of God's character and the purity of His nature, and as a deeper and clearer knowledge of Jesus in all His covenant relationship is gained, the more it is felt to be an evil and bitter thing to depart from "the Fountain of living waters."

Some people seem to think many allowances ought to be made. "They have business," they say, "to attend to, and their daily occupations to follow; and they are sure they could not transact their business if their hearts were not in it, nor carry on the necessary dealings in trade, or pursue their worldly calling, if their minds were not fully in them." They argue that they could not be bustling trades-men, nor faithful servants, were their hearts in heaven. But do they never feel guilt, and never groan and cry because they are thus buried in the world? Is there no gathering up of their heart's affections heavenward sometimes from their business? The merchant in his countinghouse, the tradesman behind the counter, or the servant at his work—have they no secret, solemn moments when their hearts go up after Jesus? Are there no inward sighs and groans to the Lord, that He would bless, keep, and water their soul from time to time by the dew of His Spirit? Or can your hearts be buried in the world well nigh all your waking hours? Can you be as carnal and as thoughtless as the servants of Satan who are engaged in the same occupation with yourself? and never be cut to the quick at your carnality, never pour out one sigh, nor groan out your trouble before God?

I believe, from soul experience, that a backsliding heart and an idolatrous nature, is one of the greatest troubles a child of God can

have. All his worldly trials, heavy as they may be, are light compared to this. That he should daily, and sometimes hourly, seek pleasure and gratification in the things of time and sense; and should perpetually turn away from all things spiritual and heavenly, gives him more trouble than all his other trials put together. But what good comes out of all this soul exercise? What spiritual profit springs from a sense of our diseased nature and depraved appetite? Such need the Physician. And the deeper they sink into soul sickness, and the more sensible they are of the plague of their hearts, the more do they prize and want to realize the healing remedies which this great and good Physician has to bestow.

4. But there is, after all, one class only of persons that this great Physician admits as patients. In this metropolis, you know, there are hospitals for different diseases; and a man afflicted with one disease must not go to an infirmary intended for another. The consumptive patient must go to the hospital for diseases of the chest; the man suffering from typhus fever must be taken to the fever hospital: and the sufferer from inflamed eyes must go to the Ophthalmic institution. So spiritually, the Lord's Hospital, "Christ's Hospital," if I may use the expression without irreverence, is only for incurables; and till every other hospital refuses us admission, or turns us out as hopeless cases, the Lord does not admit us as patients. It is like a man with a fever going for admittance to the consumptive hospital. They would say, "You are not the patient for us; persons with your disease are not admitted here." So spiritually, the Lord's dispensary is only for incurables, whom every other hospital rejects; and as long as we, like Asa, seek to other physicians, we are not admitted into His sick wards.

Look at the woman who had spent all her living upon physicians, and got worse instead of better. Was it not her incurable disease that instrumentally caused her to seek and find health and cure from the hem of Jesus' garment? And it is the Lord's purpose to bring all His people into the same spot of being incurable by human power or help. We may illustrate this, by supposing there were

in this city a hospital for incurables. If a patient came for admittance who was not very ill, the physician would say to him, "You are not bad enough for admittance here; you are not sufficiently ill; we may make an out-door patient of you; but at present there is no room for you. When the disease lays greater hold upon you, then we can admit you." And so spiritually, as long as a man has only a trifling ailment, is only slightly wounded, and the disease is not deeply spread, there is no admission for him to the benefits of Christ's blood.

Look at the leper under the law. Le 13 Had he not to go before the priest, whose province it was to examine "the rising, the scab, or bright spot?" And was not this one of the marks of leprosy, that it "spread much abroad in the skin," and "in sight was deeper than the skin?" But the priest was not to receive him immediately as a leper: he was to shut him up seven days, and wait till it was a clear ease of leprosy, which was known by its deepening and spreading. The leprosy was an incurable disease. So experimentally, till the disease of sin gets so desperate as to be past the help of all human skill, past our own healing, and all healing from others, we cannot seek unto, and I am sure we cannot find, the great Physician. A great part, an important part of the Spirit's work, is to bring men into this state; for we read, "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up." 1Sa 2:6,7 And what is "to kill," and "bring down to the grave," but to render a man incurable? Not that God is the author of sin; God forbid. He does not work sin in us, but discovers it as already there; and shews us what we are, by bringing light and life into the conscience; so that in His light we see, and in His life we feel, and groan over the malady of sin thus made manifest.

Now many of God's people are on the way to this free hospital; but they are not admissible yet; not deeply sunk enough into the disease yet; it has not yet laid hold of their vitals, not yet spread its deep roots into their conscience. Like the first commencement of a cancer, or of a consumption, the symptoms may be discoverable,

but the disease has as yet not spread into the whole constitution. But like the two fatal diseases I have named, the felt malady of sin will spread and extend until the soul becomes incurable: and the more this is seen and experienced, the more urgently will a man seek, and the sooner will he find, the great Physician. But O, how nature shrinks from this! What a death-blow it would be for a patient in a decline to be told that he is not bad enough yet for the consumptive hospital. The physician might say, "I see the symptoms; I mark the hectic flush, the labouring breath, the hacking cough; but you are not bad enough yet: a few weeks or months will make you admissible" What a death-blow to him. But if according to the common phrase, "you must be worse before you are better," the remedies used at this point were to be the means of healing the patient, instead of its being a death-blow from the physician, it would be the first buddings of a hope of cure.

O how the soul shrinks from going more deeply into the felt malady of sin! The little it has known of it has made it so sick and faint, that it dreads its spreading more and more, and becoming more and more incurable. But if the more deeply we sink into a knowledge of the disease the more we prize and value the great Physician, then may we not say, "Welcome disease, welcome pain, welcome sickness, if it be but the preparation for us to receive Jesus in all His fulness and covenant characters." But this is a way quite contrary to sense and reason, and utterly distinct from anything which nature would suggest as true or desirable. We cannot think that the way to make us prize Jesus is to get deeper and deeper into the filth and guilt of discovered sin, and that we must lie in our blood, that the Lord may come down to us, and spread His skirt over us, enter into covenant with us, and call us His. Eze 16:8

This great Physician has His eye upon all His patients and sees in whom the malady is just beginning, in whom it is progressing, and in whom it is fast reaching the incurable point, and only waiting for Him to stretch forth His hand to cure. The patient often knows not the nature of his own disease; but the great Physician

has His eyes on every one of His patients; on those who are just feeling their sickness, and on those who are dying without His healing balm. The first He deepens, and the latter He cures. But O, how tenderly does He deal with every class of His patients! And even if He deepens the wounds of some, however painful, it is for their profit; for “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” Ps 103:13

III.—But what are His remedies? For this great Physician must suit the remedy to the malady.

1. One remedy, then, and that perhaps the only one, may be to take off a diseased limb. We may have a scrofulous knee; and the only remedy is, to take the limb off to keep us from dying. You may have some corruption, some lust, some besetting sin, that, like a diseased limb, is gradually draining away your spiritual health, and making such havoc with your constitution, that you must die, unless the limb be amputated, unless the idol be removed. It may be even your money, or good name, or something which you hold near and dear, and can no more willingly part with than your leg or your arm; and yet it must be amputated that your life may be saved. The skilful operator, we know, in a hospital will not spare the patient for his crying; nay his very tenderness directs him to make a deeper incision, and to wield the knife with a firmer hand. So this great Physician, in proportion to His skill and tenderness, will amputate with a firmer hand the diseased limb which is draining away our spiritual strength.

2. Or, as a part of His office as the Physician of the soul, He may have to handle our sores. How we shrink, naturally, when the surgeon puts his hand on a tender spot, and presses it to ascertain where the disease lies; and so, when the Lord puts His finger on some sore place in the conscience, some backsliding, some inconsistency, committed perhaps years ago,—how the soul winces from the touch! And, I believe, could I thoroughly ransack the conscience of each living soul before me, there would be something of which you were deeply ashamed before God, some secret sin, past

or present, which when the Lord puts His finger on it, and brings it under the light of His countenance, makes you wince under the pressure of His hand. But it is needful to have it pressed, that it may be probed, in order to be thoroughly healed. How often is it with God’s people, as the Lord complains, by the Prophet, “They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly.” Jer 6:14 Sin has been passed over and thought little of; but the Lord, sooner or later, laying His hand on the conscience, brings it to light, and makes the soul feel the guilt and shame of it, before He manifestly pardons it.

3. But this great Physician has balm also to apply, as well as limbs to amputate, and wounds to press. What balm is this? It is that “blood which cleanseth from all sin.” “Behold,” He says, “I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth.” Jer 33:6 This is the “blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel;” which is the only God-appointed remedy for a guilty conscience; as the Holy Ghost testifies, “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” The Lord will not suffer His people to rest upon any other remedy than this. There are many who rest in doctrines, or church membership, or consistency of life, or zealous exertions for what they consider truth; but the Lord will never let any of His own children rest upon anything save, an experimental knowledge of “the blood of sprinkling,” the precious blood of the Son of God. And if a man can rest upon anything else but this, it shews that God the Spirit has not yet taught him either his malady, or the only remedy provided for sin-sick souls.

Those, then, “that are sick” need a Physician. It is not with them a matter of speculation. I might read in the “Court Guide” the names and residences of all the physicians in the metropolis; but

that would not profit me if I were labouring under disease. So men may read in the Bible of the offices and titles of Christ, of the healing virtue of His blood, the justifying power of His righteousness, and the saving efficacy of His intercession; but it is applying to and receiving benefit from His healing hands which can alone endear Him to us as the great Physician. A man may pass by a chemist's shop, and see the bottles of medicine in the window, may read the labels, and even theoretically know their use; but having recourse to the remedies will alone profit one in sick circumstances, or afflicted with bodily disease. And so spiritually: whenever soul sickness is opened up in our conscience, and whenever the malady is felt and groaned under, there will be a needing of the great Physician. Who and what Jesus is will be no barren speculation then. His Person will not be a mere doctrine floating in the brain; His blood will not be a mere theory, His righteousness merely an article of creed, and His dying love but a stone in a sound Calvinistic arch. There will be something deeper, something more abiding, something more powerful than names, notions, and theories to the sin-sick soul; and the more it needs the Physician, the more it will apply to Him.

This blessed Physician heals "without money and without price;" He never demands a fee for His wondrous cures; nor did He ever turn away one that lay languishing at His door, that felt his sickness, or pined at His feet after a manifestation of His healing blood applied to his conscience with almighty power. All His covenant characters, all the sympathizing tenderness of His bosom, all His almighty power, all His everlasting love, all that He is and has as God-Man, are all enlisted on behalf of His poor and needy family.

You are languishing, say, under sickness of soul, and feel the plague of a wretched heart, a depraved nature, a vile body of sin and death, and a corrupt imagination. You are afflicted with every disease. You have palsy, to weaken all your powers; you have consumption, to drain up your very vitals; you have fever, quickening

your pulse after evil and inflaming your base lusts; you have lethargy, so that you cannot move forward a step in the Lord's way. Your heart is diseased; your appetite depraved; your knees are faint; and your hands hang down. In fact, there is scarcely a disease known to the physician, of which we have not spiritually the anti-type in our vile nature; with this striking difference, that we do not usually suffer in our body from more than one disease at a time, but in our soul from all. But, you say, your malady is such as none but yourself have experienced. Yet does it not say, "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint?" and surely that includes every disease; for if the whole "head" and "heart," all the intellectual powers of the one, and all the feelings and affections of the other, are sick and faint, that surely must include all.

Why should you, then, perish from your diseases? Is it for want of power in the great Physician? Is it for want of will? Does not He combine in Himself these two qualifications? "O," say you, "I believe He has the power, for my conscience has received the truth, that He is God as well as man; but I dare not say He has the will." He has the will, for He has made you willing to be cured; and if you are willing to be cured, you are one of His people; for this is one of their characters, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." Ps 110:3 Well then, He has both power and will, and has in the exercise of both, healed thousands of diseases and thousands of patients, and never turned away one that came unto Him. Then, why despair, sin-sick soul? "Because my heart is so corrupt," you reply; "because my imagination is so depraved, my will so rebellious, my affections so earthly, and my nature such a sink of sin." It is so; far deeper than you or I can know, far worse than you or I can feel. It is so. But shall that be a reason why you should die in your sickness? It is rather the very reason why you should hope.

Now, if you were "whole;" if you had no sickness; no pain, no ailment, no languishing, no pining away, no nightly groans, no daily sighs, you would not want a Physician; you would be whole-hearted, and could do without Jesus. This is your very mercy, that you

feel your sickness and disease; and that it is incurable by all that you have yet done, or think of doing. This very incurability is the very reason that makes you a fit patient for this great Physician. The Lord sees in all His people this incurability; His eye is upon them all for good; His heart overflows with love and compassion; and, if I may use the expression, He tenderly desires to stretch out His hand to heal.

Let me ask you two questions. Search the records of the New Testament. Look at the acts of Jesus.

1. Did you ever know a patient to be sent away uncured?

2. Did you ever know any saved but an incurable? Did not the Lord give eyes to some that were born blind? Were not they incurable? Did He not unstop the ears and loose the tongue of those who were deaf and dumb? Were they not incurable? Did He not heal the woman of her disease that had suffered so many years? Was not she incurable? Did He not heal the man at the pool of Bethesda? Was not he incurable? Did He not heal the ten lepers? And were not they incurable? Can you find any disease which He healed that was not incurable? If they were not incurable, would not His power have fallen short in point of manifestation? Would not His numerous enemies have said, it was all collusion or deception?

And can you find that He anywhere said to those diseased sufferers that cast themselves at His feet, that they were first to do something for themselves, and begin the cure which He would then complete? Or can you find that any were sent away, without being made perfectly whole? He healed all their maladies in a moment, by one glance of His eye, one touch of His hand. Has His power ceased? Does not the same compassionate heart beat in His bosom? Is He not, still “mighty to save?” “God over all, blessed for ever?” Ro 9:5 And will He disappoint any poor soul now whom He has made to feel his own sickness and his own sore? He cannot do it; He would deny Himself if He did; and “He cannot deny Himself;” for “He abideth faithful.”

But how many of God’s poor needy children have many years of sickness to pass over their head before they feel the balm of His atoning blood on their conscience! And why is this? That they may become more incurable if I may use such an expression and sink deeper and deeper into the sense and feeling that they cannot cure, comfort, bless, or save their own souls. And when they at length are brought here, the Lord will appear for them, that they may know His power, and that He alone may have all the glory. Thus, while he sends away all the “whole,” and does not vouchsafe them a look, He bestows His compassion and love on those that are “sick.” And all to redound to the glory of Jehovah, who, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three Persons in one undivided Godhead, deserves the praise, adoration, and thanksgiving of His redeemed and justified church now and for ever.

61 Spiritual Mysteries

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord’s Day Morning,

July 14, 1844

“In the Spirit he speaketh mysteries.”

1 Cor. 14:2

In the days of the Apostles, God saw fit, for wise purposes, to bestow special and miraculous gifts upon the church. These, indeed, have been long withdrawn; and while they lasted, peculiar evils appear, through man’s perverse nature, to have been connected with them; among them this not the least, that they tended much to fill with pride the person who possessed them. We therefore find the Apostle Paul reproving the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 14, for the confusion and disorder manifested in their assemblies, and giving directions how these gifts were to be exercised for the profit and edification of the church. The gifts I allude to were such as prophecy, speaking in strange tongues, healing the sick, and other miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost. It appears, then, that some of those who were favoured with these supernatural gifts, were apt

to make a display of them; and amongst these, particularly the persons gifted with speaking in unknown tongues. Sooner than not display their gift they would speak in a language not understood by the congregation. This the Apostle reproves. "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue, speaketh not unto man, but unto God; for no man understandeth him; howbeit, in the Spirit he speaketh mysteries." Now, the Apostle was not blaming him for speaking mysteries; but he blames him for speaking them in an unknown tongue: for in so doing he edified himself, but not the church. May we not apply this reproof to ministers now, who preach in such fine language, that God's poor, plain, and uneducated people hardly understand what they say?

Every true minister of the gospel is "a steward of the mysteries of God;" as the Apostle declares (1 Cor. 4:1), "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." And his office is, as God the Spirit teaches and enables him, to bring forth these mysteries for the edification and consolation of the people of God. "We speak," says the Apostle, "the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory."

But what is a mystery? Let us endeavour to discover its scriptural meaning.

A mystery, then, has these three marks attending it. 1. It is a truth beyond the comprehension of nature, sense, and reason. 2. It is hid from the wise and prudent. And 3. It is revealed by the Spirit of God unto babes. These three distinct marks are found in every gospel mystery; and therefore nothing but divine teaching can lead us into a spiritual and experimental acquaintance with heavenly mysteries.

With God's blessing, I shall this morning endeavour to set forth some of those mysteries which are revealed in the Scriptures; and which, therefore, we may justly conclude, the person mentioned in the text would speak in the Spirit. And may God the Holy Ghost reveal them with power to our hearts.

1. The first grand mystery in point of importance which God has revealed in the word of truth, is the mystery of the Trinity; as we find the Apostle speaking (Col. 2:2), "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." Here the Three Persons of the Trinity are named, and their undivided Essence declared to be "a mystery." Can we find the three marks of a mystery in it? It is, 1. Beyond the comprehension of nature, sense, and reason. 2. It is hid from the wise and prudent. They may, indeed, have a notional acquaintance with it, and contend for it as a part of revealed truth; but as to any feeling acquaintance with it, any experimental knowledge of it, any spiritual enjoyment of it, they are completely destitute. But 3. It is revealed to the babes, a secret into which God's people only are introduced by the teaching of the Holy Ghost.

A spiritual knowledge of the Trinity lies at the foundation of all vital godliness. To know Father, Son, and Holy Ghost by special teaching and divine revelation, is the sum and substance of spiritual religion, and is eternal life; according to the Lord's own testimony, John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Thus, sooner or later, the Lord leads all his people into a feeling acquaintance with, and divine reception of this glorious mystery: and thus they come to know the Father's electing love, the Son's redeeming work, and the Spirit's inward testimony; and that these Three are One. But how opposed to nature, sense, and reason is this glorious mystery; and how they all rise up in rebellion against it. How can Three be One, or one be Three? nature asks, and reason argues. And yet the babes receive and believe it. For take away the doctrine of the Trinity, and all their hope is gone in a moment. How can we rest upon Christ's atoning blood, if it is not the blood of the Son of God? or upon his justifying righteousness, if not the righteousness of God? or how could we be kept, led, taught, and guided by the

Holy Ghost, if he too was not a divine Person in the Godhead? Thus we come to know the mystery of Three Persons in the Godhead, by feelingly receiving into our hearts the work of each with power; and yet we know that these Three are but one God. It is this inward reception of the truth in the love of it which holds up the soul in a storm. We are often tossed about, and ready to say, "How can these things be?" But we are brought up by this deep-rooted feeling, as the anchor brings up the ship in the gale, that we are undone without it. If this mystery be removed, our hope must be removed with it; for there is no pardon, peace, nor salvation, but what stands in, and flows out of, an experimental knowledge of the Three-One God.

2. Another deeply important mystery which the Holy Ghost has revealed in the Scriptures, is what the Apostle calls "the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh,"—the Person of Immanuel, "God with us." Deity and humanity in one glorious Person is this great "mystery;" in an experimental acquaintance with which lies so much of the secret of vital godliness, and so much of the faith, hope, and love of a Christian. But do we not still find the three marks of a divine mystery attending it? Nature staggers, reason fails, sense is confounded, that the Eternal God should lie in the womb of the Virgin a span long—that he "who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, should make himself of no reputation, and take upon him the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, should humble himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:6, 7, 8.) That he who was crucified on Calvary should be God and man in one glorious Person, may well be a mystery hidden from the wise and prudent. But in the feeling reception of it into the heart, and in an experimental acquaintance with it in the conscience, does every child of God, more or less, feel vital godliness to consist. When we begin to view, by the eye of faith, the Person of Jesus as God-Man, see his blood as the blood of God, his righteousness as the

righteousness of God, his love as the love of God, his sympathy as the sympathy of God, his power as the power of God, and that all he is and has as God is engaged on behalf of his people, how such a sight encourages the poor fainting sinner still to hope in his mercy; and how it emboldens him who is groaning and crying under the evils of his heart, to take refuge under the shadow of this glorious mystery, "God manifest in the flesh." How the love, grace, and condescension displayed in this wondrous mystery meet every want that God's people feel, suit every desire of their hearts, and are adapted to every experience of their troubled minds. Let this truth go, and they are driven on the quicksands of despair; let this hope fail, and their souls are eternally lost; let this sure refuge be abandoned, and they are tossed on the billows of guilt and shame, without any haven to flee unto. Thus, however nature, sense, and reason may be baffled by this mystery, yet as God the Spirit, in fulfilling his covenant office, unfolds and holds it up to the soul's view, and applies it with unction and power to the conscience, the whole heart of the child of God receives it, his affections flow to it, and all his hope hangs and centres in it. Sooner, therefore, than give up this glorious mystery, he would, when favoured with the enjoyment of it, consent to have his head struck off with an axe on the scaffold.

Now, if there were no cavillings working against it in our carnal mind, no mustering up of misgivings sturdy and strong, no formidable array of infidel objections, no subtle reasonings and pleadings of our natural understanding, it would cease to be a mystery to us. Could sense understand it, reason comprehend it, or nature explain it, we should not need the Holy Ghost to reveal it, nor faith to receive it; but because it is a mystery beyond nature, sense, and reason, it must be received by faith through the revelation of God the Spirit. There may be some poor desponding creature here this morning who has been tossed up and down, and his soul sorely oppressed with the harassing darts of infidelity. Do not despair because your faith is staggering under the force of these infidel sus-

pitions that continually shoot across your heart. Do not think that you are altogether a castaway, or will soon turn out an open infidel. It is because Satan sees that your heart longs to embrace this glorious mystery, that he exerts all his power, and musters all his infernal arts and arms against you. It is when the soul longs most to lay hold of this mystery, that Satan plies most thick his fiery darts; so that the very infernal objections that cross your mind, the very staggerings of faith, and sinkings of hope, so far from proving that you believe not that God was made manifest in the flesh, evidently show that you do believe it; for those who believe it doctrinally with the head, have few or none of these darts of infidelity; they only assail those who believe with the heart. I believe, from soul experience, that many of God's people are exercised with these temptations of infidelity; my own soul has had to labour under them at times for years. But these gusts of infidelity that rush down on the mind, only tend eventually to ground the soul more firmly in the truth; as the winds and storms that blow upon the oak only make it take firmer root in the soil. A winter storm soon blows down a dead tree; but it makes the living tree, when the first shock is passed away, to take a stronger root: and thus the gusts of infidelity, which would root up a dead professor, eventually establish a living soul more firmly in the truth. For myself I can say, that the more I have been tried about this mystery, the more firmly I have cleaved to it, for I have felt to part with it is to part with all.

3. Another mystery revealed in the sacred Scriptures, and received by faith, is, the mystery of the union of the church with her covenant Head, as the apostle speaks, Ephes. 5:30-32, where having declared, "we are members of Christ's body, of his flesh, and of his bones;" he adds, "for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." But why should the union of the church with her covenant Head be a mystery? Let us see if the three marks of mystery, which I before pointed out, are to be found here. First, nature,

sense, and reason, cannot understand how the church could be in eternal union with her covenant Head. That the future wife can be a bride before she is born—how can reason comprehend this? And, secondly, is it not hidden from the wise and prudent, who therefore shoot out their arrows, even bitter words against it, and treat it with universal contempt and ridicule? How many ministers in London, for instance, believe in eternal union with Christ? And O what an armoury of academical objections may be found against it! But does it not bear the third mark of a gospel mystery; that it is revealed to babes by the Spirit, and sealed on their hearts with a heavenly unction? And a mystery indeed it must ever be to them, that such a beggarly wretch, such a filthy pauper, such a vile adulteress, should ever have an eternal union with the Son of God. I know indeed that the Church was viewed and taken before her Adam-fall; but base is the condition in which she is found, when the union is manifested by the Spirit's work. If a king were to take a beggar girl to his bed and throne, it would not be half or a thousandth part of such a marvel, as that the darling Son of God should take into union with himself his Church and Bride; pluck her, when debased to the lowest hell, from the ruins of the fall, wash her in his own blood, clothe her in his own righteousness, bring her into a feeling sense of union with himself, and shew her that this union existed before all worlds. O what a mystery is this to receive into the heart by faith.

But the very essence of a mystery is, that it is beyond nature, sense, and reason. And will not then nature, sense, and reason fight against it? And will not faith stagger at the thought, that a vile wretch, sunk into the depths of sin and shame, should be in eternal union with the glorious Son of God? Do not a thousand darts of suspicion shoot through the mind whether these things can be true? Does not Satan perpetually ply all his infernal armoury of doubts and fears to sink the soul, if he could, in the waves of doubt, despondency, and despair? But in spite of all suspicions and objections, the soul is brought to receive it by a living faith; and in

embracing this glorious mystery, feels a measure of its sweetness and power. And no one truth of revelation received into the heart will more debase the sinner, exalt the Saviour, and bring glory to the Triune God.

4. Another mystery revealed in the sacred Scriptures, and made known by the Spirit to the hearts of God's people, is, the mystery of the gospel; as the Apostle speaks, (Eph. 6:19), "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." The mystery of the gospel! Let us see if the three marks are applicable to this mystery also. Is not the pure gospel of Jesus (I say, pure, in opposition to a mangled or mongrel gospel) opposed to nature, sense, and reason? Is it not hidden from the wise and prudent? And is it not revealed unto babes? But what is the gospel? It is "good news," a proclamation of mercy and grace, a message of glad tidings. But to whom? Why this is what makes it a mystery, that, in the gospel, salvation is proclaimed for guilty wretches, condemned rebels, and vile criminals. It would be no mystery if it were for the good and holy, the pious and religious. Nature, sense, and reason could easily understand how a reward is given to the deserving; nor would the wise and prudent cavil at that. But this makes it a mystery, that the gospel of the grace of God should be for the worthless and undeserving, for the guilty and filthy, the lost and undone. Yet in this consists the glory, the preciousness, and the comfort of the gospel, that it is for sinners; according to those words, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." (1 Tim. 1:15.) And what a word the Holy Ghost makes use of (Rom. 4:5), "He justifieth the ungodly!" He does not justify those who are naturally righteous, holy, and religious; but the mystery is, that he takes the sinner as he is, in all his filth and guilt, washes him in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and clothes in his own robe of righteousness the naked shivering wretch, who has nothing to cover him but filthy rags. How this is set forth, Zech.

3:3, 4: "Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." This is the gospel, the mystery hid from the wise and prudent, but revealed to babes. "But," say men, "such a gospel as this leads to licentiousness; we know that the Scriptures say, 'Christ died for sinners;' but we must guard it with conditions, and hedge it in with limitations, or it will only make men sin the more." But what other than a gospel of free grace, without conditions, could suit us in our desperate circumstances? We want something that comes down to us, not something for us to clamber up to; something to pluck us out of the pit of ruin into which we are sunk; not a something suspended over the top of the pit for us, all maimed and crippled, to reach by mounting its sandy and slippery sides. We are like the man journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho, who fell among thieves, and was left half dead. Instead of getting to the inn by our own exertions, we want the good Samaritan to come to us, pour the wine and oil of the gospel into our bleeding wounds, and carry us himself where we can find food, rest, and shelter. And no other gospel is worthy the name but the gospel of the grace of God, which brings glad tidings of pardon to the criminal, of mercy to the guilty, and of salvation to the lost. A gospel which nature can understand, which sense can explain, which reason can fathom, is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no mystery in a conditional gospel: but that the holy God should look down in love on wretches that deserve the damnation of hell; that the pure and spotless Jehovah should pity, save, and bless enemies and rebels, and make them endless partakers of his own glory; this indeed is a mystery, the depth of which eternity itself will not fathom. As I before hinted, wherever there is a mystery, there will be doubts and suspicions floating through the mind; and as regards the mystery of the gospel, it will chiefly be how it can possibly be for such vile, guilty wretches. "If I could do

something to recommend myself to God's favour, if I could purify my heart, renew my mind, and abstain from all sin, live entirely to God's glory, and be holy in thought, word, and deed, then," says the soul, "I think I might be accepted. But when I continually find all manner of evil working in my mind, every base corruption crawling in my heart, every thing vile, sensual, and filthy rising up from its abominable deeps, can I think God can look down in love and mercy on such a wretch?" And yet our very necessities, our very poverty, the very extremity of the case, and the desperate nature of all the circumstances, all combine, under the teachings and leadings of the Spirit, to prepare us for the gifts of faith, hope, and love; and thus really confirm us in a knowledge of the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For we feel brought to this solemn conclusion in our minds, that without a free grace gospel, we are entirely lost. The law, we are sure, cannot save us, for it only curses and condemns; the creature cannot help us, nor can we help ourselves. But the free grace of God, flowing through the Saviour's love and blood, and manifested in the gospel, brings mercy, peace, and pardon, unclogged by works or conditions. And therefore nothing but such a gospel can suit our case, or do us any real good. Thus, sometimes through painful necessity, and sometimes through pleasing enjoyment; sometimes feeling lost without it, and sometimes feeling its beauty and glory; sometimes driven by the north wind of Sinai, and sometimes drawn by the south wind of Zion, we are led to embrace this glorious mystery of the gospel. And sweet indeed is it to see how in it all the perfections of God harmonize; how the sinner is pardoned, and yet sin condemned; how the justice of God is preserved in all its purity, and yet the mercy of God is manifested in all its fulness; how all the attributes of Jehovah meet in the Person of Christ, and the sinner is saved without one being sacrificed; nay, rather all heightened, magnified, and glorified in the face, love, blood, and work of the Lord Jesus. Now no other gospel than this is worth the name; no other gospel than the gospel of the grace of God is revealed to the heart by the Spirit. Every

other is a mongrel gospel, and will leave the soul under the wrath of God. No other gospel brings deliverance from the curse of the law, manifests the pardon of sin, gives a sense of acceptance and reconciliation unto God, and takes away the sting of death: nor is any other gospel but the gospel that reveals salvation for the vilest of the vile, a mystery; nor will any other give the church all the comfort, and God all the glory.

5. Another mystery which the Scripture speaks of, is the mystery of the kingdom of heaven; as the Lord said unto his disciples, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God." (Mark 4:11.) By "the kingdom of God" is meant the same thing as "the kingdom of heaven;" that is, the internal kingdom set up in the heart by the power of the Spirit:—that kingdom which shall stand for ever and ever, and last when time shall be no more. This the Lord calls a mystery. And if it is a mystery, it will have the three marks I have mentioned; it will be beyond nature, sense, and reason, will be hidden from the wise and prudent, and will be revealed unto babes. Let us see if we can find these marks belonging to the kingdom of heaven set up in the heart. It certainly is above nature, sense and reason, that God should dwell in a man's heart, as the apostle says, "Christ in you, the hope of glory;" and again, "Ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said I will dwell in them, and walk in them." (2 Cor. 6:16.) That God should take up his abode in a man's heart; that Christ should be in a man; and the Holy Ghost should make the body of his saints his temple; how can nature, sense, and reason understand such a mystery as this? When one of the ancient martyrs, I think it was Polycarp, was brought before Trajan, when the Emperor asked him his name, he answered, "I am Polycarp, the God-bearer, for I carry God in me." At this answer the Emperor laughed, and said, "Let him be thrown to the wild beasts." That was the only answer a persecuting tyrant could give. That a man, frail and feeble, whom a lion could tear to pieces in a few moments, carried God in his bosom,—how could the wise and prudent Trajan believe a thing so unheard of? Yet it

is a mystery revealed to babes for they receive it in the love of it under divine teaching, as one of the mysteries that God the Spirit makes known in the heart.

Daniel, in prophecy, had a view of this kingdom of God. In interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image, he said to the King, "Thou sawest till a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to 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 threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." (Dan. 2:34, 35.) This "stone cut out without hands," represented the Lord Jesus, and shadowed forth his kingdom which was to stand upon the ruins of all the preceding. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall brake in pieces and consume all the kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Dan. 2:44.) Thus the internal kingdom of God breaks to pieces all the other kingdoms, and stands upon their ruins; it breaks to pieces the kingdom of pride, the kingdom of covetousness, the kingdom of self-righteousness, the kingdom of lust and passion, in a word, all that kingdom in which nature, sense, and reason reign. Now, if this is the case, that the kingdom of God stands on the ruins of all the rest, it must, indeed, be a mystery, that I have no true religion till I have lost all my old; that I can enjoy no sense of God's goodness till I have seen the wreck of all my own; that the mercy and grace of God are built upon the ruins of self; that I have neither righteousness, or holiness of my own to boast in, or to be saved by. That the kingdom of heaven should be thus built on the wreck of the creature is indeed a mystery which nature, sense, and reason cannot comprehend; is a mystery indeed hidden from the wise and prudent; but one which is revealed by the Spirit of God unto babes. And to their experience I may appeal.

Do we ever know anything of the grace of God in Christ till nature is laid low? Do we ever feel the blessedness of God's salvation till our own righteousness becomes an unshapely wreck? Do we feel anything of supernatural religion and vital godliness till our own religion and our own exertions fail us in the hour of need? Thus the internal kingdom of God stands upon the ruins of nature; and only so far as it does so stand, has it any abiding place in our souls.

But this kingdom of heaven within is exposed to perpetual assaults; the child of God, therefore, taught by the Spirit, finds there is an inward mystery in himself—the mystery, I mean, of the two natures, of "the flesh lusting against the spirit," and the "spirit lusting against the flesh." Are you not often a mystery to yourself? Warm one moment, cold the next; abasing yourself one half-hour, exalting yourself the following; loving the world, full of it, steeped up to your lips in it to-day; crying, groaning, and sighing for a sweet manifestation of the love of God to-morrow; brought down to nothingness, covered with shame and confusion, on your knees before you leave your room; filled with pride and self-importance before you have got downstairs; despising the world, and willing to give it all up for one taste of the love of Jesus when in solitude; trying to grasp it with both hands when in business. What a mystery are you! Touched by love, and stung with enmity; possessing a little wisdom, and a great deal of folly; earthly-minded, and yet having the affections in heaven; pressing forward, and lagging behind; full of sloth, and yet taking the kingdom with violence. And thus the Spirit, by a process which we may feel but cannot adequately describe, leads us into the mystery of the two natures, that "company of two armies," perpetually struggling and striving against each other in the same bosom. So that one man cannot more differ from another than the same man differs from himself. But do not nature, sense, and reason contradict this? Do not the wise and prudent deny this? "There must be a progressive advance," they say, "in holiness; there must be a gradual amendment of our nature until at length all sin is rooted out, and we become as perfect

as Christ.” But the mystery of the kingdom of heaven is this, that our carnal mind undergoes no alteration, but maintains a perpetual war with grace: and thus, the deeper we sink in self-abasement under a sense of our vileness, the higher we rise in a knowledge of Christ; and the blacker we are in our own view, the more comely does Jesus appear.

6. Another mystery spoken of in Scripture, is “the mystery of iniquity;” as we read (2 Thess. 2:7), “The mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.” There is a twofold mystery of iniquity—one outward, and the other inward. The outward mystery of iniquity is in the professing church; and to this the Apostle refers in the passage quoted, where he shews that it will one day be fully ripened and developed in the man of sin, that “Wicked” one, “whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.” (ver. 8.) The mystery of iniquity in the outward church is the mystery of a dead profession, the hands being full of blood, and the heart full of hypocrisy. This, in its varied forms, seems now fast ripening to a head, and gradually advancing till it will come to its grand completion in the “man of sin.”

But there is, also, the inward mystery of iniquity in a man’s own bosom. And O what a mystery is that! What shapes and forms it wears! What marks and disguises it puts on! How it intermingles itself with every thought, appears in every word, and discovers itself in every action! This inward mystery of iniquity we cannot for a single moment bar out; like a flood, it will force its way in; do what we will, still it works in the heart; with all our desires or resolutions to the contrary, we cannot keep this mystery from working and manifesting itself perpetually. This mystery in a man’s heart takes such subtle forms, wears such various dresses, insinuates itself into such crevices and corners, entwines and entangles itself so around every thought of the heart, that we never seem free from it. Would we pray against it? The mystery of iniquity still works in the very prayer. Would we read the Scriptures to find some promise

against it? It mingles with all our reading. Would we separate ourselves from the world, and seclude ourselves from all society? Still the mystery of iniquity will work in the deepest solitude. So that do what we will, we find the mystery of iniquity will still work. But is it not hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes?

7. Another mystery revealed in the Scriptures, is the mystery of the resurrection. As Paul says, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” (1 Cor. 15:51, 52.) The mystery of the resurrection is this, that the vile body shall one day become a glorious body, changed into a perfect likeness to the glorified humanity of Jesus, and entirely conformed to his image, so as to be for ever with him, and like to him, as the Holy Ghost testifies, Phil. 3:21: “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.” 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.” (1 John 3:2.) Now this is a mystery which nature, sense, and reason cannot grasp; a mystery hidden from the wise and prudent, and yet revealed unto babes. Has it not struck you sometimes as an inexplicable mystery, how you could be ever holy enough for heaven, so as to find all your delight to centre in looking at Jesus and being like him through the countless ages of eternity; and to have no other happiness but what consists in communion with the Three-One God? Is not this a mystery? Now you can scarcely for a quarter of an hour be spiritually-minded, scarcely now for the space of five minutes be engaged in meditating on the Person of Christ. When on your knees, vile thoughts will intrude; when at the ordinance, some wicked iniquity will suggest itself; in hearing the word, your minds cannot sometimes for a quarter of the sermon keep up their attention. Being now so earthly and sensual,

is it not a mystery how you, who are God's people, shall one day be perfectly holy, perfectly pure, and perfectly conformed to the image of Christ; and that all your happiness and joy will be in being holy, and in holding communion with the Three-One God? O what a mystery is this to nature, sense, and reason. Do they not stagger and give way beneath it? When we compare the happiness and glory of the saints in heaven with what we are here on earth, how amazing the contrast. When we see our vileness, baseness, carnality, and sensuality; how our souls cleave to dust, and grovel in things evil and hateful; how dark our minds, how earthly our affections, how depraved our hearts, how strong our lusts, how raging our passions; we feel ourselves, at times, no more fit for God, in our present state, than Satan himself. What a mystery then is this, that such a wonderful change should take place as to make the saints perfectly holy in body, soul, and spirit, and fit guests to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb! Sure I am, the more that a man becomes acquainted with the depravity of his fallen nature, and the more that he feels the workings of devilism in his heart, the more will he wonder how he can be brought into such a state as to be perfectly holy, enjoy uninterrupted communion with the Three-One God, and bask for ever in the smiles of Jehovah.

But though this is a mystery which nature, sense, and reason cannot comprehend, yet faith receives it as revealed by the Holy Ghost. Would it be heaven, if we could carry our present depraved nature there; our pride, our presumption, our hypocrisy, with all the abominable workings of our fallen, filthy, and grovelling hearts? To carry these with us to that glorious abode of perfection, holiness, and purity would make heaven to us a hell. Therefore, though it is indeed a mystery how it can be, yet, as received by faith, the child of God is happy that it should be so; for he is certain, were it otherwise, heaven would be no heaven for him. He would not be fit for it; he could not enjoy it; nay, the very thought of being there for ever would be irksome and intolerable to him. Nay more, when the soul is tossed to and fro by exercises and per-

plexities, and the workings of sin in a depraved heart, and can look forward with something of gospel hope to that day when it shall feel the plague of sin no more, but be perfectly holy and perfectly pure in body and soul, it becomes commended to the conscience, and is embraced by faith as a blessed mystery suitable to us, and glorifying to God.

8. And then comes what John saw in Revelation (10:7): "In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished, which he has declared to his servants the prophets." This is the winding up of all things, when the mystery of iniquity in the professing world; the mystery of God's dealings with his people in grace; the mystery of his dealings with them in providence; the mystery of the way in which God has led his church; the mystery of all our trials, temptations, afflictions, and sufferings; the mystery of the crooked road we have walked, of the tangled labyrinth which we have threaded; the mystery why the wicked have prospered, and the righteous been oppressed—all these mysteries, which now puzzle and perplex nature, sense, and reason, will then be unfolded to the church of God. Then "the mystery will be finished;" and God will lay bare the mystery hid for ages in Christ Jesus, and make it known to the salvation of his people, the confusion of his enemies, and the glory of himself.

Now, "in the Spirit," the man of whom the Apostle spoke, preached "mysteries;" for "in the Spirit" they must be preached, and "in the Spirit" they must be received; or he that preaches, and those that hear, will preach and hear in vain. But what a mercy if the Spirit has preached any of these mysteries into our hearts; and what a blessing if we have received them in a measure of faith, hope, and love; and being deeply sensible of our ignorance, have received the truth in the love of it, been enabled to embrace it, in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, for our soul's edification and consolation. They must be received as mysteries. Immediately that natural reason intrudes, and the question is asked, "How can these things be?" we cease to submit to God's will and word.

But when we fall down before the throne of God, and feeling that though we cannot understand them, cannot comprehend them, cannot reason ourselves into them, we yet are enabled to receive them into our heart by a living faith, we see their beauty, taste their sweetness, and enjoy a measure of their glory.

Thus we have some evidence that we have received and have felt a power in the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, when a reasonable religion, a natural religion, an intellectual religion satisfies us no longer. Has there not been a time with us when we scorned all mysteries, and would have no religion but one which we could comprehend, and, by dint of our natural understanding, could lay hold of? And through mercy, has not this proud Babel been laid low? And have not some of us, through the teachings of God in the conscience, found nature, sense, and reason buried in the dust; and felt ourselves brought down to be little children, to know our own ignorance, and to cry to the Lord to teach us the truth by divine revelation? And since the Lord in mercy has brought our reason to nought, since in mercy he has caused the tall steeples of natural religion to topple down and be stretched in the dust, have we not felt a measure of sweetness, of power, of reality in the things of God not known before? Has not truth come with life and light into our souls, made us new creatures, revolutionized our lives, changed all our views, and given us eyes to see realities we never thought of before? And has not the Gospel of the grace of God been received into a believing heart, and a measure of its sweetness been experienced? It is thus we have some evidence that we have received the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. And are they not doubly sweet, because reason cannot comprehend them, because we are not able to understand them; and because they can only be received from the lips of Jesus, or as they are dropped into the heart, and distilled on the conscience by the power of the Holy Ghost? And is it not far more blessed to learn them thus, than if we could understand all mysteries by natural intellect, or fathom the depths of God by the line of creature understanding?

Some of you perhaps are poor and despised, and are ridden down by great professors; your family and friends perhaps cast you out, and say, "Really we cannot understand you; you were a good Christian once, a pattern to others, a truly pious character; and everybody loved and spoke well of you. But," say they, "what a strange person you are now! we cannot at all get on with you. Ever since you have gone to that chapel, and become connected with that strange set, you are quite altered, and we know not what to make of you." Does not this shew that the mystery, revealed unto babes, is hidden from the wise and prudent? If all could see as we see, hear as we hear, feel as we feel, the gospel would then be no mystery at all; but by knowing something of this mystery, we are made to differ from them, and this stirs up their enmity and wrath. "What," say they, "are there only two or three in a village, only half a dozen in a town, only one in a family going to heaven? and are none right but they?—Away with such narrow-minded, bigoted wretches." What is this but declaring that there is a mystery in this people's religion? If they could understand it, if it were agreeable to nature, sense, and reason, it would cease to be a mystery, and you would cease to have a testimony from God that you have received it into your heart with power. Therefore, to know gospel mysteries by divine teaching, will separate a man from the world, lead him out of false churches, cut him off from dead ministers, and bring him into union with the people of God. And as he finds these are spiritually led into the mysteries of the kingdom of God, it will produce a communion with them, and a sweetness which he never knew in dead churches; and, his heart being dissolved in love and affection, he will cry, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." (Ruth 1:16.) And thus he will have an increasing testimony from God that he is not one of the "wise and prudent" from whom these things are hidden, but one of "the babes" to whom they are revealed.

O may we know more of these divine mysteries! And may the Lord the Spirit lead us more deeply into them, favour us with more

sweet and abiding views of them, and specially make the mystery of the gospel, in the Person, love, and blood of Jesus, "all our salvation and all our desire." And then, we shall bless God not only that there is a mystery in the gospel, but that he has mercifully unfolded it with power to our consciences.

62 A Father's Expostulation and Inquiry

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening,

July 14, 1844

"O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?"

Hosea 6:4

I know not any part of Scripture more difficult to understand than the book of Hosea. It is difficult to understand it literally; and it is more difficult, if possible, to understand it experimentally. It is difficult, literally, because we know so little of the historical circumstances of Ephraim (or Israel), under which these prophecies were delivered; and it is difficult to understand it spiritually and experimentally, because the different traits of Ephraim's character are so scattered up and down this book, that it is very hard to bring them together so as to form out of them a complete description. And yet a few words upon the literal meaning of the book may be preparatory to entering into the experimental meaning of it.

Under what historical circumstances, then, were the prophecies of Hosea written? They were addressed, for the most part, to Israel; that is, to the ten tribes who separated under Jeroboam from Judah, and who, a short time after Hosea's prophecy, were carried into captivity by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria. It was therefore to the ten tribes known under the name of Ephraim (that being the most important tribe of them all), that Hosea, a short period previous to their captivity, delivered these prophecies.

But when we look at the spiritual meaning of the book, we find a deeper signification in it than any mere literal address to the ten tribes. We see in it a character, a spiritual character, set forth and

described under the name of Ephraim; and who and what this spiritual character is, we may make the subject of some enquiry.

One thing, at first sight, I think is evident, that a child of God is set forth under the name of Ephraim: for the promises are so great and glorious, that none but a living soul can be addressed in them; and yet a child of God under peculiar circumstances and in a peculiar state.

Let us endeavour, then, to gather up a few of the traits of Ephraim's character.

1. The grand distinguishing feature of Ephraim seems to be this, that he was "a backslider." We read, for instance, "Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer;" (4:16) and we find the Lord addressing to him a promise in that state, "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely." (14:4.)

2. This backsliding of Ephraim was the real root of all his other sad evils; we find therefore, that he was also an idolater. "Ephraim is joined to idols." (4:17.) Idolatry is the source of backsliding. No sooner do we depart from the "Fountain of living waters," than we "hew out to ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water;" no sooner do we run in our desires after idols than backsliding begins; and when backsliding begins, rapid is the progress that it makes.

3. Another feature of Ephraim's character traced out in this book, was, that he was mixed up with the world. "Ephraim hath mixed himself among the people." (7:8.) He had become entangled in the world, had forsaken the company of God's people, and got into close connection with those who feared not the Lord. Thus his heart had become hardened, and his conscience deadened; and he was as "a cake not turned." What a striking figure is this! It was not all dough, so as to be moulded by the divine hand; it was not all bread, so as to be good food; but it was burnt on one side, and dough on the other; neither fit for God nor man; neither suited to the world, or the church. "Strangers" too, we are told, "have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not." (7:9.) There was, if we may use the expression, a secret drain upon his constitution; he

had got so entangled in the world and so buried in the things of time and sense, that these strangers, as a disease in his vitals, had "devoured all his strength." "Grey hairs" too, were "here and there upon him." He had lost the vigour of youth, and the wrinkles of age were seen spreading themselves over him, and yet "he knew it not."

Now these traits, and I might, if time allowed, notice others, show that the distinguishing feature of Ephraim's character was, that he was a backslider. Like many of the Lord's people, his heart had become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. What little feeling he had was momentary and transient, like "the morning cloud and early dew." So that all God's providences and all God's judgments had little effect upon him. And therefore, in the words of the text, the Lord says to him, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?"

Here the Lord takes the language of a tender father. A parent, perhaps, has a very wayward child: say, a son, grown up, who will follow his own ways, and over whom the parent has lost his original control. To regain his authority, he treats him with the greatest kindness, but that does not succeed; next he tries harsh measures, and these have no effect; sometimes he is distant, but that does not alter his course; sometimes friendly, but that does not change his conduct. And though, at times, the son may have some workings in his heart towards his father, "like the early cloud and morning dew," and has transient determinations not to go on in his wayward and rebellious course: yet kindness and severity equally fail. The father, therefore, sometimes says, "What shall I do with him? What shall I do to him? Whatever course I take, whatever means I employ, all are alike fruitless; he is just the same wayward creature, and all that I do does not seem in the least to mend him."

Now, in that sense, we may say, the words of the text are words of expostulation, as if reasoning with Ephraim, arguing the matter over, putting the case before him, and saying, "What plan next shall I adopt! What is the next course I shall pursue!"

But there is another meaning of the word, which I think I may

take without violently straining it from its original signification, and that is, an enquiry: "What shall I do unto thee?" "Tell me what it shall be, and I will do it."

If we look, then, at the question, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?" first, as an expostulation; and next, as an enquiry, if God the Spirit shall throw a light upon it, and bring it with power to our heart, it may be for our edification to consider the text in these two points of view.

I.—First, then, by way of expostulation. "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?" Now, the Lord does not ask this question as though he were ignorant what course to take, for he knew perfectly well all that he meant to do. But he expostulates as a man might reason with his neighbour; for this is the way in which God sometimes speaks. He condescends to take into his lips the language of man. As we find him speaking of his arm, or his hand, or his ear, parts that only belong to the human body; so here he adopts a language of a man, as though he were in doubt, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?"

But alas, when we get into a backsliding state, (and O! who does not get into a backsliding state, I should like to know?) it seems as though nothing that the Lord said could move us. Perhaps, we have heavy afflictions; but these do not bring us nearer to him; they only stir up rebellion, make us peevish and fretful, and increase our natural perverseness. As we read, (Isaiah 57:17), "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." Like a sulky child, the more the parent strikes, the more sullen it is; the parent may break the rod on the child's back before he breaks the child's heart. And so God in his providence may break us to pieces by afflictions, but not break our hearts into contrition and godly sorrow. So on the other hand, the Lord may show us great kindness temporally, may shower down upon us providential favours, give us our natural heart's desire, and prosper every plan. But these favours will not bring us out of our backsliding state, wean us from idolatry,

or make us say, "What have I any more to do with idols!" Thus, whether the storm of adversity blows, or the sun of providence shines, the backslider still goes on in the frowardness of his own heart, and the perverseness of his own way.

II.—But we may take the words of the text in a way of enquiry; and to that meaning I shall chiefly confine myself. It is as though the Lord had said, "Come to me, come to my throne; tell me, tell me, all that is in thine heart; tell me, tell me, all that thy soul wants to have accomplished; tell me, tell me, all the desires that heave and ferment in thy bosom." "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?"

When the base backslider gets a little softened (and the Lord does soften him sometimes, as we read, "I will be as the dew unto Israel," Hosea 14:5); when the dew falls into the backslider's heart, it softens, melts, and breaks him down; for when the Lord heals his backslidings, it is sure to break his heart all to pieces. When, then, he calls up Ephraim before him, and says, "What shall I do unto thee?" what a long list of petitions does Ephraim then bring. For now that he can get the King's ear, he pours out his petition before the King's throne. Having the privilege of pouring out all his soul and telling out all his desires, what a list, what a catalogue of petitions is he enabled to spread before his divine Majesty. And is it not sweet to have some access unto the Lord in prayer? If you know anything of access to God, you have felt the secret of vital godliness in your soul. Is it not, then, sweet to enter the throne-room, and be admitted into the very presence of the King? There are times and seasons when we can open our hearts before the Lord, and tell him every desire and want that heave and ferment in our minds. They are indeed very rare seasons, but very sweet and blessed when granted. And if ever the Lord give us a heart to plead, he has an ear to hear; and if ever he give us access to himself, he will grant every petition we are enabled, under the teachings of his Spirit, to spread before his throne.

Let us, then, take the words in a way of enquiry: "O Ephraim, what is it thy heart longs after? Tell me, and it shall be granted?"

We will go, then, with the poor backslider to the throne; and with him, we will, if the Lord enable us, simply, humbly, and sincerely tell the Lord what we want him to do with and for us.

1. Pardon of sin by the healing of his backslidings is one of the things Ephraim would ask of the Lord, if he gave him an open mouth before his throne; for the Lord has said, "I will pardon them whom I reserve." (Jer. 50:20.) Ephraim, therefore, says (Hosea 14:2), "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." Now when we feel what we are and have been; when we have a solemn feeling in our conscience what base wretches, what vile rebels, what filthy monsters we are and how polluted with everything black and horrible from day to day, and hour to hour; and when we feel shining upon us the purity and holiness of God's nature, how we long to have the manifested healing of all these sins sealed upon the conscience. And if the Lord does but speak into the heart, and say, "What shall I do unto thee? what is it thy soul most earnestly desires?" the answer would be, "That my backslidings may be healed, that my sins may be forgiven, that my aggravated crimes may be blotted out, that my transgressions may be cast behind thy back, and that my soul may be washed in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness." And as the soul is enabled to spread this petition before the throne, the pardon is in a measure given. No sooner does the soul ask in faith, than it receives in faith; and the power to plead in faith brings down the gracious manifested answer. How strikingly was this the case with Isaiah (6:5-7) and Daniel (9:20-23). Thus, the Lord says, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?" "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it," says the Lord: make thy petition deep and large. "Ask it either in the depth, or the height above" (Isaiah 7:11); and tell me what thou wantest?

Now, my friends, take this as a piece of counsel. I speak it not in a legal way; I trust I know something spiritually and experimentally of what I am saying. When the Lord favours your soul with sweet access at a throne of grace, make the most of it. What should we think of the master of a vessel coming up the river, if, when the

wind was favourable and the tide served, he would not heave her anchor, or hoisted but her fore-sail to the breeze, and would not take full advantage of wind and tide? Now it is so sometimes with our souls; a gale blows, a gale of grace on the soul, and the tide of faith rises. Is it not our wisdom, and is it not our mercy, at such a rare season, to make the most of it? If the Lord deign to give us an ear, is it not our mercy to tell him all that our souls desire? Do you recollect what the Prophet said to the king who only struck his arrows three times on the ground, and then stayed? "The man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it; whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice." (2 Kings 13:19.) Had he continued to strike his arrows on the ground, so many more victories would have been obtained; the prophet therefore was angry with him because he stayed his hand.

Sometimes it is so with us. When the Lord gives us some little access unto himself, we do not make the most of it. Satan casts in some fiery dart, some worldly circumstance distracts our mind, some filthy imagination rises up in our bosom; and instead of resisting the devil that he may flee from us, we give way to him; the opportunity is gone, the sweet moment is lost, and it may be months before we get the ear of the King again. It will, therefore, be your wisdom and your mercy, when the gale blows, and the tide rises, to spread every sail, and to get as far as you can on your course to the haven of eternal rest and joy.

2. But again; when the Lord says to the soul, "What shall I do unto thee?" would not the petition be, "Lord, that thou wouldest manifest thyself unto me; that thou wouldest reveal thy glorious Person, atoning blood, justifying righteousness, and dying love in my heart?" When the soul has known something of the love of Jesus, does it not want the veil to be removed, that it may without interruption behold the Object whom it loves? He that has seen anything of the beauty, preciousness, and glory of the Lamb of God, does he not want nearer and dearer, sweeter and more fre-

quent communications and revelations, of his gracious and blessed Majesty? And if the soul be privileged and enabled to come before his throne, and the Lord should say, "What shall I do unto thee?" "Tell me what thy heart most earnestly desires;" will there not be some filial breathings to the Lord, that he would manifest himself to us as he doth not unto the world? Would not the language be, "O that I might have such a sweet discovery of thy glorious Person, and such a blessed manifestation of thy dying love, as shall give me union and communion with thy glorious Self, and bless me now and for ever?" Sure am I, if the soul gets the King's ear, it will want to see the King in his beauty; sure am I, if ever the soul is indulged with access to Jesus, it will say, "Lord, do discover thyself to me, that I may see thee in all thy beauty and all thy loveliness."

3. But the King is not tired with listening; his almighty ear is not weary of the many petitions presented at such times. He still says, "What shall I do unto thee?" If, then, we get the King's ear, we shall feel ourselves under the Spirit's inward leadings, teachings, and guidings; and we shall have a great many wants, and a long list of petitions to spread at his feet. One will be, that he would make our conscience tender in his fear. Where the conscience is tender, we shall fear to offend him, shall want to please him, shall desire to walk in his footsteps, to be conformed to his image, and long to have his likeness stamped upon us; we shall want to abstain from all that he hates, and cleave to that which he loves. And when he brings us near to himself, and says, "What shall I do unto thee?" "Make my conscience tender;" answers the soul; "let my heart be softened and meekened;" let the fear of the Lord be in perpetual exercise; let me see the evil of sin, and the beauty of holiness; let me perceive the snares that Satan is spreading for my feet, and let me, through thy mercy and thy grace, avoid them; let me never do anything to displease thee; and let my walk, conduct, and conversation be consistent, and such as is well-pleasing in thy sight." Sure I am, if the Lord only say, "What shall I do unto thee?" and we feel that he is able and willing to do what our souls need, to have a

conscience made tender in his fear, will be one of the first and foremost requests. Was not this the prayer of Jabez? And God has seen fit to write it down for our instruction. "O that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil that it may not grieve me?" (1 Chron. 4:10.) And was not this one of the petitions which God heard and granted?

4. But again. If the Lord say to the soul, "What shall I do unto thee?" It would answer, "Lord give me communion with thyself; let me know what it is to walk with thee and talk with thee, as a man talketh and walketh with his friend; let my soul mount up into holy fellowship with thee, and know what it is to have sweet and heavenly communion with the King of kings." What intercourse is to be compared with this? We go into the world; and what does intercourse with the world do for us? It defiles our conscience, hardens our heart, pollutes our minds, and fills us with everything sensual and carnal. We go among professors; and what does intercourse with them do for us. It either puffs us up with pride and presumption, or sends us away dead and barren. We go sometimes among the children of God; and have we not found lightness and frivolity too often in them? (I will not say always, for sometimes we get light and life, power, strength, and consolation from the people of God.) But what do we frequently get? Perhaps, from some dear friend we get wounds, have our minds pained, or imbibe carnality and death. But what do we get from the Lord, if ever we are enabled to commune with him? Some conformity to his image; some power from his presence; some communication of light and life from him in whom light and life eternally dwell. And if your soul knows anything of being brought out of the world, as the Lord says, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee" (Isaiah 26:20); if you know anything of going into the chambers, and closing the doors about you; if you know anything, in solemn moments, of breathing your souls out before the Lord; you will feel, that five minutes' communion with the Lord of life and

glory is more profitable and sweet, than an hour's intercourse with the most holy and highly favoured of his people.

5. But again; for we have not yet exhausted our list of petitions: if the Lord says, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?" We shall reply, "Lord, break every snare my soul is entangled with; deliver me from every temptation that catches and entangles my roving feet; remove every idol that interposes between thyself and my soul; take away insincerity, hypocrisy, and superstition; purge and cleanse me from self-righteousness, and from the hateful dominion of every idol." And the Lord will not be angry with us, if we ask him to do these things in us and for us. He himself first implants the desires which he means to answer; he first kindles the prayer that he means to grant; and therefore he is not angry with us for asking him to do those things that he means to bestow; he loves to hear the cry of the humble before his throne. And as the Lord brings us into some measure of union and communion with himself, he dethrones these idols, breaks these snares, overcomes these temptations, makes us honest and sincere before him, and purges out that wretched hypocrisy of which our hearts are full to overflowing.

6. Again. If the Lord says, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?" another petition will be, "That I may be the clay, and thou the Potter; and that I may feelingly and experimentally be the work of thy hands; that I may know thy will, and do it; that I may be moulded into a measure of conformity to thy likeness; that I may feel thy gracious fingers working in me to will and to do of thy good pleasure; and find and feel myself a vessel of mercy made meet for the Master's use. When a man is brought here, it is the death of pride in him; free-will gives up the ghost, when human exertion utterly fails, and the soul lies helpless and powerless before the Lord. And until free-will, self-righteousness, creature exertions, and human merit are dried up and withered away, till they all give up the ghost, we can never come into that spot where we are the clay, and God is the Potter. Can the clay make itself into a vessel?

Can it mould itself into shape and form? Can it start from its bed, and work itself up into a vessel for use or ornament? Nor more can we make ourselves fit for glory, or mould ourselves into vessels of honour. If the Lord do but give us the feeling in our souls, our sweetest privilege, our dearest enjoyment, is to be the clay. Free-will, self-righteousness, human wisdom, and creature strength—we give them all to the Pharisees; let them make the most of them. But when the Lord indulges our souls with some measure of access to himself, and brings us in all humility and brokenness to lie low before his throne, we feel that we are nothing but what he makes us, have nothing but what he gives us, experience nothing but what he works in us, and do nothing but what he does in and for us. To be here, and to lie here, is to be the clay; and to find the Lord working in us holy desires, fervent breathings, secret cries, and the actings of faith, hope, and love; and to feel these things freely given, graciously communicated, and divinely wrought, and to know the Lord is doing all this for us and in us, is to find him the Potter, and is to be brought to the sweetest, lowliest, and happiest spot that a soul can come into.

There may be some here, perhaps, who think they shall get to heaven by creature piety, native holiness, human exertion, and natural wisdom. I solemnly tell you, that you will find it all a blank and an awful deception; and believe me such a way of getting to heaven is nothing else but a delusion of the Devil, and the spawn of our own self-righteous hearts. We have no natural power, no creature wisdom in the things of God; for we are and have nothing but as God gives and spiritually works it in us. Nor will the knowledge and experience of man's misery and of God's mercy lead a man to sin; but it will make him heavenly-minded, dead to the world, full of love to God and to God's people, to which the creature with all its exertions never could possibly attain.

7. "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee!" Most of the Lord's people have some peculiar thing that they want to have granted. Most living souls have some peculiar temptation from which they

want to be delivered. If some of the Lord's people could sum up all their desires in one petition, it would be to have the pardon of their sins sealed upon the conscience. If others of God's people could crowd up in one sentence all the wants of their soul, it would be to be brought into the enjoyment of gospel liberty. If others could condense in one short prayer the chief desire of their heart, it would be to be delivered from some powerful temptation, or be preserved from some peculiar besetment. And if others could get into one request the longings that heave in their bosom, it would be to be relieved from some special trial or trouble that at times seems as though it would weigh them down to the dust. When the Lord, then, does but enable them to come before him, and tell him what is working in their hearts, it is as though he said, "Be not afraid to tell me; I know it already; I have the power to grant thy request; I have the will to bestow the desired answer. 'What shall I do unto thee?' Tell me what it is?" The Lord encourages and enables every one that he thus draws near to himself to tell him what he most needs; and when he is enabled to lay them before his throne, it is half answered. The needed blessing is on its way; like Gabriel, it has left the palace, and is speeding its course to the soul.

But in what path must we travel before we can tell the Lord what our soul chiefly desires to have granted? Before we can come here, we must see an end of all perfection; we must be brought off from depending on or looking to creature righteousness; our strength must have become weakness, our wisdom folly, our knowledge ignorance; all we once proudly thought we were must have faded away, and become like a vision of the night. We must sink down into the ruins of the creature, before we rise up feelingly and spiritually in Jesus; we must come to the end of all creature religion, creature exertions, creature refuge, creature help, before in godly sincerity and spiritual simplicity we can come before the Lord, and ask him to work in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight. Now this is the main reason why so few of us know what it is to have manifest answers to our prayers. How we go on, many of us, year

after year, praying and desiring, and do not get a clear answer! Why is this? Because these prayers and desires are half-hearted. They are like Ephraim's cake; they want turning; they do not come from the heart. Our fleshly religion has not been thoroughly broken, turned upside down, brought to confusion, reduced to beggary and thorough insolvency. How we read, "When they had nothing to pay," (O what a qualification!) "he frankly forgave them both." Now too many of God's people are like the servant in the gospel, who said to his master, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." Most of God's people try at first to make some composition with their great Creditor; as a man sinking in the world, sooner than be a bankrupt, will compound with his creditors for five shillings in the pound. But as long as we have a penny in the pound to pay, the whole debt remains against us. As Hart says,

"Tis perfect poverty alone
That sets the soul at large;
While we can call one mite our own,
We have no full discharge."

But many of God's people who have not been brought to this spot are afraid to come here. How many a sinking tradesman dare not look into his accounts! He will borrow money at immense interest, give bills, or do anything to shore up his sinking credit: but at last, down he comes with tenfold more ruin to himself and others than though he had broke at the first. Some of God's people are like this sinking tradesman; they will shore up their rotten credit by borrowing good opinions from others; will make vows, promises, and resolutions, and use every exertion and attempt to avoid beggary. But, sooner or later, the bills come back on them; they are all dishonoured; God will not accept them; and down they go, where they should have gone at first, into thorough ruin, complete beggary, and utter insolvency. And when they are brought here, there is a full acquittance; the debt is paid; and when the Lord brings his dying love into their consciences, they get full discharge. As in nature, so in grace; to have nothing and to be nothing but a

beggar and a pauper, how it lowers the topsails of human pride! To have nothing in self to rest and hang upon, leaves but a step between hell and the soul. To pull down everything in self is to take away the wall that keeps us from falling down the precipice. But the truth is, that till self is dethroned, till creature righteousness, creature piety, creature exertions, and creature strength are brought to nought, we do not enter into the power, blessedness, and reality of Christ's kingdom; we are not fit guests to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. We cannot enter into the treasures of pardoning love, see the riches of atoning blood, and feel the glory and beauty of justifying righteousness, till that idol, religious self, is hurled from its pedestal. Whilst full of pride and self, we cannot follow Jesus into the garden of Gethsemane, nor see, by the eye of faith, the suffering, groaning, agonizing, bleeding Son of God; we cannot take our station at the foot of the cross, and behold the wondrous mystery of Immanuel, the God-Man, bleeding and dying there. While we are engaged in looking at our own pharisaic religion, our own piety, our own exertions, our own doings, we have no eyes to see Jesus, no ear to hear his voice. We are so enamoured with ourselves that the King of kings has no beauty in our eyes; he is to us as "a root out of a dry ground, and there is no form nor comeliness in him that we should desire him." But when we begin to see, shall I say, the ugliness, the depravity, the dreadful workings of self, we see how impossible it is that self can ever stand before God. And when we feel the ruin of self, then we begin to feel what a glorious salvation has been accomplished, according to the counsel and mind of God. We see the Lord of life and glory stooping down to save wretches who could never climb up to him, pardoning criminals that have no righteousness of their own, and opening up the treasures of his dying love and risen glory to those who without him must utterly perish. As this is revealed to faith, faith embraces it as the great "mystery of godliness;" hope casts out her anchor, and enters within the veil; and love flows out to Jesus, and embraces him in the arms of affection for such dying love as

that which the Son of God manifested on the cross of Calvary. Now this experience puts the sinner in his right place; it debases him in his feelings, humbles him in his soul, and breaks him to nothing. And at the same time, it exalts the Lord Jesus in his affections, and he becomes manifestly in his conscience as his "all in all." So that he lives for nothing else but so live unto him, and he dies for nothing else except to be with him; and he thus feels the power of that Scripture, "whether we live we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether, therefore, we live or die, we are the Lord's." (Rom. 14:8.)

Just suffer me, then, by way of summing up and bringing these things into a narrow compass, to lay down these two broad lines of truth; and may the Lord in his mercy seal them upon our consciences. There are two grand lessons to be learnt in the school of Christ, and all divine teaching is comprehended and summed up in them. One is to learn by the Spirit's teaching, what we are by nature; so as to see and feel the utter ruin and thorough wreck of self, and the complete beggary, weakness, and helplessness of the creature in the things of God. This is the first grand branch of divine teaching. And we have to learn this lesson day by day, "line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." Through this branch of divine teaching we have almost daily to wade, and sometimes to sink into very painful depths under a sense of our depraved nature. And the other grand branch of divine teaching is, "To know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent." To know who Jesus is, and to know what he is; to know the efficacy of his atoning blood to purge the guilty conscience; the power of his justifying righteousness to acquit and absolve from all sin; the mystery of his dying love to break down the hardness of our heart, and raise up a measure of love towards him; and to see, by the eye of faith, his holy walk and suffering image, so as to be in some measure conformed to him, and have his likeness in some measure stamped upon our souls.

By these two branches of divine teaching does the Spirit make

and keep the children of God humble. And all our various providences, trials, temptations, and deliverances; all we pass through in nature, and all we pass through in grace; in a word, the whole course of circumstances by which the child of God finds himself surrounded, all tend to lead him into these two paths—either into a deeper knowledge of himself, or a deeper knowledge of Christ; and under some form or other to humble him, and exalt the Lord of life and glory; thus eventually causing "all things to work together for the good" of his soul, and every event in providence and every dealing in grace to terminate in God's eternal glory. To this point all the dealings of the Spirit tend, and in this channel all the teachings of the Spirit run. And every teaching (or what we think is teaching) and every experience (or what we think is experience), that does not run in this channel, and does not tend to this point—to abase us, and to bring us down to the dust; and at the same time exalt the Lord of life and glory, and put the crown on his blessed head—all experience, or fancied experience (for there is a great deal of fancied experience in the church) that does not run in this channel, or tend to this point, does not spring from the teachings of God the Spirit in the heart; for his covenant office is, to take of the things of Christ, and make them known to the soul, so as to exalt and glorify Jesus. Thus all his dealings, leadings, guidings, and teachings are for this purpose, and to this end; and will eventually terminate in the consolation and salvation of all the redeemed, and to Jehovah's glory, who, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is worthy of all adoration, honour, power, praise, thanksgiving, and glory, both now and for ever.

63 Obedience From The Heart

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening,

July 18, 1844

"But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form

of doctrine which was delivered you.”

Rom. 6:17

The Holy Ghost foresaw the abuse which the depraved heart of man would make of the doctrines of grace. He foresaw that nature would argue, because the elect are saved by grace without the works of the law, there was no obligation for them to perform good works at all; and that because they are accepted freely in the Beloved, “without money and without price,” therefore they are discharged from all obedience to the revealed will and word of God. And not only did the Holy Ghost foresee the consequences that depraved nature would draw from the pure gospel of Jesus; but there were also characters in the apostolic days who were base enough to carry out these principles into practice. The apostle alludes to these when he says, “Shall we do evil that good may come? God forbid.” There were some then that said, we might do evil that good might come; but he adds of them, “whose damnation is just.” If we look at the book of Jude, we shall find these base characters most accurately described as “wandering stars,” “trees twice dead,” “clouds without water,” “spots in their feasts of charity;” in a word, practical Antinomians, living in sin under a mask of godliness; professing the truth, and disgracing it by their lives. The Holy Ghost, then, foreseeing the consequences that corrupt nature would draw from the doctrines of grace inspired the apostle to write this chapter, Rom. 6, which is almost entirely aimed at these perversions. He as it were bursts out, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” He had said in the preceding chapter, that “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” The carnal heart might thence naturally argue, “If this be the case that grace superabounds, just in proportion as sin abounds, then the more we sin, the more will the grace of God abound; and, therefore, the more sin we commit, the more will the grace of God be glorified.” Such would be the reasonings of depraved nature, the arguments of man’s perverse heart. The apostle, therefore, meets

these horrid consequences with “God forbid” that any who fear the Lord should draw such a conclusion. “How shall we,” he adds, “who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” If “we have been buried with Christ in baptism,” it is that, according to the power of his resurrection, we should “walk in newness of life.” If we are delivered from the law, and brought under grace, it is that sin should not reign in our mortal body, or that we should obey it in the lust thereof. And then in a most beautiful, experimental, and convincing way, which I cannot now enter into, he goes through the whole argument, and shows that, so far from being discharged by grace from all obligations to obedience, or so far from grace setting us free to do the works of the flesh, it only binds us the more closely to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, and to live in conformity to his holy image who died for us.

The main head of what the apostle sets forth on this point seems to be summed up in the verse before us, from which I hope, with God’s blessing and help, to speak this evening. “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”

The apostle commences by ascribing a solemn thanksgiving to God. “But God be thanked,” he says. Now what was the object of this apostolic thanksgiving? What drew forth this expression of gratitude from his bosom? Not I believe, that they had been servants of sin. I do not think we can, for a moment, admit that the Apostle thanked God because the believers to whom he was writing had been the “servants of sin.” I am sure my own experience could never bear that out to be the mind of the Holy Ghost. Nor do I believe that your experience, if God the Spirit has touched your conscience with his finger, would bear you out in such an interpretation, that Paul could thank God because they had been the “servants of sin.” Did you ever on your knees bless God that you had gone to great lengths of wickedness before you were called by grace? Did you ever thank him because you once lived in uncleanness, drunkenness, or other open and base sins? You may

have thanked God for having kept you from open sin in the days of unregeneracy, or for having mercifully pardoned and delivered you. But I defy a living soul on his knees to thank God, because he had formerly been a servant of sin. So that we must understand the Apostle to mean here: “But God be thanked, that though ye were the servants of sin,” yet now the case is altered; you are so no longer; a mighty change has taken place; a blessed revolution has been effected in your hearts, lips, and lives. “God be thanked though ye were the servants of sin,” yet “now, through the grace of God, it is so no longer;” “ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”

In looking, then, at these words, I shall, with God’s blessing, endeavour to show,

I.—What it is, in our fallen and unregenerate state, to be “the servants of sin.”

II.—What is the “form of doctrine” delivered to us; and

III.—How by “obeying it from the heart,” we are no longer the servants of sin, but become the servants of God.

I.—Let us look, then, at the words, “Ye were the servants of sin.” What a picture does this draw of our sad state, while walking in the darkness and death of unregeneracy! The Holy Ghost here sets forth Sin as a hard master, exercising tyrannical dominion over his slaves; for the word “servants” means literally “slaves;” there being few domestic servants in ancient times, nearly all being slaves, and compelled implicitly to obey their masters’ will. How this sets forth our state and condition in a state of unregeneracy—slave to sin! Just as a master commands his slave to go hither and thither, imposes on him a certain task, and has entire and despotic authority over him; so sin had a complete mastery over us, used us at its arbitrary will and pleasure, and drove us here and there on its commands. But in this point we differed from slaves naturally—that we did not murmur under our yoke, but gladly and cheerfully obeyed all sin’s commands, and were never tired of doing the most servile drudgery. Now it is a most certain truth, that all men whose

hearts have not been touched by God the Spirit, are the “servants of sin.” Sin, the lord, may be a more refined master; and man, the servant, may wear a smarter livery in some cases than others. But still, however refined the master may be, or however well-dressed the servant, the master is still the master, and the servant is still the servant. Thus some have had sin as a very vulgar and tyrannical master, who drove them into open acts of drunkenness, uncleanness, and profligacy; yea, everything base, vile, and evil. Others have been preserved through education, through the watchfulness and example of parents, or other moral restraints, from going into such open lengths of iniquity, and outward breakings forth of evil; but still sin secretly reigned in their hearts. Pride, worldliness, love of the things of time and sense, hatred to God and aversion to his holy will, selfishness and stubbornness, in all their various forms, had a complete mastery over them; and though sin ruled over them more as a gentleman, he kept them in a more refined, though not less real or abject servitude. Whatever sin bade them do, that they did, as implicitly as the most abject slave ever obeyed a tyrannical master’s command. What a picture does the Holy Ghost here draw of what a man is! Nothing but a slave! and sin, as his master, first driving him upon the thick bosses of God’s buckler, and then giving him eternal death as his wages!

II.—But the Apostle shows how the soul is brought out of this servitude—how it is delivered from this hard bondage, and brought to serve a better master, and that from better motives—”But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.” It was by obeying “from the heart the form of doctrine which was delivered them,” that they were rescued from the miserable servitude and hard bondage under which they lived in sin, and made to walk in newness of life.

Let us look, then, at the expression here used—”that form of doctrine which was delivered you.” It is in the margin—and that is more agreeable to the original—that form of doctrine “whereto,”

or “into which, ye were delivered.” By the word “form,” is meant “mould;” and by “doctrine” is meant, not what we understand by the term as the article of a creed, but teaching. This is a frequent meaning of the word “doctrine,” in the New Testament. Thus Paul tells Timothy (1 Tim. 4:13) to give himself unto “doctrine,” that is to teaching. And Titus 2:7, “in doctrine,” that is, teaching, “showing uncorruptness.” Thus we may consider the meaning of the text to be this: “God be thanked, that though ye were the servants of sin, ye have obeyed from the heart that mould of teaching into which ye were cast, or delivered.” The figure is this—the impression which a coin takes from a die; or the effect produced upon melted metal run into a mould; the doctrine being the die, and the heart the coin; the teaching being the mould and the soul the cast. Thus, the “form of doctrine” signifies not so much a creed of sound doctrine, which the Apostle in a formal, systematic manner laid before his hearers, as the mould of heavenly teaching into which the Holy Ghost delivered their souls.

It is thus evident, that the Holy Ghost has a certain mould of teaching, into which he casts and delivers the soul, from which it comes out as a coin from the Mint, bearing the impression of the die upon it in every form and feature; or, which is perhaps the more exact interpretation of the figure, as a cast from a mould, bearing a perfect likeness to the original model. This “form” then, “of doctrine,” or mould of teaching, into which they were delivered, was that which the Apostle, through divine instrumentality, had set before them.

Let us see, then, with God’s blessing, what was this “form of doctrine,” or mould of divine teaching, into which, through grace, their souls had been cast; for it was by being delivered into this mould that they were delivered from being the “servants of sin,” to be made “vessels of honour meet for the Master’s use,” as well as conformed to the Master’s image.

What this “form of doctrine” was, we may gather from what the Holy Ghost, by the Apostle Paul, has left on record.

1. He insisted, I believe, first, on the utter ruin and fall of man. He began from the beginning, and like a “wise master builder,” raised up the structure by first digging a deep foundation. He knew as every rightly-taught man and minister knows, that unless a foundation be made by digging deep, the house will not be built upon the rock; that if a knowledge of our utter ruin by nature be not brought into the heart by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, all our religion will be like a house founded upon the sand. This therefore we find to run through all his Epistles. Thus, he tells the Ephesians, (2:1) But “you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” How he insists there on man’s death in sin! Again, Rom. 5:6, he shows our helplessness, “When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” And more especially in Rom. 7 does the Apostle exhibit at large what we are by nature and practice, and describe from his own experience the desperate wickedness of the human heart. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.” “I am carnal, sold under sin.” He there sets forth, from his own experience, the complete fall of man, the entire ruin of the creature, the thorough wickedness of “the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, and is not subject to his law, neither indeed can be.” This being a part of his ministry and of the inspired Scriptures, into this mould of teaching does God the Spirit deliver the soul. And just in the same way as upon the piece of money you may read the exact lineaments of the original die, so when the heart is rightly taught by the Holy Ghost, and we are delivered into this “form of doctrine,” it comes out of the mould bearing the exact impression. It is thus we are made to feel every line of what the Apostle says of our ruined, undone state, and to know by painful experience, that “in us, that is in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing;” that “when we would do good, evil is present with us;” that “the law in our members wars against the law of our mind.” And under these feelings, we sigh and groan, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” It is thus that Paul’s experience becomes ours; and

we find every line of Rom. 7 engraved upon our hearts, and feel every expression to be as much ours as if it were drawn from the workings of our own mind. No coin bears a greater resemblance to the die, no cast is more the counterpart of the mould, than our experience corresponds to that of the Apostle, as the Holy Ghost delivers us into this mould of divine teaching.

2. But we find, that another part of the Apostle's ministry was to set forth the holy law of God in all its strictness and spirituality. He says (Rom. 7:14), "the law is spiritual;" "by the law is the knowledge of sin;" "what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world become guilty before God." And describing his own experience, he says, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." And therefore he adds, "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and just, and good." He thus sets forth the law in all its purity, strictness, and spirituality, and shows how when it comes home with power to the conscience, it kills us to all hopes of justification by it. Into this "form of doctrine," or mould of heavenly teaching, is the soul delivered; and the law being brought into the conscience, as the die at the Mint is brought down upon a piece of gold to produce a coin, its spirituality is then and there revealed, stamped with all its lineaments and features, and thus a deep and lasting impression is made upon the heart to which it is supplied.

3. But the Apostle Paul, that workman who never needed to be ashamed of the tools or of his work, not merely sets forth man's utter ruin, and the spirituality of God's law, as slaughtering the sinner, and cutting up all his righteousness, root and branch; but his darling subject, his grand theme, was the mode by which God justifies the ungodly. What reason have we to bless God that he so instructed his Apostle to set forth how a sinner is justified! For how could we have attained to the knowledge of this mystery without divine revelation? How could we know in what way God could be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly? How could we see all the

perfections of God harmonizing in the Person and work of Jesus? His law maintained in all its rigid purity and strictest justice—and yet mercy, grace, and love to have full play in a sinner's salvation? But the Spirit of God led Paul deeply into this blessed subject; and especially in the Epistle to the Romans does he trace out this grand foundation truth with such clearness, weight, and power, that the church of God can never be sufficiently thankful for this portion of divine revelation. His grand object is, to show how God justifies the ungodly by the blood and obedience of his dear Son; so that "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." He declares that "the righteousness of God is unto and upon all them that believe;" and that "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood," he pardons the sinner, justifies the ungodly, and views him as righteous in the Son of his love. In opening up this subject, the Apostle (Rom. 5) traces up this justification to the union of the church with her covenant head; shows us her standing in Christ as well as in Adam; and that all the miseries which she derives from her standing in the latter are overbalanced by the mercies that flow from her standing in the former: winding up with that heart-reviving truth, that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign unto eternal life." This then is a "form of doctrine," or mould of teaching, into which the soul is delivered when it is brought into a heart-felt reception of, and a feeling acquaintance with it; and by being led more or less into the experimental enjoyment of it, is favoured with a solemn acquiescence in, and a filial submission to it, as all its salvation and all its desire. And as the mould impresses its image upon the moist plaster or melted metal poured into it: so the heart, softened and melted by the blessed Spirit's teaching, receives the impress of this glorious truth with filial confidence, feels its sweetness and power, and is filled with a holy admiration of it as the only way in which God can justify an ungodly wretch, not only

without sacrificing any one attribute of his holy character, but rather magnifying thereby the purity of his nature, and the demands of his unbending justice.

4. But again. The Apostle not merely sets forth the way in which the sinner is justified, and becomes manifestly righteous, but he also strongly insists upon the kingdom of God being set up with power in the heart. He says (1 Cor. 2:4, 5), "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom"—these he discarded—"but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." He was afraid their faith might stand in human wisdom, and not in divine power. His anxious desire was that it might be a faith wrought in their hearts by the Spirit of God; that it might not be learnt from man, nor stand in the wisdom of man, but stand wholly and solely "in the power of God." And again, when he holds a rod over the rebellious church at Corinth, he says (1 Cor. 4:9) he was determined "to know not the speech of them that were puffed up"—those gossips and chatterers who could prate loudly about the doctrines, but knew nothing of them as experimentally revealed in the conscience; against such pretenders he would "come with a rod, and use sharpness." He would bring to bear upon their profession some of those "weapons of warfare, which were mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;" and says, "if he came to Corinth, he would not spare." He was therefore determined to search them out, and find their real standing; "to know not the speech, but the power; for the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." Thus in setting forth the truth before them he powerfully contended that there must be a vital experience of divine realities in the heart; that truth could only be known by a spiritual revelation (1 Cor. 2:10-13); that "faith was the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8); that we are "to turn away from those that have the form of godliness but deny the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5); that "bodily exercise profiteth little" (1 Tim. 4:8); and that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in

the Holy Ghost." (Rom. 14:17.) Into this mould of divine teaching is the soul, born of God, cast; and thus learns and enters into the nature and blessedness of the internal kingdom of God.

5. But connected with this, he sets forth also the way in which believers should walk. This he specially insists upon in this chapter; and doubtless there was much reason for it then, as there is much reason for it now; for how lamentable are the cases of inconsistency which we sometimes hear of, even ministers professing truth falling under the power of besetting sins! The Apostle, therefore, as every rightly taught servant of God must do, insisted upon a life and walk agreeable to the doctrine which is according to godliness. He would give them no warrant for a loose, careless, inconsistent walk but insisted that grace bound the soul with the cords of love to the blessed precepts which God has set forth, to follow the footsteps of Jesus, and look to him as a pattern and example. In this chapter, therefore, he insists strongly upon a godly life; he says, "When ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those days whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the end, everlasting life." How strongly he here insists upon their "having their fruit unto holiness!" He shows that if we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with him; and being by grace delivered from the law, we are under greater obligations to walk as becometh the gospel; adding, as knowing our weakness and helplessness, that promise, "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." So that "the form of doctrine" into which they were delivered was a conformity to Christ, and an obedience to his will; a holy desire to please God; a hatred to evil, and a cleaving to that which is good; a longing after more intimate communion with Jesus; and a more earnest wish that his holy example might be made manifest in their lives. For the more we are brought into communion with him, the more manifestly shall we walk as he walked, and abstain

from those things which he hated.

III.—But the Apostle says, “ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.” A “form of doctrine” was delivered them, or rather they were delivered into it; a mould of divine teaching was set up, into which their souls had been cast and they had come out of this mould new creatures, so that “old things were passed away, and all things had become new.” The effect was, that they “obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine.” There was an obedience wrought into their conscience, which flowed not from legal principles, not from self-righteous motives, not from the precepts of men, but “from the heart:” the root of this obedience, as flowing from the heart, was being delivered into this form of doctrine. Their hearts had been so moulded by divine operation, and their conscience so effectually wrought upon by their being delivered and cast into the mould of teaching which the Holy Ghost had inwardly set up, that they “obeyed from the heart,” because the impression had been made there.

Let us see then, with God’s blessing, how a man “obeys from the heart” the “form of doctrine” delivered unto him. This will comprehend the whole of the Spirit’s work upon the conscience—every lineament and feature of that heavenly mould, so far as the soul has been delivered into it. We will therefore revert to the distinguishing features I have already pointed out.

1. I mentioned first, the utter fall and ruin of man, and the complete helplessness of the creature, as a branch of divine teaching. A man obeys this form of doctrine when he is completely convinced in his conscience what a poor, helpless creature he is; and in obedience to it, desists from all self-righteous attempts to please God. He obeys it from his heart when really convinced of his own helplessness and ruin, he falls down before God, and beseeches he would work in him that which is well-pleasing in his sight. And as he is cast into this mould of teaching, he becomes day by day more and more spiritually convinced of his own helplessness and complete ruin, and will daily cry to the Lord to work in him to will and

to do of his good pleasure.

Now, will a knowledge of his sinfulness, a conviction of his helplessness, an acquaintance with his own ruin, lead a man into sin? I say boldly, No. On the contrary, it will lead him from sin. He will no longer run recklessly and heedlessly forward; but he will go softly and tenderly, continually begging the Lord to keep him. There are two professors, say, in this congregation: one, ignorant of his own sinfulness, unacquainted with his own helplessness; the other day by day, deeply and spiritually convinced of the one, and groaning under a sense of the other. Take these two men into the world; place them in the market; send them to traffic in the busy marts of commerce. In whom will you find most consistency of conduct, most tenderness of conscience, most abhorrence of evil? In the man ignorant of his own depravity and helplessness? Or in the man who carries about with him the deepest sense of his own sinfulness and wretchedness; and who feeling his helplessness, is perpetually crying to the Lord, “Keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me?” As we pass through the streets of this metropolis, we are continually exposed to temptation; but who is the man most likely to fall into the snares spread for his feet? Not he who feels that he has a roving eye, and a wandering heart, and is crying to the Lord, “Hold thou me up: let me not fall,” as fearing he shall fall every moment; but he who goes recklessly on, confident he can keep himself. So that to be spiritually cast into this “form of doctrine,” so as to be deeply convinced of our sinfulness and helplessness, so far from leading to sin, leads us from it; so far from encouraging the vile depravity of our nature, makes the conscience tender in God’s fear, and leads us to hate that which God abhors. There is no greater libel than to confound a knowledge of our sinfulness with “a gloating,” as they call it, “over corruption.” We are taught our sinfulness that we may hate it, and our helplessness that we may flee to him on whom God has laid help.

2. So again. A knowledge of the purity and spirituality of God’s law, is another feature of divine teaching—another branch of the

mould into which the soul is cast. A man who has never been made to see the purity of God's law, never felt its spirituality, never known its condemnation, never groaned under its bondage, will have very dim and indistinct views of sin. "Blessed is the man," we read, "whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law." In that glass the strict justice of God, and all its holy unbending demands are clearly seen.

3. A spiritual reception of, and what the Apostle calls a submission to, the righteousness of God, (Rom. 10:3) is another branch of that form of doctrine which produces obedience from the heart. Let a man know what justification is through the imputed righteousness of Christ, and feel what it cost the Son of God to work out a meritorious obedience to the law for his guilty soul; it will not make him think lightly of sin. When delivered by the Spirit's operation into this mould of teaching, and thus brought into a spiritual acquaintance with it, it will make his conscience tender. He will then obey, not from natural convictions or hypocritical motives, but from the heart, as penetrated with a sense of mercy, and will desire to be brought into a spiritual acquaintance with it, that he may walk before God in all blamelessness. But if a man, however sound in the doctrine of justification as a creed, has never been cast into the mould of it, so as to receive the impression upon his conscience, and feel it with power in his heart, he will probably be one of those who disgrace it by their lives; because, through want of divine teaching, his conscience is unaffected by the power of the truth he professes. Whence is it that men, and, to their shame be it spoken, ministers who profess the doctrines of grace, often walk so inconsistently and unbecomingly? In doctrine none can be sounder than these men; but had they received by divine teaching the glorious truth of justification through the righteousness of the Son of God—and had their hearts been impressed by it, and their souls been cast into this mould, they would have adorned the doctrine by their life and conversation. But not being delivered into this heavenly mould, and the Spirit never having brought this

truth down upon their conscience and stamped its features upon their heart, as the die is brought down upon the coin, they can "continue in sin, that grace may abound." It is only, therefore, as we are delivered into the mould of this blessed doctrine of justification by Christ's glorious righteousness, that we obey it from the heart. In proportion as we feel our soul to acquiesce in it and enjoy it—so far from leading us into sin, it will lead its way from it, and enable its to walk in those things which become the gospel.

4. So when, by divine teaching, the soul is delivered into another branch of "the form of doctrine," or mould of divine teaching, viz., that the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power, gospel obedience will flow from the heart. Just in proportion as this divine truth is stamped upon the conscience, do we find and feel that religion does not consist in a few notions, doctrines, or names, but in the power of the Holy Ghost setting Christ up in the soul. A kingdom in the heart implies that a king reigns there; and if so, the obedience paid to that king will be in and from the heart. This is true gospel obedience; and in proportion as the soul is cast into this mould, it will become a servant unto God. This so far from leading us to obey sin, will make us obey God; and so far from causing us "to yield our members servants to uncleanness unto iniquity, will rather make us yield them servants to righteousness unto holiness." If we know anything, if we feel anything of the kingdom of God set up with power in the conscience, that knowledge, that feeling, so far as each is spiritual and experimental will produce an effect. Vital godliness will be divinely worked into our conscience, and will leave, more or less, a deep and abiding impression upon our heart. Our religion will not consist in merely embracing a sound creed, in talking about ministers and books, attending a certain chapel, hearing certain ministers, or going through certain ordinances. If we have been delivered into this mould of divine teaching, that "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power," there will be something higher and deeper, something more lasting and abiding, something more spiritual and supernatural than creeds and

external performances. It is the glory and beauty of vital godliness, that the soul possessed of it obeys from the heart; that the spring of its obedience is spiritual and inward; that a Christian does what he does from noble principles; that as far as he is rightly taught and guided, what he does, he does from his heart; what he says, he says from his heart; what he prays, he prays from the heart; and if he be a preacher, what he preaches, he preaches from the heart. His very soul is in the matter; and as his conscience lives under the dew and unction of the Spirit, what he does he does unto God, and not unto men. As the form of doctrine is more deeply impressed upon him, he day by day more obeys it from the heart: and is led more clearly into this truth, that what God looks to, and what he works in us, is an obedience that springs from the heart. So that, the more the soul is delivered into this mould of heavenly teaching, to believe with the heart unto righteousness, confession is more made with the mouth unto salvation.

Now, till a man is thus spiritually taught and wrought upon he will be the servant of sin. He may indeed have a very shining profession; but it may only be a mask for the deepest and blackest hypocrisy. He may contend much for spirituality of mind; and yet hide under that profession the basest sins. He may plead much for the doctrines of grace; and yet use them as a cloak for the vilest licentiousness in practice. A man must, in one form or other, be “the servant of sin,” till he “obeys from the heart the form of doctrine”—the mould of divine teaching, into which the soul is spiritually delivered. But when the Holy Ghost takes him in hand, and casts him into the mould of divine teaching, so as to bring into his soul the word of God with power, he fixes the truth upon his conscience, and impresses it upon his heart; so that he comes forth with the truth of God stamped upon him, as the cast comes out of the mould, and the coin from the die. Then, and only then, is he delivered from the service of sin. Sin might indeed not have worn an outward or gross form. The life might have been circumspect, and sin worn in him a very subtle shape. But there is no real de-

liverance from bearing the yoke of sin till the mould of heavenly teaching is obeyed “from the heart.” This is the fulfilment of that new covenant promise—“I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their heart.” Thus inward, spiritual, and vital obedience can alone be produced; and one truth written by the Spirit in the heart will bring forth more fruit in the life than a hundred doctrines floating in the head.

It is, then, in this way that “the form of doctrine” which we have received in the Spirit, is made to produce an impression upon our hearts and lives. And the more that “the form of doctrine” is brought into our heart, and the more we are moulded by it, the more shall we obey it; and, as the Apostle says, “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” We grow in grace by growing in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and we only grow in the knowledge of him as we grow in the knowledge of ourselves. Thus to grow in grace is to grow in the knowledge of our own weakness and of Christ’s strength; of our own sinfulness, and of Christ’s atoning blood; of our own ignorance, and of Christ’s teaching in that ignorance. A sense of daily depravity, and yet seeing God’s grace superabounding over it all; a constant fear we shall fall every day and hour unless God keeps us, and yet mercifully feeling his fear springing up in our hearts, as “a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death;”—to be cast into this mould of heavenly teaching will deliver us from being “the servants of sin.”

Let us with God’s blessing, by way of summing up the whole, look a little into our own conscience. There is, then, a “form of doctrine,” a mould of divine teaching. What evidence have we that we have been delivered into it? What have we felt, what have we known, of our own ruin by nature? Have we groaned and sighed because we have been and are so vile? Did sin ever lie as a heavy burden upon our conscience, and did we ever see what wretches we are by nature and practice? Have we ever desired deliverance from the bondage of servitude and sin? Have we become tired of

our old master, of his ways, and of his wages? and have we longed for a better master and better wages? That is the beginning of the breaking off of the chain of servitude. The first link of the servile yoke is snapped, when we begin to be discontented with our slavery, and cry and sigh for a better master and a better service.

Again. What do we know, or what have we known of the spirituality of God's law? Now this we must know, in order to feel more keenly our servitude. Not that we can break off the chains of sin through the law, because "by the law is the knowledge of sin," and therefore the law never can deliver us from the power, guilt, and service of sin. But the heavier the yoke, as with the children of Israel in Egypt, the nearer is deliverance from it. And what know we of being cast into the mould of the grand gospel truth of justification by Christ's imputed righteousness? Have our souls ever received this glorious truth with a measure of divine power? This is the first evidence of a deliverance from sin, the first striking off of its fetters and chains; this is the first raising up of liberty in the conscience, and of experiencing a measure of the sweetness and power of the way of salvation. And have we felt the kingdom of God set up in the heart? Have we felt a cleaving to the teaching of the Holy Spirit? and been convinced in our consciences that the kingdom of God stands only in power? To come to this is to obey and cleave to the form of doctrine delivered unto us. And then may I not justly ask, what effect this has on our lives? What deadness to the world does it produce in our soul? What cleaving to the things of God? What desiring in our conscience to be conformed to the image of Jesus? Sure I am, that the more the blessed Spirit lets down into our conscience the power of truth, in all its branches; and leads us into an heartfelt reception of, and acquiescence in it, the more shall we get delivered from serving sin, and the more be led to obey from the heart the form of doctrine delivered unto us; the more we shall walk in the footsteps of the Lord of life and glory, and have the truth stamped with power on our conscience. And then, feeling our own ruin, weakness, and helplessness, we shall learn to

give glory to whom glory is due; and to ascribe salvation first and salvation last to the God of all grace and glory; and cast the crown before the throne of God and the Lamb, who, with the Holy Ghost, is alone worthy of praise and blessing, now and ever.

64 **The Dropping Down Of The Heavens, And The Opening Of The Earth**

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning,
July 21, 1844

"Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it."

Isaiah 45:8

In revealing the Scriptures God has seen fit to make great use of figures; so that we can scarcely open any part of the Bible without finding them, more or less, employed. The Lord himself declares in the Old Testament, (Hosea 12:10,) "I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets;" and in the New, we can scarcely open a page of the gospels without finding some parable from the Lord's lips, which is but another form of figure or divine similitude. Among these figures there is scarcely one more prominent than that of dew or rain. And the Lord the Spirit seems especially to have fixed upon this figure of dew and rain as an emblem of his own power and unction in the heart and conscience of God's people. Thus Moses said of what he spake by divine inspiration, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." (Deut. 32:2.) So the Lord says of his own divine operations, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing

upon thine offspring.” (Isa. 44:3.) It was a custom among the Jews, on the last day of the Feast of the Tabernacles, to pour out water in the courts of the temple as figurative of the pouring out of the Holy Ghost. And to this the Lord Jesus evidently refers in those words, “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:37, 38.) We have the same figure of rain also employed very sweetly, Psalm 65:9-12: “Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it; thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water; thou preparest them corn when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; thou settlest the furrows thereof; thou makest it soft with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof; thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths drop fatness.” And if we look at our text, we shall find the same figure employed to set forth the same divine operations: “Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it.”

Without laying down any formal divisions, I think we may observe three distinct and remarkable things in our text.

I.—The dropping down of the heavens from above.

II.—The opening of the earth from beneath.

III.—The bringing forth of salvation, and the springing up of righteousness, as the fruit and effect of the dropping down from above, and the opening of the earth beneath. And in this way, if the Lord give me power and ability to bring forth what I see and feel to be its spiritual meaning, I shall endeavour to handle the passage before us this morning.

The Lord himself speaks in the text, and addresses himself to the heavens—”Drop down, ye heavens, from above.”

The heavens naturally are the source of all the fertility of the earth; nor could there be any fruit or grain from the earth, nor

could man or beast exist a single day upon it, unless the heavens above communicated to it fruitfulness. The atmosphere whereby the earth is surrounded, and the dews and rain that fall from that atmosphere, are the sources of all the fertility that we witness in the earth; and could these mysterious operations of nature cease, or be suspended for a single day, the earth would languish away, and all its inhabitants perish. Now, as naturally, so much more spiritually, all the fruits found in the hearts and consciences of God’s people, every thing good, every thing spiritual, every thing holy, every thing gracious in them, comes down from above; as James so emphatically declares, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (James 1:17.) From the heavens, then, drop down all the gracious communications of light, life, and power that are ever found in the heart of God’s people, and make them fruitful in every good word and work.

But there is a peculiar reason why the heavens spiritually should be the source and fountain of every thing good and gracious in us. Who is in the heavens but the risen Mediator? Is he not at the right hand of the Father as the covenant Head of his church and people? And out of his fulness (“for it has pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell,”) does not every thing good and gracious come down into the consciences of those whom he loves? And this, we may observe, in a perpetually recurring circle. We read, “All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.” (Eccl. 1:7.) So spiritually, no man will ever be in heaven, whose name was not eternally registered in heaven; and no man will go to heaven who has not his Representative already there at the right hand of the Father, and is not one of the mystical body whose risen Head is in glory, but whose members are in suffering circumstances upon earth. If, then, any of us are going to heaven, if heaven is to be our home and our eternal abode, it is because we had a dwelling-place spiritually and mystically in heaven before we had any

existence on earth. So that, in going to heaven, we are but going to the place whence we came, because we were there in Christ as our covenant head, before time had an existence, or this round world was created. In that sense the heavens are the source of all present fruitfulness.

But much more since Jesus is ascended on high, as we read, "When he ascended up on high he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men;" and he "ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." (Eph. 4:8, 10.) Much more now do the heavens become the source of all fertility produced in the hearts of God's children, for we are and have nothing spiritually good except what we receive out of the covenant fulness of a covenant Head. So that, when the Lord says in the text, "Drop down, ye heavens, from above;" and calls upon them to let dew fall; it is as though he spake thus, "Out of Jesus' fulness, who sits enthroned in majesty and glory, as the covenant Head of his Church, full of grace and power, let the dew and rain of his grace drop into the hearts of his people." So that, the spiritual dew and rain are sure to come in the appointed season; seeing there is a covenant fulness in Jesus, out of which they drop into the hearts of his people, because God has already "blessed them with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen them in him before the foundation of the world, that they should be holy and without blame before him in love." (Eph. 1:3, 4.) So when, in the text, the Lord says, "Drop down, ye heavens, from above," he calls upon them to let fall their dew as figurative of the coming down of the Spirit into their hearts.

But why should the Lord have selected the figure of "dew" to set forth the coming down of the Spirit into the soul? There must be something in natural dew analogous to the spiritual dew, or the Lord would not have employed such a figure. Let us, then, observe two or three circumstances in which the analogy is evident.

1. Dew falls down independently of the power and will of the creature. Who can command the dew to drop down? Who can go

forth at night, and say, "Dew fall?" It falls just as, and when God sends it; on some nights it falls, on others it falls not; each wholly depending on the sovereign will and power of the Creator. So spiritually. Who can command the dew and rain to fall into the hearts of God's people? Who can go, and say, "Dew of the Spirit, fall?" Who can command the grace of God to visit this or that individual? The dew, spiritually, falls just as the God of grace would have it; as the dew naturally falls, just as the God of creation would have it.

2. But in the falling of the natural dew there is something soft, still, and gentle. We therefore read, "We will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground." (2 Sam. 17:12), that is, stealthily and unseen. It does not rush down like the pelting hail, but falls stilly, and often imperceptibly: so that we scarcely know it has fallen, till we go out in the morning, and see every blade of grass tipped with the sparkling dew-drops; by these bright gems we know that dew has fallen during the still hours of the night. So spiritually, the kingdom of God is not in noise, rant, or wild excitement. The Lord was not in the strong wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the still small voice. (1 Kings 19:11, 12.) And thus there may be a great deal of religious fire, but no presence of God felt: fleshly passions worked up into a storm, but no "still small voice" speaking to the conscience: a very earthquake of natural convictions, but no inward "demonstration of the Spirit and of power." But when the spiritual dew falls, it drops gently, softly, and stilly into the heart, and it is only known by the sweet and blessed effects it produces.

3. But again. Dew, naturally, has a softening effect, especially in warm climates, where it falls very copiously. We therefore read "Thou makest it soft with showers." (Ps. 65:10.) It does not tear up the ground as with thunderbolts, but by moistening and softening penetrates into the soil. And thus the dew of God's grace moistens and softens the heart, humbles, dissolves, and fertilizes it; not by tearing it up with the thunderbolts of wrath and condemnation, but by dropping gently and stilly into it, so as to melt it into contrition, meekness, and godly sorrow before the throne of mercy and

grace.

But when the Lord says, “Drop down, ye heavens, from above,” they drop down not only dew, but sometimes showers also; as we find the Prophet speaking, “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater.” (Isa. 55:10.) The rain which the heavens drop down at the word of the Lord has the same effect as the dew, and only differs in being more copious. Rain is therefore needed more after a dry season. How, after this long season of drought, for instance, under which nature has pined, have a few showers refreshed the soil! How before our eyes has the dry, burnt-up ground, since the late fertilizing showers, resumed its livery of green, and the brown hills re clothed themselves in their wonted garb of verdure, and again look fresh and beautiful! And do not the souls of God’s people become withered and dry, when neither dew nor rain fall, until they resemble the barren wilderness and the parched heath? But the heavens drop down rain and dew, and the soul becomes once more revived out of its barrenness and dearth.

“Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness.” Two expressions are here made use of, which seem to have a special allusion to dew and rain. The one is applicable to the dew, which “drops;” and the other, to rain, which “pours down.” But whether in drops or showers, each lets fall the same blessing—righteousness.

What righteousness, then, is this which the heavens sometimes drop, and sometimes pour down? If we have any righteousness, where is it? It is in the heavens: we have none here. What read we? “Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness.” (1 Cor. 1:30.) “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength;” “In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.” (Isa. 45:24, 25.) This imputed righteousness is called in the Scriptures, “the righteousness of God,” because it is the righteousness of him who is God; the righteousness of Emmanuel, who is in heaven at the right

hand of the Father, and bestows it from heaven upon his needy, naked, shivering, destitute people. The Lord therefore says in the text, “Let the skies pour down righteousness;” that it may come down as in a shower. Thus, when God does manifest it to the soul, it is always through the revelation of the Holy Ghost. We can have no experimental acquaintance with Christ’s righteousness, nor any spiritual enjoyment of it, except as brought down into the heart through the power of God the Spirit. When the skies pour down righteousness, so that a sense of Christ’s righteousness is brought with divine power into the conscience, then, and then only, is it rightly received. But we look to the earth to bring forth fruit after the dew and showers. Look at those portions of the earth where they have no rain nor showers to fertilize the soil. What can they produce? They are a wild waste. The earth cannot produce fruit until the showers and dew come upon it; nor can a man’s heart produce anything spiritually good until “God works in him to will and to do of his own good pleasure.”

II.—And this leads us to the second point—“Let the earth open” from beneath. What is meant by the term “earth?” By “earth” we are to understand the heart of man. We read, “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord.” (Jer. 22:29.) “Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.” (Deut. 32:1.) Has the literal earth ears to hear? Does God speak to the natural soil? That is a lump of inanimate matter, a huge clod of stone and clay; that has no ears to hear the word of God. When the Lord, then, speaks to the earth, it is not to the soil, but to the dwellers upon the soil. And thus the earth spiritually represents the heart of man. And why so? Because until fertilized by the showers of God’s grace, man’s heart is but a lump of inanimate matter;

“A lifeless lump of loathsome clay.”

As unable to bring forth fruit to God’s glory as the earth is unable of itself to start forth into fertility and productiveness.

Now, the Lord says in the text, “Let the earth open.” This points to the opening of the heart by the power of divine grace. The Lord,

we read, “opened the heart of Lydia, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of by Paul,” (Acts 16:14); and we read also, “The entrance of thy words giveth light.” (Ps. 119:130.) But if the word enters, there must be an opening for it: nay, its very entrance makes the opening. Thus, when the Lord says, “Let the earth open,” he bids the heart, before closed up and impenetrable, open itself to receive the dews and showers of his invincible grace.

Whenever the Lord speaks, he speaks powerfully; “Where the word of a king is, there is power.” (Eccl. 8:4.) No sooner, then, does the Lord thus speak than the effect follows. When the Lord said, “Let there be light,” instantly there was light. When he said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind,” immediately the earth was covered with fruits and flowers. When he commanded, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven,” the sun and moon immediately sprang into existence. He had but to speak, and the effect immediately followed. So, when the Lord says, “Let the earth open,” the heart immediately opens, the conscience is made tender, and the soul hears and receives what God speaks.

And what follows this opening? The heart receives the dews and showers of God’s grace that fall into it; and these dews and showers of God’s grace communicate to it softness, fertility, and productiveness. O how we have to learn this by painful experience! Is not our heart as hard sometimes as the nether millstone; and, to our feelings, utterly destitute of light, life, and power, without one grain of brokenness, contrition, godly sorrow, spiritual desire, or fervent breathing after the Lord? And are we not often as dead, and apparently as conscience-seared, as though we had never been melted down into godly sorrow, as though the tear of contrition had never dropped from our eyes, or the sigh of godly emotion had never heaved from our bosom? This painful experience the Lord’s people have to pass through perpetually, that they may know, that “in them that is in their flesh dwelleth no good thing,” and that “power belongeth unto God.” Could I make my own heart soft,

should I want the Lord to do it for me? Could I communicate fertility to my own soul, should I ever pant after the dews and showers of the Holy Ghost? Could I bring pardon and peace into my own conscience, should I need the Lord himself to speak with power? Could I believe, hope, rejoice, and have at my own command every gracious and blessed feeling that I desire to experience, there would be no pleading the Lord’s own promises, no wrestling in importunate prayer, no taking the kingdom of God by violence, no longing and panting for the Lord to appear in our souls. The Lord therefore sees fit that we should walk in these paths, that we may know, “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.” (Rom. 9:16.)

But when the Lord says, “Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness,” he says also, at the same moment, “Let the earth open;” and the earth opens to receive as instantaneously as the heavens to give. No sooner do the dews and showers of God’s grace fall, than there is an opening of the heart to receive the truth in the love and power of it. These dews and showers penetrate into and reach the very depths of a man’s conscience. Sometimes it is with us, as during this long season of drought, a few drops only have fallen, a hasty shower, which has soon dried up. The farmer said, “The rain did not go deep enough.” The gardener complained that it did not sink below the surface of the soil; something more abundant, something heavier and more lasting was wanted, a good soaking rain that would penetrate down to the very roots of the plants. So spiritually, we have a little feeling sometimes, but not very deep; a drop or two for a few moments; but it is gone immediately. This is indeed better than a continued drought; but we want a good hearty shower that shall go to the very root, something that shall penetrate to the very depths of the heart, and sink deep into the soul; as the Lord said to his disciples, “Let these sayings sink down into your ears.” (Luke 9:44.) Many people say, “How well they have heard to-day.” But what is their hearing well? A few drops dried up immediately in the dust of carnality,

or soon burned up by the sun of temptation. They say, "How well they have heard," but they have not moved a hundred yards from where they have heard so well, but their hearts are as dead, as dry, as hard as the ground after a long drought. A man whose heart is really made tender in God's fear is not content with a few transient feelings, which leave him as hard as they found him; he wants a shower to penetrate into the very roots of his soul, to soften and melt the heart before the Lord. When the earth opens, how it receives, embraces, and drinks in the showers that fall into it. And the wider it opens its ample bosom to receive, the deeper does the rain penetrate, and the greater fertility is produced. And thus, the more that the heart opens all its capacious longings and pantings to receive the grace of God in its manifestations, the more is spiritual fruitfulness and fertility produced.

I.—But what is the fruit and effect of the dropping down of the heavens, the pouring out of the skies from above, and the opening of the earth from beneath to receive? "Let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together."

1. The first fruit and effect is, "the bringing forth of salvation." The expression, "Let them bring forth," is a Hebrew idiom, for "Let it be brought forth." We find this Hebraism in the New Testament, Luke 16:9. "Make to yourselves friends of the manner of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." It has puzzled many persons to know what is intended by the expression, "they may receive you:" but it is merely a Hebrew idiom for that ye may be received. So here, "Let them bring forth salvation," means, Let salvation be brought forth. And is not this experimentally true? Is not salvation brought forth into the heart and conscience, when the dew drops down grace, and the skies pour down righteousness, and the earth opens to receive the gift of heaven?

The skies pour down Christ's righteousness—his glorious imputed righteousness. There is no salvation by any other righteousness; for "there is none other Name under heaven given among

men whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12.) "By him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:39.) And salvation can only be brought forth experimentally in the heart and conscience by the heavens dropping down the dew of grace, and the skies pouring down a shower of this imputed righteousness, and the heart opening to receive it in faith, hope, and affection.

How many people are looking to self to bring forth salvation, to their good works, their consistency of life, their attempts at reformation, their doings for the past, or their intentions for the future. And what fruit do they reap by all their pains? Vanity and vexation here, and everlasting condemnation hereafter. Man, fallen creature man, can never do anything spiritually good, or bring forth one thing out of his heart that God can be pleased with. To know, to feel, and to be deeply concerned about this, lies at the root of all vital godliness; and till a man learns this by the teachings of the Spirit, he knows nothing of what spiritual religion is. As the Lord, then, leads our souls into a knowledge of their darkness, barrenness, emptiness, and nothingness; and as we become more deeply and daily acquainted with our thorough helplessness and impotency, we become convinced that God is the only Giver of every good and perfect gift; and this conviction being wrought into our conscience makes us feel the need of, and long after revelations and manifestations of grace, mercy, and salvation to our soul. The more we are out of conceit with ourselves, the more do we fall in love with Jesus; the more loosed from ourselves, the more closely do we cleave to him. Thus, until we are thoroughly convinced, and well humbled too under the spiritual conviction of it, that we have no righteousness, salvation, hope, or help in self, we shall not be looking up to the heavens that from thence the dew and rain may come down into our consciences. But when, after a long season of drought, the heavens begin to drop down the dew, and the skies to pour down righteousness, and the heart opens to embrace the mercy of God in the face of Jesus Christ, salvation is brought

forth into the conscience. Is not the earth entirely dependent on the dews and showers to bring forth fruit? So the bringing forth of salvation is entirely dependent on the dews and showers of righteousness dropping into the soul. How am I to receive and become personally interested in salvation? It must come down from heaven to my heart; it must be revealed by the Spirit to my conscience. I can have no feeling enjoyment of salvation till Christ's righteousness is poured into my soul, and my heart is opened by the Spirit to receive it. It is only thus I receive Christ as my righteousness, and embrace his finished work as all my salvation and all my desire. Ruth said to Boaz, "Spread thy skirt over thine handmaid, for thou art a near kinsman." (Ruth 3:9.) This spreading of the skirt was a pledge of marriage and protection. Love and helplessness struggled together in Ruth's bosom, and brought out that cry. She lay humbly at his feet till he took her to his side, and the gleaner widow became an honourable wife.

Now how different is this way of salvation from all the ways that man devises for himself! How low it lays the creature, that "salvation is of the Lord!" Jonah had to get into the belly of hell to learn this. (Jonah 2:9.) O what would not man do, if he could get to heaven by doings? What weight would he not attempt to raise, if by turning the winch, he could crane up his soul into heaven? But there is no clambering up to heaven; that was tried at Babel; they raised their tower of eight stages, but God came down and confounded their speech. And since the days of Babel, all attempts to clamber to heaven by the towers of our own righteousness, will end in confusion and destruction.

2. "And let righteousness spring up together." Two things here are spoken of as the fruit and effect of the dew and showers from above, and the opening of the earth to receive them—the bringing forth of salvation—and the springing up of righteousness. This "springing up of righteousness" may be understood, in one sense, as the internal knowledge of righteousness, a sense of justification made known by God's Spirit. But I think there is another and

deeper meaning connected with it, for we have had that already intimated in the words, "Let them bring forth salvation." I think, therefore, it rather means, an inward righteousness produced in heart and conscience by the Spirit.

There are three kinds of righteousness, or at least three kinds of righteousness which bear that name. There is inherent righteousness, of which we have none. There is imputed righteousness, which is all our justification. And there is imparted righteousness, when God the Spirit makes us new creatures, and raises up in the heart that "new man, which after God" (that is, "after the image of God") is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Eph. 4:24.) When the Lord, therefore, said, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:20.) He did not mean only an external righteousness wrought out by his obedience to the law for them, but an internal righteousness wrought out by the Holy Spirit in them. Thus, we read of the inward as well as the outward apparel of the church. "The King's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold." (Psa. 14:13.) Two kinds of righteousness belong to the Queen; her imputed righteousness is her outward robe, "the clothing of wrought gold;" but imparted righteousness is her inward adorning, which makes her "all glorious within." This inward glory is the new man in the heart, with all his gifts and graces, what Peter calls "the divine nature." (2 Pet. 1:1.) "Christ in the heart, the hope of glory."

Thus, when the heavens drop down their dew, and the skies pour down righteousness, and the earth opens to embrace it, not only is salvation brought forth in the heart, but "righteousness" also "springs up together," a righteousness produced by the inward work of the Spirit on the conscience, its main fruit being that "love, which is the fulfilling of the law." Many persons are trying to please God by their righteousness, their consistency, their holiness, their attempts to do something for his glory. But why is it that so many fail in their attempts, and fall so utterly short? Why is it, when the

people of God look at their deeds, all appear defiled and polluted? The reason is this, for the most part, because they put things in the place where God has not put them. The Lord puts “salvation” before “righteousness,” and the work of the Spirit upon the heart before the fruit that springs out of that work. The gardener need not be surprised that he has no crop, after he had well dug the soil, and hoed and raked the garden, if he had never sown any seed, nor set any plants in the beds. He need not wonder, that with all his digging, hoeing, raking, and watering, his garden produced neither fruit nor flower. Why, the main thing was wanting. So spiritually, men dig, hoe, and rake their hearts; and then they wonder that no crop is produced. The Spirit of God has never sown the seed of the word in their consciences, nor planted his graces in their soul. The Church is compared to a garden, “A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.” (Sol. Song 4:12.) She therefore says, “Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.” (Verse 16.) Eat what? My pleasant fruits? No. His pleasant fruits, for it is his garden. “From me is thy fruit found.” Thus the great Husbandman has to sow and plant his graces in the soul, as the gardener sows his seeds and plants his flowers in the beds and borders. Then his hoeing, raking, and watering will bring a crop. So we must have first the heavens dropping down dew, the skies pouring down righteousness, and the heart opening to receive it; and when salvation is inwardly planted and brought forth, righteousness will spring up together with it; and then there will be a crop of inward righteousness. Separation from the world, deadness to its spirit, mortification of sin, crucifixion of the flesh, a putting off of the old man and a putting on of the new; simplicity, godly sincerity, uprightness, integrity, faith, hope, and love in blessed exercise; a conscience made and kept alive in God’s fear; yea, every good word and every good work will be brought forth by the power of the Spirit in the heart, when the heavens drop down dew, and the skies pour down righteousness, and the earth opens to receive them, and salvation is brought forth in the heart. This in-

ward righteousness will always spring up in the soul together with salvation, because it is experimentally and essentially connected with it. “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” (Heb. 21:14.) But what can make me holy? Not my own exertions, not my vows, resolutions, and promises; not my fastings, alms-deeds and bodily mortifications. This is but Pharisaism and Popery. God must give and work in me true holiness. “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psa. 51:10.) It is only by a knowledge of righteousness, and through a sense of salvation, that the Holy Ghost brings forth in the heart “fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.” (Rom. 6:22.) So that would we be holy, we cannot be so in our own strength: we can only be so as God the Spirit lets the dew of his grace fall into our consciences, as the showers of righteousness fall into the soul, and as God opens the heart to receive his mercy and his truth.

And then the Lord winds up the whole with that short and expressive sentence, “I the Lord have created it.” What a jealous God he is! “He will not give his glory to another.” But the rebel man, a wretch that God with one frown could wave out of existence, and could trample upon in a moment as we trample upon a worm in our path—that a rebel like man should talk of what he has done, or means to do for the Lord, should boast of his mighty feats and proud exploits—why, how sunk in the depths of ignorance must he be that such a thought should even come into his heart! What a plague-spot must there be upon him, that a crawling, grovelling wretch like man, that only exists by tolerance, should talk of his doings and exertions! As well might we expect a bankrupt lawyer, imprisoned in Newgate for forgery, to boast of what he will do when he sits as Lord Chancellor on the woosack; as well might we expect an aged pauper, living upon half-a-crown a week, to talk of what he means to do when he sits in the senate, or mounts the throne; as for a bankrupt wretch like man, who, if grace prevent not, only lives to be damned, talk of what he intends to do for God. The Lord therefore puts an extinguisher on all the doings of

man, when he says, "I the Lord have created it." It is all my work, all the effect of my sovereign power, all my divine creation; I, the Lord have done it. And who, after this challenge, dares sit upon his throne, and take the sceptre from his hand? Shall a grovelling worm dare creep upon the Lord's throne of power? Shall a maggot crawl up and sit by the side of Jehovah? The Lord has extinguished this rebel pride of man, when he says, "I have created it," and takes all the glory to himself. Sure I am, if you and I know anything of God and of ourselves, we shall fall down in the depths of creature abasement, and say, 'Let God be glorified; let God be all in all, and let me fall into the lowest spot of nothingness.' "I, the Lord have created it." What? I create the dew of grace to fall, the showers of righteousness to descend, and the opening of the heart to embrace. I have created salvation to be brought forth in the conscience; I have created righteousness to spring up with it. "I the Lord," alone, wholly and solely, by the might of my hand, and my sovereign power; and none but "I, the Lord, have created it." Now, this is a humbling doctrine to the proud wretch, who, like the frog in the fable, would fain swell himself up to the size of an ox, with his own doings; it is humbling to the self-righteous Pharisee, who is pleased with what he has already done for the Lord, and is still more pleased with the noble avenue, the long vista of good works which he intends to do for him. How pleased is a nobleman, sometimes, with projecting plantations, and has already in his mind's eye a noble avenue of oaks and limes that shall one day rise up in his park; but the self-righteous Pharisee looks with greater delight at the grand avenue of good works that he is about to raise up, when, poor wretch, all his exertions could not raise up a shrub.

But to those who know their own ruin, and helplessness, and complete imbecility, it is sweet to find that the Lord takes the whole matter into his own hand; that he is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end; and that he works in our hearts that which is well-pleasing in his sight. And when they come to that safe and blessed spot—to have nothing, and yet possess all

things; to be ignorant, and yet to have wisdom in Christ; defiled, yet to be sanctified in Christ; captives, yet redeemed by Christ; to have nothing in ourselves, and yet to have all in him—this will suit beggars and bankrupts, comes down to the necessities of the poor and needy, and is adapted to all the wants of the pauper. And thus, when God the Spirit brings light, life, and salvation into the conscience, the soul comes to that blessed spot, where it takes all the shame, and ascribes to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost Israel's Three-One Jehovah, all the praise and all the glory.

65 What Things to Flee, What Things to Follow

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening,

July 21, 1844

"But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."

1 Timothy 6:11

I have often been struck with the vein of sincerity that runs through Paul's writings; and have sometimes thought, if infidelity were not case-hardened, it would fall beneath the power of the sincerity so manifestly displayed, and would come to this conclusion, that whether what we read in the Scripture is the revelation of God or not, this one thing is certain, that Paul believed it to be so. It seems to me nearly impossible to read his Epistles without seeing that he writes them out of the fulness of a believing heart, and that he himself was perfectly convinced of the truth of those things which he declared. And I do not know any of Paul's Epistles which show more of this striking vein of sincerity than the two Epistles to Timothy. What an affectionate, I might say, parental solicitude does the Apostle display in them! What tenderness, gentleness, and wisdom shine through them; and how his whole heart and soul seemed to desire the spiritual prosperity of his dear son to whom he addressed them.

In the text, we find him exhorting his beloved son Timothy to flee from some things, and to follow after others. "But thou, O man of God," appealing to him as a servant of the Lord of Hosts, "flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." If then, with God's blessing, I am enabled this evening to show, first, the things that we are to flee; and then, what we are to follow, I shall, I trust, spiritually unfold the mind of the Holy Ghost in the text.

I.—But in order to see what things the Apostle exhorted his dear son Timothy to flee, we must go back a little to the early part of the chapter.

We find, then, the Apostle, in the beginning of the chapter, (1 Tim. 6:1) giving a precept to believing servants; "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." The Apostle was afraid of the abuse that human nature might make of the doctrine of grace. The Lord in mercy, perhaps, had visited the soul of some servant, or slave, as the word literally means, as in the case of the runaway Onesimus. (Philemon 15, 16.) Now the slave might argue, "If the Lord has made me free; if I am an heir of glory; if God is my Father, the Son my Saviour, the Spirit my Teacher, and heaven my eternal home, am I still to be a servant, and do servile drudgery?" "Yes," says the Apostle; "God's mercies in grace do not alter your relation in providence. The Spirit's work in your heart does not take you out of your temporal station in life; and so far from releasing you from all obligation to obedience to your master, it rather enhances it by giving new motives how to perform it in the spirit of the gospel." "Let," he says, "as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." Let them pay their unbelieving masters additional honour, instead of less, that the master, seeing what advantage the servant takes of the doctrine he professes, may not blaspheme or revile the name of God which the servant takes into his lips.

He then goes on to consider another case, where the believing servant had a believing master. "And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren." The servant might say, "My master and I are both believers, and stand upon an equality in Christ; we are precisely upon one footing. And why should there be any difference or distinction of station on earth? Why should he command, and I obey?" But the apostle says, "Let them not (the believing servants) despise the believing masters because they are brethren, but rather do them service (that is, obey as servants) because they are faithful (that is believers) and beloved of God, partakers of the benefit," that is, of grace. So far, then, from the servant being absolved from all respect and obedience to his master because he is a believer, he is bound, for that very reason, to pay him additional respect, and serve him more faithfully. These things he enjoins on Timothy to "teach and exhort."

And this leads him to speak of those loose and licentious characters in the professing church who preached different doctrines. "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words." There were in the professing church, in those, as in our days, practical Antinomians, who considered that by the gospel all the bonds of obligation were dissolved; and that grace, instead of making a man more obedient to the will and word of God and to human laws, released him from all earthly ties, and gave him liberty to act as he pleased. Now, the apostle exposes such characters, and warns his beloved Timothy against them; "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words," that is, sound, healthy doctrines, as opposed to all flights of wild enthusiasm; if he consent not to such wholesome, sound doctrine as this, "he is proud," puffed up with presumption and vain conceit; "knowing nothing," with all his professed knowledge, as being ignorant of divine teaching; "but doting" (that is, raving in his excited mind, or idly dreaming, like a superannuated creature,

or one who has lost his intellect by old age or idiocy), “about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness;” a covetous heart being the root of all; and then, he emphatically adds, “from such withdraw thyself.”

The things, then, that the apostle calls upon his beloved son Timothy to flee, are those evils which he mentions. And he calls upon him in the name of the Lord to flee from, that is, shun, avoid, and depart from these things. But what is it that makes us depart from these things? What they are, I shall presently show. But that which makes us to depart from them, and withdraw from the men who teach them, is this—having had the heart touched by God’s Spirit. This produces light in the understanding, giving us to see light in God’s light; and thus we see the evil of these things in the light of God’s countenance. And this divine work raises up also life in the soul, so that the evil of them is felt in the life of God’s Spirit; and the conscience being thus made tender before the Lord, we flee from what we thus see, and what we thus feel to be hateful to God.

But let us come a little to particulars, and see what those things are that we are exhorted to flee from; for the exhortation is addressed not merely to “the man of God,” but it belongs to the whole church of God; it must not be confined to ministers, but is equally incumbent upon private individuals; for “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”

1. We are then called upon to flee from “questions and strifes of words.” But are not questions and strifes of words the chief things preached nowadays? If a man can bring before the people some knotty question, some intricate text, some out-of-the-way figure, or mysterious passage, and solve it to his own admiration; or, if he can get up some strife of words, and show how all else are in error, and how he alone is right—how it feeds his pride at the wonderful display of wisdom which he thus makes before his congregation!

If you were to analyse by this test of Paul’s many so-called gospel sermons, and see their drift—how often, instead of God’s glory and the edification of God’s people, would they be found to turn upon mere questions and strifes of words!

2. But certain fearful evils are closely connected with these questions and strifes of words, as “envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, and perverse disputings.” “Envy,” because some may be better received by God’s family than themselves; “strife,” being engaged in perpetual contentions, and raving against all that differ from them; “evil surmisings” and suspicions of the motives of those who oppose or withdraw from them; and “perverse disputings,” perpetually wrangling from mere perverseness on every disputed point. The real authors of all these evils being men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, and supposing that gain is godliness, covetousness being the root of all their movements.

Now these things and these men the Lord the Spirit, by the pen of Paul, calls upon us to flee; he says, “From such withdraw thyself.” And sure am I, if God the Spirit be our Teacher, and make our consciences tender in his fear, that we shall flee them; and we shall withdraw from these men of envy, strife, and discord, and especially from preachers whose ministry teems with these evils. My Zoar friends, if ever a minister came among you, full of questions and strifes of words; if any one should get into this pulpit whose object seems to be to exalt himself, to sow strife, discord, and confusion, and rend the church and congregation, never let him stand up in this place again. From all strifes of words, from all perverse disputings, and from the men who scatter these firebrands, the Holy Ghost bids us flee. And I am sure that every sent servant of the Lord, who knows what divine teaching is in his own soul, and near to whose heart lies the glory of God and the profit of the church of Christ, will flee these perverse disputings, and will withdraw from men who sedulously propagate them to get themselves a living.

II.—But we pass on to consider what the things are which the Lord the Spirit in the text, calls upon us to follow. This divine

Teacher, in mercy not only sets before us the things we are to shun, but the things also we are to pursue.

But, as I endeavoured to show what led us to flee the evil, let us consider what it is that induces us to follow after the good the apostle here speaks of. Two things chiefly conspire to do this: first, a feeling of our need of them, a deep and painful conviction in our souls how very far short we fall of attaining and enjoying them. And secondly, the raising up, by a divine power in our heart and conscience, intense desires and spiritual breathings after the enjoyment of these blessings, so as to know the sweetness, unction, and power of them. It is like one running a race: the sight of the goal to which he is tending urges forward his steps; the view of the prize stimulates his exertions. So spiritually, unless our eyes are opened to see the beauty, and our hearts in some measure touched to feel the power of the things we are to follow, we shall be but sluggards in the race; our hands will hang down, our knees will be feeble, our spirits languish, and our desires after them will be half-hearted, and but faintly breathed out.

Let us, then, take one by one the things which the apostle calls upon Timothy, his dear son, to follow.

1. The first is "righteousness." "Follow after righteousness." We may understand two things by this expression. First, the discovery to the conscience of Christ's imputed righteousness in the way of justification; and secondly, the communication to the soul of a divine or righteous nature, whereby it brings forth the fruits of sincerity and uprightness before God. Both are to be followed after. But it may be asked, why the first, if a man has a knowledge of his justification, and a sense of his acceptance with God? But may not a sense of interest in Jesus' glorious righteousness, and the inward testimony of the Spirit be lost in the enjoyment of them, or at least considerably diminished, for a time? We read (Luke 15:8) of the woman who lost a piece of silver. Was there not a lighting of the candle, a sweeping of the house, and a diligent search into every corner till it was found again? The woman's piece of money was

not really lost; it was still in the house; but as to her feelings, it was as much lost as though she were never to receive it again into her possession. So a sense of acceptance and justification by Christ's righteousness, this precious coin from heaven's mint may be lost for a time in feeling, though not really lost out of the heart. And what will the soul do that has lost it but diligently search the house in every corner, by the candle of the Spirit, till it find the piece of money again?

The Lord sees fit that many of his dear children should be often tried in their minds, and cast down in their souls about their acceptance with him; he permits clouds to rise and darken their evidences; he suffers Satan to shoot in his fiery darts; he allows their carnal mind to breed numerous doubts and fears; he withdraws the light of his countenance, and suspends the inward witness of the Spirit. These things cause the soul to walk in darkness and gloom, and halt and stumble by reason of the difficulties of the way; so that its feelings are those of Job, when he complained: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." (Job 23:8, 9.)

The Apostle calls upon us, then, to "follow after righteousness;" that is, to press forward and eagerly desire in our consciences a sense of acceptance with God, a knowledge of pardon and of justification, that we may taste and realize "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." Now, if a man watches the various movements of his heart, if he is much tried with temptations, much beset with perplexities, and much harassed by Satan, to follow after righteousness will cut him out abundant work; and he will not have time, and will feel less inclination, for "questions and strifes of words, and perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds." He will not be for solving knotty points of divinity; but he will be for having this knotty point solved in his conscience, "Where do I stand? Am I bound for heaven or hell? Is what I have professed to believe

a work of grace the genuine work of the Holy Spirit on my heart? Is my experience the fruit of the inward teachings of God? Do my feelings come from the Spirit's inward operation? Am I right before God? Am I washed in the blood of the Lamb? Do I stand accepted in the beloved? Does the Holy Ghost bear his sweet witness in my conscience?" Where a man is exercised and tried upon these points, he will follow after righteousness; because he cannot be satisfied until he enjoys the manifestations of it to his conscience, and is brought to feel the love of God in his soul.

But as I before observed, the word "righteousness" has another signification in the New Testament. There is righteousness imparted, as well as righteousness imputed; and, in this sense, righteousness is a fruit of the Spirit, and resides in "the new man," which, as we read, "after God (that is, after the image of God) is created in righteousness and true holiness." It is, in this sense, an inward principle of uprightness, honesty, integrity, simplicity, and godly sincerity; in a word, what we understand in the Scripture by the word holiness. Now holiness is a thing in our day much sneered at; and it seems as though some would almost trample the very word under their feet, and consider it only another name for legality. But the Holy Ghost declares most plainly that "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." (Heb. 12:14.) The Lord himself prayed to his Father, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." (John 17:17.) And the Apostle exhorts us to put off "the old man with his deeds," and "yield our members servants to righteousness unto holiness."

The righteousness, then, spoken of in the text, not only means acceptance and justification before God, but also that inward work of the Holy Ghost which produces a righteous and holy principle within us, with all the graces of sincerity, uprightness, and godly fear, brought with power into the heart. This is the righteousness the Apostle speaks of as "fulfilled in us." "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," (Rom. 8:4); and is the express fruit of the Spirit;

"For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth." (Eph. 5:9.)

But how are we made spiritually to "follow after righteousness" in this sense? By knowing our own defilement, feeling our own filthiness, seeing the pollutions that cleave to every thought, word, and action, and thus becoming thoroughly sick of sin, and sick of self. As we feel and abhor these evils, we shall, under the teachings of the Spirit, desire to bring forth fruit to God's glory, and to do those things that are well-pleasing and acceptable in his sight. If there are no inward breathings after sincerity before God, uprightness before men, and integrity in our various callings; if there is no hatred to evil, and love to that which is good; no inward desire to please God, no fear to offend him; no spiritual sorrow because we hourly do things that are displeasing to him; if there is no inward groaning of soul because we are so base and vile; and no earnest wish for the Lord to work in us that which is well pleasing in his sight,—I want to know what grace has done for us? But, just in proportion as we feel our lack of inward fruit, as we see afar off, at a vast distance, the beauty and blessedness of the Spirit's graces, and desire them to be brought into the conscience with divine power, there will be a following after them with the whole soul. As David says, "My soul followeth hard after thee." (Ps. 63:8.) Thus, sometimes on the knees there will be a pleading with the Lord to work it in us; sometimes there will be self-abhorrence because we know so little of it; and sometimes a desire that the Lord would turn away our eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken our soul in his way. There will be often, too, an earnest wish to avoid those sins in which we have been already entangled, and a desire to be kept from those snares which before have proved so dangerous. O that those who preach the doctrines of grace would more "follow after righteousness!" How often do those who stand up in the name of the Lord to preach a full and free salvation (to their shame be it spoken), make the truth stink in the nostrils of those who fear not God! What lightness, what frivolity, what presumption and

vain confidence are visible in some! What drunkenness and even worse, such as adultery and lasciviousness, do we find sometimes come abroad in the world as transacted in secret by others who have stood up to preach the gospel of the grace of God! How these things, when they come to light, as sooner or later they do, grieve the hearts of the Lord's people who are zealous for the truth, and what occasion do they give for the enemies of God to blaspheme!

2. "Godliness." That is the second thing which the Apostle desires his son Timothy to follow after. Godliness! What is meant by the expression? It occurs very often in Paul's Epistles, and especially in those to Timothy. Thus, we read, "Exercise thyself unto godliness." (1 Tim. 4:7.) "Godliness with contentment is great gain." (1 Tim. 6:6.) "Great is the mystery of godliness." (1 Tim. 3:16.) "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim. 3:12.)

By the word "godliness," I think, is intended, the life of God in the soul; the inward teaching of the Spirit. For we find it opposed to "bodily exercise," which, says the Apostle, "profiteth little," whilst "godliness is profitable unto all things." (1 Tim. 4:8.) Now nothing is more opposed to all forms, and such exercises of the body as bowings and prostrations, than the inward work and teachings of the Spirit. And this godliness, or the life of God in the soul, in which all the power of religion consists, the Apostle exhorted his dear son Timothy to follow after. But how are we to follow after it? Two motives must conspire to urge us forward to this pursuit. First, a deep, painful, and increasing conviction how far short we fall of it. Secondly, to see its beauty, and to have an earnest desire to have it brought with divine power into our consciences. In order, then, "to follow after godliness," we must learn what we are by nature; we must feel our ignorance, know our baseness, and experience what fallen wretches we are. We must be well acquainted with our helplessness and thorough impotency to work anything spiritual or gracious in our own consciences; and thus, feeling poor and needy, come before the throne of mercy and grace beseeching the

Lord to do for us what we cannot do in and for ourselves.

We must see, too, what a beautiful thing godliness is. We must feel what a precious gift it is to have the life of God in the soul; to have something more than a name to live; to have something deeper than mere consistency of conduct; to have something more abiding than a few doctrines floating in the head. We must feel what a mercy and blessing it is to have the Spirit of God for our Teacher, communicating light, life, power, and savour to our souls; working in us faith, hope, and love, and communicating out of Christ's fulness all his heavenly graces. But in order really to know and prize them, we must experience also what sweet feelings, blessed emotions, and divine sensations—what an inward power and satisfaction are known and realised in the soul under the operations of God the Spirit. To be acquainted with these inward feelings will make us follow after "godliness;" not the "form," which a man may have while he "denies the power;" not merely a set of correct notions; not the articles of a sound creed; not admittance into a gospel church; not attending to gospel ordinances; not hypocritical gestures, or turned-up eyes;—all which things may subsist where the life of God is absent. But we shall follow after the inward teachings of the Spirit, the presence of God in the soul, and the manifestations of his goodness and love. This is godliness; and to have this heavenly teaching and these divine operations in the conscience makes a man a godly man. It is not taking up a profession of religion, embracing a sound Calvinistic creed, coming out of the professing world, being baptized, and joining a gospel church, that makes a man a godly man, though a godly man will do some or all of these things; but a man may be and do all this, and only add hypocrisy to the rest of his sins. But to be a godly man is to have the Holy Ghost for our Teacher, to live under the bedewings and droppings of his grace upon our spirit, and to feel his divine operations in our heart and conscience. Now as we feel how short we come of the power of this vital godliness; as we deeply and daily experience how barren we are without his fertilizing dew; how cold without

his reviving warmth; how dark without his heavenly light; how worldly and carnal without our affections are fixed heavenward by his inward drawings; and as we see sometimes the beautiful land of godliness very far off—these things stir us up to follow after it. We are thus led inwardly to say, “What will it profit me, if this or that man thinks well of my religion; what good will it do my soul to have a name to live while dead? O what will it profit me in that terrible day, when the King shall sit upon his great white throne, to have deluded my own soul, deceived God’s people, and died with a lie in my right hand? But to have had ‘godliness,’ to have experienced the Spirit of God working in me and dwelling in my body as his temple, to have known the presence of Jesus, to have felt the inward teachings of the Holy Ghost, and his divine testimony in my conscience—that will enable me to stand in that great day when the heavens are rolled together like a scroll; that will give me boldness before the Son of Man at his coming.” So, as a man feels these things laid with weight and power on his conscience, he will say also, “What avail to me ‘questions and strifes of words,’ and ‘perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds?’ What avails to me their doting about things that will not profit my soul? How do I stand? Where am I? What does God think of me? And have I any testimony in my conscience that I am right for eternity?” As these things are felt, there will be a following after godliness.

3. The next thing the Holy Ghost calls upon Timothy, by the pen of Paul, to follow after, is “faith.” Now what I said before is equally applicable to this, that we can follow after nothing until we know how short we come of it, and how desirable it is to possess it. Look at the man running a race! Is it not because he sees he is yet short of the goal, that he presses on to reach it? And does not the feeling how desirable the prize is when the goal is reached, also stimulate his exertions to obtain it? So spiritually, if I think I have “all faith,” if I need no more than I have, if I want no more communications from on high, I shall not be following very eagerly after it. But if, on the contrary, I feel, as I do painfully, what an unbelieving

heart I carry in my bosom, what infidel suspicions dart across my mind, how unable I am, in my own power, to receive God’s truth in the love of it, and how helpless to call the little faith I may have into exercise,—as I am conscious of these things, and yet know by heartfelt experience what an active grace faith is, these two things working together in the soul will urge me to follow after it. Nothing is easier than a profession of faith; it costs but a few words. It only requires a seared conscience, a hard heart, a presumptuous mind, and a hypocritical tongue to lay claim to all the faith possible. But when, by God the Spirit’s teaching, we have been driven out of refuges of lies; have been shown how undone we are by nature; when we groan and sigh under a body of sin and death, and feel how deficient and ineffective our faith is at those seasons when we most need it—this will make us “follow after faith.” Not that we can obtain it by our own exertions, but we follow after it as a divine gift, as something communicated and brought into our conscience by God the Spirit.

Now, if we know anything of unbelief on the one hand; or anything of faith on the other, we shall find that we want faith to be brought into our souls, continually. Here is the world spreading its nets, and entangling our feet in its snare; sometimes distracting the mind with its business, at others alluring the heart with its pleasures; and continually attempting to draw us aside into paths that, if walked in, would make a living conscience bleed. Do not you, men of business, feel the world to be a fearful snare to you, in these days of almost general cheating and swindling, when business transactions can hardly be carried on by a man of tender conscience? I am sure you must find it hard work to act in the fear of God. But the more you find the world setting snares for your feet, the more will you need that faith which overcomes it. If a man have nothing but false faith, when he goes abroad he can leave his religion at home. He can go on the Exchange, or into the market, and talk and act as if he made no profession at all. Religion, he thinks, is not wanted there; he can transact his business best without it;

for then he can do as other people do. But a Christian man cannot thus act. He knows that to go into the world, and leave his faith at home, would be like a soldier going to war without taking his musket, or rushing upon the enemy, without any weapon of attack or defence. He that knows anything of living faith, cannot leave it thus at home, for it will not leave him. He cannot leave at home the inward rebukes and checks of conscience, if he act wrong; he cannot leave at his fireside the tongue of truth, nor a heart made honest by God's grace, for they will ever accompany him. And thus he will find on the Exchange, in the market, and behind the counter, his need of living faith in exercise; for he feels that he can only overcome the world by the possession of this precious grace.

I will tell you how it is with most persons. Sin does not very much affect or trouble them; and the reason is, because there is no inward dam set up against it. I very well remember Old London Bridge. Often, as a boy, have I passed over it, and stopped to look at the tide rushing impetuously through the narrow arches. But I pass over London Bridge now, and I see no such rushing of water, and no such danger to the slight wherries. What has made the difference? There is now a greater passage for the water; it is no longer hemmed in by the narrow ancient arches; the old lumbering water-works exist no more. It was the opposition that the old bridge made to the stream that caused such a rush of the water through the middle arch, and sometimes raised so fearful a cascade. Now the arches are all wide and open, and the tide flows through freely. So it is in grace; where there is only a name to live, it is New London Bridge; the arches are wide enough to let the waters flow through; there is no opposition made to sin. But where the grace of God lives and moves in the heart, it is Old London Bridge. And just in proportion as the dam opposes and keeps back the water that comes in like a flood, shall we feel the rushing of sin against the narrow arches, and fear sometimes that the power of evil will carry the bridge and us all away together.

So again, with respect to every gracious thought and act, as

prayer, meditation, reading the Scriptures, abstaining from evil, watchfulness and circumspectness: only so far as we are blessed with living faith can we spiritually do these things. If a man do these things formally and hypocritically, as the acts of mere bodily exercise, he may be wholly free from the temptations, perplexities, and harassing insinuations of Satan that assail the soul that seeks to worship God in spirit and in truth. But if a man has the power of grace in his heart and a living principle of faith in his conscience, whereby he sets himself against the subtle workings of the flesh, he will soon feel how helpless he is toward anything spiritually good, and how he needs perpetual supplies of life and power from the Lord.

4. "Love" is another grace that the Apostle urges his son Timothy to follow after. Love is the grand cementing bond of union between Christ and the members of his mystical body. Well then may we earnestly follow after this as the choicest gift the Lord has to bestow. But I may say of this, as of all the other graces that God the Spirit bids us follow after—our want of it makes us desire it. Do we never feel the workings of enmity against God, rebellion against his holy law, or coldness toward his dear people? Do we not sometimes seem as destitute of love toward God and his people, as if we had not one grain of spiritual affection? But if we had never felt some flowings out of love toward God and toward his people, we should not wish to follow after it. We cannot follow after a thing that is not desirable; we do not desire a thing that has no value in our eyes. But when we know what a blessed grace love is, from having at times enjoyed a measure of it, and felt our hearts warmed by it to God and his people, and find how cold and lifeless we are without it, the very sense of want creates a following after it, and a pleading with the Lord to shed abroad his love in our hearts. A sincere and hearty confession of our coldness in his ways, and of our want of love towards his people, is really a following after it. And is it not better far, in our secret chamber, on our midnight bed, in some lonely corner where none but the eye of God sees us,

to be mourning over our want of love, and beseeching the Lord to bestow this heavenly gift upon us, than to be engaged in “questions and strifes of words,” and “with perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds?” Is not this secret panting after the gift of divine love far better than to be continually angling and wrangling upon knotty points of divinity, and cutting down all who differ from us? Is it not far more profitable, in the solitude of our heart, to feel our want of love, and plead with the Lord to bestow it upon us, than to display our fancied wisdom before men, or by slandering and backbiting, seek to exalt ourselves at the expense of others?

5. The next grace which the Apostle urges the “man of God” to follow after, is “patience.” But why is patience needed? Because if we are the Lord’s people, we are sure to have many trials. The Lord sends us afflictions that he may give us the grace of patience to bear them. But O, what a rebellious heart do we carry in our bosoms! What perverseness, peevishness, and self-will dwell in its! How soon our temper is stirred up, and our irritable minds roused in a moment by the veriest trifle! How little patience have we under the trials that God sees fit to lay upon us! The Lord afflicts some of his people with weakly tabernacles; and how impatient they sometimes are under this dispensation! He sees fit that others should be tried with a persecuting partner in life; and how peevish and fretful they often are under this trouble! Others he is pleased to afflict with disobedient offspring; and how murmuring and rebellious are they when their children are not what they would wish them to be! Others he chastens in providence, disappoints their schemes, blasts their prospects, and brings to poverty. Trial upon trial, embarrassment upon embarrassment, difficulty upon difficulty beset them on every side; and O, what peevishness and fretfulness, what hard thoughts of God, and what self-pity work in the carnal mind! We thus learn our need of patience, and that it is not a fruit of nature’s soil. The want of it makes the soul follow after it; and when the Lord does give submission to his will, and enables his children to see how profitable these trials are for their

souls, and how, but for this heavy ballast, they would certainly have been carried away into the world, they can see his merciful hand in their heavy affliction. Thus, sometimes by feeling peevish and rebellious, and thus knowing their need of patience; and sometimes by feeling submissive, and enjoying the sweetness of it, they see what a blessed grace patience is; as the Apostle says, “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” (Heb. 10:36.) Scarcely any grace do we more daily need than that of patience. We need it toward God, when he crosses us in our schemes, thwarts us in our desires, and instead of shewing why he afflicts us, hides himself behind a thick cloud that neither faith nor prayer can pierce through. We need patience with each other, with the world, with our relations in life, and with the church of God. We need patience when anything is said or done to hurt our minds, wound our feelings, irritate our tempers, and stir us up to revenge. And what a mercy it is, under these sharp trials, to have patience, and thus follow the example of the blessed Lord, “who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” (1 Pet. 2:23.) Perhaps you are a servant, and have a master or mistress who is wayward and irritable, or so harsh and oppressive that your carnal mind boils over with wrath. But what a mercy it is under such trying circumstances to have patience! Or, your partner in life may at times by unfounded suspicions and jealousies greatly irritate you. You feel it sometimes very much to affect your natural disposition, and stir up your easily excited temper. But what a mercy it is to feel a little patience under the trial, and to win by affection what we cannot obtain by sullenness! Our spiritual friends too often try our minds by cutting speeches, and these not always to our face. Our proud heart resents the injury, and would bid us draw the sword of revenge. But have we not always found that when we have taken the sword to strike down a brother, there was a concealed blade in the hilt which ran into our own hand? And thus we learn rather to bear and submit to injuries,

and to desire that God may bless us with patience, than say, “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.”

We thus gradually and slowly learn our need of patience: and being inwardly convinced that we have no power to work it in our own hearts, desire to follow after it, that it may be communicated by God the Spirit to our souls.

6. The last grace the Apostle desires this “man of God” to follow after is “meekness.” And O, what a blessed grace is this! What an exhortation do we find the Holy Ghost giving by the Apostle Peter to the women that profess godliness! “Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair,” (and perhaps, he would have added, “of putting flowers into it,” had he lived in our time) “and of wearing of gold” (such as gold necklaces, and watches by the side), “or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price.” (1 Pet. 3:3, 4.) O what wise instruction does the Apostle give to those wives and daughters that profess godliness! And how he warns them against attiring themselves like the daughters of Belial, and following the women of Canaan in their love of gay and fashionable apparel, while they slight the inward adornings of the Spirit, such as kindness, gentleness, meekness, and humility! But how far better are these inward ornaments which the Spirit of God puts into the heart! And how much more comely do they look thus spiritually attired than if loaded with all the finery that the daughters of Belial array themselves in!

But how are we to follow after this grace of meekness? By learning the contrary. I have had at times a contentious spirit, and (more especially formerly) have, no doubt, carried this spirit into the ministry, whilst endeavouring sincerely and honestly to contend for the truth of God. But “the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God;” and thus, as the Lord the Spirit leads us on, we shall flee from our own spirit, and cease from strife and contention. Not that we shall be a whit less faithful, God forbid! Nay,

the more we feel the power of truth, shall we with greater faithfulness contend for it: but we shall contend more in the spirit of meekness. How often have we mistaken false fire for the light and fire of God’s Spirit! and have contended more for our own views, in our own spirit, with many rash and unbecoming words, rather than for the glory of God. But after a time we are led to see that strife and contention, in our own spirit, are contrary to the spirit and temper of the gospel, and are brought to see what a blessed grace the spirit of meekness is. Nay, the very want of it, the risings up of an excited temper; the anger, strife, envy, and jealousy that often work in our bosoms convince us how little we know of “the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” We thus feel what a blessing it is to be made humble and submissive; and how impossible it is to enter into communion with a broken-hearted Jesus, till the soul is in some measure weakened by his Spirit. But it is by having a succession of things to try and provoke us, that we learn whether we have meekness or not. The husband can be very meek, while his wife and children are doing everything to please him; but where is his meekness when they thwart and provoke him? The master may be very meek, while the servant is obedient, obliging, and attentive; but how is he when things are different? Thus the knowledge of the disease makes us desire the remedy; and by the wretched sensations caused by wrath and evil temper, we are brought to desire an experience of those sweet feelings which gospel meekness produces in our consciences.

These, then, are the graces of the Spirit which Paul exhorts his dear Son Timothy to follow after. Now, if you are a reckless Antinomian, and have plenty of notions in your head, but are destitute of God’s teaching in your heart, you will not want to “follow after” these graces of the Spirit; you will be satisfied with a name to live, and call all such exhortations the very dregs of legality. But if God the Spirit has wrought with power upon your conscience, you will say, Lord, these are the things my soul desires to follow after; I feel my deficiencies, and how short I come in these matters! How little

do I know of righteousness, faith, love, patience, and meekness! How wofully defective in these inward graces and blessed teachings! But, Lord," the soul says in simplicity and sincerity, "I desire to follow after them, and to be possessed of them; to have them revealed in my heart, and wrought in my conscience by the power of God the Spirit." So far, then, from kicking and rebelling against these wholesome and sound truths, we shall be grieved that we come so short of the graces of the Spirit, and earnestly desire to be led into a deeper experience of them.

To sum up all in a few words. Here are the things which God the Spirit bids us flee from; and here are the things which he bids us to follow. And may I not say with the Prophet, "If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him?"

66 The Death Of The Flesh The Life Of The Spirit

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening,

July 25, 1844

"O Lord, by these things men live; and in all these things is the life of my spirit."

Isaiah 38:16

The words I have just read, some of you may remember, are a part of "the writing" that King Hezekiah penned after "he was recovered of that sickness" which Isaiah the prophet was sent to declare was unto death. But when the Lord, in answer to Hezekiah's prayers and tears, reversed the sentence, and raised him up once more to health; and not only so, but enabled him to say, "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption, for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back"—then, that there might be a lasting record of the Lord's dealings with him, and a standing word of consolation to Gods afflicted people, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he penned this writing. Thus was his triumphal chant; the song of his deliverance which he sang upon the "stringed instruments in the house," and to the honour and praise

"of the Lord." (Isa. 38:20.)

Before, then, I enter into the spiritual and experimental meaning of the words of the text, it will be necessary to trace out a little of Hezekiah's experience, that we may know what he intended, when he used this expression, "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." The term, "these things," is clearly the key of the text, and has a reference to certain dealings of God upon his soul; in order, therefore, to know what he meant to convey by it, we must take a glimpse at these dealings of God with him.

Hezekiah, let it be remembered, was a gracious character before God brought on him the heavy trial recorded in this chapter. (Isaiah 38.) But he was where many of God's people are, though he knew it not: he had not been plunged deep enough into a knowledge of his own ruin, helplessness, and hopelessness as a fallen sinner. He wanted what Mr. Hart speaks of in his experience; (he uses a strange word, but a very expressive one;) he says, "After this my, shall I call it reconversion?" Many of God's people need this reconversion. They want a second plunge; and until they have had this second plunge, they do not, for the most part, know gospel mysteries deeply.

I shall endeavour by tracing out the experience of Hezekiah to explain my meaning more fully; and thus show how consistent it is with the teachings and dealings of God the Spirit on the heart. Hezekiah, as I have hinted, was a partaker of grace before the heavy trial came on him recorded in this chapter. And you will perceive most marked traits of his being a spiritual character, if you will read what is said of him in the corresponding passages in the books of Kings and of Chronicles; for there we have many proofs of his being one that feared God. For instance, we find in him a great zeal for the Lord, in breaking down the images, and cutting down the groves. It is also expressly said of him, that "he trusted in the Lord;" that "he clave to him, and departed not from following him;" and that "the Lord was with him." (2 Kings 18:4-7.) How earnest he

shewed himself that the house of God might be opened, (which had been shut up by his father Ahaz,) every part of the temple purified, its worship and sacrifice restored, and the Passover duly celebrated. (2 Chron. 29.) And we see how his love extended beyond Judah; he sent post, we read, even from Dan to Beersheba to gather together to the solemn feast those that feared the Lord of the tribes of Israel. He was a man of a tender conscience also; one who knew something of real brokenness and contrition before the Lord; for when the blasphemous letter came from the King of Assyria, we find him rending his garments, clothing himself in sackcloth, and going into the temple to spread out the letter before the Lord; and not merely spreading out the letter, but also pouring out his soul in cries and groans, in prayers and supplications, that God would vindicate his own cause, and deliver him and his people from the hands of Sennacherib. (Isa. 37.) Besides this, on the very eve of the trial came the deliverance. God heard his cries, smote the army of the King of Assyria, and gave Hezekiah this striking testimony that he had heard his prayer, by cutting off a hundred and fourscore and five thousand of that mighty army which had threatened him and Jerusalem with total destruction.

Putting all these marks together, we cannot entertain a doubt that Hezekiah was at this time a partaker of grace. We see his zeal, his faith, his love, his humility, and the tenderness of his conscience; that he knew what spiritual prayer was, and answers to prayer; the application of promises, and the fulfilment of them. But still, though he had the grace of the Spirit in his soul, though he had a new heart and a new nature, and had received tokens of mercy from God, yet there was something deficient, something grievously lacking in him. And this is the case with many of God's people. They have the fear of God in their conscience; they have a zeal for the Lord of hosts; they have a love to his Name, to his people, and to his truth; they have a measure of tenderness of heart and godly sincerity; and at times, when brought into straits and circumstances, the Spirit of grace and of supplications is poured

out upon them, by which they cry to the Lord, and which he hears and answers. Yet there is something grievously lacking in them; they are still floating on the surface of truth only; they have still a superficial religion; "the fountains of the great deep," as Hart says of himself, "have not been broken up;" the depth of human depravity, the treachery of the heart, the pride, presumption, and hypocrisy of their fallen nature, and all that fathomless abyss of the Adam-fall which is so covered over by the veil of ignorance and unbelief—this gulph of ruin into which they were precipitated by their forefather's transgression has not been opened up by the Spirit of God in their conscience. Therefore, they only float upon the surface of truth, without diving deep into that unfathomable sea of man's misery and God's mercy, to pluck up the precious jewels which are only to be found there. So that, for want of a deeper work upon their conscience; for want of being more stripped, searched, and exercised; for want of being more powerfully led into a knowledge of their ruin and misery, their views of Jesus are superficial, and shallow, mere floating in the head than felt in the heart, and consisting rather in the reception of sound doctrine in the judgment, than in a spiritual acquaintance with Jesus as he is, and with all that he has done for his people, in a broken and contrite spirit. Is not this true of the greater part of God's people in town and country? And is not this slight, flimsy religion fostered by the superficial, doctrinal preaching of the day? Persons have confessed to me, with tears flowing from their eyes, that whilst they sat under doctrinal ministers, they never knew their own misery, nor ever tasted God's mercy.

Now what is to cure this deficiency? What is to lead them into a more powerful experience of the truth? What is to bring them off this sincere yet shallow religion? What is to deepen the work of grace in their conscience? Why, the things that God brought upon Hezekiah: "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt

die, and not live.” (v. 1.) That was the way the Lord took to deepen his work in Hezekiah’s heart—to bring death before him. And no doubt, as the sentence of death entered into his body, so the sentence of death also entered into his conscience. And thus, the Lord, by sending home the sentence of death into his very vitals, and bringing it by divine authority into his heart and conscience, broke to pieces that which was hollow, false, and insincere, and showed him his true standing before him. In a word, he felt that he was not fit for eternity, to enter into the presence of God. His faith had not yet fully embraced the Person, love, work, and blood of Jesus; his hope had not yet taken a firm anchorage within the veil; and in fact, his religion stood more “in the wisdom of men” than in “the power of God.”

Now, my friends, I know from soul experience, that until the Lord tries his work upon our heart, we shall rest in a superficial religion; we shall be content with shallow evidences, dim hopes, and shadowy expectations; we shall be content with a slight wounding and a slight healing, with being sincere in the main, and in being truly desirous to serve, please, and fear God. For want of clearer and deeper teaching, we shall be ready to think we have attained to far greater things in the divine life than we have attained unto, and so be apt to deceive ourselves partially; mind, I do not say entirely, for I have along been tracing out a true, though shallow experience. But all this superficial religion is for the want of God’s sending home the sentence of death into the conscience; as the Apostle says, “We had the sentence of death in ourselves.” (2 Cor. 1:9.) I speak of what I know; for I was here, I believe, myself for some time after the Lord first quickened my soul.

But what I want to draw your attention more particularly to is this—What effect was produced on Hezekiah when the sentence of death entered his conscience? We read, “Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord.” What a reality, what a power, what a truthfulness shine through that expression! It is as though he turned away from the creature, from the world,

and from all the strength, wisdom, and righteousness of the flesh, to seek God alone as his refuge. No doubt, there were in Hezekiah’s time, as in ours, those who would give him false consolation; there were, doubtless, around his death-bed, plasterers, with polished trowels and heaps of untempered mortar. The priests, we may be sure, flocked around him, and sought to administer false comfort to his soul. “Remember,” they would say, “O king, thy zeal for the Lord; call to mind how thou didst purify the temple; how thou didst keep the passover; didst break to pieces the brazen serpent; the many things thou hast done for God; and how the Lord delivered thee from the hand of the king of Assyria.” But all these consolations (or that which they meant to be such) administered to him no comfort; for they all fell upon a heart that could not receive them. The sentence of death was in his conscience; guilt, wrath, and condemnation were all burning up his soul; the arrows of the Almighty were drinking up his spirit. It was God’s purpose that he should not be thus comforted; for if he could have taken peace from the things that they were trying to plaster him over with, he would have lost the comfort which God had designed through this trial to bring into his soul.

Now, that is the reason why God will not let his people take comfort from the opinions of men—because he means to bring them off the creature; to wean them from leaning on an arm of flesh, and to bring them to that spot where he, and he alone, becomes all their salvation and all their desire. In order, therefore, to bring them off from the creature, he knocks away the rotten props from under them, by which they so often try to shore and buttress up their sinking souls.

But where did Hezekiah turn to? He turned “toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord.” His bed was probably near the wall; and by turning to it, he implied that he felt that now he had to deal with God alone, and that no creature should come between the Lord and him. He turned, then, away from friends and from every earthly thing, to seek the Lord only. Now this is the spot to which

God will bring all his children. He makes all his people, and that through painful, sharp, cutting convictions in the conscience, turn away from creatures, and from all false comfort; and to come to the Lord as feelingly lost, naked, guilty, and undone, that he may bind up the wounds which his own hands have made. This is close work. Presumption, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness cannot live here. Godly fear and spiritual sincerity alone breathe in this air.

But, we read, that he not only turned his face to the wall, but “prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore.” There is no real prayer till we turn our faces to the wall. There is no true pouring out of the heart before the Lord till we are brought into circumstances from which his out-stretched arm alone can deliver us. How many of God’s own people go on praying in a formal way, bending their knees night and morning with all due regularity; (I speak not against it); yet how little do they know of heart-felt prayer, or of crying unto the Lord out of distress of mind, and of pouring out their souls into his bosom, because they have no other refuge wherein to hide their guilty heads! But depend upon it, there is no real prayer till there is this pouring out of the heart before the Lord, nor any real supplication, fervent wrestling, and importunate pleading till the soul, from deep necessity, turns its face to the wall to seek Jesus as its only hope and refuge.

“And he wept sore.” He could take no comfort from the things he had done for the Lord. He could not look at his evidences, they were all obscured; he could not review his well-spent life, it was blemished and stained throughout; he could not look at the future, or to what he meant to do for God, for the future was a dreary blank; yea, an eternity into which he was hastening without knowing how he stood before the Lord, whether he was pardoned, accepted, and saved, or whether the wrath of God was to abide on him for ever.

Now when he was reduced to this extremity, the Lord appeared for him. The Lord always meant to appear; he never intended to cut him off, as he threatened; he always purposed to lengthen his

life fifteen years. But he led him through this trial, not only to teach him his deep guilt and misery, but also to show the superabundings of his own grace in pardoning his sins through the blood of the Lamb. Thus Hezekiah had to bless God all the days of his life, as he himself declares, for being led into these deep waters, for having passed through this furnace, and being brought into this trial; because in it he learnt what he could not learn anywhere else, and in it pardon and peace were blessedly communicated with divine power and sacred unction to his soul.

In delivering him, then, out of this trial, the Lord lengthened his natural life, smiled upon his soul, and preserved him from going down to the pit, casting all his sins behind his back. Taught, then, and guided by the Spirit, Hezekiah penned this writing as a sweet memorial of the Lord’s dealings with him, and that it might be an encouragement to God’s people in similar circumstances in time to come.

But the main point to which I wish to call your attention is contained in the words of the text. Let us, then, with God’s blessing, see what the meaning and mind of the Holy Spirit is in them. “O Lord, by these things men live; and in all these things is the life of my spirit.” What were “these things” he alludes to? The words “these things” have reference to what Hezekiah had been speaking of—the trial into which he had been thrown, and the deliverance which had been vouchsafed to him out of it; the laying of sin upon his conscience, and the casting of it behind the Lord’s back; the furnace into which he had been put, and the Lord having brought him safely and uninjured out of it; the sentence of death sent into his conscience, and the manifestation of light, life, peace, and salvation whereby God removed it, when by it he had been thoroughly emptied, humbled, and stripped. Thus by “these things,” by the trial and the deliverance, by the affliction and the consolation, by the smarting and the healing, by being cast down and being raised up, by being made poor and by being made rich; by these alternating series of God’s dealings in the conscience “do men live;” “and

in all these things," being brought into them, being carried through them, and being delivered out of them,—”in all these things is the life of our spirit.”

I.—Let us, then, see how by “these things” men live. What is the effect when the sentence of condemnation comes into the conscience? By it we live. How so? Live by death? How can that be? Because the life of faith in the soul is of such a nature, that whatever weakens nature strengthens grace, and whatever feeds nature famishes faith. The life of God in the soul is a tender exotic which, like a flower among weeds, lives as nature dies, and pines as nature flourishes. So that “by these things men live,” since spiritual life is carried on and invigorated in the soul through the trials and temptations that starve and weaken the flesh.

1. For instance; these trials deaden us to the world. Do we not find this to be a solemn truth, that when all things go well with us, when the world is all smiles, when circumstances prosper, when the body is healthy, strong, and vigorous, spiritual religion is almost dying away in our souls? Is it not true, that, like Jeshurun, when we are waxen fat we kick? Do we not feel as the world gets a firmer hold upon our heart, that the things of God lose their reality and power in the conscience? Is it not a matter of experience, that just as nature flourishes within us, so grace seems to wither, pine, and languish? The flourishing together of these two things is incompatible. Is nature weakened? grace is strengthened. Is grace weakened? nature is strengthened. Nature and grace, the spirit and the flesh, are so entirely opposed, that the death of the one is the life of the other, and the life of the one is the death of the other. In order, then, to weaken nature, and to make the world and its charms as nothing in our sight, the Lord sends, or allows trials and afflictions to come upon us, that by weakening nature, and bringing us down in our soul, he may cause the life of the Spirit to be more active and vigorous in our heart. For instance, when a trial comes upon us, such as befell Hezekiah (a trial I have in a measure passed through, and therefore know something of it)—when

the sentence of condemnation comes into our conscience, what is the effect of it? In what state and circumstance does the trial find us? For the most part, it finds us full of the world; we have some sincerity, some godly fear, some desire to be right, and some fear to be wrong. We have had some testimonies, enjoyed some measure of consolation and of the peace of God in our conscience. But still, for want of a deeper work, for want of the stripping and emptying operations of the Spirit, the world has gradually crept in upon us, and taken possession of our heart and affections; and we know not how far we have backslidden from the right way, and into what a state of leanness, barrenness, and deadness we have fallen till the trial comes. But when the trial, temptation, or affliction comes; when the sentence of condemnation enters with power into the conscience, it shows us where we are, how insensibly we have slipped into the love of the world, and how imperceptibly its spirit has struck its deep fibres into our affections. When death stares us in the face, when our evidences sink out of sight, when God hides himself, and his wrath is felt in the conscience, what a vain thing the world is! When under these circumstances, and bleeding under the wounds which the Spirit makes in the soul, what poor consolation the comforts, pleasures, riches, and honours of this world afford! What balm can they give to the wounds of a guilty conscience? Thus, the spirit of the world, the dross and the tin mixed with the pure metal, is purged away by the severity of the trial, and the heat of the furnace into which the soul is cast.

2. But again. The trial finds us very much in this state, mistaking the teachings of man for the teachings of God; heaping up treasure, without the Lord communicating his precious riches, by the operations of the Spirit, to our conscience. How many persons there are, and it is to be feared that many of God's people are among them, who are mistaking the form of religion for the power of it; mistaking doctrines learned in the head for the teachings of the Spirit in the soul! Now when this trial comes upon us; when the Lord takes and puts us into the furnace, it burns up all this false religion. We

have perhaps made ourselves very wise in the letter, possess retentive memories which we have well stored with texts and passages of Scripture, have heard a great many excellent preachers, read numerous books written by great divines, and thus have accumulated many treasures. But when the sentence of condemnation comes, these treasures, heaped up for the day of evil, are all driven away like smoke out of the chimney, or chaff from the threshing-floor. They cannot stand the day of trial, not being wrought in the soul by divine power, nor sealed upon the heart by a testimony from God, but only floating in the judgment. When unpardoned sin lies heavy on the conscience, the soundest sentiments and the clearest views, which have not been wrought into the heart by the Spirit of God, cannot give peace to the mind; and we can no more hang upon them to save our souls from the wrath to come, than a drowning man can hang upon a straw to save him from sinking in the deep waters. Thus, this trial purges away a great deal of false religion.

3. Again. While in this state, before we have had the second plunge—for, mark you, I am speaking to the children of God—there is a great deal of presumption in the carnal mind, which passes with them for faith. Many of God's people use the language of assurance, which they never received from the teachings of God the Spirit. They have heard the minister say, "My God, and my Jesus;" at the prayer-meeting they have heard, "My God and my Father;" and they have sung it in the hymn, without the blessed Spirit having shed abroad the love of God in their heart, or given them the spirit of adoption to cry, "Abba Father." They have thus borrowed these terms of appropriation from the lips of others; and ignorantly mistake this presumption, so rife in the present day, for the real assurance of faith. But when God brings a man down to the waterflood, and gives him a second plunge, he drowns this presumption, and brings him to this spot—that he has nothing but what God gives, feels nothing but what God inspires, knows nothing but what God teaches, and is nothing but what God makes him. A man then looks at the numerous words that have dropped

from his lips, how high he has soared, misled by the example of others; and he now finds what he once thought to be faith, to be nothing but daring presumption and vain-confidence. Thus this sharp trial cuts up his false faith, and brings him down with grief and sorrow into deep humility and contrition before the Lord.

4. Another effect which the trial produces is this. When the sentence of condemnation from God's lips comes into the conscience, it opens a man's eyes to see the reality of vital godliness. My friends, there is a great deal of talk about religion; but how few persons know anything of what true religion is, of the secret of vital godliness, of the inward teachings and operations of God the Spirit upon the heart! Many men speak fluently enough of doctrines, and of the blessed truths of the gospel; but what good can mere doctrines do for me, unless they are sealed on my heart, and applied with divine power to my conscience? Without this, the greatest truths can do me no good. But when the Lord lays us low, puts us into the furnace, and drags us through the waters, he shows us that true religion, vital godliness, is something deeper, something more spiritual, something more supernatural, something that stands more in the teachings of God the Spirit and his operation on the heart, than ever we dreamt of before we entered upon the trial. We might have had the clearest views of doctrinal truth, and professed to believe too that true religion is the work of the Holy Ghost; and yet these were but dim notions floating in the head, before we came into the furnace. But these things now are seen in a different light, and felt in a totally different manner. What before was but a doctrine, becomes now a most certain truth; and what before was but a sound sentiment, is now sealed as a living reality in experience.

As the Lord, then, brings us into the dust, he strips away our mere notional, doctrinal religion. He begins to open up to our heart the real nature of vital godliness—that it is something deeper, something more spiritual, something more powerful, something more experimental than anything we have ever yet known;

that it consists in the teachings and leadings of God the Spirit in the conscience. As soon as this is felt, it strips a man of everything he has learnt in the flesh, and brings him down to the dust of death; and when brought there, the blessed Spirit opens up the truths of the gospel in a way he had never known before.

Many people know the truth in the letter, but how few by the teachings and operations of God the Spirit in the heart! They have sound views of the way of salvation, but it has never been wrought out with a mighty power into their soul; they have clear heads, but their hearts are not broken into contrition and godly sorrow; their minds are well-instructed in the truths of the gospel, but these truths have not been communicated by “an unction from the Holy One;” nor have they been felt with a solemn, overwhelming conviction, whereby they know the truth and the power of it, and have their souls baptized into a spiritual conformity to, and sweet enjoyment of it. Till a man is made to see the emptiness of a mere profession, to have his free-will stripped and purged away, and to be brought out of that empty religion so generally current, and is broken down into humility at the footstool of divine mercy, he will not feel the power, the reality, the sweetness, and the blessedness of the overwhelming love of God displayed in the gospel. Until the soul is thus stripped, till the vessel is thus emptied, these things cannot be known, nor is it in a condition to receive the glorious riches of free grace. Until the dross and tin is removed from the heart, the pure metal cannot shine, till this chaff is blown away, the wheat lies heaped up in a confused mass on the threshing floor. The Lord, therefore, will try his work on the heart; for he is a jealous God, and he will not give his glory to another, but maintain to himself his prerogative of sovereign mercy, and of saving to the uttermost.

When Hezekiah, then, said, “By these things, men live,” he meant that by these trials and deliverances, by these sinkings and raisings, strippings and clothings, emptyings and fillings, “by these things men,” that is, spiritual men “live.” It is a mystery, but

a great truth, that just in proportion as we die to the world, to self, to sense, to nature, and to false religion, the more the life of God is strengthened in our conscience. The Lord, perhaps, has taught some of you this truth through great afflictions. But when these trials came upon you at the first, it seemed as though they would entirely overwhelm you; they took away your standing, and it appeared as though they had destroyed your faith and hope. But though these floods of temptation passed over the soul, they swept away nothing but the rubbish, which till then was mistaken for the inward teachings of God the Spirit. So far then from these afflictions overwhelming your faith, you found that faith was secretly strengthened by the very flood that threatened at first to drown it. True faith is no more destroyed by sharp trials, than the oak is destroyed by cutting away the ivy, or by a storm blowing down some of its rotten branches. When temptations first assailed us, we thought they would destroy us utterly; they were so powerful we could not stand up against them; they threatened to leave us not a single sail to set before the wind. But did we not find after the first gust of the storm had burst over, that we became more deeply rooted in the truth, and were enabled to enter more into the power and sweetness of it? I have compared professors of religion sometimes to trees of two different kinds of growth. There are those who resemble fir trees in a plantation, and others, oaks in a park. The fir trees, nursed in a plantation, (like professors in a church,) and sheltered from the wind, are easily torn up by the storm; while by the same gust the oaks only get more deeply rooted. The more the wintry winds blow and the tempests howl, and the more they beat upon the oak, the more firmly fixed does it become, the more deeply the roots strike into the earth, the higher the branches tower up to heaven, the more broadly do they spread themselves over the soil. So spiritually, the storms and tempests that pass over a child of God, instead of weakening, only strengthen him; for they bring him nearer to the Lord. And thus, as the oak, the more the wind blows upon it, takes a firmer root in the soil; so the storms

and tempests that blow upon the soul, only cause it to take a firmer hold of the truth, and to strike its fibres more deeply into the Person, love, work, and blood of Jesus. So that, “by these things men live;” for through them, the life of God is maintained and kept up in the soul, the Holy Ghost secretly strengthening it by the very things that seemed to threaten it with destruction.

II.—But he adds, “And in all these things is the life of my spirit.” By “spirit,” he means the “new nature,” so called from its being born of the Spirit. This “new nature” has its ebbings and flowings, sinkings and risings; it has its fluctuations; and sometimes, to our feelings, appears almost ebbled out from our heart. But Hezekiah says, In all these afflictions and consolations, these ebbings and flowings, these risings and sinkings,—“in all these things is the life of my spirit.” By all this contrariety of feeling, grace in the soul, the life of God in the heart is nourished, strengthened, and revived. So far, then, are these trials, exercises, temptations, difficulties, and perplexities, from destroying or overwhelming the grace of God in the soul, that the very exercises and passing through them, is the life of the spirit. Grace flourishes amidst these afflictions; faith is in more lively operation by the weights and burdens that are put upon it; because God has so ordered it, that when we are weak, then we are strong. This is the grand secret of godliness, “my grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9.) In order, therefore, that Christ’s strength may be made perfect in us, we must come into trials and temptations, in order that our weakness may convince us of our deep need of him, and bring us into that spot where Christ’s strength is made perfect. We are thus brought to feel that all these trials and deliverances are mercifully given to cause our spirit to revive and flourish; to show that the Lord had laid help upon one that is mighty; that in him dwelleth all divine fulness; and that out of that fulness we receive grace for grace. And thus the Lord secretly keeps up that life he has given; and by these very trials, and what comes out of them; by these very exercises and deliverances, he causes the new nature

to revive and flourish, not only in spite of, but through and on account of these very trials and exercises that once seemed ready to overwhelm and almost destroy it.

What a mercy it is, to know that these trials and afflictions are sent by the hand of God! What a mercy, though painful in the extreme, to be stripped and emptied of all our lying refuges; to feel the truth of those words, “the hailstones shall sweep away the refuge of lies.” (Isa. 28:17.) Those of us who know the plague of our own hearts, O what refuges of lies do we find there! and what a mercy it is to be brought to feel the sentence of condemnation applied with power to our conscience! What blessed results hang upon these trials! So that the very things we thought to be against us, we find are the very things that are most for us; and the things we thought to be most for us, we prove to be most against us. The very things we thought we had most cause to fear, are the very things we have most cause to be thankful for; and if we had those things which our carnal hearts most desire, they would leave the soul barren and empty. Thus, then, the soul finds, “By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.” So that in the hour of solemn meditation, we can bless God for the trials and exercises, thank him for the furnaces, and praise him for emptying and stripping us; because we have found what occasion he has taken therefrom to teach and comfort the soul, and bring it into some measure of conformity to Christ’s suffering image. And thus we find, as Hezekiah said, “In all these things,” painful as they are, “is the life of our spirit.”

67 The Woman At The Well Of Samaria

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord’s Day Morning,

July 28, 1844

“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."

John 4:10

What a strange chain of providential circumstances is connected with the calling and justification of every vessel of mercy! Could we take a review of all the links in that widely extended chain, even as far as each of us is individually concerned, we should be astonished at their number, connection, and variety; and we should see that God's dealings with us in providence to bring us to the appointed spot where he first met with our souls, were no less remarkable than his subsequent dealings with us in grace. What a remarkable illustration have we of this fact in the calling of the woman of Samaria! What a chain of providential circumstances was connected with the Lord's meeting her at the well of Sychar!

Let us endeavour to trace out a few of the links of this marvellous chain which brought a poor adulteress into living union and communion with the Son of God.

1. The first link in the chain, as recorded by the Spirit, was the envy and enmity of the Pharisees. We read, "When the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, he left Judea, and departed again into Galilee." (Ver. 1-3.) The envy and hatred of the Pharisees, excited by the success of the Lord's ministry and the increasing number of his disciples (his "time being not yet come"), drove him, so to speak, out of Judea into Galilee.

2. "And he must needs go through Samaria." This is the second link which the Holy Ghost has recorded. What was this "needs be" that he should go through Samaria? There were two reasons. One was because Samaria lay in the road, and intervened between Judea and Galilee; so that, without taking a long circuit, Jesus could not reach Galilee without passing through it. That was the natural "needs be." But there was a spiritual "needs be" beyond any geographical reason, and that was, because he had to meet a vessel of mercy there.

3. "Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there." His reaching a city of Samaria, called Sychar, and the well being there, was the third link of this providential chain. In fact, we may carry our thoughts back to the very digging of the well; and beyond that, to the purchase of the land by Jacob of the sons of Hamor (Gen. 33:19); for had not Jacob bought the land and dug the well, there would have been a link wanting in this divine chain. But the Lord coming to the city where this well was, was another link of this chain of everlasting love.

4. "Jesus, therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well." Here is a fourth link in the chain of predestination—the weariness of the Son of Man. And what a subject of contemplation does this open to us! The weariness of Jesus! How it shews us that he had a nature like our own; not, indeed, a sinful, fallen nature, but one that hungered, thirsted, was wearied, wept, agonized, bled, and died!

5. "There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink." Here we have a fifth link of this divine chain—the woman coming out to draw water. And we may observe that there was something unusual in her coming out at this time. We read, "it was about the sixth hour," that is, twelve o'clock, or what we call noonday. It appears from another part of Scripture that this was a very unusual time for women to come to draw water. Thus, we read, Gen. 24:11, "And he made his camels to kneel down without the city, by a well of water, at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water." The evening being the cool part of the day, was the time in those countries when the women went out to draw water for their households and cattle; and therefore we read, Gen. 29:7, 8, that Jacob said, "Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered: water ye the sheep, and go and feed them. And they said, we cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep." Now, what

a remarkable circumstance it was, that this woman should depart from her usual custom, so as to come and draw water at this early part of the day! What some call a very trifling “accident” might have been connected with it: it might have been an impulse on her mind; or even the circumstance of one of her children or herself having upset the pitcher; such a trifling occurrence as this might have brought her to the well at this unusual time, and been the hinge on which the salvation of her soul turned.

6. “Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.” The Lord of life and glory asking her for water, (O what condescension!) was another link of this chain.

7. “For his disciples were gone away into the city to buy meat.” Here we may observe a further link; for their absence gave him an opportunity to converse more freely with the woman.

8. Then comes the conversation, which forms the last link that I need point out, arising from the woman expressing her surprise that he, being a Jew, asked drink of her, who was a woman of Samaria; “for the Jews,” the Apostles informs us, “have no dealings with the Samaritans.” And this leads us at once to our text, where we find the Lord saying 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.”

Three things seem observable in the text. We find, first, what we may call a Preliminary; (observe that I do not use the word condition;) “if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink.” Then follows, secondly, what would have taken place if she had known it, a Request, “Thou wouldest have asked of him.” And then, thirdly, The granting of the request; “He would have given thee living water.” If the Lord, then, enables me thus to go through my subject, I shall endeavour to trace out the words of the text in the way I have pointed out.

I.—We will look then, first, at the Preliminary. “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink.” Now, you will observe, that the Lord did not reproach her for not

knowing these two things. He did not say, she ought to have known them; he did not reprove her for the want of this knowledge. But he merely tells her, if she had known them, then certain circumstances would have followed. So he speaks with respect to the destruction of Jerusalem, “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.” (Luke 19:42.) He did not reprove Jerusalem for not knowing; he did not say, “It was her duty to have known.” He merely said, “If thou hadst known,” then this and that would have followed. So we may thus paraphrase what the Lord said to the woman of Samaria, “If thou knewest the gift of God!”—if it had been thy mercy to have known its value; if the Lord had opened thine eyes to see it, and given thee a heart to feel it; if this preliminary had been wrought in thy heart and conscience, then there would have followed two things—”thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.”

Now, what did the woman not know? She did not know, first, the gift of God; and secondly, she did not know the Person of him that spake to her. Thus, to know these two things—the gift of God, and the Person of Jesus, are the two grand preliminaries in order to ask of him, and in order to a spiritual reception of the mercies and blessings which he has to bestow.

1. What is meant, then, by the expression, “the gift of God,” of which this poor woman was ignorant? We read, Rom. 6:23, “the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The “gift of God,” then, is eternal life; and this is that which every quickened soul is taught by the Spirit first to seek after; as Bunyan represents his Pilgrim stopping his ears, and running across the plain, crying, “Life, life, eternal life!” Eternal life was the prize he had in view; that was the goal to which he was directing his steps.

But what is meant by the expression, “eternal life?” Is it something future, something in dim prospect, something to be enjoyed in heaven, and not to be known here below? It is true that eternal

life is to be enjoyed in heaven; it is true that the full manifestation of it is reserved for the other side of the grave. But “eternal life” begins below. “He that believeth on me hath,” (not, shall have) “everlasting life.” (John 6:47.) “I give unto my sheep,” (not, I shall give) “eternal life.” (John 10:28.)

But the Lord himself tells us what “eternal life” is in those remarkable words, “This is life eternal; that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3.) “The gift of God,” then, is eternal life in the soul. It is not something reserved for the future, but something felt, known, and enjoyed in this time state. And we may define it in one short sentence as the life of God in the soul, the communication of grace, mercy, and truth out of the fulness of Jesus. This is the “gift of God,” not obtained by human merit, not earned by creature doings, not to be clambered up to by the ladder of our own righteousness; but a free grant to the objects of mercy, according to those words, “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” (John 17:2.)

Now, this “gift of God” the woman of Samaria knew not; she had never received a divine communication of it to her soul; she had never known its nature, felt its sweetness, or experienced its power; nay more, she had never seen or known even the necessity of it. And therefore, on the one hand, having never felt its operation; and, on the other, having never felt her need of its operation, she was carnal, sensual, and dead in sin.

Thus, the first grand preliminary to ask of Jesus what he has to bestow, is, “to know the gift of God.” But before we can know the “gift of God,” we must be brought to feel that eternal life cannot be attained to by the exertions of the creature. Till we are brought to know it is “the gift of God,” we can never succeed in the first great preliminary; we can never utter one request, except hypocritically, that God would give it us. To this point, then, God brings all his elect people—to know and feel that they cannot by anything they have done, or can do, obtain eternal life. Their prayers, tears,

fastings, good deeds, alms givings, resolutions of amendment and obedience—all these things are utterly ineffectual to bring eternal life into the soul. We cannot by them regain the paradise we have lost. And this is not to be merely learned as a doctrine in the brain, but it must be experienced, and wrought with divine power as a certain truth in the conscience. As such it is usually learnt through a succession of failures; by trying to obey the precepts, and finding spiritual obedience impossible; endeavouring to be holy, and discovering little else but sin and corruption; labouring to keep the law, and hearing its curses sounding continually in the ears; striving to please God, yet daily and hourly doing those things that the conscience testifies against as most displeasing to him. So that, under divine teaching, (and there is no other worth the name,) by a long and painful succession of failures and bankruptcies, the soul learns at last that eternal life is the gift of God. It is a grand point to be taught this. To have our free-will smashed all to shivers, our self-righteousness shattered to a thousand pieces, and we brought helpless and hopeless to feel, “that in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing:” what a profitable lesson is this! For want of this divine teaching in the soul, there is so much of the leaven of pharisaism even in the hearts of God’s people, so much lurking Arminianism, so much talk about doings and duties, independent of, and distinct from the work and grace of God in the conscience.

But we must go a step beyond this. We must advance beyond the mere knowledge, through the want and absence of it, that eternal life is the gift of God; we must know something of its nature by the divine reception of it into our conscience. In a word, we do not know what “the gift of God” really is, till we have it in our hands; we do not know what eternal life is, till it is felt operating with a divine power in our consciences. It is in grace, as in nature; there are many things of which we have heard, and thus can form some idea of them: but we do not really know them till we have seen them. We may read, for instance, in books of travels, of foreign countries, and their beautiful prospects, noble towns, and fine

cathedrals; but what do we know of them till we have seen them with our own eyes? So spiritually, we may know, in the judgment, that salvation is all of grace, that “the election hath obtained it,” and that eternal life is the gift of God. But what is all that, if we get no farther? No more than knowing about some foreign country by reading a description of it in a book, or representing to ourselves a building by merely looking at an engraving of it. We cannot know the nature, though we may know the necessity, of the gift of God, till we experience its power as revealed and shed abroad in our soul. Then we know some measure of the gift of God when we feel eternal life flowing through our spiritual veins. How do I know I live naturally? Is not my participation of natural life known to me by an internal consciousness that I possess it? I know I live, because I feel that I live. And so, if we have spiritual life, there will be, at times and seasons, an internal consciousness that we have it; we shall feel the spiritual heart beat, and the spiritual lungs breathe, and the spiritual eyes see, and the spiritual ears hear: in a word, we shall be internally conscious of those emotions and sensations which are peculiar to the life of God in the soul. Spiritual life will be seen in its own light, felt in its own power, and shine forth in its own testimony. The little that we do know (and it is indeed for the most part but a little) makes us long for more of it. If ever we have received “the gift of God” into our conscience; if ever we have felt the mysterious operation of divine life in our hearts; if ever we have known the sweet emotions and peculiar sensations by which it manifests itself, it has killed us to all other religions. We say of this inward life with Mr. Hart on another subject:—

“May I be always thus devout,
Be this religion mine.”

When once, by the operation of the Spirit on our conscience, we have been stripped of formality, superstition, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, presumption, and the other delusions of the flesh that hide themselves under the mask of religion, we have felt the difference between having a name to live while dead, and the power of

vital godliness; and as a measure of divine life has flowed into the heart out of the fulness of the Son of God, we want no other religion but that which stands in the power of God; by that alone can we live, and by that alone we feel that we can die. And, at last, we are brought to this conviction and solemn conclusion, that there is no other religion but that which consists in the continued teachings of the Spirit, and the communications of the life of God to the soul.

But let us look a little deeper into the life of God, and in what it consists. The Lord himself tells us, that it mainly consists of two branches, the knowledge of “the only true God,”—and of “Jesus Christ whom he has sent.” To know, then, God the Father by some manifestation of his solemn presence to our hearts; to fear his great and terrible Majesty; to stand in holy awe and godly reverence of his dread perfections; to worship him in spirit and in truth; to feel his heart-searching eye looking down into our very conscience; to believe that he is about our path, and around our bed, and spieth out all our ways; to see that he is holy, just and righteous, and will by no means clear the guilty—is to “know,” in a measure, “the only true God.” But specially to know him as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, by a personal discovery of his superabounding grace to us in the Son of his love, is to fill up the measure of this first branch of eternal life. And the other branch is, to “know Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.” To know, then, by a divine revelation, the glorious Person and finished work of Christ; to know his dying love and atoning blood; to know him as suffering and agonizing for our sins; to know the sympathy and compassion of his broken heart; to know the glories of his divine nature shining through the veil of his flesh; to know who and what the Son of God is by a special manifestation of him to the heart and conscience,—this is the second branch of eternal life.

And with this eternal life are connected all the actings of faith in the soul, all the anchorings of hope in the heart, and all the flowings forth of love; nay, every tear of genuine contrition that flows

down the cheeks, every sigh of godly sorrow that heaves from the bosom, every cry and groan under a body of sin and death, every breath of spiritual prayer that comes from the heart; every casting of our souls upon him who is “mighty to save;” all submission to and reception of him; all communion with him, all enjoyment of him, and all the inward embracements of him in his covenant characters, suitability, and preciousness—each and all of these actings of the soul toward him spring from a knowledge of him, and issue from, as well as end in eternal life! And the soul that is privileged to enjoy these communications, is an “heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ.”

Now, this poor creature at the well of Sychar, living in ignorance and sin, did not “know the gift of God.” She came there merely to draw water, thinking perhaps of her children, or of the world, of her dead husbands, or living paramour, but at any rate buried in sin and self; and if she had any notion about religion, superstition, formality, and ignorance (“Ye worship ye know not what”) was the sum and substance of it all; therefore she knew not the gift of God. Do you and I know it? That is the point. Do you and I know it, not only by the want of it, but by the possession of it? not only as seeing ourselves lost without it, but by the internal feelings which this gift creates wherever it is shed abroad?

2. But there was another thing that she knew not. She was ignorant of the Person of him who said unto her, “Give me to drink.” The veil of darkness was over her heart. She perceived not Deity shining through the veil of the humanity; for her eyes were holden that she saw not the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. She was not favoured to behold his glory, “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14.) She knew not who Jesus was; she probably thought him to be some poor travelling Jew, some itinerant mechanic, as the Lord doubtless appeared in her eyes. She was surprised indeed that he should break through that rigid prejudice of the Jews against the Samaritans, and ask her to give him drink; but she saw nothing beyond

this. But had she known who he was; had God the Spirit, in mercy, anointed her eyes with divine eye-salve; had he, in love, stripped the veil from off her heart, shone into her soul, and revealed to her who he was that spake to her at the well, then she would “have asked of him.” But from her ignorance of his Divine Person, she had no request to make; for the needful preliminary was wanting. Nor can we make any request of Jesus, till we know who he is. And how can we know it except by divine revelation? For there is no truth more certain than this in God’s word, “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.” (Matt. 11:27.) We may have floating ideas in our mind about Christ; his name may be often, even to fulsomeness, upon our lips; but we cannot know him, except by a personal discovery of him to our heart and conscience.

But let us see more particularly what she was ignorant of. She did not know, first of all, his Divine Person. That is a point for which latterly I have been led very much to contend, because I see so much of vital godliness wrapped up in that glorious mystery, “God manifest in the flesh.” And if a man does not know, by a divine discovery, something of the Person of Christ, he is wandering here and there altogether in the dark; and knows not whither he goeth, for darkness hath blinded his eyes. Now, the glorious Person of Christ consists in the union of his divine to a human nature; not a sinful nature, God forbid; may that heresy sink to the lowest hell; but a holy, spotless nature, according to those words, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35.) Blessed be God for those words! What a bulwark they are against error and heresy on this vital point! That holy nature never had any existence independent of, or previous to, its union with the divine Person of the Son of God. It is not therefore a person, but a nature, a body prepared (Heb. 10:5); a “Holy Thing,” begotten by the power of the

Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and taken into union with the divine Person of the only-begotten Son of God. Jesus thus became Immanuel, "God with us;" perfect Deity and perfect humanity in one glorious, undivided Person. Now this is the great "mystery of godliness;" and he that errs here errs everywhere; he who stumbles here, stumbles at the very foundation-stone; he that denies this is not taught by God the Spirit; and if he live and die denying it, or ignorant of it, will never be where that glorious Immanuel now is, at the right hand of the Father. The "Christ of God," is not the Christ of the Pre-existerian, of the Arian, or of the Sabellian. Nor is he a Son by office, or by covenant engagements; but a son by nature and essence, "the Son of the Father, in truth and love," who came forth from his bosom to take a spotless human nature, in which he could suffer, bleed, and die.

But this poor creature, for the want of divine illumination, did not know this glorious Immanuel. He was to her, as the Prophet speaks, "a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness, and there was no beauty in him that she should desire him." (Isa. 53:3.) He appeared to her but as a poor despised Jew, as he is to thousands and millions in our day. Had she seen who he was by the eye of faith, and been favoured by a special revelation of his glorious Person, her faith would have received the great mystery of godliness, her hope would have taken firm anchorage in his glorious Person, and the love and affection of her soul would have flowed out to him as the glorious Immanuel "God with us." But she knew not who the Man of Sorrows was, and perceived not Deity shining through that visage more marred than any man's. Depend upon it, Satan will ply all his arts and arms against the Person of Christ; depend upon it, if you are wrong here, you are wrong everywhere; if you are right here by the teachings of the Spirit, you are right for eternity. If you have received into your heart, by the special revelation of God the Spirit, a knowledge of Christ's glorious Person, you are an heir of glory; but without it, eternal destruction will be your portion. How firm are the Scriptures here. "If ye believe not that I

am, ye shall die in your sins." (John 8:24.) "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also." (1 John 2:23.) "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." (4:15.) "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (5:12.)

But again. She knew not, from the want of divine teaching, that he was the divinely appointed Mediator between God and man. She did not know that he had come forth from the bosom of the Father, where he had lain from all eternity, and had come down to this world to save his Church and Bride from the lowest hell. She did not know and feel in her heart that he who stood before her at the well was the only Mediator and Intercessor between God and man. She did not see that the weary traveller was the Great High Priest over the house of God, in whom it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell, and that out of his fulness all his people should receive, and grace for grace.

Now, my friends, no sooner has living faith embraced the Person of Jesus (and that is the first object which faith lays hold of), than it embraces him as the divinely appointed Mediator. And how sweet and suitable is such a Mediator to a poor, sinful, crawling reptile, a wretch defiled, morning, noon, and night, with everything foul and filthy, who has broken the law of God a million times, and cannot keep it a single moment! 'How can I,' argues the soul, 'so full of sin and depravity, how can I approach with acceptance the great, glorious, and holy Jehovah? I cannot, I dare not!' 'But when it sees, by the eye of faith, a divinely-appointed Mediator, a glorious Intercessor, a great High Priest over the house of God: One that has shed his blood to put away sin; One who has righteousness to justify, and has a fulness of grace and glory to give to the poor, needy, and naked: as faith sees, as hope embraces, as love enjoys this, there is a coming to God through this divine Mediator; as the Apostle saith, "Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." (Eph. 2:18.) "For there is one God, and one Mediator

between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim. 2:5.) “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.) Our only access to God is through the Mediator whom he hath appointed. All your prayers, tears, sighs, and groans; all your religious thoughts, acts, and words, are worthless, utterly worthless, unless perfumed by the intercession of the only-begotten Son of God. See to this point: and I would, in all affection, charge it upon your conscience, that you look well how you approach the Father. Do you approach him through the Son of his love? Is there a solemn feeling in your heart, when you draw near to the throne, that you approach only through Jesus? Is there a believing reception of his atoning blood into your conscience as the only sacrifice that purges away sin, and of his justifying righteousness as the only robe of acceptance before God? See to it well, examine your conscience well upon this matter, for it is vital ground. See that you approach the Father through the Son of his love, and through him alone; for depend upon it, if you approach in any other way, you are but a presumptuous professor; there is no holy fire burning on the altar of your soul; nor will any answer come down but through this divinely appointed way.

Nor did this poor sinner at Jacob’s well know what stores of mercy and grace were locked up in the bosom of Jesus. She did not know him, as full of love, sympathy, and compassion. She did not know him as tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. She did not know that he was able and willing to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. She did not know his great and glorious name as “mighty to save.” She did not know the pity, kindness, gentleness, and tenderness that beat in his heart, and flowed out from his bosom towards every vessel of mercy. He was no austere Pharisee, nor rigid law-giver, but a tender-hearted Saviour. But this she knew not.

II.—There are two grand preliminaries, then, to every spiritual request. “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith

unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him.” All spiritual prayer, then, and supplication, depends upon a knowledge of these two things—a knowledge of the gift of God, and a knowledge of the Person of Jesus. What a light this casts upon what spiritual prayer is! How many persons satisfy their conscience with what they call prayer! They get up in the morning and lie down at night, and say a few words, which they call prayer, without thought or care to receive an answer of mercy and peace. Like persons in the habit of taking laudanum, they are uneasy till conscience has had its morning and evening dose of reading and prayer. Nay, even some of God’s people are here. Their consciences are too much like the stomach of the opium-eater, or of the crying child which the mother stills with Daffy’s Elixir. I am not against regular seasons of reading and prayer, for I try daily to practise them; but I cannot rest in the mere form. True prayer is far beyond time, posture, or place; it is something deeper, something higher, and something more spiritual and supernatural. In a word, it is the gift of God, who alone can pour upon the heart “the Spirit of grace and of supplications.” Wherever God the Spirit is our Teacher, he shews to us that spiritual and eternal life is the gift of God, and raises up in our minds a divine craving after a personal enjoyment of it. He also shews us the Person of Jesus as a divinely-appointed Mediator. And the same Spirit that thus reveals him in the heart, is also “the Spirit of grace and of supplications;” and teaches us how to pray, and what to pray for; as we read, (Rom. 8:26,) “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Thus, when we begin to feel what the gift of God is; and to know by divine teaching something of the glorious Person and work of Jesus, we begin spiritually to ask. And O, what a field of wants becomes opened up to the child of God, when the Spirit causes him to walk in the field of spiritual requests! The reason why there is so little prayer is, because there is so little felt necessity. It is necessity that forces prayer out of their

hearts. It is when we feel certain that we cannot communicate a wished-for blessing to ourselves, yet are sensible God can bestow it upon us, and that in a moment, that makes us spiritually groan our desires into the bosom of God. And this is the reason why God's people have to walk in such paths of tribulation, and have to wade through such heavy afflictions, temptations, and perplexities; and why they feel the way to heaven to be so rough, rugged, and narrow. It is to draw out the desires and petitions of their heart, that they may spread them before the throne. If a man can stand up, in a pulpit or out of it, without any necessities, or any feeling sense of his own ignorance and helplessness, and the deep depravity of his nature, how can he, with any consistency or an honest conscience, utter a word of prayer before God? This is the reason of so many mill-horse prayers in the pulpit, the pew, and the parlour. But just in proportion as the Lord the Spirit leads us into a knowledge of these two things—a knowledge of our wants, and of the supply of those wants; a knowledge of our malady, and of the appointed remedy; a knowledge of our ruin, and of the glorious salvation of the Son of God, just in proportion as the Spirit of God leads us into a knowledge of these two branches of divine teaching, will spiritual prayer rise up in our hearts. And out of our bosoms these two things can never be separated or dissociated. Men may say “We must not look at our depraved and sinful hearts; Christ is all in all.” But what is Christ to me, except in connection with my wants? If I never feel my sinfulness, what do I want of his blood to purge my conscience? If I never feel my helplessness, how can I want his strength to be made perfect in weakness? If I never know myself to be a blind, ignorant fool, can I want him to be my manifested wisdom? If I am never harassed by Satan's temptations, if I never groan under the body of sin and death, should I want smiles from his countenance, and words from his gracious lips? Men dare not in word dethrone Jesus; they take care not to do that: but they will take away everything that makes him precious to a believer. They dare not say that he is not the Son of God, that his blood does not

purge from sin, that his righteousness does not justify, and that a sweet enjoyment of his love is not to be felt in the soul: nay, these things they advocate, and pretend to make their boast of. But when we come to the wants, the maladies, and the necessities of the soul, to which all Christ's glorious perfections are suited, “O,” say they, “we do not want to hear about corruption.” But what are such speeches but really to dethrone Jesus? Why is he now sitting on a throne of mercy and grace? Is it not for the poor and needy, the helpless and the hopeless, the lost and undone? Is it not for the sin-sick and the self-sick? Is he not sitting on his mediatorial throne on purpose to save and bless such? If, then, you slight and despise the malady, you slight and despise the remedy also. To ridicule and condemn the sighs and cries of God's distressed people is to help Satan to remove Christ from his throne of mercy and grace, and dispossess him of his glories as the ever-living Mediator between God and man. When I walk through the streets of this city, and see the medicines in the chemists' shops, do I not know there are maladies to which they are suited? If sickness and disease were to cease in the nation, would not these drugs be needless? If there were no maladies, would not all the chemists' shops be closed at once? And would not all medical aid and skill cease too with the absence of the diseases they are employed to cure? So spiritually: if I have no maladies, no sins, no griefs, no temptations, no afflictions, no sorrows, what do I want to know of God's appointed remedy? If I have no felt sense of my misery and ruin, Christ is to me but a name, as he is to many who have him continually on their lips. So that, to speak against all experience of the malady, and brand it with the name of “corruption,” is nothing but a device of Satan to dethrone the Lord of life and glory, and to thrust him from the right hand of the Father as the Saviour of the lost.

III.—If this woman, then, had known these two things, she would have asked of Jesus. The necessities of her soul would have burst forth, and she would have asked of him that which her soul longed for. And what would he have given her? “Living water.” This

is the last point which time allows me to treat of. What does the Lord mean by “living water?” No doubt, he meant the same thing as “the gift of God,” the life of God in the soul, eternal life, for that is what Jesus is divinely appointed to bestow. “Living water!” I was speaking last Lord’s Day of the teaching and operation of God’s Spirit being set forth under the figure of water. We may, therefore, observe, that the life of God in the soul is pointed out by this striking figure. And the Lord calls it “living water,” in opposition to dead, stagnant, and I might say, stinking water.

Now, doubtless, this woman, if she had been asked, how she expected to be saved, would have answered, “by good works,” although she was living in fornication. I have not the shadow of doubt, if the question had been asked her, “good works” would have been the words on her lips, though all the while she was living in open sin.

“Living water!” “Living water” is opposed to such as is dead and stagnant: therefore, to all hypocrisy, formality, self-righteousness, presumption, resting on an arm of flesh, or trusting to our own good deeds. This “living water,” is the life of God in the soul, “springing up,” as the Lord speaks, (verse 14,) “into eternal life.” This the Lord would have given her. Had she asked for bread, he would not have given her a stone; and had she asked for a fish, he would not have given her a serpent. And had she asked for water, he would not have given her the dead, stagnant water of formality, but “living water,” ever flowing, ever bubbling and springing up, ever watering her soul, bedewing her heart, refreshing her conscience, reviving her spirit, and drawing up her affections towards heavenly things. He would have given her “living waters,” that her soul might live for ever, and not die; yes, live when time should be no more. He would have given it to her freely, graciously, and abundantly. He wanted no good resolutions for the future; he wanted it not to be purchased by alms-deeds, sighs, prayers, or tears. But he would give it, “without money and without price,” out of his covenant fulness, out of his ever-flowing and overflowing love. He

would have bestowed this “living water” upon her as an act of free and sovereign grace, whereby she would have been sealed as an heir of glory.

How blessed a thing is vital godliness! That is the thing I always wish to contend for. Not for forms and ceremonies, or doctrines floating in the brain, but for the life of God in the soul; the only thing worth knowing; the only thing to live by, and I am sure the only thing to die by. How different is vital godliness received into the heart and conscience, by the operation of God the Spirit, out of the fulness of Christ—how different is this fountain of living water from the stagnant dead water of lip service, formality, and hypocrisy! And sure I am, if our souls have ever been baptized into a spiritual knowledge of this heavenly secret; if ever we have tasted the sweetness, felt the power, and experienced a measure of the enjoyment of vital godliness in the heart and conscience, we shall want no other but living water. If we hear a preacher, we shall say, “Does he bring forth living water? or is he merely a man of strife and contention, sound in the letter, a very hair-splitter in the doctrines, but drawing out of an enlightened judgment, or an old and stagnant experience, a muddy draught that we have had to drink a thousand times over; or is there living water in his heart, and do its streams flow out of his lips, to water and satisfy our thirsty souls?” If we read books on religion, our eyes will be looking through their pages to see if we can find any living water bubbling and gurgling through them. If we converse with those who profess to love Jesus, and bear his name, our eyes will be looking, our ears will be listening, and our hearts searching if we can discover any streams of living water rising up in their soul. Nay, in all that we do for the Lord, or for those that fear his name, in every prayer, in every ordinance, we shall be, more or less, looking out for living water. Are we, who profess to be in the wilderness, like the thirsty traveller in the deserts of Arabia, panting after the wells and the palm trees? Do we know what it is, after long seasons of drought, when the living water has sunk well nigh out of sight, to find its streams again

springing up in the conscience? How living souls thirst after these revivings! We cannot now be satisfied with lip religion, pharisaical religion, doctrinal religion, a name to live while dead, the form of godliness without the power. A living soul can no more satisfy his thirst with mere forms and ceremonies, than a man naturally thirsty can drink out of a horse pond. He must have living water, something given by the Lord himself springing up in his soul.

But, does not the Lord say, that he will give it to those that ask it? "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." Shall we not ask, then, and seek for it? And will he deny us? Has he denied us in time past? Will he deny us in time to come? Has he not the same loving and compassionate heart now, as beat in his bosom towards this poor sinner at the well of Samaria? He still emboldens us to ask. He is now seated upon the throne of grace and mercy as the Mediator between God and man. And if, through mercy, we know something of the gift of God; and if through divine teaching, we know something of the glorious Person of Jesus, and have enjoyed a measure of its sweetness in our heart, sure I am, we shall ask, and our souls will receive the testimony of God in our conscience, that he will not deny us, but give unto us "living water!"

68 The Veil Taken Away

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening,
July 28, 1844

"Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away."

2 Cor. 3:16

The Apostle, in this chapter, is drawing a comparison between the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai, or the covenant of works; the other from Mount Zion, or the covenant of grace. The former he terms the "ministration of death," and of "condemna-

tion;" and the other, "the ministration of life," "of the Spirit," and "of righteousness." And he shews that though great was the glory of the covenant given from Mount Sinai, yet far greater is the glory of the covenant given from Mount Zion. The glory of the one being transient; and the glory of the other abiding. The glory of the one being that of killing; and the glory of the other that of making alive. The glory of the one consisting in condemning; and the glory of the other in justifying. So that, just as much as righteousness exceeds condemnation, as life excels death, and as the Spirit surpasses the letter; so does the glory of the covenant given from Mount Zion exceed the glory of the covenant given from Mount Sinai.

Speaking of himself, the Apostle says, "Seeing then that we have such hope" (a hope founded upon this better covenant of life and peace), "we use great plainness" (or "boldness," margin) "of speech. And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly to the end of that which is abolished;" that is, they could not look to the gospel, which is the end of the law as being perfectly fulfilled, because there was a veil over the face of Moses. Paul here alludes to what we read Exod. 34:29-35, that when Moses came down from the Mount, the children of Israel could not bear to look upon the glory that shone upon his countenance; and therefore, "he put a veil on his face till he had done speaking with them." This the Apostle shews was a typical and figurative act, and sets forth the veil which is over the heart: that as the veil over the face of Moses hid the glory of his countenance, so the veil upon the heart of man, in his state of nature, hides from him all the glory of God that shines forth in the gospel. He therefore adds, speaking of the Jews in his time, "When Moses is read," that is, the law and the testimony contained in the books of Moses, "the veil is upon their hearts," just in the same way as the veil was upon Moses' forehead. From this he takes occasion to utter the words of the text; which contains a promise to Israel, and also bears an experimental signification. "Nevertheless when it" (that is, Israel literally and spiritually) "shall turn to the Lord,

the veil shall be taken away.”

In looking, then, at this portion of Holy Writ, I shall endeavour, with God’s blessing, to show—what the veil is—what it is for Israel to turn to the Lord—and what it is to have the veil taken away. And may God the Spirit own his word with power to our consciences.

I.—There is, then a veil upon the human heart. And what is meant by the expression? We are not to understand by the word “veil” such as are now worn by women, which do not hide, so much as show off the features. The ancient veil worn by the Eastern women (and the same, I believe, is worn to this day), completely obscured the countenance. It was a thick covering which they wore over their face when they went abroad; it being considered to this day in the East highly indelicate that a single feature of a female’s countenance should be seen. Thus Judah did not know Tamar, though she was his own daughter-in-law, and of course he had often seen her, because “she covered herself with a veil.” (Gen. 38:14, 15.)

Thus also, we find, that the veil of the tabernacle, which separated the holy of holies from the holy place, was very thick; for it consisted of four distinct coverings, as we read (Exod. 36:35), “And he made a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen.” These four distinct pieces seem to have been quilted together with needlework, which we know was the case with the hanging for the tabernacle door (v. 37); and all these put together into one piece formed a thick, dense, impenetrable covering. The veil of the tabernacle was then more a curtain, or rather four curtains sewed one over the other, than what we understand by the word veil. And thus, by the veil upon the heart, we are to understand a covering, or curtain, so dense, thick, and close, as to exclude all light from penetrating through it; not merely shutting out the person from seeing, but also shutting out the person from being seen.

In looking, then, at the veil upon the heart of man by nature, we must take with us this idea of a dense, impenetrable covering, to understand what the Spirit of God means by the expression.

If we look, then, at the veil over man’s heart by nature, we shall find it to consist of covering upon covering. For instance:

1. There is the veil of ignorance. What a thick, dense, impenetrable covering is that! If we look back to the days of darkness and unregeneracy, in what dense ignorance did we walk. The very doctrines of grace, and the whole scheme of salvation, were hidden from our eyes, and we understood not a single truth of the gospel aright. Our minds were wrapped up in such thick clouds of ignorance, that we knew neither God nor ourselves, neither our state here or hereafter. This veil of ignorance spread over the heart seems spoken of, Isaiah 25:7, “He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations.” And again, “Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people.” (Isaiah 60:2.) And thus Paul testifies that the Gentiles walk, “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” (Eph. 4:18.)

2. But this is not the only covering that goes to make up this thick, dense, impenetrable veil. There is the veil of unbelief. So that could man by the dint of his natural faculties overcome his ignorance, and thus strip off one part of the veil, the other part, that of unbelief, would still remain. Look at the scribes and Pharisees; the Lord wrought such amazing and undeniable miracles, as we should think must have convinced them that he was the Messiah: as, for instance, the raising up of Lazarus from the dead. They saw him come out of the sepulchre with their bodily eyes at the word of Jesus; but it had no effect on their minds. They saw the blind restored to sight, the lame walk, and the deaf receive hearing; but it never wrought faith in their consciences. They were, as the Apostle says, “shut up in unbelief.” (Rom. 11:32, margin.) This is just our state by nature; unbelief has such possession of our hearts that we cannot believe the things of God till they are made known to us by divine revelation.

3. But again; there is the covering of self righteousness. What a

motley monster is man in his natural state! Full of evil, continually committing sin, daring God to his face by a thousand crimes, and yet setting up his own righteousness! We might just as well expect that a felon in Newgate, who is there awaiting in the condemned cell the merited punishment of his aggravated crimes, of his murders, robberies, and continued outrage against all human laws, should hope to come out of prison by his good deeds and obedience to the laws of his country, as expect such a vile wretch as man to hope to clamber up to heaven by the ladder of his good words, good thoughts, good works, and good intentions. But the veil upon his heart prevents him from seeing that by anything he can do he cannot please God. Self-righteousness in all its forms is so interlaced with every thought of our heart, so intertwined with every fibre of our natural mind, that though we know ourselves to be sinners, yet self-applause and self-complacency bid us do something to gain God's favour.

4. But again; there is the veil of superstition. What a hold has superstition over the minds of men! If we go into any country parish, what superstition universally reigns over the minds of those dead in sin! How church and churchyard, surplice and gown, font and altar, are well nigh worshipped! And in town, as well as country, in dissenter as well as in churchman, what superstitious feeling prevails; and how much passes off for religion and piety that was never wrought in the heart and conscience by God the Spirit! I believe there are many persons who cannot sin comfortably till they have said their prayers, and cannot launch out with an easy conscience into the pleasures of the world till they have gone to church or chapel. They must needs attend upon the ceremonies and forms of religion to get a license for sin, as a school-boy learns his task to obtain a holiday.

5. And then, there is the veil of prejudice. How deeply prejudiced are men's minds against the truth, and against all who profess or preach it! Have we ourselves not in time past walked in this path? What deep prejudice have our minds been steeped in against

the truths of God's word! And have we not looked upon the people who held and preached them rather as monsters than men! When I walk through the streets of the town in which I live, I can see sometimes prejudice staring out from the very eyes of the people, especially the well-dressed and respectable, whom I meet; and though they cannot, through mercy, bring anything against my life and conduct, so great is their prejudice because I hold and preach the truth, that I believe they look upon me as a worse character than an adulterer, a swearer, or a drunkard. The prejudice painted in their very features sometimes almost amuses, and sometimes annoys me; sometimes stirs up my pride, and sometimes makes me thankful that I differ from them, and suffer reproach for the Lord's sake.

6. And then, there is the veil of enmity. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." What bitter enmity there is in man against the humbling truths of the gospel, against all who live godly in Christ Jesus, and against everything spiritual and heavenly, or that breathes the Spirit of the Lord!

7. Then, there is the covering of pride. And O, what a dense veil is that, which, like an unclean bird, spreads its baneful wings over a man's heart, that he will not submit to the humbling truths of the gospel!

8. And then, there is the veil of hypocrisy, in which man is so deeply sunk, prompting him to every hypocritical word and action.

All these coverings, one upon another, are so spread over the heart of man by nature, that the truth of God, of itself, cannot reach him; so that he has no eyes to see, no ears to hear, no heart to feel, no conscience to submit to the power of truth. O, in what a sunken state man is! We never can abase man too much. O the gulph of misery and ruin into which he has fallen through the transgressions of our first parents! O the depths of depravity into which he has been hurled! O the bottomless abyss of destruction and guilt into which, when Adam fell, he cast himself and all his

race! But though so awful is man's state, yet, "the veil" upon his heart prevents him from seeing the depths of his own fall. This is one of the worst features of man's ruin, that it is hidden from him, and that he knows nothing of it till, through a miracle of grace, he is plucked out of the pit of horror, and saved from going down to the abyss of hell, with all his sins and crimes upon his head. Ministers, therefore, can never abase man too much, nor point out too clearly the awful abyss of ruin and degradation into which he has fallen; and the more they point it out, the more witness have they in the consciences of those who know something of these things by painful experience. But the veil on man's heart hides from him his own ruin; and till the veil in a measure is removed, he never knows, never sees, never feels one truth aright.

II.—Now the first work, (and this leads me to the second branch of the subject) of the Spirit of God on the heart, is, not to remove the veil, that is a second work, but to discover it. If I may use such an expression, the Spirit of God breathing on a man's heart, blows away a little corner of the veil spread over it; and then we begin for the first time to see and feel that there is a veil there. The beginning of knowledge is to learn our foolishness; the beginning of mercy is to feel our misery; the beginning of salvation is to know our condemnation; and the beginning of eternal life is to pass under the sentence of everlasting death. It is thus that the Lord, in his overflowing love to the objects of his choice, begins to deal with their consciences. The conscience is the place where God always begins, as the Apostle says in his own ministry, "Commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God:" He begins to deal with a man's conscience, when, by the secret light and life of his Spirit, he makes him see and feel something of his lost and undone state before God. Eternal realities thus are made to lie upon his conscience; the truths of God to come into his soul; and the entrance of God's word to give light to his heart.

Now where did your religion begin? It is a grand point to know where your religion began; for if the beginning be all right, all is

right; and if the beginning be wrong, is it not to be feared that all the rest is wrong? Did your religion begin with conscience, for that is the place where God begins? Were eternal realities laid upon your mind? Did a sense of your sinfulness come upon your soul? Did you feel what a ruined wretch you were in the sight of a holy God? Did you see what a veil by nature there was upon your heart? As a man begins to see these things, the veil is in a measure beginning to be removed; he begins to see eternal things in a clearer light, and as the veil thins away, to feel them with a more powerful life.

Now this leads him to "turn to the Lord." When God's truth comes into the conscience, and eternal realities lie close upon the mind, and we thus see and feel that there is a veil upon our hearts, we begin to turn to the Lord that the veil may be taken away. And there is no true turning to the Lord until these things are spiritually and experimentally felt.

But what does turning to the Lord imply? It implies a turning away from everything else. We never knew our need of a Saviour till conviction of sin was brought into the conscience; we thought we could be saved by a covenant of works till we knew something of the purity and spirituality of God's law. We thought ourselves wise in our own generation, yea, that "wisdom would almost die with us," until we felt our ignorance and blindness, and that there was a thick veil spread over our hearts.

Now, as the Lord the Spirit enables a poor sinner to turn to the Lord (for it is the Spirit's work to turn to the stronghold the "prisoners of hope,") he begins to unfold to him who the Lord is. This is the grand turning point, the Spirit fulfilling his covenant office in shewing a condemned sinner who the Lord is. This is the first discovery that there is a refuge; the first ray of gospel light whereby the way of escape is made known; the first dawn of hope in the soul; the first setting the feet in the way of peace. After the Lord has quickened our souls, for a time we often go, shall I say, blundering on, not knowing there is a Jesus. We think that the way of life

is to keep God's commandments, obey the law, cleanse ourselves from sin, reform our lives, and cultivate universal holiness in thought, word, and action and so we go, blundering and stumbling on in darkness; and all the while never get a single step forward. But when the Lord has suffered us to weary ourselves to find the door, and let us sink lower and lower into the pit of guilt and ruin, from feeling that all our attempts to extricate ourselves have only plunged us deeper and deeper, and the Spirit of God opens up to the understanding and brings in the soul some spiritual discovery of Jesus, and thus makes known that there is a Saviour, a Mediator, and a way of escape—this is the grand turning point in our lives, the first opening in the valley of Achor of the door of hope. And when the soul has once seen that there is a Jesus, and once felt a measure of the power of his resurrection, it never goes to any other quarter for pardon, justification, and salvation. We may compare the soul in this state to a mariner shipwrecked by night on a reef of rocks, and seeing the first dawn of light in the horizon. Does he not instinctively turn to the point where the sun is to rise? Are not his eyes anxiously fixed upon the dawning day? He does not look to the North for the sun to appear; he does not turn to the South, or to the West, but to the East, for there the dawn breaks, and there he keeps his eyes fixed till the sun rises. So with the poor shipwrecked soul cast away upon the shoals of despondency, and washed up on those rocks, where he fears he must starve or die. When the Spirit of God begins to open up with power in his conscience that there is a Jesus, that he is the only Mediator, that the Son of God has come down and taken a holy human nature into union with himself, and is now at the right hand of the Father, it is the first break of day, the first dawn of hope; and upon that bright spot does the shipwrecked soul fix his longing eyes till the Sun of Righteousness arises upon it with healing in his wings. It is a great step in a man's experience to turn wholly and solely to the Lord, and renounce all creature righteousness, all forms and ceremonies as a way of salvation. It is a great mercy to turn away from them, as the shipwrecked mariner

turns away from his sinking ship, and looks to the rising sun to shew him some way of escape, and thus afford him some gleam of hope.

But, as the soul turns to the Lord, it is with earnest prayer and supplication. As we read, Jer. 31:9, "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them." This is the way in which the Lord always leads the people of his choice;—he creates the want, raises up the power to ask in prayer, and then graciously answers the request. "I will yet, for this," he says, "be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." (Ezek. 36:37.) "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." (Jer. 29:12, 13.)

III.—And this leads us to the third branch of the subject—the taking of the veil away. There are three steps in experience connected with the veil upon the heart. 1. The knowledge of the veil being there. 2. The turning to the Lord, that he would take the veil away. 3. The removal of it; as the Apostle speaks in the text, and also intimates a little lower down: "We all, with open," or, as it is literally, "with unveiled face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord." The veil is taken away when the soul turns to the Lord. The light of his countenance, the beams of his grace, and the sheddings abroad of his mercy, dissolve and melt the veil away, just as the sun thaws away the winter snows.

1. And what does the soul see when the veil is removed? Till this dense covering was taken away, it saw nothing aright, heard nothing aright, felt nothing aright, but stumbled on in thick darkness. But when the soul turned to the Lord, and gave itself wholly and solely unto him, there was a discovery to faith of the glorious Person of Jesus, divine realities became manifested in the Spirit's light, and sealed upon the conscience by a measure of the Spirit's teaching. And this is what the Apostle speaks of in the next chapter, where he says, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowl-

edge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor. 4:6.) Till the veil is taken away, we do not see the glory of God shining forth in the Person of Jesus.

But what is it to see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God thus shining? It is to see all the perfections of God shine forth in the glorious Person of Jesus. We cannot know God out of Christ. He is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see.” (1 Tim. 6:15, 16.) “Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live.” (Exod. 33:20.) But the invisible God having sent his only begotten Son into the world, who is “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person;” and he having taken into union with himself a holy human nature, it is thus, as the Spirit of God gives us light to see by faith the Person of Immanuel, that we view the glory of God shining forth in the face of the God-Man Mediator. The Lord, therefore, gently chided Philip, when he said, “Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” (John 14:8, 9.)

2. But what do we see in the person of Jesus, when the veil is removed? We see in him all the perfections of God harmonize, and specially behold “justice and mercy meeting together, righteousness and peace kissing each other.” And we see in this great truth, which is all the comfort of a believing soul, how that “God can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” We see that God can pardon the sinner, and yet condemn the sin; that all the attributes of Jehovah shine forth in the face of Jesus, without clashing, without collision, and that the love, mercy, and grace of a Three-One God beam forth in the Person of Christ. We see that a propitiation has been made for sin; that atoning blood has been shed to satisfy all law-claims, “to make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness;” that a sacrifice has been

offered up which God has accepted; and a ransom paid which the Father has received as a complete acquittance of the debt due to divine and inflexible justice. When we see and feel this, the veil is removed. We may have been wearying ourselves, and we should have gone on wearying ourselves to the end of our lives, trying to make ourselves righteous, to put away our sins, to purge our consciences, and reconcile our guilty souls to God. We might go on heaping up prayer upon prayer, tear upon tear, sacrament upon sacrament, and mass upon mass, and yet after all sink down into a deserved hell. And there all will sink who are not experimentally acquainted with the propitiation made for sin through the sacrifice of the only begotten Son of God. Into that pit of horror will all sink, who put confidence in any other way of salvation than the meritorious sacrifice offered up on Calvary, or look to any other way of salvation than that propitiation which the Son of God has made by his obedience and blood. What virtue and efficacy there is in his blood to purge the guilty conscience! God the Spirit lead us deeply into it!

There is a great deal of cavilling in some men’s minds about the expression, “the blood of God!” ‘How,’ say they, ‘could the Godhead bleed? How could the Godhead suffer?’ But if it is not the blood of him who was God, I might just as well rely for salvation on the blood of one of the thieves that were crucified with him. What is Christ’s human nature? That is the rock on which many gallant ships have struck. It is not a person having a distinct existence apart from the Deity of Christ; but it is a nature: what the Holy Ghost calls a “Holy thing,” (Luke 1:35); “a body that God had prepared for him,” (Heb. 10:5) taken into intimate, mysterious, and inexplicable union with the Person of the Son of God. So that, whatever that human nature did and suffered, from its intimacy and union with the Son of God, the Son of God did and suffered. Did that nature bleed? It bled as having union with Deity; it being, so to speak, the instrument that Deity made use of. To use an illustration: as my soul touches an object through my hand, or

speaks its thoughts by my tongue; so Deity not being itself able to bleed, bled through the humanity. Did that nature suffer? It was not the mere suffering of a human person, as a man might suffer; but it was the suffering of a holy nature in intimate union with the Person of the Son of God. And did that nature obey? The Son of God obeyed through and with that nature. So that, to cavil at the expression, “the blood of God,” is nothing less than to strike a blow at a great fundamental truth. We might object, on the same ground, to the expression, “God our righteousness,” as the Prophet speaks, “And this is the name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our righteousness,” that is “Jehovah our Righteousness.” (Jer. 23:6). Who is our righteousness but the Son of God? And what was that righteousness but the obedience of his human nature? for God-head could no more obey than suffer and bleed; and yet Jehovah is our righteousness. And if we do not object to the expression, “the righteousness of God,” why should we cavil at the expression, “the blood of God?”

Now this is the grand mystery which faith embraces, and which is dear to the heart of every God-taught soul. What a power and efficacy, as the veil is taken off the heart, does faith see in that sacrifice! What a propitiation does it see made for sin by the blood of the Son of God! Faith does not view it as the blood of man! Can the blood of man put away sin? But when we see it as the blood of the Son of God, O what a value, efficacy, power, and glory shine forth in it! But till the veil is taken off the heart we cannot see it; nor can we, till the Spirit makes it experimentally known, learn what a divine reality there is in this blood to purge the guilty conscience.

3. So with respect to Christ’s obedience to the law; if his obedience were merely the obedience of man, it could not justify all the persons of his elect; but being the obedience of the Son of God, who “being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”—it becomes a justifying robe for every soul to whom it is imputed, and who, by the removing of the veil, takes a happy and blessed shelter under it.

4. Again. As the veil is taken off the heart, we begin to see and feel what a power there is in true religion, what a reality in divine teaching, and what a sweetness there is in the inward testimonies of God. Most men’s religion is nothing else but a round of forms. Some have their doings, some their doctrines, and others their duties; and when the one has performed his doings, the other learnt his doctrines, and the third discharged his duties, why, he is as good a Christian, he thinks, as any body; whilst all the time, the poor deceived creature is thoroughly ignorant of the kingdom of God, which stands not in word, but in power. But as the veil of ignorance and unbelief is taken off the heart, we begin to see and feel that there is a power in vital godliness, a reality in the teachings of the Spirit; that religion is not to be put on and put off as a man puts on and off his Sunday clothes; but when we come away from chapel we cannot take off our religion, fold it up, and put it away into the drawer, and there let it lie safe and quiet all the week. Where vital godliness is wrought with divine power in a man’s heart, and preached by the Holy Ghost into his conscience, it mingles, daily and often hourly, with his thoughts, entwines itself with his feelings and becomes the very meat and drink of his soul. But till the veil was taken away, we could put our religion on and off at pleasure; and were often glad to take off the tight Sunday coat, and slip on the easy week-day clothes.

As then we begin to see and feel the reality and power of vital godliness, it separates us from those who have only a name to live while they are dead; it makes us manifest as one of “the peculiar people;” and our friends and companions, nay, the only persons whose society we really love, are those who have felt divine realities by divine teaching. We can no more do with a dead profession of truth, than with a dead profession of error. We can no more make friends and companions of presumptuous professors, than of swearers, adulterers, or drunkards. And feeling, or at least desiring to feel, in our hearts, light, life, savour, dew, and power for ourselves, we look out for those who have experienced these things

themselves; and in whom we can read, if we have a discerning eye, the legible lines of God's Spirit written upon their conscience, or towards whom we can feel a sweet knitting of soul, as taught by the same Spirit the same realities which we believe the Holy Ghost has taught us.

Now when a man comes to this spot, to see and feel what a reality there is in the things of God made manifest in the conscience by the power of the Holy Ghost, it effectually takes him out of dead churches, cuts him off from false ministers, winnows the chaff from the wheat, and brings him into close communion with the broken-hearted family of God.

5. But as the veil is removed, the soul also begins to see and feel the workings of inward sin that it was previously ignorant of. The removal of the veil not merely shows us the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, but every thing contrary to that glory. The pride of our heart, the power of our unbelief, the enmity of our carnal mind, the awful hypocrisy, the daring presumption, the abominable treachery, the fleshy lusts, and all the obscene imaginations of our depraved nature, that will work in us in spite of all our groans and cries to the contrary—all this, as the veil is taken off the soul, becomes more and more manifested, and we have (and O, what a sight it is!) a sight of ourselves. Did ever a man see so filthy a sight as himself? When he looks down into the sewer of his own nature, does he not see every thing there, creeping and crawling, like tadpoles in a ditch, to disgust him?

But even this works together for good; for as a man feels a measure of light and life in his conscience, and sees and feels too more and more of the workings of his depraved nature, and the breakings forth of the hypocrisy of a treacherous heart, he is brought to look more simply and more singly to the glorious Person of the Son of God, and cast himself more sincerely and unreservedly upon that blood which cleanseth from all sin.

And thus, as the veil is removed from off the heart, he begins to drink more deeply into the spirit of the gospel, into the mind of

Christ, into the reality of the things of God, into union and communion with Jesus, into the solemn renunciation of himself, into an abhorrence of evil, and separation from the world, and learns to live a life of faith upon the Son of God.

But the veil is continually (if I may use the expression) flapping back again over the heart; it is not so taken away that no more darkness is felt, no more ignorance known, no more self-righteousness, and no more of its accompanying fruits perceived. It is removed as long as the Spirit shines, as long as the soul sees light in God's light. But the veil at times seems to come back over our hearts as much as if it never had been removed. We have to walk in darkness, and have no light; and frequently have to grope for the wall like the blind, and grope as if we had no eyes. We can see no beauty in Jesus, and can scarcely believe there is a Jesus. We can see none of our evidences; all seem clean swept away, and scarcely a landmark left; we can find no more cries and groans in our soul than in the emptiest professor, and can feel no more godly sensations or spiritual movements in our hearts than if we were deceived altogether. Now we fear that there has never been a single spark of grace in our hearts; for the word of God is hid from our view, the promises buried in impenetrable darkness, and past experiences covered with a thick, black cloud. This makes a man feel more of the veil on his heart than before. The feelings of darkness, when light does not shine; the sensation of misery, when mercy is not manifested; the sense of helplessness, when strength is not given; the experience of absence, when presence is denied; all these teach us what the veil is. But O, what profitable lessons are learnt in this dark valley of humiliation, in these trials, exercises, and temptations! How, by this experience, we learn more in what vital godliness consists! How the marrow of religion is more opened up in our conscience! How we learn more to cease from our own works! How we see more what a barren wilderness there is in our own hearts! And feeling how deceitful and hypocritical it is, we learn to place less confidence in it.

And when the Lord sees fit to bring the soul out of darkness, will it not make the light more precious? The gloom that hung over the soul, will it not make God's countenance more sweet when it comes? And the unbelief, the coldness, the deadness, the depravity, the hardness, and the apparent searedness of conscience which the soul has to grapple with, will it not make it prize more and more the teachings, leadings, and guidings of God the Spirit? And thus, by these various dispensations of God, we learn more to cease from man, to cease from ourselves, to cease from our own wisdom, to look more simply, more singly, more solely and wholly unto the Lord of life and glory, and to depend more upon the Spirit to work in us that which is well pleasing in his sight.

Let me just, in a few words, sum up the whole. Look at the three steps. The veil felt; the turning to the Lord; and the removal of the veil. These are the three steps in the divine life, commencing when it is first communicated to the soul.

Now, if you are a child of God, taught by the Spirit, you will know one or more of these branches. You will have learnt, first, what it is to have the veil over your hearts, under which you will groan and sigh: you will experience the darkness, hardness, deadness, depravity, hypocrisy, unbelief, and presumption of your carnal mind; and under it you may groan for months, and sometimes for years, before light, life, and power manifestly come to melt the veil away.

The next step is, to turn to the Lord with all our heart and all our soul; to see and feel that there is a Saviour; I do not mean in the judgment, but in the heart and conscience. This will produce a springing up out of ourselves to lie at the feet of the Lord; that we may receive divine life out of his fulness, and feel its powerful operations in the soul. To him will flow our desires, our supplications, our pantings, and our longings to know him and him only. This is the grand turning point.

And then comes the third step, the taking of the veil from off the heart; a discovery to the soul, by the Spirit, of the glory of God

in the face of Jesus; the inward reception into the heart and conscience of the Son of God with power; of his blood to cleanse the guilty conscience, of his righteousness to justify the naked soul, of his love as balm for every wound, and of all his attributes as God-Man, as suited to every want, every misery, and every sense of our wretchedness and ruin.

And this path of the just, as the light, shineth more and more unto the perfect day; so that the soul, as the Lord leads it on, becomes more and more acquainted with its vileness and his goodness, its worthlessness and his infinite worth, its guiltiness and his blood as purging from sin, its nakedness and filthy rags and his glorious robe of righteousness. And thus, as we sink into a deeper knowledge of ourselves, we rise higher into a knowledge of Christ; and as we are brought into the wilderness, God is more glorified by leading us in it. So that, while we sink to our right spot, a sinner saved by grace, we learn to put the crown of glory upon the head of him to whom alone it belongs, yielding the praise and thanksgiving to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, as one undivided, glorious, and ever-living Jehovah, both now and for ever.

69 Spiritual Poverty and Heavenly Riches

Preached at Trinity Street Chapel, Borough, London, on Tuesday Evening,

July 30, 1844

"Having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

2 Cor. 6:10

In the Gospel of Jesus Christ there are many apparent contradictions. I use the word apparent, for there are no real contradictions. What at first sight appears paradoxical and inconsistent is found, when we see it in the Spirit's light, to be perfectly consistent and harmonious with the whole scheme of revealed truth. The very glory of the gospel is, that it is a mystery; and if it is a mystery, there will be things in it apparently contradictory, and utterly irreconcilable by human reason.

The Apostle in this chapter has brought together some of these apparent contradictions, as worked out in his own experience. He says, "By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, yet true; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." To a natural man, to a reasoning mind, to one not initiated by divine teaching into the mystery of the gospel, what clashing and contradiction are to be found in these expressions! And yet, when seen in the light of the Spirit and known and felt in a gracious experience, all the apparent contradictions disappear, all the seeming inconsistencies are blessedly harmonised, and we taste a beauty and glory in the very paradoxes and very apparent contradictions. Mr. Hart, who of all men seems to have been led most deeply into experimental truth, speaks in similar language of Christian experience:

"Tis to credit contradictions,
Talk with Him one never sees;
Cry and groan beneath afflictions,
Yet to dread the thoughts of ease.
"Tis to feel the fight against us,
Yet the vict'ry hope to gain;
To believe that Christ has cleans'd us,
Though the leprosy remain."

With God's blessing, I shall attempt this evening to show how the apparent contradiction in the text is reconciled to, and is harmoniously consistent with, not only revealed truth, but also with the experience of every one taught of the Spirit. May the Lord in mercy crown the word with his blessing.

"Having nothing!" The Apostle might have, and doubtless had, some reference here to his needy state naturally. The Lord saw fit to keep him in a state of absolute dependence upon himself for temporals. He did not use, as he tells us, the liberty which he had as an Apostle to "live by the gospel" that he preached; but he consented to voluntary poverty that he might not "hinder the gospel

of Christ." So that, in a literal sense, the Apostle speaks here of "having nothing," as being completely dependent upon the Lord for the bread that he daily ate, and the clothing he daily wore. And yet, though such a beggar in temporals, rich in spirituals; though "having nothing," except what the Lord gave him as alms for his daily need, yet in the enjoyment of spiritual mercies, and in the possession of Christ in his heart, the hope of glory, "possessing all things."

But, I think, we should limit the Apostle's meaning; we should not get, so to speak, into the mind of the Holy Ghost in this passage, if we confined our interpretation merely to this point, that the Apostle by "having nothing" only meant that he had nothing in a temporal sense. We will take the expression in a higher sense, and place it upon another and more spiritual footing: we will view the Apostle speaking here, not so much of his temporal state as literary [literally?] dependent upon God for daily food; but consider him as speaking of his state spiritually. And thus we shall find, that the two clauses of the text, so far from clashing with or contradicting each other, meet, in the soul's experience, in a most sweet and blessed harmony. And we are borne out in this interpretation by the Apostle's own words in this very Epistle, (2 Cor. 12:11) where he says, "Though I be nothing." To "be nothing," and to "have nothing," are expressions that differ but little; so that we may bring the Apostle's own authority and his own interpretation to bear upon the text; and consider, that when he said "having nothing," his views were carried beyond this present temporal scene and the struggles for daily bread; that he had a higher reference, and looked at things in a spiritual point of view, when he spake of himself "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

Thus, then, if God enable us, we will unfold the two branches of the subject, and shew, what it is to "have nothing," and what it is to "possess all things" And then we shall see how these two opposites, or rather apparent opposites, so far from contradicting each other, are brought, in the experience of the child of God, sweetly

to harmonize.

I.—"Having nothing." Is that the experience of a man in a state of nature? It cannot be; we know it is not. Could any man, in a state of nature, honestly take such an expression into his mouth? Some might say, "Man has nothing by nature." It is true; but though that is his state, it is not his experience. Man by nature is in that spot in which we read (Rev. 3:7) the church of Laodicea was. I do not mean to say, that the Laodicean church was in a state of nature. She was a true church, though fallen; the grace of God was in her, though she had backslidden from that spiritual standing which she once occupied. But her language in her fallen state was that of every man in his unregenerate condition, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" though to the heart-searching eye of Omniscience she was "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

The Apostle, then, in using the expression, "having nothing," is not speaking of man in a state of nature, but of his own experience, and of the things he had spiritually felt and known. He was describing the state into which he had himself been reduced. I say, "reduced;" for we do not set out with this experience, nor do we come here in a day. There is a stripping, emptying process carried on by God the Spirit in the conscience; and it is only after we have passed through this stripping and emptying process, that we come into the experience of the Apostle, "having nothing." Until the Lord brings the soul down from its once lofty eminence, breaks to pieces its self-righteousness, and cuts from under its feet that ground on which it once proudly took its stand, it cannot come into the spiritual meaning of these words. The wealthy stock-broker that walks daily upon 'Change cannot honestly say he "has nothing," when he knows that he has his thousands; nor can any one say, spiritually, he "has nothing," while he has any stock of strength, wisdom, or righteousness left. But if this wealthy stock-broker, through some unsuccessful speculation, (mark, I am merely using this as a figure; I am not saying that speculation of any kind is

justifiable) were reduced to complete beggary, then he could say, he "had nothing;" and his conscience (if he had one, which few speculators have) could bear witness that he spoke the truth. Now I use this figure just to show the way in which the Lord deals with his people. When we first set out Zionward, we start full of self: we have no idea what God means to do with us. Our idea of getting to heaven is, by accumulating a treasure of good deeds, heaping up an amount of piety, and living a life whereby we may propitiate God, and secure to our souls a seat in glory. Nature never can pursue any other path; nature knows no other way to heaven, but to climb up by the ladder of good works, and to crane itself up to glory by working at the winch of human merit. But we read, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa. 55:8, 9.) Our thoughts are, to make ourselves rich; his thoughts are, to make us poor. Our thoughts are, to increase in piety; his thoughts are, to make us sink down into the ruins of self. Our thoughts are, to advance day by day in sanctification and holiness, and continually increase the amount of good works we mean to produce; his thoughts are, to teach us feelingly our helpless and hopeless state, and to strip us of all boasting in the flesh. But we struggle against this humiliating process. Our proud heart rebels against God's dealings with us in this manner; and being ignorant, for the most part, of what the Lord is doing in us by thus stripping us of the fancied treasure we are getting together, our proud, presumptuous, hypocritical heart rises up in perverseness and anger against it. We do not often see what the Lord is doing with us until some months, perhaps years, after we have been put into the furnace. I am sure I can say so for myself. We certainly do not know, at the time, what the Lord is doing with us, when he is stripping us of our fancied religion. But when we come out of the furnace, and the Lord makes it clear to us how much tin and dross we have lost, we see the reason why we were put there. When we

come out of the waters, we are glad we were sunk there, though we may have been half drowned in the process, when we see our filthy rags left at the bottom.

There is a word in the song of Hannah (a song I am very partial to, for it is a sweet epitome of the Lord's dealings with his people) that throws a light upon the text. In reviewing God's dealings with her, that gracious woman says, "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up." (1 Sam. 2:6, 7.) What a wise and well-taught woman Hannah was! She knew both sides of the question. She was not for liberty without bondage, pardon without guilt, mercy without misery, salvation without condemnation, the riches of Christ without the poverty of the creature. She (as we find 1 Sam. 1) had passed through an experience that had taught her better things. She had poured out her soul before the Lord in groans and cries, and he had manifested his mercy to her conscience. And thus she had learnt both sides of the question. She had known black, as well as white; darkness, as well as light; sorrow, as well as joy; stripping, as well as clothing; humbling, as well as raising; a furnace to pass through, as well as coming out like tried gold; floods of water to wade in, as well as to stand upon the bank blessing and praising the Lord. That gracious and wise woman, speaking by divine inspiration, has left this sentence upon record; and there it stands as a bulwark against all those who say, "That a man can know Christ and salvation without any stripping and emptying process;" "the Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich." Now Hannah must have had an experimental meaning in these words. She had no temporal necessities; her husband Elkanah was not a poor man; his coming up to Shiloh yearly, with his wives and children, shows that he could afford to travel. And we read, that "he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions but to Hannah he gave a worthy (or "double") portion." We hear only of her soul trouble; therefore, when she said, "The Lord maketh poor;" she must have had refer-

ence to the spiritual dealings of God with her soul. Taking, then, these words of Hannah as throwing light upon what Paul says here, "having nothing," we see that the Apostle means spiritual poverty and nothingness.

The Lord makes poor by taking away fancied riches. To use a figure, (and sometimes figures throw light upon truth,) a man may have invested all his property in a bank. He may get up in the morning, and please himself with thinking what a wealthy man he is; but before the hour of noon tidings come that the bank is broken; that, like many banks, it has been nothing but a swindling concern; and that he is completely ruined. Before the tidings came, he thought himself rich; and yet all the time his wealth was but fancied, only a bubble. While he was counting and calculating on the wealth which he thought so securely invested, it had all been swindled away months and years ago; and he finds himself in the deepest poverty, when he fancied himself abounding in riches. So spiritually, how many persons think they are sure to go to heaven; their hope is firm and steadfast; they never doubt their faith; they have no exercises of mind, no trials, no desponding seasons, no harassing temptations, no fiery darts from Satan; and they are quite confident that they are safe for eternity. But unless God the Spirit has revealed salvation with power in their conscience, their hope stands upon a slippery foundation. It will not do to take the Scriptures, and get your religion out of them, unless God seal mercy and pardon with power upon your conscience. Like the man whose money was all in the bubble bank, you may fancy yourself rich when you are really a bankrupt, and dream of wealth in the midst of poverty. You may resemble the man of whom we read (Isa. 29:8), "It shall be even as when a hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty; or, as when a thirsty man dreameth, and behold he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite." He dreams in the night, that he is sitting down to a banquet; but the pangs of hunger convince him to the contrary in the morning. So a man

may dream and delude himself by thinking how much religion he possesses; but when the Lord begins to show him what vital godliness really is, and convinces him that all saving faith stands, not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God; and that he has not a grain, nor an atom, but what the Spirit works in the heart, he sinks down into the depths of soul poverty. Grace makes a man's heart honest in the fear of the Lord; and therefore when he weighs up his religion in the "balances of the sanctuary," unless he feels that faith, hope, and love have been powerfully wrought in his conscience, he begins to find how much of his confidence stands in the flesh, and how much that he fancied to be a safe foundation for eternity was built upon nothing else but delusion or fleshly excitement.

Now it is from feeling this, and experiencing a measure of the stripping hand of God in the conscience (and I have known what it is to roll upon my bed in trouble whilst being stripped of my false religion, though I believe that the root of the matter was in my soul at the time), that the Lord drives his people out of the refuges of lies in which many a professor hides his deluded head. For instance, there is

1. Our own righteousness, that Babel by which we would fain climb up into heaven, and escape the rising waters of the flood; that proud tower must be levelled, and fall into complete ruin. The Lord, by bringing the law in its purity and spirituality into the conscience, discovers to us what sin is, and thus opens up the depravity of the heart and the vileness of our nature. There are many people who are strongly opposed to hearing anything about sin; they cannot bear to have "corruption," as they call it, even touched upon. But depend upon this, if you never know the malady, you can never prize the remedy. It is not very pleasant to go into a hospital, and look at the sores of the patients there; but what takes the patient there but the very sores which are so disgusting to the eyes of the healthy?

So stout, unwounded professors may say, "This gloating over corruption and the sores of human nature, how disgusting it is!" It

is disgusting to a healthy man to look at these sores. But if the man had a wound made in his conscience, and was covered with bruises and putrefying sores, how glad he would be to be admitted into the spiritual hospital; to have Jehovah-rophi, "the Lord my healer," come to his bed-side, and heal him by a touch of his gracious hand, and the application of the balm of his blood to his conscience.

2. So with our own wisdom. I do not know how it is with you; perhaps the Lord has led you otherwise. But when I set out, what a wonderful stock of wisdom I thought I should get from reading the Scriptures, and good men's books; and I thought, by such helps I could easily understand the truth. But the Lord has to teach us different lessons from this. I have been to the University, have learnt languages, studied commentators, and thought to make myself wise by cultivating my natural understanding. I have passed through all those things which are by many considered such wondrous helps; I bought book upon book, and commentator upon commentator. And what did all these helps do for me? They never gave me one grain of true wisdom. I value all these things in their proper place. But there is no greater delusion than to think we can learn the truths of God by the exercise of creature intellect. When the Lord begins to open up his truth in our conscience, he shows us (and that is the main point I am aiming at) our own folly, and that though we may "know his mysteries" and "have all knowledge," yet, short of his teaching, we know nothing as we ought to know. This is what the Apostle says, (1 Cor. 3:18) "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." We thus become fools for Christ's sake; and learning what ignorant besotted wretches we are strips us of our fancied wisdom, and brings us down to our true level. You would not think it, but I assure you it is true; I have, as I told you before, learnt languages, studied commentaries, and exercised my mind upon the Scriptures; but I have often felt, that a poor ploughman who only just knew how to hold the stilts of the plough through the field, if the Lord teach him more deeply by his grace than myself, is a

wiser man than I. And the veriest dolt that cannot read a word in a book, and does not know great A from great B, if the Lord but teach him, knows better and deeper the meaning of the word of God and the nature of the kingdom of heaven, than I, or any man, ever could by all our study of God's word distinct from that teaching. When, then, we come to know and feel in our conscience that divine teaching is the only source of all true knowledge, the pride of human wisdom is brought down. And what a mercy it is to be brought there!

3. So again, with respect to our own strength. How strong we think we are when we set out in the divine life! We do not want God to strengthen us against temptation; we may not dare actually to say so; but we never think of the Lord's keeping us, or of his strength being made perfect in our weakness. We have little idea of being guided and kept continually by him that "our footsteps slip not," and of his power being thus made known. But we go on leaning, as we think, upon the Lord and depending upon him, but in a great measure, in reality, depending upon ourselves. After a time, however, we begin to find our strength fail us; we have no power to stand against the temptations that attack us; our inward slips and falls, and the idolatrous workings of our depraved nature, startle and alarm us. From these things we painfully learn our weakness, and come to that spot where the Apostle was, when Christ said to him, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9.)

4. So with respect to holiness and inward sanctification. There is much talk about holiness. That "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," is most certain; and that there is a holy principle which the Lord communicates to every man to whom he gives a new nature, is most certain also. But how often is mere fleshly holiness mistaken for the inward sanctification of the Spirit! And until we learn painfully that we have no real holiness of nature's growth, and until we are made to know our own vileness and defilement, we never can learn what gospel holiness is. As long as the Lord lets us, we whiten the sepulchre, and make the outside of the cup and

platter clean. But when we painfully feel what defiled wretches we are by nature and practice, what vile thoughts fill our mind, what perverseness is working and bubbling up from the bottom of our heart, we cry out with the leper, "Unclean, unclean;" and with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

And thus, as the Lord leads us into the secret, we come into the experience of the Apostle—"Having nothing." Now I would just direct your thoughts for a few moments in the way in which the Lord brought his Apostle here. What an unheard-of way it was! It is enough to strike our minds with wonder and astonishment. He took him up into the "third heaven," (as we read 2 Cor. 12:2) to that blissful abode of eternal happiness and purity, where he saw and heard things "not lawful," nor "possible," for a man to utter; and his soul was bathed in such unutterable bliss and overwhelming joy, that he knew not whether he was in the body, or out of the body. But did this teach him his weakness? Not so; he learnt no weakness there: for we read, "Lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations." The pride and presumption of his carnal mind would puff him up; as Hart says,

"The heart uplifts with God's own gifts."

There was "given to him, therefore, a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure." Now here we have the experience of the Apostle in learning the secret of his own weakness. A "messenger of Satan" was sent "to buffet him." There is something very expressive in that word; it means literally, "beating a man with a fist." Here, then, we have the Apostle coming down from the "third heaven," and the Lord sending "a messenger of Satan to buffet him." Whatever this thorn in the flesh was, this vile temptation, as an emissary of the Devil, beat his face to a mummy, smote him with the fist of wickedness, and by these infernal assaults brought him into the greatest distress and horror of mind. Under the pressure of this "thorn in the flesh," "this messenger of Satan," (some vile temptation, no doubt,

perpetually haunting and harassing his soul) “he asked the Lord thrice that it might depart from him.” Now what was the Lord’s answer? “My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength,” (not thy strength) “is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore,” says the Apostle, “will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” He could bear the very buffetings of “the messenger of Satan,” he could endure the rankling “thorn in the flesh,” he could submit to the vile temptation that perpetually haunted him, in order that he might find the strength of Christ made perfect in his weakness.

But what a mysterious dealing was this! That this highly favoured man of God should come down from the “third heaven” to the very gates of hell, (that is not too strong an expression, for “the messenger of Satan” came from hell)—that he should sink, I say, in soul feeling to the very gates of hell, there to be buffeted by “the messenger of Satan;” and all to teach him a lesson that heaven did not teach him, the strength of God made perfect in weakness! Do you not think, my friends, that if we are to learn our weakness, we must learn it in the same way? How did Paul get his religion? And must we not get ours, in our feebler measure, through the same channels, by the same means, and by the same inward teachings? If we are to learn the secret of Christ’s strength, it is not by making daily advances in fleshly holiness, and getting stronger in self day by day. It is not by old nature being so mended and improved, as by and by to be shaded off into grace, just as the colours in the rainbow are so harmoniously blended that you can scarcely tell where the one ends and the other begins. For this is what is really meant by “progressive sanctification,” that the old nature is so gradually softened and blended into grace, that we can scarcely tell where the old man ceases and the new nature commences. I say, did the Apostle learn Christ’s strength in that way? No: but by being buffeted by Satan’s messenger, and thus being beaten out of his own strength, he found Christ’s strength made perfect (what a word that is, perfect!) in his weakness.

If, then, you know not experimentally the meaning of the expression in the text, “having nothing” in self, you may depend upon it, your religion, however highly you may think of it, is but a delusion; or if you have not learnt it in some measure as Paul did his, in the experience of a feeling heart. I am not setting up a rigorous standard for conformity; but we must all learn our weakness and Christ’s strength in the same way that the Apostle learnt his. If you know anything of Christ it must be by learning what you are by nature, and by finding in him a remedy for every malady, and a mercy for every misery.

II.—Now this leads me to the second part of the text, “Possessing all things.” I hinted that these two clauses of the text, so far from being really contradictory, had a most blessed and harmonious consistency. They dovetail into each other; and so far from being inconsistent, heighten and illustrate each other. When we look at a beautiful picture, we do not say, that the shade disturbs or destroys the light, or that the light disturbs and destroys the shade: but we see that the light and the shade mutually relieve each other. So in a beautiful prospect, sunlight and shadow do not destroy each other; but the light sets off the shade, and the shade sets off the light. The light and the shade are really contradictory; but the contrast enhances the beauty of the landscape. It is true, a reasoning man may say, “Having nothing and yet possessing all things! It is a flat contradiction.” We may fancy an infidel, or a person that had never seen the Bible, picking up a leaf in the street, and reading, without knowing it to be the word of God, this list of contradictions. Would not the pride of his heart rise up, and would he not throw it away with scorn and say, “The man that wrote it is a fool.” But seen in the Spirit’s light, we find that so far from contradicting each other, they beautifully harmonize.

For instance. “Having nothing,” that is the needful preparation, the indispensable preliminary to “possessing all things;” and only so far as we “have nothing,” do we “possess all things.” But how do we possess all things? Not in self; that is very clear. We pos-

sess all things in Christ. We find the Lord himself, if I may use the expression, puzzling his opponents by the apparent contradiction between those Scriptures that speak of him as God, and those that speak of him as man. For example; he asked the Pharisees, “What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?” (Matt. 22:42-45.) The difficulty was, to reconcile how David could call him Lord, if he were David’s son? How could the son be Lord, and the child reign over the father? Now that difficulty could not be explained except by acknowledging Christ’s divine nature, in which he was David’s Lord; and his human nature, in which he was David’s son. By seeing the union of the two natures in one glorious Immanuel this apparent contradiction disappears, and we see a blessed harmony in the very seeming inconsistency. So in this passage, “having nothing, and yet possessing all things”—how can that contradiction be reconciled? It is thus—”having nothing” in self, “possessing all things” in Christ. And just in proportion as I have nothing in self experimentally, so I possess all things in Christ. For my own beggary leads me out of self to his riches; my own unrighteousness leads me, under the Spirit’s teachings, into Christ’s righteousness; my own defilement, into Christ’s sanctification; my own weakness, into Christ’s strength; my own misery, into Christ’s mercy.

But how do we “possess all things” in Christ? Let us take for our guide what the Lord the Spirit says in that striking passage, “Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” (1 Cor. 1:30.) Let us see, then, how of God Jesus is made these things unto us.

1. Look we first, then, how he is made righteousness. Assuming that the Lord has, by his inward teaching, brought us down to poverty and beggary, our own righteousness has disappeared; we have “seen an end of all perfection, and found God’s law exceeding

broad.” Now this has prepared our soul for the reception of Christ’s righteousness. I do not wonder that men who hold freewill views should call Christ’s imputed righteousness “imputed nonsense;” such blasphemies (for they are blasphemies) do not strike me as wonderful. As long as we hold the principle of freewill in the creature, all that Christ is and has for his people is nonsense, because it is giving us what we do not want, bestowing on us a treasure we do not stand in need of; so that the expression, however blasphemous (and it is most blasphemous), is perfectly consistent with the whole scheme of human freewill and creature righteousness. But when the Lord makes known by his teaching in the conscience, that we have no righteousness; that, as the Prophet speaks, “all our righteousness are as filthy rags,” (and what a figure is that!) and convinces us that we must have a perfect righteousness in which to stand, or sink into hell under the overwhelming wrath of God; as the Spirit opens our eyes to see the glorious righteousness of the Son of God, and that all the obedience, both acting and suffering, of Jesus is imputed to those that believe on his name—having none of our own, we are led, taught, and guided to embrace this imputed righteousness as all our justification before the throne of God. And thus the deeper we sink into a conviction that we have no righteousness of our own, and the more we trample under foot our own filthy rags, the higher do we rise in an experimental reception of Christ’s glorious righteousness as suited to all our necessities. Thus, not having any righteousness of our own, not an atom whereby God can be pleased, we indeed “have nothing;” yet, in having Christ’s righteousness, we “possess all things.” We possess a full satisfaction made to God’s righteous law; all the demands of God are honoured, justice is completely fulfilled; not a single atom is missing, not a single iota deficient, not a thread in the garment wanting. What a beautiful picture has the holy Ghost made use of in Psalm 45:14, to show us Christ’s imputed righteousness, where, speaking of the Queen, he says, “She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework.” What a sweet expression that is, if

I can explain it without vulgarising it! Every stitch in the raiment of needlework must have had the needle to pass through it. And O, what a succession of laborious stitches must the raiment of needlework have gone through in which the church is attired! Now, when we look at every holy thought that passed through Christ's mind, every holy word that dropped from Christ's lips, every holy action performed by Christ's hands; at every holy emotion, every holy prayer, every act of obedience, from the moment that he came into the world till the moment he died on the cross, we see how stitch by stitch the justification of the church was wrought out. We thus see how all the demands of the law were completely satisfied, and how the Queen stands before her Bridegroom in the raiment of needlework. And when Jesus looks upon the raiment of needlework, he sees that every part of that raiment has been accomplished by his own hands. Thus, however needy and naked we are as to our own righteousness, when standing in his righteousness we possess "all things," and we want no more.

2. So with respect to wisdom; for he "of God is made unto us wisdom." We have none; not an atom, not a grain of true wisdom. But Christ is "made unto us wisdom," in all the circumstances of life, in all the difficulties of the way. So that we cannot come into any condition or circumstance of difficulty, for which there is not a provision in his wisdom. Having none of our own, in him we possess all wisdom.

3. So with respect to strength. Strength of our own we have none. We are all weakness, and cannot stand a day. People talk of their firm standing; but if God were to deal with them, as with Job, take away the hedge, and let Satan come upon them with one of his temptations; if he did not support them, they would be at once swept away. Christ being strength to the soul, he supports it in every state into which it may come. Not having any of our own strength, we have the strength of God; not the strength of a man, like ourselves, but the strength of God in every state. So that, as the Lord said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Our sufficiency

is in his strength, not in our own. Our strength fails when we need it most. His strength is suited for every place, for every case, every condition, every circumstance; so that a man may say, "Christ is my strength; I have therefore strength; for I have just as much as is suited to my day;" as the promise is, "As thy day is, so thy strength shall be."

4. And so with respect to sanctification. We have none in ourselves; but Christ of God being made unto us "sanctification," we have in him all holiness. Holiness is to have Christ dwelling in our hearts; to have him making our bodies his temple, and working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight. He is the fountain of holiness. There is an outward sanctification, whereby the church was sanctified in him before the foundation of the world; and an inward sanctification by his indwelling presence. Shall I go then to the filthy streams, or to the fountain of living waters? I might as well dip a cup into the common sewer, or fill a goblet from the puddle that rolls down the dirtiest street in London, while a fountain of pure water was at hand, as look to my own holiness, when "the holy child Jesus," the Son of God, is sanctification to all that believe in his name; inward sanctification by his indwelling Spirit, and outward sanctification by his covenant headship.

So I might similarly carry out every other circumstance. Happiness, in this world, we have none; life is a blank; afflictions, troubles, and trials are our lot here below, for "through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom." Can we find comfort here? It is blighted. When the Lord drove Adam out of paradise, he planted the cherubims there with the flaming sword pointing every way; and man will never enter this paradise again below. But in Christ we possess all things.

Thus the Lord leads us into these two branches of divine truth, by showing us first that we have nothing, and then, that in him we possess all things. There are two rooms in the chambers where God brings his people, as he says, "Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers." These are the two rooms in the spiritual cham-

bers—the room of self-abhorrence, and the room of admiration of Jesus; the room of humility, and the room of exaltation; the room of poverty, and the room of riches; the room of beggary on our part, and the room of wealth in him; the room where all that the creature has is felt to be a blank, and the room where all that Jesus gives him, and all that Jesus has, is seen to be the source of eternal bliss and happiness. So that these two branches of divine truth, so far from clashing with each other, sweetly, gloriously, and blessedly harmonize. And just in proportion as we are let down into the one, we are led up into the other; and just as much as we know spiritually, experimentally, and vitally of the one as “having nothing,” just so much shall we know spiritually, experimentally, and vitally of the other to “possess all things.”

70 The Secret of the Lord is with Them that Fear Him

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning,
August 4, 1844

*“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him;
and he will shew them his covenant.”*

Psalm 25:14

There is no truth more offensive to the carnal mind, nor one more sweet to those taught of God than this—that true religion is of a spiritual and supernatural character. That God should dwell in man; that the blessed Spirit should condescend to be our teacher; that we know nothing except through this divine tuition; that all saving faith stands wholly and solely in the power of God; and that there is no true religion independent of the inward work and witness of God the Spirit in the conscience—such a creed as this may well raise up all the scorn of the natural mind. But take away the Spirit's work, and what is left? Nothing but a dead carcass of forms. There can be but two kinds of religion—the one outward, and the other inward; the one natural, and the other spiritual; one that stands in forms and ceremonies, and the other that stands in

the communications of mercy, grace, and truth out of the fulness of Jesus. So that if a man deny the inward teachings of the Spirit of God to be the sum and substance of religion, he has no other refuge but Popery; and, to be thoroughly consistent, he should declare himself a Papist at once; for there is no real stopping-place between vital religion wrought in the heart and conscience by the power of God the Spirit, and that which stands in external forms, rites, and ceremonies.

But it is the especial privilege of God's people, and when enjoyed it is the very comfort of their souls, that all vital godliness is wrought in their hearts by the power of God. They are well convinced that they have no more religion, and no less religion, than is brought into their conscience with divine power. To have a measure of this heavenly teaching, and to live under the enjoyment of it, constitutes all the happiness that a child of God can really feel here below. He learns this, not only from the presence of it when divinely communicated, but also from its absence when these blessed communications are withdrawn and suspended.

In the text we find the Holy Ghost speaking of “a secret.” We need not wonder, therefore, that vital godliness is known but to a few. If it is “a secret,” it is evident it is not understood and known by all; the very essence of a secret being that it is confined to a few. And if there be a secret in religion (and such the Holy Ghost declares there is), it shows that vital godliness is confined to those only to whom the secret is made known by the power of God.

But if we look at the text, we shall see there are certain characters spoken of to whom this secret is discovered, and a promise also is made to those characters with whom the secret is. Thus, if God enable, we may take up the text in three leading divisions, and show who the characters are that “fear the Lord”—how “the secret is with them”—and what a promise the Lord has made to such, “he will shew them his covenant.”

I.—How much fear is spoken of in the word of God! But in order to understand what the Holy Ghost means by the term,

which he so frequently employs, “the fear of God,” we must bear in mind that there are two distinct kinds of fear. There is a servile fear which dwells in the carnal mind, and which devils, reprobates, and hypocrites may experience; as we read, “the devils also believe and tremble.” (James 2:19.) Thus “Felix trembled,” when Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” (Acts 24:25.) And the mariners on board with Jonah “feared the Lord exceedingly” (Jonah 1:16), so that they offered sacrifices, and made vows. This is the fear of which we read, 1 John 4:18; “Perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment; he that feareth is not made perfect in love.” And it is the same fear which the Apostle Paul speaks of Rom. 8:15; “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.” This then is a servile fear, that has its dwelling in the carnal mind; and was manifested in Adam, when he hid himself from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden; in Cain, when his countenance fell as being the murderer of his brother Abel; and which discovered itself also in Saul, in Ahab, in Herod, and in other characters of whom we read in the word of God.

But “the fear” to which so many blessings are annexed, and which is spoken of in the text, is the filial fear that dwells in the new man of grace raised up by the Spirit of God, and is the sole privilege, the alone portion of those whom God has chosen in Christ, and made to be heirs of his glory. This filial fear is a new covenant blessing; as we read, “I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.” (Jer. 32:40.) It is also a grace of the Spirit. “Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” (Heb. 12:28.) And it is the beginning of wisdom. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Ps. 111:10.) It being the first grace in point of exercise that the Spirit of God draws forth in the conscience.

How many blessings are promised to and connected with this

filial fear! For instance, we read, “The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him.” (Ps. 33:18.) “The angel of the Lord encampeth around them that fear him.” (Ps. 34:9.) “Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord.” (Ps. 112:1.) “The Lord will fulfil the desire of them that fear him.” (Ps. 145:19.) In fact, you can scarcely find any blessing of the highest nature, which is not more or less connected with the fear of God. And so far from this filial fear of the Lord being checked, much less cast out by divine manifestations, and by the shedding abroad of the love of God, it is only heightened thereby. The “fear of the Lord,” that begins at the quickening of the soul into divine life, deepens with every fresh teaching, and is increased by every fresh communication. Being a member of the new man, it is nurtured by the food wherewith the new man is fed; and thus, as we make progress in the divine life, so far from this fear being weakened, it becomes more deepened and strengthened. Thus it is not only compatible with, but ever accompanies consolation and enjoyment; as we read, “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” (Acts 9:31.) How these two things are brought together—“the fear of the Lord, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost;” and it is spoken of as the highest attainment of the church, when she is blessed with these two graces at the same time in lively exercise. Nay, more, however high in filial confidence the soul may rise, fear will always rise with it. True confidence is strengthened just as filial fear is deepened; for we read, “In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence.” (Prov. 14:26.) So that so far from confidence, assurance, and enjoyment weakening fear, they only strengthen it. Let the soul rise to the highest point of divine consolation, fear will rise equally, I might say, increasingly with it. For the more we spiritually know of the character of God, the more will godly fear of his great majesty be experienced in the soul. Wherever, then, you find in yourself, or others, confidence, or what is called assurance, and do not see the fear of God accompanying it, be sure that such confidence does

not spring from the inward teaching of God the Spirit in the soul. For the fear of God, so far from being weakened, much less annihilated or cast out by true confidence and the genuine consolations of God the Spirit, is only deepened and heightened thereby. Apply this test when you hear persons speaking of their assurance; it will unmask a good many.

But this “fear of God” must have its foundation in some spiritual and experimental discovery of God. We cannot fear God until we know him; and we cannot know God until in some measure he reveals himself with power to our conscience. This, then, is the beginning of all true religion; this is the foundation of all vital godliness; this is the starting-place from which every living soul begins to run the race set before him—an inward discovery of the character of God by the revelation of the Holy Ghost through the Scriptures. This makes a deep, solid, abiding, eternal impression on the soul; for until the Spirit of God shows unto us and gives us to know something of the holy, spiritual, pure character of God, we cannot have any knowledge of him; and if we know him not, it is impossible for us to fear him.

But wherever the fear of the Lord is in the conscience, there will be fruits flowing out of it. We judge of a tree by the fruits it brings forth; and we judge of the extent of spiritual teaching by the effects manifested. If, then, the fear of the Lord be in our hearts, there will be certain effects and fruits flowing out of that fear. There will be, as this fear is in exercise, an abhorrence of evil, deadness to the world, separation in heart and spirit from those who are immersed in it: a desire to please God, and a fear to offend him; a living as under his immediate eye; there will be the workings of a tender conscience in our bosom; a sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin; a flowing out of godly simplicity and sincerity, and an earnest desire to live and die under the immediate teachings and testimony of God in our conscience.

There are indeed many of the people of God who cannot rise in strong faith, nor feel an assurance that all their sins are pardoned;

they cannot cry, “Abba Father;” with an inward spirit of adoption; and yet know something spiritually and experimentally of the fear of God working in their conscience. This is quite distinct from the servile fear that they had in the days of their flesh, and quite distinct from the ebbings and flowings of natural conscience, and the workings of that slavish spirit which drove them in times past from the sins they committed into some faint and short-lived repentance. Those confessions and amendments were the mere ebbings and flowings of nature; hence there were no abidings in them. But where the fear of the Lord is, it is “a treasure;” (Isa. 32:6), therefore not easily spent; something abiding in the heart, like a fountain, which is perpetually casting out its waters in living streams.

II.—But we pass on to consider—for this is the main drift of the text—What “the secret of the Lord” is, which is said “to be with them that fear him.” What do we understand by the expression “secret!” It something not revealed, nor made known to everybody; something locked up and concealed from the majority, and discovered only to a favoured few. All the inward teachings, leadings, guidings, and dealings of God the Spirit upon the conscience, are therefore included in the word, “the secret of the Lord;” for all these inward leadings and teachings are “hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes.” So that, with all their profession, they know nothing of the secret operation of God the Spirit in the conscience; their religion stands in forms and ceremonies, in rites and observances; it does not stand in the inward teachings of God the Spirit.

1. One part of “the secret of the Lord” is to shew the very being of a God. “He that cometh to God,” we read, “must believe that he is.” (Heb. 11:6.) We cannot believe in the very being of a God, (at least such a God as the Scripture represents—a holy Jehovah, who compasseth our path and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways,) until it is shown to us by the Spirit’s teaching. So that all men in a state of nature are Atheists; nay, all professors, devoid of the Spirit are the same. I do not say they are so doctrinally, but

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they are so practically; for until the Lord does in some measure spiritually make himself known to the conscience, all men actually live without God in the world. But when the Lord does shine into the conscience, (for the “entrance of his words giveth light,”) we begin to feel that there is a God; that we are in his hand; that his eyes searcheth all our ways; that go where we will he still accompanies us; that we cannot hide ourselves from his all-searching eye: and that he is such a God as the scriptures represent, who “will not clear the guilty;” but is just, righteous, and pure, and hateth sin with perfect abhorrence. It is a great thing to have this spiritual knowledge wrought in the conscience. O how much sin would this keep a man from! What a check to a light and frivolous disposition! What a bridle to a gossiping tongue! What a principle to bring out of the world! What a power to overcome the spirit of covetousness! What a maul upon the head of pride! What a turning out of doors of that base hypocrisy that our hearts are so full of! To carry about with us an abiding, inward feeling, “Thou God seest me!” and feel ourselves living under his eye, looking down unto us, searching out our heart, and continually spying out all our ways, what a fountain of spiritual uprightness!

2. The Lord’s providential dealings with us is a part also of “the secret” which is “with those that fear him.” What a mercy it is to see the Lord’s hand stretched out for us in a way of providence! Some people affect to despise the providential dealings of God. But, as some one has justly observed, such as see him only as the God of grace see but the half of his countenance. We must see and feel him as a God of providence also to see the full face of Jehovah. How sweet it is to trace the Lord’s hand in providence; to look back on the chequered path that he has led us by; to see how his hand has been with us for good; what difficulties he has brought us through; in what straits he has appeared; how in things most trying he has wrought deliverance; and how he has sustained us to the present hour. Thus to trace out his dealings with us, is a main part of “the secret of the Lord” which is “with them that fear him.” Some per-

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sons may laugh and jeer at the Lord’s dealings in providence; but all this is little else than the mere spawn of a man’s atheistical, infidel heart, that is continually denying him to be the God of providence as well as the God of grace. How sweet are providential favours when they come stamped with this inscription, “This is from the Lord!” How precious every temporal mercy becomes—our very food, lodging, and clothing! How sweet is the least thing when it comes down to us as from God’s hands! A man cannot know the sweetness of his daily bread till he sees that God gives it to him; nor the blessedness of any providential dealing till he can say, “God has done this for me, and given that to me.” When a man sees the providence of God stamped on every action of life, it casts a glory, beauty, and sweetness over every day of his life. Thus to see the Lord’s hand is indeed a main part of “the secret of the Lord which is with them that fear him.”

3. A sense of the Lord’s presence. O this is indeed a part of the secret which is with them that fear his name. The Lord’s presence! Who but the Lord’s people know anything of that solemn feeling which that presence creates, and which Jacob expressed, when he said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!” (Gen. 28:16, 17.) What solemn feelings are produced in the mind under a sense of God’s presence! How the Lord’s presence turns night into day, makes every crooked thing straight, and every rough place plain! How it banishes all the gloom, melancholy, and despondency which hang over the soul! How it clears up every difficulty; and like the shining sun it drives away the damps and darkness of the night. If there is one thing to be coveted more than another, it is, that the Lord’s presence might be more felt in our hearts; for it is “the secret of the Lord which is with them that fear him” to shew to them and make them to feel his blessed presence.

4. The favour, the goodness, and the graciousness of the Lord brought with power into the conscience, is another part of “the

secret which is with them that fear him.” It is a secret, because it is only known to a few. It is a secret, because it is carried on in private between God and the soul. It is a secret, because never known till God the Spirit unfolds the mystery. It is this which makes the secret so mysterious and peculiar, that God’s grace and favour should be given to such vile, filthy, polluted, unworthy, and unclean wretches, as every child of God knows and feels himself to be. It may indeed well astonish such that favour should be shewn them, that mercy should ever reach them, and that there should be any communication of it to visit and water their souls.

5. Communion with the Lord, so as to be able to talk to him, and find some access to his presence, is another part of “the secret which is with them that fear the Lord.” What a different thing this is from mere wordy prayers! A man may fall upon his knees, utter words and sound words too, and be engaged for a long time in his devotions, and yet have no communion with God. And he may be lying on his bed, sitting in his chair, or engaged in his daily occupation, and in a moment his heart may be caught up into communion with the Lord. But one five minutes’ (shall I say one minute’s, for these seasons do not last very long) communion with the Lord is better than being on our knees the whole day, supposing we could kneel so long, merely uttering words without a sense of inward fellowship with the Lord of life and glory. It is through this communion with the Lord that heavenly blessings are bestowed. By communion with the Lord we drink into his Spirit, learn his mind, know his will, taste his goodness, and receive of his fulness. And only so far as we are brought into communion with the Lord is there any communication of spiritual blessings to the soul. Sometimes it is with us as though a wall were built up betwixt us and the Lord: we pray, but the voice never seems to reach the heavenly ear; there is no answer communicated; there is no seeing him, no getting near him, no pouring out of the heart before him; still less is there a receiving any communication from him. But when the soul is brought near to the Lord, these barriers are broken down,

these walls fall, a measure of communion with him is enjoyed; and then there is a receiving out of his fulness, a communication out of him who filleth all in all; a divine reception of his truth into the heart. So that by five minutes’ communion with the Lord, we learn more, know more, receive more, feel more, and experience more than by a thousand years of merely studying the Scriptures, or praying to the Lord without his teaching and testimony. But this is a secret known only to those who fear God; and they at times are privileged and indulged with it.

6. The power of truth made known in the conscience is a part also of the secret which is with them that fear the Lord. What a powerful thing truth is, when it drops into the soul! The mere utterance of it is nothing. The most solemn truths are no more to me than the mere blowing of such a storm as we had last night, unless it is dropped with divine power into the heart and conscience. But truth, when it is accompanied with a divine power, fills the heart, enriches the soul, drives out all error and falsehood, and lifts up the soul Godward. This is a secret which those know only who fear God. There is a great talk about religion in our day: well nigh every one is religious. But as to the inward operations and teachings of God the Spirit, whereby light, life, and power, are brought out of Christ’s fulness into the heart, this still remains a secret. This cannot be got at by human exertions; this cannot be attained so easily as a nominal profession; this is still confined to those who fear God, and they sometimes feel so blessed a power in the truth as it is in Jesus, that they can live by it and die by it.

7. Communications out of Christ—such as faith, hope, love, meekness, patience—every good gift and every perfect gift—to receive them into a soft heart; to know their working through a divine operation on the soul, this, too, is a branch of that secret which is known only to those that fear God. They know they cannot produce these things themselves, and yet they know the power of vital godliness consists in them. But to their astonishment the Lord does sometimes work in them that which they could not pos-

sibly work in themselves; and thus they find that a life of faith is a secret which they could not get at till the Lord himself was pleased to reveal it, and seal it with divine power in their conscience.

8. But just so far as we are led into an acquaintance with this secret, will it have a powerful effect upon us; and one will be, to bring us into union with those who are taught the same divine lessons, and bring us out from those who are not so taught. If any with whom this secret is, are wrapped up in dead churches, there will be an aching void felt; they will want to have the secret which they feel traced out from the pulpit; but there is no word to meet their case. They want to trace something of it, too, in the members of the church of which they form a part; but they do not find that in their case, “as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.” This inward want, sooner or later, brings them out of dead churches, from under dead ministers, and away from dead professors; and brings them into personal union and communion with the people who are taught by the Spirit of God. And though they may still have (as we know we all have had) great prejudices, and even at times strong enmity, working against the peculiar people; and perhaps have to make great sacrifices, so that they hardly know what to do or say; yet when they are brought into union and communion with the spiritual family, it so overpowers every adverse feeling, that it makes them willing to take up the cross, and endure the shame, that they may live and die with the people of the living God. And thus we find the secret of spiritual communion with the people of God, and learn that the same secret is known to them which is known also to us; and thus there is a blessed fellowship and sweet participation in the consciousness of the same secret being with one another. What a union this creates, what love this kindles, what sweet emotions this produces in the bosom—to enjoy communion with Christ, and communion with the people of Christ! This is worth all the dead fellowship, all the vain esteem, and all the honours that the world can bestow—to be brought into a measure of divine communion with the Lord of life and glory,

and into communion with the people of God—this secret is with them that fear God, and is worth a thousand worlds.

Now, you will observe that the text says, “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.” It speaks of it in the present tense, as something now known, felt, and enjoyed. It is not future, but present. So that if we have any evidence that we fear the Lord, we shall find something of this secret in our consciences. We may doubt and fear at times whether we know it aright; for our unbelieving heart ever breeds doubts and fears, and our desponding minds will ever put forth the spawn of despondency. Satan too will thrust in his fiery darts, and a thousand objections will shoot through the mind. But this does not destroy the reality of it; this will not throw down the Lord’s building, nor injure the foundation. However the house may be rocked by the storm, or beaten by the winds, it stands fast for ever, because it is founded upon a rock.

You who fear God, do you not find at times something of this secret? Would you go back to a dead profession in which perhaps you were wrapt up for years, when you tried to reform your habits, break off your bad practices, become religious; and yet all the time were unacquainted with the secret, and knew not the inward teachings of God the Spirit? Then there were no communications of light and life, no breathings and longings after the Lord, no desire to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection. You rested upon something external of your own to save your soul. But when the Lord mercifully and graciously took you in hand, he battered down this proud natural religion, and laid it low in the dust, and by working powerfully in your conscience raised up his fear in your soul. Then you found something of which you were before completely ignorant; and since that time you have found spiritual religion, vital godliness, to consist in the inward teachings and leadings God the Spirit. You find now there is a secret in these things. If you speak of it to your relations, they do not understand you; if you talk of it to those who are called “pious people,” they cannot make you out; they think you are some mysterious being,

whose religion they cannot fathom. But if you go into the company of God's people, and converse with them on spiritual matters, they know what you mean; and when you hear your experience described from the pulpit, and traced out in a hymn, or some experimental book, you feel a sweet going out of soul toward it; and you say, "If the man or book knew all that was passing in my heart, they could not describe my feelings more completely." This is to know something of the secret of the Lord—to have a secret and inward religion wrought with power in the conscience; and this is God's gift and God's work, and will shine when time shall be no more. If a man deny and scorn this, he had better go on to Rome; for if he has not those inward teachings and leadings of God the Spirit, he has no more true religion than if he were wedded to all the abominations of Popery.

III.—But we find a promise also in the text, and that you will observe runs in the future tense. "He will shew them his covenant." The Holy Ghost has changed the tense here. "The secret of the Lord" (that is present possession) "is with them that fear him; and he will shew them" (that is something future), "his covenant." This shews, that while all the people of God, who fear his name, have the secret with them, that is, a measure of the secret, yet all the people of God have not the covenant revealed to them at the same time with the secret. The "secret" is in the present tense; the "showing of the covenant" is in the future. It is very sweet to see how the Holy Ghost has discriminated between these blessings. If, for instance, it had run thus, "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he shews to them his covenant," some doubting, desponding child of God might say, "How can I be one of those that fear God? for it says, God shows to them his covenant, and he has not shewn it to me yet." But being put in the future tense, "he will show to them his covenant," it takes the form of a promise, and so is just adapted and sweetly suited to their wants. The more we see what is the language of the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures, the more we shall admire it. Men need not talk of improving the Scriptures; let

them take what the Holy Ghost has delivered; for the more we are led into an experience of the truth, the more we shall admire the wisdom of the Holy Ghost in the way whereby he has revealed it.

But what is this covenant that the Lord will shew those that fear him? It is the covenant that "stands fast for evermore;" the everlasting covenant of grace, which stands in the Person, love, blood, and work of the Son of God; the covenant made by a Triune Jehovah, on behalf of the elect, before the world was.

Those, then, who cavil at this covenant, who deny there is such a thing, who abhor the doctrines that flow out of it, who resist and rebel against sovereign election, discriminating grace, particular redemption by the blood of Jesus, and justification by his imputed righteousness, cannot, we know very well, be among the people that fear God, for if they feared God he would shew to them his covenant. And if the Lord shewed to them this covenant, this everlasting covenant, they would not call it "everlasting nonsense." If ever they had been shewn election, and had felt its weight and power, if they had ever known it as a blessed part of the covenant, they would not kick at it, nor call it a damnable doctrine. If ever they had seen Christ's righteousness, or the beauty and grandeur of those covenant engagements, whereby the church stood justified in Christ from all eternity, they would not call imputed righteousness "imputed nonsense." So that no man, kicking and rebelling against the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, which was all David's salvation and all his desire (and I am sure if God be our teacher, it will be all our salvation and all our desire)—no man kicking and rebelling against this covenant, we may be sure, can fear God; for if he did, God would show it him; and I am sure if God ever shewed it to him, he would convince him of its truth, reality, and blessedness.

This covenant God shews to his people. And how deeply they need it to be shown to them! For what are they? Always fluctuating and vacillating, ever ebbing and flowing, perpetually tossed up and down. We want something that will stand. If we look at the

workings of our minds, they are scarcely ever the same; sometimes up, and sometimes down; sometimes cheered, and sometimes discouraged; sometimes tried, and sometimes comforted; sometimes tempted, and sometimes delivered; sometimes in the dark, and sometimes in the light. As far as we are concerned, we pass through perpetual changes. Thus we prove we fear God; those who fear him not, know no changes; but those who fear him, are like the tide of the Thames, perpetually ebbing and flowing, and going backwards and forwards. We want, then, something which shall not ebb and flow as we do; we want something permanent, on which our feet may stand, and be planted there for eternity.

The Lord, then, shews to them that fear him his covenant: he shews to them how stable it is; that it stands fast for ever and ever; that it endureth, like himself, unchanging, and unchangeable, because it stands in his own eternal counsels, and is founded upon the engagements, love, blood, and work of his dear Son. The Lord shews them that fear him, that this covenant standeth for evermore, and that they have an interest in it. What a suitable foundation for a poor tottering heart! The Lord in shewing this covenant unto them that fear him, shews there that it is all of grace, and therefore meets all their unworthiness, and superabounds over all the aboundings of their sin; that it is more than a match for their aggravated iniquities, and will land them safe in glory, because God has determined to bring them there. Nothing but a covenant of grace can suit a poor exercised soul, who knows his helplessness and worthlessness; and the Lord shews this to them that fear him.

He shows them, also, that his covenant abideth for ever; that there is “no variableness, nor a shadow of turning” in it; that a vessel of mercy is not a child of God to-day, and a child of the devil to-morrow; and that whatever stripes he brings upon his back, whatever painful feelings he gets into by the Lord’s chastening, these things do not cast him out of the covenant which standeth sure. As we read Psalm 89:30-35, “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep

not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness 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. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.”

As the Lord the Spirit, then, shows them this covenant, and brings it with power into their hearts, it becomes all their salvation and all their desire. To live by it, and under the enjoyment of it; to have it more opened up, and to have fresh discoveries of it, to feel its sweetness, and live in the blessedness of it;—this forms the leading desire of the soul. So that so far from rebelling against the covenant of peace, we want to have it more blessedly and powerfully revealed in the heart and conscience.

These, then, are the blessings which the Lord will show unto them that fear him. And what a mercy it is to be amongst those so taught and so led! But two characters will fight against these truths: those who know nothing beyond a servile fear, and those who know nothing but rash presumption and vain-confidence.

There are some in a profession of religion who have nothing beyond a servile fear; they have no divine teachings, but feel the workings of natural conscience, and the ebbings and flowings of fleshly conviction. But there is no promise for such; we know not what the Lord may do for them, but there is no promise for the workings of natural conviction, and the ebbings and flowings of servile fear. A man may have all the convictions of the damned, and yet be damned after all; he may have all the fears of Judas, and yet go where Judas is, unto “his own place.”

Again. There is no promise made to those who are presumptuous and vain-confident, who rashly and recklessly rush into the solemn things of God. But the promise is to the poor, the needy, the exercised family of God, who by divine life, divine grace, divine leading and teaching, know something of spiritual fear, whose consciences have been made alive and tender before the Lord. To

these it is promised, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant."

The Lord in mercy deepen this fear wherever it is implanted, and show us that where this fear is, there every mercy is connected with it; that those in whose hearts he has caused it to spring up, he will lead safely on, till at length he brings them to see him as he is, and to sit down with him in glory.

71 Profit and Penury

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening,

August 8, 1844

"In all labour there is profit; but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury;"

Prov. 14:23

In the day that Adam disobeyed the commandment given him, and fell from that righteousness and innocency in which he was created, the Lord said to him, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake." It was no longer to yield its fruits as it would have yielded them, had man continued in a state of innocency, without toil and labour on his part. But, as a fallen sinner, he was doomed to eat his bread in sorrow, and in the sweat of his face, until he returned to the dust out of which he was taken. Thorns only and thistles would the earth now bring forth, instead of those fruits which otherwise it would spontaneously have borne. But this very curse, in the providence of God, has proved to be a blessing. There could be no greater ruin of man, viewed naturally, than to remove from his shoulders labour and toil, and to give him a life of sloth and inaction. The very labour to which he is doomed to earn his daily bread is a spur to all the faculties of his nature; and thus every natural comfort that we possess, and all the progress of arts and civilization, spring from this very curse which God has imposed. Man, having to earn his bread by his daily labour, has been stimulated by his very wants to produce and carry out those inventions which have removed us

from a level with the brutes. For of all the human inhabitants of the earth, none are more debased, none more deeply sunk in barbarism, licentiousness, and crime than those in the warmer parts of the world, where, with little toil and labour, the earth brings forth produce enough to maintain man just above starvation.

Solomon, doubtless, had some reference to this natural fact, when he wrote the words of the text; for his Proverbs are not merely most inestimable lessons of divine truth, but also contain admirable instruction in natural things. Being the wisest of men, he saw the profit arising from the daily and incessant labour that man's hands have to perform; and, in the text, contrasts the profit which springs out of this labour with the penury or poverty that ever attends the idle talk of the lips.

This, then, is the meaning of the text, taken in a moral and literal point of view; and I have explained it as such, in order to lay a solid foundation on which to build up a spiritual superstructure; for it must be ever borne in mind that, in the allegorical parts of Scripture, the spiritual interpretation always rests upon, and coincides with, the literal interpretation. If we let this rule go, we shall fall into a thousand absurdities, and totally err from the mind of the Holy Ghost.

Solomon, then, views two persons; the one, a hard working industrious man, who from his labour derived profit, God blessing the work of his hands, whereby to support himself and his family. And then, standing by his side, he observes a lazy, slothful fellow, who can do nothing but talk; who is always boasting of the wonderful exploits he means to perform; but never takes the spade or hoe in his hand to cultivate the ground, according to his original doom, but looks on and prates, whilst the other works. With a glimpse of his penetrating eye, the wisest of men saw the end of each—that whilst the one found profit in his labour, the other was justly doomed to a life of penury.

This is the literal interpretation, the natural connection of the two clauses of the text. But we may be sure that the Holy Ghost

meant something deeper than this—something more than a lesson in political economy. As then, there is a natural connection between the two clauses, so, if God enable me to bring it out, we shall find a spiritual connection too; and see that it is a truth in grace, as well as in providence, that “in all labour there is profit, but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.”

Let us, then, with God’s blessing, this evening look a little at what spiritual labour is, and what profit there is in it; and at the same time shew that empty talk without this labour only tends to beggary and starvation.

When the Lord begins a work of grace in a man’s heart, then labour commences in his soul; his life of ease is at an end, and spiritual toil begins, to continue all his days.

1. What, then, is the first labour, for the most part, that God sets a quickened soul to do? or rather, what is the first labour that such an one is engaged in? It is to labour under the law; and in this labour there is profit; for the Holy Ghost, by Solomon, declares, that “in all labour there is profit.” Now, what is it to labour under the law? Before a man can be exercised with this labour, he must know something, by a divine discovery to his conscience, of the purity and spirituality of that holy law which God has given as the ministration of condemnation and death. And no sooner does the soul begin to see and feel the purity and spirituality of the commandment, than labour to fulfil it begins. But to fulfil the law is an impossible task for a fallen sinner, whose whole nature is depraved, enmity against God, and alienation from him; so that the more the purity and spirituality of the law are seen and felt in the light and life of the Spirit, the more impossible does the soul find it to perform that which God has commanded. This, however, is not soon nor easily learnt; and the Lord sees fit, for the most part, that his people should toil, and that sometimes very hard, under the law, that solid profit may come out of that labour wherewith they are exercised. But, it may be asked, what profit is there in this labour? Much, we answer, every way; but chiefly two-fold; first,

that by this labour is gained a knowledge of the purity, spirituality, justice, and holiness of God’s character; and secondly, a knowledge of ourselves, as fallen sinners before him. But the profit, generally speaking, bears a proportion to the labour; the more labour the greater the profit; the less labour the less profit. Thus, the more the soul labours under the law in order to fulfil its demands, the more it feels of the burden and bondage of the law; and the more it seeks to bring forth a righteousness to satisfy its requirements, the more profit there is in it; because a deeper knowledge is thereby gained of the holy character of God, and of the spirituality of that commandment, which can only curse and condemn the soul under it. And is not this a most profitable and indispensable lesson to learn—the purity and unbending justice of God’s character, his unspeakable holiness, his indignation and anger against sin? Unless these lessons are written more or less powerfully on a man’s conscience, there is no depth of hypocrisy into which he may not sink, no height of presumption into which he may not rise. But if this schoolmaster has brought the disciple low under the rod, it will do much to keep under and subdue that cursed hypocrisy of which the heart is full, and lay an effectual blow at the root of that presumption which Satan is always endeavouring to breathe into the soul.

But in that labour, as I have hinted, we get another branch of profit. The soul thus learns its complete helplessness and thorough impotency toward every thing spiritually good. For until a man learns something of the purity and spirituality of God’s character, as revealed in the holy law, he will never know his own sinfulness, ruin, and helplessness. How do we learn our own helplessness naturally? By having a task set us which we cannot perform. How many a man boasts of his abilities to do this and that! Put him to it; let him try his power; his failure will convince him of his inability better than argument. Was it not so with the children of Israel all through their history? Did they not learn their helplessness by their burdens and oppressions? So when the Lord says, “Thou shalt

love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself;" (Luke 10:27,) he sets us an impossible task; but we learn our helplessness by the very attempts made to fulfil it. Being, however, beat in all its attempts to bring forth that righteousness, and being defeated in all its exertions; trying to climb up this hill of sand, and perpetually slipping back, the soul learns, as it can learn in no other way, its total helplessness toward anything spiritually good. There is profit in that; for who wants help from without till he has no help from within? who wants the strength of God till he knows the weakness of the creature?

In this labour too, the soul learns its thorough depravity, complete ruin, and utter wreck. Is there no profit here? Let unwounded professors talk as they please, not to know our own corruption is to know nothing. This is the grand, the indispensable preparation of heart to receive mercy and truth; this lies at the threshold of the strait gate. To cast this aside is to put ourselves out of the pale of all the promises, and to proclaim with a loud voice, "The gospel is not for me; for Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and I do not yet know that I am one." For want of this ballast, how main gallant ships have made shipwreck, and been tossed upon the shoals of presumption or despair! For without a deep experience, by the Spirit's inward teaching, of the depravity and corruption of their fallen nature, how many have drunk into every error and heresy of the day, despised the Spirit's work upon the heart, and were at last landed in open profanity! So that, in this labour, though painful, there is profit; and the profit is this—that the soul becomes thereby established in the knowledge of its own complete ruin, guilt, and depravity. And this is an effectual cure to all self-righteous notions, presumptuous confidence, and all letter religion, however high or however low, and opens up a way for the soul to receive all the consolations of the gospel.

"The talk of the lips," in this, as in other instances, "tendeth only to penury." A man may talk of his own corruption and depravity

from a natural acquaintance with it, and be convinced of his being a sinner by falling headlong time after time into sin. But there is no labour here, no groans and sighs, no guilt of conscience, no distress of mind, no crying to the Lord for deliverance. It is but mere talk; and emptiness and starvation will be the result of such idle chatter. Unless a man has passed through the labour of guilt in his soul, and learnt he is a sinner by the Spirit's work upon his conscience, all the notions he may lay hold of in his judgment, and the talk he may get upon his tongue, will leave him at last destitute of those riches that are communicated to the poor and needy out of Christ's fulness.

2. But again; there is a labour to make our calling and election sure; and we are exhorted to give all diligence for this purpose; for "if we do these things, we shall never fall." (2 Pet. 1:10.) It is surprising how some people can lay hold of the doctrine of election with the greatest ease imaginable. Some book falls in their way which treats upon it; O, they can see it before they have read it half through. Or perhaps they hear some minister prove it by the Scriptures from the pulpit; before they leave the chapel they are thoroughly satisfied that it is true, and spring up at one leap from the lowest depths of Arminianism to the loftiest heights of Calvinism. Such abortive births do not produce full grown men; such mushroom growth does not raise an oak or a cedar; such Jehu driving is not the chariots of Amminadib. To learn election right is to have it ratified and sealed by the Spirit of God upon our conscience. For the exhortation is not to make the doctrine sure; that is sure enough; but to make your own election sure; that is, to make it sure in your conscience, and to come to a settlement and establishment in your own heart by divine teaching and revelation, not of the truth merely of the doctrine of election (that is supposed to be known) but of the truth of your own election, the blessed reality of your own soul being included in that everlasting covenant of mercy and grace. And the Apostle bids us give "all diligence" to it. It is not a thing to be had in a day; to be done lightly, hastily,

and smoothly; but we are to give “all diligence,” as though it required very much diligence to make this calling and election sure. This, then, is a labour which God has seen fit his people should be exercised with. And if we had not had a good deal of labour to make our calling and election sure, the knowledge and belief of our calling and election stand on a very slippery foundation. First, we have to make our calling sure; and there is often much labour in that. We have to go to the first spot where God began with our souls; to the first feeling Godward that we were exercised with. We have to look at the effects and fruit of God’s touching our conscience with his finger; to bring our experience to the Scriptures, and see whether it will stand according to the word of truth; and to cry to a heart-searching God that we may not be deceived in this important matter. We have to be exercised with doubts and fears whether this calling was certain, clear and distinct; whether some corrupt motive did not lie at the root of our profession; whether we were not talked into it by man; and whether we did not begin with God before he began with us. I believe that many of God’s children have to labour (and you know labour is no pleasant work) perhaps for years under doubts and fears, and experience trouble and distress because they cannot make their calling sure, nor be perfectly certain that they have been called by the Lord himself effectually unto life and salvation. We may well be exercised upon this matter, for what a solemn word is that, “Many are called (that is, outwardly) but few chosen!” And who that knows the deceitfulness of the heart has not reason to fear lest it deceive him?

But “in all labour,” says our text, “there is profit.” And O, what profit there is in being well-exercised about our calling! How satisfied most professors are with theirs! A church has taken them into membership! what else can be wanted? they think. A minister shakes them by the hand, and calls them “brother” or “sister;” what other evidence, think they, can be needed? They have had something or other under a sermon that has left a little impression upon their minds; what else can be wanted? they think, to make

their calling sure? They are sound Calvinists, and have their minds sometimes lifted up by hearing a minister cut down doubts and fears and corruption-preaching; and tell the people that nothing is so easy as the full assurance of faith, and that they have all a right to it. Depend upon it if a man can take up with every shallow evidence as to his calling; if he be not at times exercised about the matter, at least, until he his well-established in his soul as to the certainty of it,—depend upon it, his calling, or rather the evidence of it, rests upon a very sandy foundation. The devil has not tried him very sorely, nor a vile heart of unbelief much harassed him, nor the corruptions of his fallen nature much battered down his evidences. To rest upon a shallow foundation for eternal life, and never be exercised about it, clearly proves that the calling was of nature, not of grace; and that such an one is in the ranks of that band of traitors, of whom it is said, that “a deceived heart has turned them aside.” But when we feel the workings of a vile heart of unbelief that calls everything in question, are plagued with a thousand doubts and fears, are harassed with a thousand suspicions, tormented with a thousand fiery darts of blasphemy and obscenity, and find infidelity doubting every thing, from the being of God down to his testimony in our conscience; to have all that the Lord has done sifted backwards and forwards in the heart, and all that has been going on from first to last to be tried as by fire, I warrant you, there will be some labour here. But “in all labour there is profit.” And shall this be without? How it cuts up false evidences! How it throws down rotten props! How it winnows away the chaff and dust of natural religion. And O, when the Lord does reveal himself, when he does apply his atoning blood, and does speak home to the conscience, what a profit is there in the labour that the soul has gone through, in order to make its calling and election sure! Where do we find, generally speaking, most life in the soul? Who are the best hearers in a congregation? Who are the most humble, God-fearing, and consistent members in a church? Is it not those who are exercised in their souls, labouring under and burdened with a vile heart of

unbelief to make their calling and election sure? And who can sleep under a heart searching sermon, and parry, with a smile of contempt, every arrow aimed at graceless professors? Who are first to swim in the troubled sea of politics, are most a prey to pride and covetousness, and sooner or later bring a reproach on the cause of truth? Is it not those who have never doubted their religion, have had no labour nor soul trouble, and have never been exercised in their conscience whether God the Spirit has been at work in their hearts or not? "In all labour," (and therefore in this labour) "there is profit." And the soul that has passed through this labour, and has reaped the profit, would not, when the profit comes, have been without the labour for any consideration. How often has the poor labourer in the field had to toil among the heavy clods! What work has he had to plough, sow, and harrow the land; and how, at this season of the year especially, when he has had to ply the sickle, and gather in the harvest, has the sweat run down his face! But how sweet is the bread when it is put upon the table, and he can sit down and eat the fruit of his toils! And so spiritually; when a man by exercise has laboured hard in his soul to make his calling and election sure; and when the Lord drops some precious testimony into his conscience, how sweet is the bread that comes out of this previous labour, how precious the comfort that comes out of this foregoing toil!

But "the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." What praters, what gossips, what idle chatters there are in the visible church of God, who are always talking, talking, talking about religion, and know nothing secretly of groaning and crying unto the Lord! Bunyan has drawn their character with a masterly hand under the name of "Talkative" in his *Pilgrim's Progress*. Who so forward as these to discuss the most knotty point of doctrine; and who so backward to call upon the Lord in secret? Who so forward with their tongue; and who so backward with their heart and hand? Who so much for the mere talk of the lip; and who so ignorant of the hard labour and severe exercises of a troubled and tried soul?

Who so ready to condemn others? who so slow to condemn themselves? Who so nimble with the letter of Scripture; who so ignorant of the power? With them it is all talk, talk, that tends only to penury! They will never profit your souls, children of God. Talkative associates will never be your help and comfort, if you are labouring under heavy loads. It is the meek, quiet, humble, broken-hearted, exercised family of God, who have not often a word to say, and can only speak as they feel some little power moving in their heart, that will be your choice associates. Take Solomon's advice, ye that fear God, "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge." (Prov. 14:7.)

3. Again. There is labouring under temptation. If it is true that in all labour there is profit, then there will be profit in this labour also. The inspired word of truth says, by the Apostle, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." (James 1:2, 3.) The Lord sees fit that his children should be exercised with temptation. God himself does not tempt them, for, "he cannot tempt any man" (James 1:13); but he suffers them to be tempted. He deals with them as with Job of old. Satan, we read, said to the Lord, "Hast thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side." (Job 1:10.) God had set a hedge around his servant, and Satan could not shoot through it. But God could, without being the author of sin, remove the hedge. He might and could withdraw his restraining power over the prince of darkness; and when he withdrew this restraining power, then Satan could tempt him, but only by the permission of God. So the Lord sees fit that his people should have to labour under temptation. And O, what severe temptations many of God's children have to conflict with! Sometimes they have to labour under the temptation, that there is no God; at other times, all kinds of infidel thoughts and suspicions as to the truth and inspiration of the Scriptures, fill and distress their mind. The most subtle arguments, and the most daring reasonings work up in their hearts, to which they can give

no satisfactory answer; such as, “What is the soul? How can we be certain that it is immortal, or subsists at all after death? How can we be sure that Christ is God as well as man? What if all religion be a delusion, and the Bible itself the invention of men?” A thousand other suspicions rush through the mind at times and seasons, which I need not infuse into yours who know them not. “O,” cry some, “you ought not to have such wicked thoughts. You to call yourself a believer, and ever to have such doubts as those!” Can you keep them out of your mind? I cannot out of mine. They rush in at the door and window, and fly about in one’s soul without asking leave to come or go. Many of God’s people, I believe, have to labour under these sharp and powerful temptations, till they sometimes think they are little better than infidels.

“And can there be profit in this hard labour?” says the soul. Yes, great profit. How so? Because when the Lord does convince us (as he does at times) of his own being, of his own presence, of the truth of his own word, by bringing home that truth with power to the conscience, then we become established in the knowledge of, and faith in, the being of God, and the truth of his word, as we get established in no other way.

There are two seasons when we cannot doubt the being of God, and the truth and inspiration of his word; and I will tell you when they are. One is, when we have sinned, and guilt falls upon the conscience—then we know painfully there is a God, that his holy eye has seen the sin which we have committed, and that his word, which condemns us, is inspired by the Holy Ghost. The sighs, groans, and cries that come out of a guilty conscience carry with them their own attestation, not only that there is a God, but also of this, “Thou God seest me!” Another season when we cannot doubt either the being of God, or the truth and inspiration of his word, is when the Lord makes his truth precious to our souls; when his word drops like dew into our heart, and it becomes to us “sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.” Then we become as certain, as we are of our own existence, not only that there is a God, but, that

he has revealed his grace, mercy, and truth in the Scriptures; for our souls have felt the sweetness, power, and comfort stored up in them. Now we should not have got this profit unless we had passed through the previous labour. There are many who believe because they never doubted. But what a sorry faith is this! The best way to believe is, after we have doubted, by the power of God removing those doubts through the communication of a living faith. O how strong faith is when it comes after doubt! But to believe before you doubt, and because you never doubt, O what a sorry faith is that! And how one gust of temptation will blow that faith into a thousand shivers! There are some who say, “they have never had a doubt these twenty years.” Is the devil dead? Is an unbelieving heart no longer in their body? Are they soldiers of Jesus Christ, and never had during twenty years campaign a fiery dart from hell? Twenty years without the furnace and fiery trial! Neither God nor Satan leave the elect alone so long.

So other temptations that work up in the heart, as the rebellion, blasphemy, and enmity of the carnal mind against a holy God,—what hard labour is this! “O,” says one, “you should never touch upon these subjects; you should exalt a glorious Christ, and leave all these corruptions alone.” But how can we know anything of the power and presence of God in the soul, unless we know something of these corruptions, and of the Lord’s mercifully subduing them? Can we know the reality and power of God’s grace in our hearts, unless we feel there is that which grace subdues, as well as pardons? A minister of Christ, I grant, is not to preach corruption—what I may perhaps be allowed to call “naked corruption”—corruption apart from the grace that fights against and subdues it. He will not, if rightly taught, so describe all the various workings of corruption as to infuse temptation into the mind of others, or speak of sin in a light trifling spirit and presumptuous manner. But I will tell you what he will do, if God has sent him—he will describe the struggles of grace against corruption, and of corruption against grace; he will shew the strength of besetting sin, when the enemy comes in

like a flood, and the power of God in keeping the soul from falling; he will dissect and anatomize the human heart, and trace out its subtleties and deceits; and he will speak a word in season to the weary by declaring how he himself has been tempted and delivered. If he never do this, he will not fulfil his commission, “to take forth the precious from the vile.”

But what profit do we get from feeling the enmity and rebellion of our fallen nature? We become satisfied of this truth, that “the carnal mind is enmity against God;” we see and feel into what an awful depth of corruption we are sunk; we learn to abhor ourselves in dust and ashes; and we rejoice that grace superabounds over all the aboundings of sin. Thus in this “labour there is profit;” but “the talk of the lips only tendeth to penury.” How many ministers are always as they say, exalting Christ, and preaching the offices of Christ? But it is to be feared that, with most of them, it is but the talk of the lips that tendeth only to penury. They preach Christ out of the Bible, as the Mahometans preach Mahomet out of the Koran. They have no spiritual faith in him, nor experimental knowledge of him. There are certain truths in the Bible, and these they set forth with skill and eloquence; but they have never had them sealed upon their conscience by the Holy Ghost. They cannot describe the operations of the Spirit on the soul; nor trace out, from their own experience, a work of grace; nor enter into the various exercises that God’s people are tried with. This talk of the lips about “the offices of Christ” that does not spring from a heartfelt experience, and is not accompanied by the power of the Spirit, tendeth only to penury, and is nothing but starvation to the souls of God’s people. There is no solid food brought forth, no spiritual profit communicated, no dew and savour. Their pulpit eloquence is but rant and empty noise; and God’s poor and needy children who have had all this talk of the lips sounding in their ears, come away without one crumb of the bread of life.

4. To labour, too, under a vile heart of unbelief; to feel how impossible it is to bring forth a single act of faith; to find, that do what

we will, there is an evil heart of unbelief counteracting all we do—in this labour there is profit. How am I to know what faith is? I will tell you, at least if I know anything about it in my own experience. We learn it first, by knowing our own unbelief, by feeling the workings of a doubting, fearing, distrusting heart. This effectually beats to pieces false faith; it dashes to shivers vain-confidence and daring presumption. But we learn what faith is, secondly, by the enjoyment of it. Shall I use a familiar figure to explain my meaning? for sometimes these illustrations throw a light upon the subject. Picture to yourself a starving beggar standing at the window of an eating-house; he sees and smells the savoury, smoking meet on the counter. How does he know it is so good and savoury? A man in a fever would not think it so. Do not his fainting body and sinking stomach, do not the feelings of starvation that he experiences, all tell him, by the longings and hungerings of his keen appetite, what good food it is? But should some kind passerby purchase and give him an ample slice from the smoking joint, he would know then how savoury it was by the enjoyment of it, as he knew it before by the want of it. And is it not so with most other things?—with sickness and health, toil and rest, pain and ease, cold and warmth, misery and happiness? Are not all learnt from their opposites as well as from themselves? So spiritually; we know what faith is by the want of it, being exercised with an unbelieving heart, and not being able, in our feelings, to muster up one grain or find a single particle of it. But when faith comes, and the Lord draws it forth into blessed exercise, to embrace the Person and work of Christ, and lay hold of God’s promises—then we know what faith is by the enjoyment of it, as we knew it before by the absence and want of it. In this labour, then, there is profit.

5. So with the temptation to throw away all our religion, and profess the truth no more. I dare say some here have been tempted to give it all up, and not go on a single day longer with it, thinking themselves hypocrites, altogether destitute of the root of the matter, deceiving themselves and deceiving others. In this labour (and

what labour sometimes this is!) there is profit. For how honest it makes a man! how eager such an one is to have a minister trace out the real work of God upon the heart! how he wants all his evidences brought to light! how he opens his bosom to every arrow that may be shot from the pulpit! how he groans and secretly cries to the Lord that he would speak to his soul, and give him some evidence of sonship. In all this labour what profit there is, when the soul gets the blessing that comes from it! The heaving of an anxious bosom, the various exercises of the mind, how sweet they make the blessing when the blessing comes!

Neither body nor soul can do without exercise. Thus, we find the Apostle speaking to Timothy, "Exercise thyself rather unto godliness." (1 Tim. 4:7.) And of himself he said, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." (Acts 24:16.) He was not for letting Timothy take things for granted, and sleep satisfied in a profession of truth, without a real work on the conscience. Speaking of affliction, he says, in another place, "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Heb. 12:11.) You see it is the exercise, the toil, the labour, the tossing up and down that does the good; and out of these the spiritual profit springs. It is not to fold one's arms, like the fool of whom Solomon speaks (Eccles. 4:5), and says, "I am satisfied with my religion; I want no more of these exercises; I have got beyond all experience; and now live above the reach of doubt, guilt, and fear." This smooth road to heaven is no more than what Lord Chesterfield said, when he retired from public life, that "he should sleep in his carriage the rest of the way," not knowing that way would end in a precipice. The end of the profane nobleman, and of the professing Calvinist, may be more similar than many dream of.

6. The Apostle, writing to the Thessalonians, (1 Thess. 1:3,) speaks of their "work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope." This is a short summary of spiritual labour. For these are the three

chief Christian graces,—faith, hope, and love. But are these slothful, indolent, inactive graces? Are they not all connected by the Apostle with some labour to be done or endured? Has not faith "a work?" And what is work but labour? Is there not "the patience of hope?" And what is patience but endurance? And is not endurance labour? And has not love "a labour?" That is said too expressly to be denied.

"If then, we have faith, there will be a work for faith to do. If we have hope, there will be a patience for hope to endure. If we have love, there will be a labour for love to perform. For instance,

There is, "the work of faith." Wherever there is faith in the soul, there will be many conflicts and trials, as well as sharp and severe exercises attending it, in order to try it; we therefore read, "That the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold which perisheth, though it be tried with fire." (1 Pet. 1:7.) So the Lord said to the Laodicean church, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich." (Rev. 3:18.) And the Apostle says, "After that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." (1 Pet. 5:10.) A dead faith has no trials, labours, exercises, temptations, or conflicts. But where there is a living faith in the conscience, it will have to labour; as Hart says,

"It lives and labours under load;
Though damped it never dies."

This labour of faith is a very different thing from the legal workings of a self-righteous heart, trying to please God by internal or external acts of natural obedience. The work of faith with power is begun and carried on by God himself, and is altogether spiritual and supernatural. This is its main work—to believe on the Son of God, and receive, embrace, and submit to the truth as it is in Jesus. As the Lord said to the Jews when they asked him, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." (John 6:28, 29.) But O, what opposition there is to this work of faith! How unbelief will work up against every

act of faith in the soul! What difficulties, impediments, obstacles, and afflictions lie in a man's path when he sets out in faith! There is sin perpetually working, there is the devil tempting or harassing him: sometimes the world snaring or persecuting him; and often his own heart deceiving and entangling him. If faith be a living grace brought forth by the operation of God the Spirit in the conscience, it will not lie dead, like a stone upon the road. No; faith has to labour under these exercises and in these conflicts, that it may embrace the truth of God in spite of them. But our text still holds good. In this "work of faith" there is profit; because the more faith is exercised, the stronger it becomes. If I may use a familiar figure, it is like the blacksmith's arm. What brings up the muscles so strongly, and give his arm the vigour it possesses? The labour of the sledge-hammer. And what the labour of the sledge-hammer is to the arm of the smith, so is spiritual labour to faith. It becomes stronger by its exercises. If I were to tie up my arm or my leg, as we read is sometimes done by the Hindoo Pilgrims, it would soon shrink and wither, and I should become a cripple. So were faith to have no conflicts, labours, or exercises, it would become weak and flaccid, its sinews would shrink, and it would fade away out of the heart. Not that faith can strengthen itself. I mean not that. But the Lord mercifully strengthening it, and supplying it out of Christ's fulness to fight; the more difficulties, exercises and trials it has to conflict with, the more it becomes invigorated instead of weakened. So that the very things that seemed as if they would destroy it, are overruled to strengthen it. You that fear the Lord, have you not found it so? You have had illness perhaps to bear, or depths of poverty to wade in, heavy afflictions in your family, and much darkness and distress of soul. You thought that these weights and burdens would crush your faith. Did you find it so? Was not your faith stronger then under these trials than it is now? Was it not strengthened in proportion to the loads it had to carry? Like the children of Israel, the more they were afflicted, the more they multiplied and grew. But if you are at ease in Zion, with no difficulties,

no personal or family troubles, no spiritual exercises, no tempting world, no plaguing devil, you may fancy how wonderfully strong your faith is, yet it is but as the dream of some invalid lying on his bed, and in his sleep fancying he is hard at work, when, awake, the poor creature could scarcely rise without fainting. You are in a dream, my friend, when you think how strong your faith is, and what feats it can accomplish. Were it brought into actual labour, it could not stand a single hour.

So with hope. Some may say, "What a good hope I have! How strong it stands! What a blessed anchorage I enjoy! Neither wind nor wave can remove it!" A trim wherry is very well suited to row up and down the Thames; but it will not do to go to sea with. To cross the Atlantic Ocean would make sad work even with some of the pretty river-built yachts. So an unexercised professor may say, "How strong my hope is! I lie at anchor waiting my dismissal; my soul is established in the doctrines of grace and I am confident of going to heaven." Let some storm come to try the cable; it will be a mercy if it do not go down at once into the deep waters. Hope has "patience" for its labour. But what can we know of patience before the trial comes? As Berridge says,—

"I fancied patience would be brought
Before my trouble rose."

How patient the husband is when the wife is all smiles! How patient the wife is when the husband is good-tempered, and doing all he can to please! But let some family broil arise; patience is often sadly wanted then. And so spiritually, we may well be patient when we have no trouble; we may well have a good hope when no storm is trying how the anchorage holds. But where is our patience when trouble comes? If we have hope, we shall have "the patience of hope;" and the "patience of hope," will be in proportion to the troubles that beset us. And thus, when hope patiently rides out the storm, the cable proves to be good, and the anchor to hold fast.

And so with the "labour of love;" there is profit in that, but "the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." What is more disgusting

than to hear a dead professor for ever talking about “his dear Jesus, his precious Christ;” and when called upon to make any sacrifice for his “precious Jesus,” there is no man so unwilling to take up the cross! How many are canting, “Brother this, and Sister that;” but let the brother or sister get into adversity, is the pocket opened? is the heart enlarged? is any love shewn by action? But the talk of the lips, “my brother, my sister, my God, and my Jesus,” only tendeth to penury. Where there is real love, such as God sheds abroad in the heart, there will be the “labour of love;” and it is in this labour of love that there is the profit. If you love the Lord, you will have a thousand risings of enmity against him, a thousand suspicions whether he love you, a thousand blasphemous darts shot through your carnal mind against his glorious Person, atoning blood, and justifying righteousness, and the more you love him, the more your love will be tried. You know that jealousy is always a close attendant upon love. The Scripture connects them closely: “Love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.” (Song Sol. 8:6.) But dead love has no jealousy. He that talks of love and does not feel it, is never jealous whether the Lord love him; never jealous when he sees the smiles and kisses of the Lord given to a more favoured object. Oh no! dead love has no labour, because it has no jealousy. But living love has a labour. The mother that loves her child—what labour attends her love! If the mother do not love her son, he may grow up a thief or a drunkard; the mother does not care what he is. But if there be love in her bosom, then she will have trials and sorrows that loveless mothers feel not at all. If the husband love the wife, or the wife the husband, how jealous each will feel should any mark of affection or tenderness be shewn to another! But dead love, Gallio-like, careth for none of these things. Wherever, then, there is love, there will be labour attending it; and it is only in this labour that there is profit. Dead love has neither hopes nor fears, neither work nor wages. But living love has an inward labour to obtain some smiles from the Beloved, some glance of his counte-

nance, some token of his dying love making the heart glad.

But “the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.” And if any one thing more beggars the soul than another, it is the mere talk of the lips. Few things bring more barrenness into the soul of a child of God than to hear an empty professor prate out his fulsome chattering to the Lord; no inward grace, no power, no dew attend it; it only robs and plunders him of all that he most prizes.

The Lord, then, has appointed, that “in all labour there should be profit.” And if we are to enjoy the profit we must endure the labour. In the margin of 2 Tim. 2:6, we read, “The husbandman labouring first, must be a partaker of the fruits;” that is, he must labour first, and then sit down to partake of the fruit of his labours. There is nothing valuable without labour. The sermon is worth nothing, if it has not come out of the labour of a minister’s heart; if he has not laboured in soul for the things brought forth, it will never profit God’s people. And you that pray at the prayer-meetings, your prayers are only empty talk, and brings penury into the souls of God’s children, unless your heart has secretly laboured for the petitions which you utter. Without this labour, you will go through your round like a horse in a mill, in an ever recurring circle; so that the friends will know how you will begin, when you are in the middle, and where you will leave off. Such talk of the lips tendeth only to penury. And so in spiritual conversation, so called; the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury, if what is spoken is not brought forth from labour in the heart. All your unravelling of knotty texts, and discussion of doctrines in the mere letter, only tend to penury; there is no real profit nor food in them to a gracious soul. But “in all labour there is profit.” The more the heart is exercised, and the more it labours in the good things that God bestows, the more profit there will be to our own souls, and to the souls of others; and the more praise, glory, and honour there will be to the Lord.

Our religion, then, if it be the religion of the Holy Ghost, will be of this nature. There will be labour in it. And when the Lord out of this labour, out of this ploughing, sowing, harrowing, and reaping,

brings forth a blessed harvest, we shall enter into the meaning of those words of the Psalmist, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." (Psa. 126:5, 6.)

72 The Mountain Made a Plain

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning,

August 11, 1844

"Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it."

Zechariah 4:7

The children of Israel were, beyond all controversy, a typical people; and therefore God's dealings with Israel after the flesh were typical of his dealings with his elect family, Israel after the Spirit. This typical character of God's dealings with them we may trace throughout the whole of the Old Testament. I need not multiply instances, for they are to be found in almost every page; but I shall confine myself this morning to that portion of their history, which, with God's blessing, may throw some light upon the text.

You know that, as a chastisement for their sins, the children of Israel were carried captive to Babylon, and remained there seventy years. When the seventy years, however, were expired, "the Lord," we read, "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying: Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (he is the God), which is in

Jerusalem." (Ezra 1:1-3.)

In obedience to this edict, many of the children of Israel left Babylon to return to the land of their fathers, and to Jerusalem, their beloved abode. And one of the first things which they did, after "they had set the altar upon his bases," (Ezra 3:3) was, to commence rebuilding the temple of the Lord, which had been laid in ruins by Nebuchadnezzar. We have an account of the laying of the foundation, which I need not enter into, in the book of Ezra (3:8-13) where we find that Zerubbabel, who was the temporal head, and Jeshua, who was the spiritual head—the one being the Prince, and the other the High Priest, "set forward the work of the house of the Lord." And we gather from Zech. 4:9, that the hands of Zerubbabel in particular laid the foundation-stone, he being the Governor of Judah, and the lineal descendant of David, and thus a type of the Lord Jesus.

But no sooner was the foundation of the temple laid, than difficulties arose as to its completion. "The adversaries of Judah," when their offer to become co-partners and co-workers was refused by Zerubbabel and Jeshua, "hired counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose" during several reigns; and wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes, complaining that they were "building up the rebellious and the bad city once more;" and if they succeeded in setting up the walls again, there would be no more toll or tribute paid to the kings of Babylon. In consequence of these obstacles, for thirteen or fourteen years was the building of the temple much hindered, and during the latter portion of that period entirely suspended.

But at the end of this period of fourteen years, the Lord raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, in order to stir up the spirits of the people to go on with the building of the temple in spite of all the opposition made to it; as we find Ezra 5:1, 2, "Then the prophets Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. Then rose up Zerubaa-

bel, the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua, the Son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.” And we find the Lord prospering the undertaking, and moving the heart of Darius king of Persia, so that he gave command that they should not be interrupted in the building of the temple, but should have money given them from the king’s tribute towards the completion. (Ezra 6:8.)

At the time, then, that this prophecy was delivered—which was just at the end of the fourteen years, but whilst all the difficulties still existed in the way of finishing the temple—the heart of the people was faint and desponding; for they saw no prospect of the temple ever being completed. It was begun, but how it was to be finished they knew not; and their hearts sank within them at seeing the walls of the temple only half-reared, and no probability of the head-stone being ever put on. Under these trying circumstances it was, that the Lord spake these words to Zerubbabel, who had laid the foundation of the temple: “Who art thou, O great mountain?”—thus alluding to the difficulties, opposition, and impediments that lay in the way of completing the temple. “Who art thou, O great mountain?” What are all those adversaries, all this opposition, all these difficulties? “Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” All the difficulties shall as much disappear, as though a mountain in a moment were to sink down into a level. “I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies; my house shall be built in it, saith the Lord of hosts, and a line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem.” (Zech. 1:16.) He who has begun the temple shall also complete it; as we read, “the hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, his hands shall also finish it.” (Zech. 4:9.) And so it happened; the prophecy was literally and historically fulfilled; the mountain became a plain: and the head-stone was brought forth and put upon the temple with shoutings of “Grace, grace unto it;” as we read, “And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. And the children of Israel, the priests, and

the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy.” (Ezra 6:15, 16.)

These, then, are the historical circumstances on which I hope, with God’s blessing, this morning to build up a spiritual and experimental interpretation; and to show spiritually, if God enable me, how all the mountains (and many there are) which stand in the way of the completion of the work of grace in the soul, and the building of the inward temple where the Holy Ghost takes up his abode, (for “your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost”) all disappear before the spiritual Zerubbabel, the Lord of life and glory. And how he is sure to bring forth the head-stone, and put it upon the spiritual building with shoutings of “Grace, grace unto it.” As this spiritual interpretation is my object, and this the line of things I mean to pursue, I shall, with God’s blessing, take up the words as they lie before me.

I.—The Lord here begins with an inquiry, “Who art thou, O great mountain?” There are many, probably, here who have never seen a mountain; and if you have never seen one, you can have a faint conception what a mountain is. I never saw one till I was more than twenty-three years old; and I shall never forget how surprised I was, as I was travelling through North Wales, when I first beheld its steep and rocky sides. My idea of a mountain was, that it was a high grassy hill, an elevated knoll, covered with beautiful trees and herbage up to the very top. But as to those lofty peaks, that thrust themselves into the sky, completely barren of verdure, with their deep and rugged precipices;—of such a mountain as that, I had not the least conception. In carrying, then, into your mind what a mountain is, you must not think of such a hill as Primrose Hill, or such grassy knolls as are in this level, cultivated country; but you must conceive an object that rears up its lofty peaks into the sky, and presents an insuperable and impenetrable barrier, an obstacle not to be clambered over, but which must be entirely removed that a free passage may be afforded. And unless you carry into your mind this idea, that these tall peaks, deep precipices, and unfath-

omable abysses present an insuperable obstacle, you cannot enter into the mind of the Spirit in the text, and will therefore lose much of the sweetness, beauty, and force of it.

The Lord, then, addresses himself to this mountain, and says, "Who art thou, O great mountain?" As though he had said, "Let us look at thee; let us take thy dimensions; let us see thy heights; let us look at thy depths; let us view thee in all thy magnitude, and examine this insuperable obstacle that stands in the way. 'Who art thou?' Be thou ever so high; be thou ever so huge; be thy precipices ever so deep; be thy peaks ever so lofty; 'who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel'—let him but speak, let him but appear—'thou shalt become a plain.' It matters not how high; it matters not how deep; 'before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.'"

Now, let us look at this spiritually. Say, that the Lord has begun a work of grace upon your hearts. Zerubbabel (Jesus, set forth by that name), the true Prince of Israel, through the operation of God, the Holy Ghost, has laid the foundation of a spiritual temple in your conscience. But no sooner is the foundation-stone of God's grace laid in the soul, than it is with us spiritually as it was with the Jews naturally; opposition arises, and enemies start up on every hand; and the great mountain which before did not appear rears up its head. The adversaries of the church were quiet enough when she was in Babylon; but when she came forth to build up the temple at Jerusalem, then they started up. So spiritually: all the enemies, obstacles, impediments, and difficulties that the quickened soul meets with, were dead as stones, when there was no work going on in the conscience; but no sooner does Zerubbabel lay the foundation-stone of grace in the heart, than adversaries rise up thick, lofty mountains begin to start up, and, where before there was nothing but a plain, thrust up their lofty peaks into the sky.

1. For instance. There is the mountain of God's inflexible justice. Who knows anything of God's justice, righteousness, purity, holiness, and indignation against sin whilst in a state of nature? But when the spiritual Zerubbabel lays the foundation-stone of

grace in the heart, this lofty mountain for the first time begins to appear; the high and rugged peaks of God's immutable justice, and the deep abysses and precipices of eternal woe;—this Sinai mountain, hitherto not perceived, rises up betwixt heaven and the soul. Now it cannot be passed over. There are many who are trying to wind their way round this mountain; but they will only fall down its precipices. Some skilful engineers are attempting to lower its peaks, and bridge its ravines; but the rocks will fall upon them, and the bridges break under them, and let them down into ever-devouring flames. The mountain of God's justice in a broken law is not to be passed over by a fallen creature like man; it ever stands up as an impenetrable barrier betwixt God and the soul till Zerubbabel appears; but "before Zerubbabel," this lofty mountain of God's inflexible justice becomes a plain. He has fulfilled it; therefore he has removed it out of the way. As the apostle speaks, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." (Col. 2:14.) By fulfilling the law, he removed the impenetrable barrier of God's inflexible justice. He made no bridge over the precipices; he did not lower a little the peaks, that the sinner might by degrees clamber over them; but by fulfilling the Law, he completely put it out of the way. Thus before the spiritual Zerubbabel this mountain of inflexible justice becomes a plain.

2. But there is also an unbelieving heart, which stands up as a great mountain betwixt salvation and the soul. We know nothing of an unbelieving heart till God the Spirit makes the conscience tender in his fear. Deceived by Satan, we mistake presumption for faith, and vain-confidence for a good hope through grace; the unbelief and infidelity of our fallen nature are completely hidden from us; and we know no more about the workings of a fearful, doubting heart, and the utter impossibility of creating spiritual faith in our own souls, than the dead in the grave-yard. But when the spiritual Zerubbabel sets his hand to the work, and lays the foundation-stone of grace in the conscience, then for the first time

this mountain begins to appear—the mountain of a doubting, unbelieving, and infidel heart, which questions every thing that God has revealed, and will not and cannot receive the truth as it is in Jesus. And O, what struggles, difficulties, perplexities, and exercises are felt in the soul through this great mountain of unbelief which rears up its huge head so unexpectedly! When God the Spirit convinces us of unbelief, he does not create the mountain; for if he did, it would make God the author of sin; but he shews us the mountain which before was hidden from our view, and makes us feel what a barrier it is betwixt heaven and our souls. The mountain was there before, but we did not see it. When this truth is revealed by the Spirit in the conscience, that “without faith it is impossible to please God,” we are brought to see, that to live and die in unbelief, is to live and die in our sins. As soon, then, as we get faith, we feel unbelief in our hearts. For we need living faith to believe our own unbelief; spiritual light to see its existence and divine life to feel its power. O this great mountain that stands up as an insuperable obstacle between heaven and our souls! But the Lord says, “Who art thou, O great mountain?” “Art thou so high, art thou so deep, art thou so immense, that thou canst not be removed?” For if it be not removed, not a single soul can get to heaven. But some say, “We must do our best to get over this mountain: we must take God at his word; we must believe his promises, look to Jesus, and rely upon his truth.” In other words, we must, with a great deal of pains and skill, lower this mountain, level it, tunnel it, cut through it, or make a road over it. But a living soul finds it no such easy thing to take God at his word, no such simple thing to believe the Lord’s promises. He finds that all this “taking God at his word,” leaves him still in the mud and mire of doubt and fear, still in the pit wherein is no water, still under the curse and sentence of a broken law. Therefore, all this taking God at his word, looking to the promises, relying on Jesus, without the Spirit’s inward work and witness, is found in our experience to be utterly unable to remove the mountain of unbelief.

Now the Lord says, “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel, thou shalt become a plain.” The spiritual Zerubbabel, with one glance of his eye, with one touch of his finger, with one word of his lips, in one moment, can cause faith to spring up in the soul to receive him in all his covenant fulness. And thus, the great mountain of unbelief, which seemed completely irremovable and utterly impassable, sinks down into a plain; and we can no more refuse to believe when the spiritual Zerubbabel gives us faith, than we could believe before he gave it. When faith is given, of all things it is most easy to believe; the mountain before Zerubbabel sinks into a plain.

3. But there is also the burden of sin, that lies hard and heavy on a tender conscience. The iniquities and transgressions of his past life; the base, base backsliding of which he has been and is perpetually guilty; the slips, falls, and inconsistent words and actions; and the horrible workings of a depraved nature;—all these at times lie with great weight and power on the conscience of an awakened sinner, and, like a mountain, press down his soul to the earth. “How is this great mountain of sin and sinfulness,” asks the soul, “to be removed? I cannot change my own heart; I cannot take away the burden of sin; I cannot purge my guilty conscience; I cannot bring spiritual, holy, and heavenly thoughts into my mind. How is this great mountain to be removed?” Why, such a mountain as that left upon the soul would be a millstone to sink it into the lowest depths of hell. But when the Lord says, “Who art thou, O great mountain?” this burden of sin, this weight of guilt that makes thy soul cry and groan? What art thou “before Zerubbabel?” let him but speak with power, “it shall become a plain.” For Zerubbabel, the spiritual Zerubbabel, has shed atoning blood to wash away all this guilt, has brought in everlasting righteousness to justify the ungodly, and has a heart full of love which he can and does shed abroad in the soul of his beloved ones. Thus, then, this burden of guilt and shame, this great mountain, before Zerubbabel, let him but speak, becomes a plain.

4. A hard heart. And O, what a burden a hard heart is to one whose conscience has been made tender in God's fear! A hard, rocky, unfeeling heart,—what a great mountain is this betwixt God and the soul! When we cannot produce one feeling of contrition, when we cannot raise up one pang of godly sorrow, when not a sigh will come out of our steely bosom, not a single tear fall from our iron eye, O, at what a distance does this hard heart keep us from the Lord! What a burden, what a plague, what a source of guilt and trouble is a hard heart to all that fear his name! O this great mountain that thrusts up its lofty peak into the sky, so that heaven is not seen, nor the countenance of God beheld, nor the lovingkindness of Jesus' heart is realized; but nothing seen except this dark and impenetrable barrier between God and our souls! We cannot move it. All the preaching in the world cannot stir it, all the praying in the world cannot move it, and all the exertions of the creature cannot alter it. You might as well try to remove Snowdon from its base as try to move away the rocky barrier of a hard, unfeeling, impenetrable heart. But, before Zerubbabel, the spiritual Zerubbabel, the mountain becomes a plain. In one moment, the hard, unfeeling heart that seems shut up in chains of adamantine ice, in one moment, can he make it flow down and dissolve. Did not the church feel this, when she cried, "O, that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence?" (Isa. 64:1.) This is the way whereby Zerubbabel removes the mountain of a hard heart. He does not remove the mountain (if I may use the expression) bodily, but he makes it dissolve, flow down, and melt into a plain. He softens the heart, (as Job says, "God maketh my heart soft:" 23:16) and makes it tender and contrite before him.

5. But a thousand difficulties, a thousand perplexities stand in the way of a soul that fears God. Men devoid of the grace of God, in a fleshly profession of religion, have no difficulties; the constant burden of their song is "What a pleasant thing religion is!" "It never was designed," they quote, "to make our pleasure less." "Cheerful

piety, how delightful it is!" is the great song of the day. But if such silken holiday professors knew anything of the difficulties, exercises, temptations, and sorrows that lie in the path of every real Christian, we should not hear so much about cheerful piety, which is often but another name for delusion and hypocrisy. Look at the rebuilding of the temple by the remnant that returned from Babylon; view the obstacles thrown in the way of its completion; see how the enemies start up at every stop; how the great king sends his commands not to go on with it; how the builders are compelled for many years to desist from putting a single stone upon the walls; what despondency seized the breasts of those that loved Zion to see the place of God's abode desolate; and how indeed they found that prophecy fulfilled that "the wall should be built in troublous times!" (Dan. 9:25.) Had they much "cheerful piety," as they surveyed the unfinished pile?

But does not this delay of the work set forth one of the great mountains that the children of God find in their path? The work of grace seems often at a standstill in them. And what a trying path it is to God's people, that, perhaps for thirteen or fourteen years, they cannot trace the hands of the spiritual Zerubbabel to have laid a single stone in their heart, or raised up one clear and striking Ebenezer! This apparently complete suspension of the work makes them often say, "Surely if I were the Lord's, I should feel more than I do! I should have more going on in my soul; I should certainly experience more sorrow, or more joy; more castings down, or more liftings up; more darkness or more light; more striking dealings of the Lord in providence; more manifest testimonies in grace; surely if the Lord were at work on my conscience, I should not be at this standstill for so many years." But look at the temple. Several years elapsed without a single stone being put upon the walls. The foundation had been laid, and the walls raised to a certain height; but for a long time there was a complete suspension of work. This entire cessation from building, producing hopelessness and despondency in the minds of the people as to its completion, was chiefly

“the great mountain” that the Lord declared should be removed. The hands of Zerubbabel should complete what his hands had begun. And we know that this great mountain became a plain—that King Darius issued orders that the temple should be completed, and that he who opposed the work should be hanged, and his house made a dung-hill. (Ezra 6:11.) Thus Zerubbabel literally and actually brought forth the head-stone with the shoutings of those exulting in this manifestations of the Lord’s grace and favour who had once sunk into distress and despondency.

But what a mountain is this in the way of God’s people! To feel so little faith in exercise, so little love, so little joy, their affections so cold, and so little life and power in their hearts, is indeed at times to a tender conscience a great mountain. “O,” says such an one, “that I could feel more! How many sermons do I hear, and not a single word comes with power to my heart! How many chapters I read, and not a verse is applied with sweetness to my soul! How I go on sighing and groaning, and yet seem not to advance one step forward in the heavenly road!” “Who art thou, O great mountain?” the Lord still says by his prophet. “Who art thou?” What! Is this mountain too great to be removed? Are these peaks too lofty to flow down at the Lord’s presence? “Who art thou?” “Before Zerubbabel,”—let him but speak, let him but appear, let him but smile, let him but drop one soft word into the conscience, “before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.”

6. But whatever good thing we try to do—whatever spiritual thing we are engaged in, we are sure to find some mountain or other in the way. When busy in the world, when engaged in business, when occupied with the things of time and sense, there are no difficulties then. You can use your head and hands, and employ your thoughts without interruption; but no sooner does the soul become engaged in spiritual things than a thousand vain thoughts intrude, a thousand worldly things fill the mind; and it seems scarcely possible to be spiritual and heavenly-minded for a single half hour together. This apparent (for in the case of the spiritual

building of the temple of mercy there is no real) suspension of the Lord’s dealings with the soul is indeed a great mountain. “O,” says the poor groaning soul, “if I could but be spiritual, if I were but heavenly minded, if I had more sweet communion with Jesus, if I could see him agonizing under my sins, if I could but have a solemn sight of the Son of God suffering and dying for me! But whenever I try to take up spiritual things, a host of vain and worldly thoughts rush into my mind, and my gadding, roving, roaming, adulterous, idolatrous heart is running everywhere. I cannot read the word; I cannot fix my attention; I cannot understand nor feel what the Bible says; I cannot lift up my heart to God for five minutes, nor is my soul melted by his love. O, what a mountain, what a barrier, what an obstacle there is in the way betwixt God and my soul!” “Who art thou, O great mountain?” How the Lord challenges the mountain to stand forth in all its stature! How he takes a survey of it in every part; he gauges the depth, and measures the height, and looks at it in all its towering bulk, and all its huge dimensions! “Who art thou?” What! too great to be removed? too hard and rocky to flow down! “Before Zerubbabel!” one touch of his finger, one glance from his eye, one word from his lips; let it be the highest mountain, although it be a second Andes, it shall at once “become a plain.” Do not you find it sometimes to be so? Your hard thoughts of God are removed; your doubts and fears take wing and fly away; your carnality and earthliness are for a time dispersed; heavenly affections, spiritual desires, holy breathings, and ardent longings come into your heart; and you feel some embracement of Jesus in the arms of faith, because “before Zerubbabel” this mountain has become a plain.

But some may ask, “Why has the Lord appointed that these mountains should stand up betwixt himself and our hearts?” I will answer this question by another. Why did the Lord permit the temple to be so interrupted by the adversaries of Judah? Was it not his sovereign pleasure that the temple should be rebuilt? Did he not declare that the glory of the latter house should exceed the glory of

the former? Did he not mean it to come to pass? Why did he then suffer these adversaries to rise up on every hand to stop its completion? To shew them these two things, which man cannot learn in any other way. First, the utter helplessness, complete weakness, and thorough impotency of the creature to everything good; and secondly, the almighty power of the Lord displayed in removing every obstacle in the way of his will. People talk of "Almighty God;" "the Almighty" is in everybody's lips; but how few know that he is the Almighty! And the people of God too, though persuaded that he is almighty, and that the spiritual Zerubbabel has "all power in heaven and earth," yet when they come into the slightest difficulty, their faith staggers and gives way, and they cannot believe that he has power or will to deliver. Have you not been in temptations, out of which you believed the Lord himself could not deliver you; at least, if the words did not come from your lips, the thought passed in your heart. Have you not been in trials, out of which you have been confident no good could come? And have you not been in straits and difficulties when it seemed utterly impossible for the Lord to appear? What was all this? Were you not doubting the very omnipotency of God, which is the foremost article of your creed, and secretly saying, "he is not almighty?" Now, the Lord, to shew that he is almighty, causes or permits these mountains to rise up in our paths, that he may have the glory of taking them out of the way; that he may convince us that we have not the least power to remove them ourselves; and when he removes them, that he may get glory to himself; for he is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another.

Now I would ask those here who know the Lord, have not you ever found the highest mercy to be shown forth in the deepest misery; your clearest deliverances to come out of your sorest temptations; and the greatest power of God to appear in the greatest weakness of the creature? And why is this? In order to convince you, not as a cut and dried article of a Calvinistic creed, but to shew you in your very heart of hearts, in the very depths of your

conscience, what a poor helpless creature you are in the things of God; and thus to make it plain that the hand of the Lord has done it all. If there were no mountains of difficulties, perplexities, and obstacles for the soul to be harassed and exercised with, we should not want a Zerubbabel, an almighty Jesus to appear; we should not need the power of God to be put forth in our hearts. We should be satisfied with a sound Calvinistic creed, with a dead formal profession, with a name to live, and merely seeing the truth in the letter. But having these mountains of difficulties, obstacles, perplexities, and exercises, we are brought to feel our need of the almighty power of God experimentally put forth to remove them. And when the Lord does remove them, the soul can give him all the praise and glory. Then "before Zerubbabel" every mountain "becomes a plain." And if you are a child of God, let these two things be written on your conscience, (God himself in mercy write them there!) you will have a mountain in your way pretty well every step that you take in the divine life. If you ever were to visit a mountainous country, you would see that it was a continued chain of eminences, so that one is only the introduction to another; that mountain rises after mountain, and peak after peak; so that the whole journey is a succession of mountains. So, spiritually, there will be a succession of mountains in the path of every one that fears God. And you will also find this, that "before Zerubbabel," before the almighty power of Jesus, these mountains will become "a plain." And thus we learn to sink into the depths of self-abasement, and put the crown upon the head of him to whom it alone rightly belongs.

II.—"And he shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." What is literally meant by these words? Zerubbabel had laid the foundation of the temple; but it had been at a standstill for several years. The Lord, therefore, promises, by his prophet Zechariah, that the hands of Zerubbabel which had laid the foundation should also put on "the head-stone," or the last stone in the roof; and that the temple should stand forth complete, towering in all its beautiful proportions and all its sub-

lime grandeur. This is the historical meaning of the prophecy. But we have a spiritual and experimental meaning couched under it. The spiritual Zerubbabel, Jesus, the Lord of life and glory, whose hands have laid the foundation-stone of grace in the heart, will accomplish the work, and bring forth the head-stone thereof, with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it."

1. There are two senses in which the spiritual Zerubbabel brings forth the head-stone: one, when Jesus reveals himself with divine power to the soul, and thus completes the spiritual building, making the heart a temple for God to dwell in; for, until Christ is manifested in the conscience, and his love, blood, and grace are sealed with a divine witness upon the heart, the head-stone is not brought forth, nor are there shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it." The building is begun, but not finished; the walls are raised up, but the roof is wanted to keep out the wind and weather. The temple is not completed for the Lord of the temple to come in and dwell there till the top-stone is fitted in. How many of God's dear children are in that state! Zerubbabel has laid the foundation in their conscience; there is a work of grace begun in their heart; there are testimonies, signs, tokens, promises, evidences; yet the head-stone is not brought forth, with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it." The last stone is not yet laid on; the arch wants the key-stone; so that they cannot say, "My Lord and my God." And because the headstone is not brought forth with shoutings, they are troubled, distressed, exercised, tossed up and down with fears that they are not "the Lord's building;" for they think that if the work were of the Lord it would have been finished long ago. But look at the temple! Consider the long time it took to finish. Look at what an interval took place between laying the first stone and putting on the roof. What exercises the spiritual Israel must have had in those days, and how often must the souls of those who loved Zion have sunk within them when they looked at the unfinished walls! Many doubtless were the sighs, cries, and groans that went up from the people of Israel, that the Lord would complete the temple; and many anxious enqui-

ries among themselves, "Shall we ever see the head-stone brought forth? Shall we ever behold the Lord's house completed?" So spiritually. How many of God's dear people are troubled in their minds, and go on questioning, doubting, and fearing perhaps for years, because they have no clear testimony in their conscience that their sins are pardoned, are unable to cry, "Abba Father!" or say, "the Lord is their God!" But he that has laid the foundation of the temple will also complete it. Shall the heavenly Architect commence and not complete! Shall his enemies ever mock him, and say, "He began to build, and was not able to finish?" (Luke 14:29, 30.) Shall not grace finish what grace began? The promise is express. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6.) The mountain of doubt, fear, unbelief, questionings, perplexities, shall "before Zerubbabel," in his own time and way, "become a plain;" and he will bring forth the head-stone thereof with such sweet revelations of his blood and love that the soul will shout "Grace, grace unto it."

But why is the repetition? O there is a sweetness in it. Grace begins the work, and grace completes it. Grace applied the Law, and grace reveals the Gospel; grace killed, and grace makes alive; grace wounded, and grace heals. Grace laid the foundation, and grace brings forth the top-stone. Thus grace reigns first, and grace reigns last; yea, every stone in the temple is laid by the hands of almighty grace. One "grace," that would not express half the feeling of the soul—"grace, grace" must be redoubled, as though the soul were under the necessity of repeating it—"grace, grace!" for nothing but grace could ever have laid the foundation, and nothing short of grace could ever have brought forth the head-stone.

2. But there is another meaning of the word. For the temple shadowed forth not merely the work of grace upon the heart whereby the bodies of God's people become the temple of the Holy Ghost, but also the whole church of God, who are living stones in that temple, which will one day shine forth in all its beauty and glo-

ry, and of which Solomon's temple was but a feeble and imperfect type. Zerubbabel has laid the foundation below, and in each successive soul that he takes to glory there is another living stone laid in the glorious temple above. But the head-stone is not yet brought forth. There are many of the stones yet buried in the quarry; others are being hewed out of the rock, and digged from the hole of the pit; others are being chipped and hacked, to bring them into some fitting shape; and others, already squared and fashioned to occupy their destined place above, are lying for a short time amid the parings, chippings, and rubbish. The head-stone is not yet brought forth with shoutings. But when the last vessel of mercy shall be safely gathered in, and the great, the glorious, the living temple shall stand forth in all its beautiful proportions and sublime grandeur; when Zerubbabel, the heavenly Architect, who laid the first and each successive stone, brings forth the head-stone, the keystone of the arch, which binds in the roof and completely fastens the building, the arches of heaven will ring with shoutings; and there will be one universal burst of joy and exultation from the redeemed throng of "Grace, grace unto it." The sound of good works will not be heard there; creature righteousness will not be extolled there; there will be no discordant clink of man's axe and hammer; there will not be a semi-chorus half round the throne above singing the praises of human piety and creature exertions; but there will be one universal song of harmony, extolling sovereign, superabounding grace. And if the Lord do not teach us the first note of the song of the Lamb here below, depend upon it, we shall never sing it hereafter. But O, what harmony will come in a full body from the heavenly choir, when there will not be one discordant note, nor one jarring sound, but all will be in sweet melody, and "grace, grace," will still be the song throughout the countless ages of eternity!

But what a deal of exercise and work upon the conscience it takes to make a man feelingly join in that note! What depths of man's depravity must be known as well as heights of redeeming

mercy! What an acquaintance is needed with the workings of a fallen nature! What troubles, exercises, perplexities, and temptations has the soul to wade through, and what testimonies and deliverances to experience before it is fit to join in that triumphant song.

Now, if the literal temple had been built up without any trouble whatever; if all had gone on smooth and easy, there would not have been any shouting of "grace, grace," when it was finished. But when they saw how the Lord had brought a few feeble exiles from Babylon; how he had supported them amidst, and carried them through all their troubles; and how he that laid the foundation had brought forth the head-stone, all that stood by could say, "Grace, grace unto it." It was these very perplexities and trials that made them join so cheerily in the shout, and made the heart and soul to leap with the lips when they burst forth with "Grace, grace unto it." And who will shout the loudest hereafter? He that has known and felt the most of the aboundings of sin to sink his soul down into grief and sorrow; and most of the superaboundings of grace over sin to make him triumph and rejoice. Who will have most reason to sing, "Grace, grace?" The lost and ruined wretch, who has feared that he should go to hell a thousand times over, and yet has been delivered thence by sovereign grace, and brought to the glory and joy of heaven. No other person is fit to join in that song; and I am sure no other will join in it but he who has known painfully and experimentally the bitterness of sin, and the evil of a depraved heart; and yet has seen and felt that grace has triumphed over all, in spite of the devil, in spite of the world, and in spite of himself, and brought him to that blessed place where many times he was afraid he should never come.

73 The Faith and Confession of a Pilgrim

Preached at Jewry Street Chapel, Aldgate, for the Aged Pilgrims' Friend Society, on Tuesday Evening,

August 13, 1844

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.”

Hebrews 11:13, 14

The Holy Ghost in this chapter (Heb. 11) not only gives us a definition of faith, (as we find verse 1,) but draws out also that definition into a number of examples. His object is to show us, that there is but “one faith,” as there is but “one Lord, and one baptism;” and that the Old Testament saints were partakers of the same faith which Christ and his Apostles preached as necessary to salvation. Now this was very much to the purpose, considering the persons to whom the Epistle was addressed. It was written “to the Hebrews,” that is, to the believing Jews, as distinguished from the believing Gentiles; and it was therefore exceedingly appropriate for the Apostle to show that the very faith of the gospel which he preached, and for which he was contending, existed in the days of old—that it dwelt in the heart and conscience, and was manifested in the life and conversation of the Old Testament saints. In order to prove this, he takes his stand from the very first saint recorded in the Scripture, Abel, and brings it down even below the times of the Old Testament; for there is in the latter part of the chapter (ver. 35,) a clear allusion to a circumstance recorded in the Apocrypha, “And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.” There is an evident allusion here to an account given us in the book of Maccabees (2 Mac. 7) of a mother with her seven children, who were all offered their lives, one after another, on condition of renouncing Judaism; but who all consented to die under the greatest tortures rather than give up the faith of their forefathers. One of the brothers, “when he was ready to die said thus, It is good, being put to death by men, to look for hope

from God to be raised up again by him.” (v. 14.)

Thus the Apostle shews, that all the Old Testament saints, of whom the Jews had the highest opinion, and to whom the Lord himself had borne the strongest testimony, such as Enoch, who was translated; Noah, who, was saved in the ark; Abraham, their lineal ancestor; Sarah his wife; Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and others, of whom time would fail him to tell—that all these ancient believers were partakers of the same faith which was set forth in the gospel. It is as though the apostle said, “It is no new faith that we preach; your forefathers possessed and were saved by it. The Scriptures in your hands testify of it; to them we appeal as our witnesses that the saints of old lived by and died in the faith that we now by the gospel preach unto you.”

The words, from which I hope to speak this evening, refer chiefly to the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; for these, with Sarah, appear to be the persons of whom the Apostle says, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.”

I shall, with God’s blessing, endeavour this evening to trace out the faith spoken of in the text; to show, if God enable me, what were the fruits and effects in the hearts of those to whom it was given; and what a confession they made by their lips and in their lives.

I.—The first point to which I shall call your attention is contained in the clause, “Not having received the promises.” Of whom is the Apostle speaking here? Of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the lineal ancestors of the Hebrews to whom he was writing. But what were the promises which God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? If you look to the book of Genesis, you will find, that the promise made to them was two-fold; and that the Lord repeated the same promise to each of these patriarchs. One was, that the land of Canaan was given to them and to their posterity, for a perpetual

inheritance; and the other, that “in Abraham, and his seed, all the nations of the earth should be blessed.” Thus one of the promises was temporal, though doubtless typical; and the other spiritual, pointing to the Messiah who was to come from the loins of Abraham, and in whom all the chosen seed are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. These were the two grand promises on which their faith was fixed; and yet neither of these two promises was ever received by them in their complete fulfilment. Bear this in mind, that they received a portion of the promise; but because they had not received the whole, the Holy Ghost in the text speaks of them as “not having received the promise.” This clears up what appears to be a little contradiction; for we read a little lower down (verse 17), “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son.” Now there the Holy Ghost declares that he “had received the promises;” and yet in our text, we read, that he had not received the promises. There is no real contradiction. He received the promises in a portion of them; but he did not receive them in their complete fulfilment. He had an earnest of them, but not the whole harvest; he had the first-fruits, but the whole crop was not gathered in. For instance. He was a stranger in the land of Canaan, and “dwelt in tabernacles,” as we read, or tents, with “the heirs with him of the same promise.” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were but sojourners in the land of Canaan, though it was given them for an inheritance; yet they all laid their bones there, and thus took possession of it in death. But their faith laid hold of it as their inheritance; and therefore Abraham would not suffer the servant of his house to take his son Isaac back to his own country, the land of the Chaldees (Gen. 24:6-8); and Jacob and Joseph left a charge on their death-beds that their bones should be carried up from Egypt, and laid in the land of Canaan. (Gen. 49:29; 50:25.)

Again. They did not receive the complete fulfilment of the promise, that “in Abraham, and his seed, all the nations of the earth should be blessed.” (Gen. 22:18.) It was near two thousand

years after the promise was first given before Christ came into the world; and in this sense therefore “they did not receive the promises,” because they did not receive the complete fulfilment of them, that being reserved for a future period.

II.—But though they did not receive the promises in the sense I have explained, yet we read, “they saw them afar off.” The promises which God gave them were held up to the eyes of their faith; and by this faith they saw the promises near at hand; though, as to their actual fulfilment, they were far off. For that is the meaning of the expression—not that they saw the promises to be far off, but that they themselves being afar off, or remote by the length of time from their complete fulfilment, yet saw them as near at hand. For they would not otherwise have “embraced” them. We do not embrace what is distant, but what is near to, yea, what is already in our arms.

Thus by faith Abraham saw that his descendants should one day inherit the land of Canaan in which he was a sojourner; and in the exercise of that faith he buried his wife Sarah in the cave of Machpelah, and he himself was buried in the same spot. (Gen. 25:9, 10.) In similar faith lived and died Isaac and Jacob; and in the same land were their bones laid. Thus the certainty of the promises they saw afar off; though none of them enjoyed in their time the complete fulfilment of them. This is the way in which faith acts now; and if we have the same faith that they had, (for the Apostle’s object in this chapter is to shew that there is but “one faith,”) it will act in the same way, and run in the same channel. Do we not then receive the promises of the heavenly Canaan in the same way as Abraham received the promise that his seed should inherit the earthly Canaan? The land of Canaan was typical of that better country, that rest which remaineth for the people of God. Abraham was a sojourner in the land; he never could say that a foot of it was his own; yet he walked up and down in it, believing that all was his by a divine grant, and that his children should have full possession of it. Nay, when he wished to bury his wife out of his

sight, he had to purchase a burial-place of the children of Heth. Is not this the way with the children of God respecting their eternal inheritance? God has given them a home above, and has promised them an eternal weight of glory. The heavenly land is theirs, and Christ the forerunner has already taken possession of it for them. It is theirs by promise and the oath of God; and yet not theirs by present possession. They have it in promise, but not in enjoyment; in prospect, but not in reality. They sojourn in a waste howling wilderness, looking forward to that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; hoping for a better country, even a heavenly one; and yet it is a great way off. In this sense then we do not receive the promise; we have the earnest, the first fruits, the beginning; but the full accomplishment of it is reserved for a future period. Now this is the way whereby faith is exercised. Was it not so with the patriarchs? Five different times did the Lord distinctly promise Abraham that his seed should inherit the land of Canaan. (Gen. 12:7; 13, 15; 15:7, 18; 17:8.) The same promise he repeated to Isaac, (Gen. 26:3); and again to Jacob at Bethel, (Gen. 28:13); and yet the soil was in the possession of seven strong nations who dwelt in walled towns and cities, while they lived in tents, roaming about as strangers in the land which they believed to be their own, because God had made it theirs by a divine grant. May we not justly suppose that their hearts were at times exercised, when they looked at themselves as a few, feeble sojourners, and saw the land possessed by armed inhabitants? Men of like passions with ourselves, and encompassed with the same infirmities, must not their faith have been often shaken whether the promise would ever have a completion? Look at their difficulties. How could their families grow up in sufficient multitudes to take possession of the land? How could they rise up against its warlike inhabitants without being crushed in the bud? We who have the Bible in our hands, and read the history of the past, can form no idea of the difficulties that perplexed them. We can see now, in God's mysterious providence, they were to go down to Egypt, to multiply there, and come up six

hundred thousand fighting men, besides women and children. To us the book of the past is unfolded, and we can read the promise and the fulfilment; but to them the book of the future was sealed, and they had only a bare promise to embrace. How tried and exercised their minds must have been as they walked backwards and forwards in the land; and how their hearts must have sunk within them when considering how they ever could wrest it from its present possessors! How Jacob was terrified lest the violence of his two sons should bring down upon him their vengeance! "And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house." (Gen. 34:30.) And thus it is now with the exercised children of God. He that knows himself by divine teaching, and has had a glimpse of future bliss and glory, will often thus reason with himself, "How is such a poor, blind, ignorant creature as I, surrounded by so many enemies, oppressed or beguiled by so many of Satan's temptations, beset by the workings of a depraved nature—how am I ever to enter the heavenly inheritance, and enjoy the promised rest?" True faith always has difficulties to encounter. There are two things that stamp faith as genuine. In one of them consists the nature of faith; in the other the trial of faith. And observe how the Apostle brings together these two marks of faith in the chapter before us, as well as in Romans 5.—1. that the nature of faith is to believe what God has revealed and sealed upon the soul; and 2, its trial is to have a constant opposition made to it. Look, for instance, at Abraham's faith with respect to the promised seed. It clung to the promise that his seed should be for number as the stars of heaven. This was his justifying faith, as we read Gen. 15:6, "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." Thus to believe was the nature and essence of his faith. But had it no trial? Did all things flow easily towards the accomplishment of the promise? Were there not (shall I use the term? it is

not too strong) impossibilities in the way? And yet Abraham's faith clung to God's promise in spite of all these impossibilities. It was the actings of living faith, in spite of impossibilities, that proved it to be the faith of God's elect; and God was glorified in removing these impossibilities in his own sovereign way, and fulfilling the answer in his own appointed time. So that an easy faith, a faith that is never subject to questionings, a faith that is never opposed by Satan, a faith never assaulted by doubts and fears and the infidel suspicions of our carnal heart—a faith of that smooth, slipshod kind, is not the living faith which the saints of God had in the days of old. Their faith was of this nature—it hung upon the promise of God, made known by a divine testimony to their conscience, in the midst, and in spite of all the difficulties and obstacles that fought against its fulfilment. For their faith was not “to take God at his word,” as it is called, because such and such truths were found in the Scripture; for there was not one line of the Bible written in their day; but they believed what God spake with his own lips to their heart with divine power. And this is the nature of faith now, to believe the promise that is spoken to the heart with divine power, while every thing in nature opposes it; and thus to maintain its ground in spite of all the impossibilities that hang like a mill-stone round its neck. If, then, your faith is never subject to difficulties, trials, questionings, and oppositions; if you can always believe, and take hold of the promises in the word, as you would cut a slice from the loaf upon your breakfast table, is it not to be feared that it is a dead faith, and that you are but a dead professor?

Thus Abraham's faith must have been tried also with respect to the promised Messiah. God declared to him, that “in him and his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 12:3; 22:18.) But what difficulties lay in the way! How day by day the promise seemed to be removed farther and farther off! How for twenty-five years the Lord kept back the fulfilment of the promise! Must not Abraham's heart often have sunk down within him? He and his wife getting older and older; and the accomplishment of

the promise removed farther and farther by natural circumstances! But yet his faith held on to the promise of God in spite of them all. Thus, to get to heaven we must wade through difficulties, improbabilities, nay, impossibilities. We shall meet with such hindrances, such impediments, such obstacles, that nature will fail and give up the ghost, as much as Abraham's and Sarah's decayed body. And yet, as divine power, in their case, triumphed over nature's death, so grace superabounds in the case of the Christian over all the aboundings of sin, and lands him safe in glory.

But this was the grand point in which Abraham's faith, and that of the patriarchs, was conspicuously manifested, that they “saw the promises afar off.” Though the promises were, so to speak, at a distance so remote that by the eye of sense, nature, and reason they could not be seen, yet faith's perspective glass pierced through all the intervening distance, and fastened upon the promise which God had made sure to the heart. I may illustrate it thus. Has not love, I mean natural love, very keen eyes? How the lover (not to bring the subject down too low) can tell the form and figure of the person he loves at a distance, where the eye of another could not perceive it! And has not love very sharp ears? How well the affectionate wife knows her husband's footstep! You mothers, do you not know your children's cry? You can tell your child's voice out of a thousand others. So with faith. It is so keen-sighted as to see into futurity; so keen-eared as to hear what the Lord speaks to it; so keen-hearted as to feel, though clouds of obscurity and mists of darkness are wrapped around it. Thus they saw the promise “afar off.”

III.—But what is the next thing that we read of these ancient believers? “And were persuaded of them.” This is the nature of faith, to be persuaded of the reality and certainty of God's promises. We therefore read in the first verse of this chapter, “Faith is the substance (or realization) of things hoped for, the evidence” (or convincing testimony) “of things not seen.” The nature of faith is to realize the things which God has spoken, and to believe them to be

most certain and true, though nature, sense, and reason contradict them. Faith thus turns into reality, and gives a substance to things that to other persons are but shadows. The living faith of God's elect is not a mere passing thought, or hasty opinion, or fancied imagination; no, nor a well-grounded conclusion from arguments and proofs, nor any exercise of reason, in its lowest or highest degree. It is a divine faculty in the soul, as distinct from sense and reason, as the eye of a living man from the eye of a marble statue. And its work and office is, to turn the truths of God which are revealed to it into blessed realities; to feed upon them as heavenly food and to believe them to be as certain and far more abiding than the things the bodily eyes see, the natural ears hear, and the literal hands touch. Is your faith of that nature—a thing that has substance, reality, and power in it? All other faith is but emptiness and delusion; all other faith leaves the soul under the wrath of God. Thus, those ancient patriarchs, possessing this living faith, “were persuaded” of the truth of those things that were revealed to them, and of the certain fulfilment of those promises which God had given them. They knew that there was no uncertainty in the matter; but were confident that God who cannot lie would fulfil the promises which he had made for his own name's sake.

There is a very sweet meaning, I think, contained in the expression “persuaded.” There is a softness, a tenderness, and yet an experimental power and beauty in it which I much admire. If a person persuade you into a thing, it is with your own will; you are not driven, forced, compelled into it. A man may do many things by force of circumstances, or by compulsion from others—that is not persuasion. Persuasion carries the heart with it. And this corresponds with what we read Psa. 110:3: “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.” If a person persuade me into a thing, I do it willingly, cheerfully, pleasantly. It was not, indeed, at first my own suggestion; but he has, so to speak, put his mind and will into me; and it has now become my mind and will as much as if it had originated with myself. He has given me his eyes; and I now see it

as he does. Thus, when the patriarchs are said in the text to have been “persuaded of the promises,” it implies that the promises had been so wrought with divine power into their hearts, so communicated with sweetness to their souls, that God's mind and will had become theirs. Their hearts were moulded into a reception of them as sweet, precious, and suitable, bringing glory to God and happiness to them. O what inestimable favour it is to be persuaded of the truth of God's promises by a revelation of them in our conscience!

And you will bear in mind, that to persuade a person implies that there was a difficulty to be overcome. If I persuade a person to do a thing, it presupposes that the person is not willing at first to do it; but at last by my arguments, or on account of his natural love to me, or through the influence I may have over him, he is persuaded to do it. You wives, you know what it is sometimes to persuade your husbands into something you wish to be done. You cannot drive nor compel them, for you are the weaker vessel; but you gently persuade them; and then they follow in the path marked out, and do it cheerfully and willingly. So spiritually. When the Lord makes a promise sweet, opens up the truth to our hearts, gives us to see the beauty and glory that there is in the Son of his love, he persuades us to receive in love what he reveals in power. This is called in Scripture a receiving of the love of the truth, that we may be saved (2 Thess. 2:10); an opening of the heart (Acts 16:14); an inclining of the ear that our soul may live (Isa. 55:3); and it seems especially summed up in that verse (Gen. 9:27): “God shall enlarge (marg. persuade) Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem.” Our hearts are thus drawn toward the Lord, and we receive the truth as it is in Jesus; not by compulsion, not merely as a speculation, a notion, or a theory in our judgment, but with a divine power. The heart and conscience are persuaded; the rebellious will is subdued; unbelief and infidelity are silenced; and that takes place of which the Apostle speaks, “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of

Christ.” (2 Cor. 10:5.)

IV.—And this leads us to the next thing said of these ancient patriarchs, that they “embraced them.” What did they embrace? The promises. But does it not say in a preceding clause, that “they had not received them?” How could they embrace what they had not received? It is true that they had not received them in their complete fulfilment, but they embraced them as to be fulfilled. These are two different things. We may embrace the earnest of a thing, and yet not receive it in its full completion. And this was the way with the ancient patriarchs; they did not receive the promises in their full completion, but they embraced that earnest of them which was given into their hearts. Though so distant, faith brought them near; and what faith brought into their heart, their affections laid hold of and embraced. There is something, to my mind, very sweet and expressive in the word “embrace.” It signifies a laying hold of a beloved object, a clasping of it in our arms, a bringing of it to our bosom, a bestowing of all our fondness and love upon it. This is the way whereby God’s people embrace the truth. It is clasped in the arms of affection, as something sweet, suitable, dear, near, and precious. And yet the promises thus embraced are seen afar off, and not received in their full completion. God has given many promises to his people. He has promised them “eternal life” (Titus 1:2);—that “all things shall work together for their good” (Rom. 8:28);—“that he will never leave them, nor forsake them” (Heb. 13:5); and that they shall eventually be with him where he is (John 14:2, 3.) The people of God do not receive these promises in their complete fulfilment. Like the patriarchs, they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. The inheritance of the saints is still future; but yet a sufficient measure of its sweetness and glory is given to show them what it is, and to raise up in their souls a love and affection, whereby the promises concerning it are embraced as sweet, suitable, and precious. To embrace a thing implies an affection on the part of the person who embraces; it implies a closeness, and also that we desire to hold the object embraced as near to our

heart as we can. So that when the soul embraces the promises, it is not with our reasoning mind, as we receive natural truths; but in faith, hope, and love, as precious realities. There are degrees of this divine embracement of the truth, from the feeblest actings of that faith which works by love, to the height that Peter speaks of, “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” (1 Peter 1:8.)

There are many men who preach what is called truth; but if you look at the grand object and drift of their discourses, what is it? Merely to fill the people’s mind with certain ideas; to inform their judgments; to bring them off Arminian errors; and to settle them down into a sound creed. To belabour the doctrine of free will, and to prove the doctrine of free grace; to bring some novelty out of the Scriptures; to ridicule the Arminians, and flatter the Calvinists,—it is to be feared, is the sum and substance of much that is called “preaching the Gospel.” But this will not satisfy one whom the Lord has thrust out into the ministry. To see people deceiving themselves into the belief that they are the children of God, because they have a few sound opinions in their heads, a few scriptural sentiments floating in their brain, and a Calvinistic creed embraced in their judgment—O what a spectacle to an honest man of God! Will he, can he foster such a delusion, when he knows that souls are at stake, and eternity at hand; that salvation does not consist in a few crude ideas or sound doctrines; but that it is an eternal reality; revealed and manifested to the conscience by the power of God the Spirit? As the brisk gale drives before it the rolling mists, so does the north wind of the Spirit’s teachings drive away this delusion out of the hearts of the Lord’s saints; and when the south wind blows upon their soul, they embrace the truth, because it drops into their heart from the lips of God, as the dew of heaven. Truth and the believer’s heart are like the mortise and tenon; the mortise is useless without the tenon, and the tenon is useless without the mortise; but put them both together, and

there is a union. So with God's people. Their heart is the mortise, hollowed and chiselled out, so to speak; a place dug in it for the Lord to occupy, for the truth of God to come in with divine power. Until a man is emptied and stripped, and a place made in his heart for the Lord to come into the tenon, God's word, the power of God's truth, and the promises God has made, have no place in his heart; as the Lord said to the Jews, "My word hath no place in you." (John 8:37.) They wanted the Spirit's inward work chiselling out a place for the truth of God to fit into. But when the heart, under divine teaching, becomes exercised, cast down, and humbled; when the world and its charms fade out of sight, and eternal realities come with weight upon the conscience—then the precious promises which God has revealed in his word, especially those that speak of salvation through the blood of the Lamb, and justification by his imputed righteousness, are embraced in the arms of love and affection as sweet and suitable. In this way the old patriarchs embraced the promises. When they walked up and down the land of Canaan in which they were sojourners, they were thinking of the time when their posterity would inherit it; and they embraced it as for them. Thus the Lord commanded Abraham, "Arise, walk through the land, in the length of it, and in the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee." (Gen. 13:17.) Abraham thus saw what a goodly inheritance it was for his children to dwell in. So spiritually. The Lord sometimes lets down a little taste of heaven into the soul, gives a sweet rest from sin, from the devil, from doubts, fears, and perplexities; and as he took Moses upon Pisgah's top, and shewed him all the length and breadth of the land, so he sometimes takes his people to the top of the spiritual Pisgah, and shows them by faith the goodly land which is their inheritance. This they embrace in its sweetness, power, and reality; their affections go out after it as their eternal home, believing that one day they shall be where sin and sorrow are no more, where the inhabitant shall not say, "I am sick," and where tears will be wiped away from all faces.

So also with respect to the promise of the Messiah. Abraham,

and the patriarchs were not only persuaded that the Lord would give the Messiah from Abraham's loins, but they embraced it, and felt a sweetness and power in it; their faith leaped over all the distance that separated them from its fulfilment; and they rejoiced in it as if already accomplished. Thus the Lord said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad." (John 8:56.) He looked over the intervening near two thousand years. His faith over-leaped every obstacle, and saw the day when God would appear in flesh, when the Son of God would come into this world to take the body which was prepared for him in the womb of the Virgin Mary, Abraham's lineal descendant. More than nineteen hundred years before the God-Man came, shed his blood on Calvary's tree, and rose from the dead, Abraham embraced the power of that blood to purge his conscience, and the power of that righteousness to justify him before God. We have received the promise indeed in its fulfilment; but we need similar discoveries, Pisgah views, glimpses and glances of "the King in his beauty," in order to embrace him in the arms of faith and say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." (Psa. 73:25.) Old Simeon thus embraced the babe Jesus in the temple, and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." (Luke 2:29, 30.) Nor till we embrace in the arms of faith and affection the Lord of life and glory can we use the language of that aged saint. What a blessing it is to embrace Jesus, and the truth as it is in Jesus, in a living conscience and a believing heart, by the operation of the blessed Spirit! and thus to feel the sweetness, preciousness, reality, and power of vital godliness! How different this is from merely being a sound Calvinist, possessing a correct set of sentiments and scriptural views of the scheme of salvation floating in our mind, while the heart is as destitute of divine unction and heavenly teaching, as the stones in the street on which we tread!

V.—But what was the effect of this faith on the aged patriarchs? "They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on

the earth.” What made them witness this good confession? It was because seeing the promises afar off, and embracing them, they felt a measure of their sweetness and power. If you look to what is recorded of the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you will see that they all acknowledged they were sojourners in the land. Abraham said to the sons of Heth, “I am a stranger and a sojourner with you.” (Gen. 23:4.) Here he confessed that he was a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth. We find Isaac also making the same confession when he sent away Jacob to Padan-aram, “God Almighty give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee, that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham.” (Gen. 28:4.) And we find Jacob making the same declaration before Pharaoh, (and to this the Apostle seems more specially to allude,) “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.” (Gen. 47:9.) Thus we see these three patriarchs confessing they were strangers and sojourners on the earth; and this, the Apostle says, sprang from their seeing the promises afar off, and being persuaded of them, and embracing them. It was because these three things had been done in their conscience that they made this confession. But this acknowledgment of the lips sprang from the feeling of it in their soul;—did it not? For “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Rom. 10:10.) “I believed, therefore have I spoken.” (Psa. 116:10.) The witness in the heart first, the witness in the lips next; faith the root, confession the fruit. So with these patriarchs; they confessed they were strangers and pilgrims, because they felt it; otherwise their confession would have been but hypocrisy. What made them strangers and pilgrims? Their persuasion of the promises; having seen them afar off; having embraced them in their conscience. Look at the case of Abraham. Had he not every thing to make him happy naturally? Had he not more than three

hundred armed servants (“trained,” as we read in the margin) to defend the rest of his property? These servants were soldiers, at least, might be used as soldiers, to defend the rest of his goods. He was most abundantly rich in flocks and herds; yet he was a stranger and a pilgrim; and, doubtless, often burdened and tried through the difficulties of the way. It was because these patriarchs had received eternal realities into their heart and conscience that they felt themselves to be strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Nothing else will effect it. Many people say, they are “strangers and pilgrims” here below; but they take care to have as much of this world’s comforts as they can scrape together by hook and by crook. They talk about being strangers, yet can be in close connection with men of the world. And could you see them upon ‘Change, at the market, behind the counter, or at home with their families, you would not find one mark to distinguish them from the ungodly. Yet they come to chapel; and if called upon to pray, they will tell the people they are poor strangers and pilgrims, in a vale of tears; while their hearts are in the world, and their eyes stand out with fatness; while they are as light and trifling as a comic actor, and have no care or anxiety except to get the largest slice of the well-sugared cake that the world sets before them.

It is not the mere profession and acknowledgment of the lips, but grace in the heart, that makes a man a stranger and a pilgrim. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob made no affinity, no connection with the Canaanites; they kept to themselves, and were a separated people. And so God’s people do now, as the Lord works in their hearts. They are strangers and sojourners; the world is not their home; nor can they take pleasure in it. Sin is often a burden to them; guilt often lies as a heavy weight upon their conscience; a thousand troubles harass their minds; a thousand perplexities oppress their souls. They cannot bury their minds in speculations and derive all their happiness from their successes; for they feel that this earth is not their home; and they are often cast down and exercised, because they have to live with such an ungodly heart in such an un-

godly world.

A stranger, you know, is distant and shy. When he comes into company, his lips are closed; there is no familiarity, because he is a stranger. If, then, we are strangers in the world, we shall have some distance and shyness towards it; we shall have no fellowship with the carnal people that we are mixed up with; but we shall stand aloof from them, and with the dead professors also of the day. We cannot be at home with those who have no fear of God in their hearts; who have but a name to live, and are dead. We cannot take up with every sound Calvinist, and receive him as a brother, because his head is clear in the truth. We want to find some true faith, some marks of the life of God being there; some evidence that his conscience has been made tender in God's fear; that he walks consistently in life and conduct with his profession; and that he really is what he professes to be,—a stranger, not having his heart fixed upon the things of time and sense.

But they confessed they were "pilgrims." What is the literal meaning of the word? The English expression is borrowed from superstitious times, and applies chiefly to those travellers who used to visit the sepulchre at Jerusalem. I do not know whether our translators were very wise in using the word. But the Greek word means sojourners; that is, persons not natives of the place where they dwell, but aliens or foreigners, who tarry for a time in another country that is not their native home. That gives us a better idea of the word "pilgrim," than of one who went to the Holy Land gathering up dead men's bones, and, with a cockle-shell in his bonnet, bringing home chests full of rotten relics. A sojourner is one that does not speak the language of the country, nor understand its customs, nor associate with its people. This metropolis is full of foreigners. How they all herd together! They cannot speak our language; they are not familiar with our habits! What a picture this is of God's family, sojourners in a strange country, speaking another language! They cannot lie, cheat, swindle, and carry out tricks of trade under the mask of a profession, nor do those things that hon-

est and honourable men would be ashamed of. But their language is pure, the language of Canaan seasoned with grace. They speak of the exercises, troubles, and difficulties of their path; and of those manifestations and testimonies which none know but themselves. But some of our Calvinistic preachers—see them out of the pulpit, and what would meet your eye and ear? lightness, frivolity, and joking. But the Lord's people, whose hearts the Spirit has touched, are strangers and sojourners; they do not live in this world as men of the world. In that invaluable work of the immortal Bunyan, "The Pilgrim's Progress," which the more it is read the more it is prized, what a sweet account we have of a conversation that was held in the house Beautiful. "I will warrant you," to use one of his own expressions, there was no jestings there, no light, frivolous vain conversation. How Prudence, Piety, and Charity, those three modest damsels, entertained the Pilgrim with the work of grace upon the heart! What a sweet picture this is of the family of God conversing of the things he has done for their souls! These were true sojourners; not professors merely; but persons having the real grace and fear of God in their consciences. And thus the patriarchs confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims; and they walked as a peculiar people living to God's honour and glory.

VI.—And from this the Apostle draws this conclusion, "They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." A man must have some home. If he cannot be at home with the world, it is plain he is seeking a home somewhere else. Now if these aged patriarchs could have been satisfied as the rest of the nations were, they would have built houses, and tilled the fields, and not have been a company of houseless wanderers, living in tents. They would have had houses, lands, and title-deeds, and been like our modern Colonists. But "they confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth;" and by that confession declared that they were seeking another country; that is, as the Apostle explains it, "a heavenly one." And all their pilgrimage and all their sojourning declared this, that they sought this country. They had no land of

their own; neither house nor home; no fixed habitation; but they sought “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” In a word, their hearts were, more or less, in heaven; their desires were tending there, and there in due time they hoped to be. And having this experience wrought with divine power in their conscience, they declared it plainly, so that men could see it by their actions, that they sought another country.

Now, does your profession of religion allow you to be like other people? Is your pride like theirs? Is your covetousness like theirs? Are your affections like theirs, buried in the things of time and sense? Are you selfish and quarrelsome, and acting all together as the men of the world? What will they think, what can they think of such a profession as this? They will say, “The man talks about heaven; but he is very glad to get a heaven here below too; he tries to make himself as comfortable as he can now; he talks of his treasure being above; yet a keener man in the market, or a greater screw to his servants, is not to be found in the whole town.” What do the apprentices and servants think? They must say, “Master tells us at family prayers that his treasure is in the heaven; and yet he gets out of our bones all the sweat and blood he can.” Now, I say, such men are a disgrace to the Christian profession. Is this the way for them to declare they are seeking a country? How did you come by your religion? Does it consist in expressions picked up from the pulpit, and scattered up and down in the family prayers? Or, is it manifest in your life and conversation, by a deadness to the world, and a separation from the things of time and sense; and so made evident that you are seeking a better country, that you are not satisfied with the poor perishing things of the world, but looking forward to a city “which hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the lamb is the light thereof.” (Rev. 21:23.)

74 Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thurs-

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“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

2 Cor. 4:7

How different is the estimate that faith makes of riches, honours, and comforts from that made by the world and the flesh! The world has no idea of riches but such as consist in gold and silver, in houses, lands, or other tangible property; no thought of honour, but such as man has to bestow; and no notion of comfort, except in “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” But the soul that is anointed by an “unction from the Holy One,” takes a different estimate of these matters, and feels that the only true riches are those of God’s grace in the heart, that the only real honour is that which cometh from God, and that the only solid comfort is that which is imparted by the Holy Ghost to a broken and contrite spirit. Now, just in proportion as we have the Spirit of God, shall we take faith’s estimate of riches, honour, and comfort; and just so much as we are imbued with the spirit of the world, shall we take the flesh’s estimate of these things.

When the eye of the world looked on the Apostles, it viewed them as a company of poor ignorant men, a set of wild enthusiasts, that travelled about the country preaching concerning one Jesus, who they said, had been crucified, and was risen from the dead. The natural eye saw no beauty, no power, no glory in the truths they brought forth: nor did it see that the poor perishing tabernacles of these outcast men contained in them a heavenly treasure; and that they would one day shine as the stars for ever and ever, whilst those who despised their word would sink into endless woe.

The spirit of the world, and the views that the flesh takes are not altered now. Nature ever remains the same, and can never understand or love the things of eternity; it can only look to, and can

only rest upon the poor perishing things of time and sense. By this test, therefore, we may in a measure try our state. What, for instance, are our daily and hourly feelings about the things of time and sense, and what about the things of eternity? Which of the two press with more power on our minds, which occupy more of our thoughts, which are laid up more warmly in our affections? And just in proportion as the solemn things of eternity, or the things of time and sense, occupy our mind; just so much as our hearts are fixed upon heaven or earth; just so much as we are living to God, or to ourselves, in the same degree is the strength of our faith, and the depth of the work of grace upon our conscience.

The Apostle, in the text, speaks of “a Treasure;” and he tells where this treasure was lodged, “in Earthen Vessels.” And he gives us also the Reason why it was lodged there, “that the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of us.”

If, then, we look at the text in these three points of view, and consider—1. What the treasure is.—2. In what vessel it is lodged.—and 3. Why it is lodged there, we shall, if God enable us, perhaps see something of the mind of the Spirit in the passage before us.

I.—Our first business, then, is to examine—What this treasure is. For the Apostle says expressly, “We have this treasure.” But in order to understand what he means by the expression, we must look back a little to what he had been speaking of in the preceding verses. He says (4:6), “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure.” This, then, is the treasure—God shining into the heart to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Wherever, therefore, he has so shined into the heart as to give that light, to bestow that knowledge, to communicate that grace, there is the treasure: and where “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” has never so shined, there this treasure is altogether wanting.

But to understand the expression, “treasure,” we must bear in

mind, that, in ancient times, money was for the most part hoarded: it was not, as in our day, invested, and put out to interest; but generally locked up and carefully preserved, as jewels, coin, or bullion. Thus, we read of “the treasures of the king’s house, which Shishak took away, (1 Kings 14:26); and of “the treasuries” which King Hezekiah made. “And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels.” (2 Chr. 32:27.)

1. Treasure makes a man rich. This is the leading idea connected with the word. So spiritually, the man who possesses this inward light shining into his heart is rich indeed; and in the possession of it his wealth consists.

2. But there is another idea connected with the word “treasure.” Treasure was often hidden. We read, for instance, of “treasures hid in the sand.” (Deut. 33:19); and the Lord compares the kingdom of heaven to “treasure hid in a field.” (Matt. 13:44.) It was the custom of wealthy men in ancient times, through fear of robbery and violence, to conceal their treasures by burying them in the earth. The Apostle seems to have an allusion to this in the text, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels;” it being the custom to put the treasure, when thus buried, into earthen vessels, in order to keep it safely, and prevent the gold and silver from being scattered about.

But what is this treasure spiritually? 1. One part of it is light. The Apostle expressly says, “God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” This light springs from the Spirit’s inward revelation of the truth of God with power to the conscience. There is always light in a new-born soul, which distinguishes it from those dead in sin. As the Apostle says, “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” (2 Cor. 4:3, 4.) When a man is

walking in the darkness and death of unregeneracy, he has no true light. He may indeed have a false light, as the light of presumption, delusion, or vain-confidence; but all such borrowed light is worse than darkness; as the Lord says, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:23.) There is very much of this false light abroad in the world. Men's judgments get notionally enlightened, as we read, Heb. 6:4: "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened." This light resides in the carnal mind, and has its seat in the judgment; but there is no unctuous power, no divine feeling attending it. It is not the light of the Holy Ghost in a regenerate heart, but a dry light, floating merely in the brain. It is not the light "sown for the righteous;" nor "the shining light" that beams upon "the path of the just;" nor "the light" that, together with "truth," God "sends out to bring us to his holy hill and to his tabernacles." (Psa. 43:3.) No conviction of sin, no humility of soul, no meekness of spirit ever accompanies it. This dead and dry light never touches the conscience, never penetrates through the veil spread over the heart, never sinks deep into the soul; it never brings a man upon his knees to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" It never discovers to its possessor the hypocrisy, pride, presumption, and deceitfulness of his heart; it never shows to him the holy character of God, and gives him in his light to see light.

The only saving light is the light of God shining into the soul, giving us to see and know "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." A man may have the clearest light in his judgment, and yet never have the penetrating light of the Spirit producing conviction in his soul; he may have the soundest knowledge of the doctrines of grace, and see the harmonious scheme of salvation; and yet never have seen a holy God by divine teaching, nor have ever felt the spirituality of God's righteous law condemning him as a transgressor.

But "the light of life," as the Lord calls it, is sure to guide its possessor aright. If we have it not, we shall be sure to go astray; we shall be entangled in some error, plunge into some heresy,

imbibe some doctrine of devils, drink into some awful delusion, or fall into some dreadful sin, and "concerning faith make shipwreck." A false light is something like the light which Pirates hold up to entrap ships to their destruction; or like the fires, which the "wreckers," those dreadful characters in Cornwall, used to kindle on their iron-bound coast, in order that the mariner might mistake them for some friendly light-house, and run his vessel on the rocks, where those heartless wretches plundered it. A false light can but wreck us on the rocks of presumption or despair. But the light of divine life in the soul is accompanied with all the graces of the Spirit. It is the light of the glory of God, the light of Jesus' countenance, and the light of the Spirit's teaching, and therefore an infallible Guide and Guard; as the Apostle says, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things." (1 John 2:20.) And this infallible pilot will guide the soul to whom it is given safe into the harbour of endless rest and peace.

2. But the treasure, of which the Apostle speaks, not only consists of light, but of life also. Light and life go together. Where light is imparted, life is communicated; and it is in the enjoyment of divine life, as much as in the possession of divine light, that this heavenly treasure consists. A man may have much light in his judgment, and no life in his soul; but if he have life in his soul, he must have a measure of light in his judgment; though he may not be so clear in the doctrinal knowledge of the scheme of salvation as many that have light in the judgment, and no inward, spiritual life.

But, wherever there is life, there will also be feeling. This is the sure evidence of life: for just in proportion to the depth and reality of life, will be the depth and reality of feeling. Some condemn all feeling: and say, "Away with your frames and feelings." But what awful language is this to come from the lips of men! For if we have no feeling, what religion have we? We have not a grain more of religion than we have of feeling. For instance; if sin lie upon my conscience, can I know anything of the guilt of it, except I feel it? If pardon be revealed to my heart, can I know anything of pardon, if I

do not feel it? If I am in bondage, is there not a feeling of bondage? And if in liberty, is there not a feeling of liberty? Can we touch an object without feeling? Can we see an object without feeling? Can we hear a sound without feeling? Can we move a single step forward without feeling? What is the greatest misery of a paralytic? Is it not that he is without feeling? Is it not his cry, "O that I could have some feeling in my paralysed limb, or paralysed side!" There is death in it, because there is no feeling in it. How awful, then, it is to hear ministers saying, "Away with your frames and feelings!" when we have no more true religion than we have of feeling? If I fear God, I fear in feeling; if I believe in God, I believe in feeling; if I love God, I love in feeling. If I rise to the highest point of assurance, I rise there in feeling; and if I sink to the lowest depth of despondency, I can only sink there in feeling. In fact, I know nothing but by feeling. Just in proportion to the depth of the work of the Spirit on my conscience, will be the depth of feeling in my soul. You wives and husbands, what would you think of your partners telling you they loved you without feeling? You parents, can you love your children without feeling? or you children, can you love your parents without feeling? When love is in exercise, we find there the deepest feeling; and when love is not in exercise, there is the absence of feeling. When we are in trouble, are we not troubled in feeling? and when we are glad, are we not glad in feeling? To say, then, "Away with your frames and feelings," is to cut down all vital godliness. It is like a man at work in a garden, who should pull up all the flowers, and leave only the weeds; or cut down every fruit-tree, and spare all the nettles, thistles, and brambles. So to cut down, or attempt to cut down frames and feelings, (for being the work of the Spirit, they never can be cut down) under the idea of setting up a faith without them, is but to pluck up (if the hand of man could do so) every fruit of God's planting in the soul, and leave nothing but the thorns, thistles, and briars of vain-confidence and presumption. O that we had more feeling! It is this which condemns us, that we have so little of it. Is it not wretched to have no

feeling under the word?—to be as hard as the seats we sit upon? And, on the contrary, when we hear with feeling, is it not sweet to our souls? When we read the word, is it not blessed to read with feeling? When we pray, is it not sweet to pray with feeling? When in conversation with God's people, is it not sweet to converse with feeling? And when attending to ordinances, and partaking of the Lord's supper, is it not sweet to be engaged in them with feeling? How miserably shut up and cold the soul is when it has no feeling! And how condemned the conscience is, when we go through these things in a hard and vain-confident manner.

A main branch, then, of this "treasure" is life. And wherever there is life, there will be feeling in proportion to the depth of that life. By this life we feel a fear to offend God, and have a desire to please him; by this life we groan under the weight of sin; by this life we breathe out our desires after the manifestations of his mercy and grace; and by this life we receive into our heart and conscience the Lord of life and glory. The work of the Spirit of God is to communicate this life, and to keep it bright and burning in the soul; when desponding, to revive; when drooping, to raise up; when cast down, to comfort; and from time to time to keep it alive by pouring in the oil of his own heavenly grace.

3. But another branch of this heavenly treasure is, the fear of God; as we read, "The fear of the Lord is his treasure." (Isa. 33:6.) And O, what a treasure is this! Treasure, as I have hinted, in ancient times was generally hidden; it was concealed from the eye of man, hoarded up, and not brought out ostentatiously to view. Wealthy men of old hid the knowledge of their treasures, lest they should be spoiled of them by the hand of violence. So spiritually, the fear of the Lord is hidden in the heart, and lies deep in the soul; it is not spread out ostentatiously to view, but is buried out of sight in a man's conscience.

But though hidden from others, and sometimes even from ourselves, this "fear of the Lord" will act as circumstances draw it forth. There may be times and seasons when we seem almost hardened

and conscience seared; sin appears to have such power over us, and evil thoughts and desires so carry us away, that we cannot trace one atom of godly fear within; and the soul cries, "What will become of me! Where am I going now! What will come next on such a wretch as I feel myself to be!" But place him in such circumstances, say as befell Joseph, then he will find that the "fear of the Lord," is in him a fountain of life, a holy principle springing up in his soul. Thus, this fear, which is a part of the heavenly treasure, acts when most needed. And the more the life of God is felt in the soul, the more the fear of God flows forth as a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death. The more lively the grace of God is in the soul, the more lively will godly fear be in the heart; and the more the Spirit of God works with power in the conscience, the deeper will be the fear of God in the soul.

Now, there is a fear "which hath torment," a slavish fear, which devils and carnal men have, and which is cast out by love; (1 John 4:18) and there is another fear, filial or godly fear, a member of the new man, an effect of divine teaching, a fruit of the Spirit. This godly fear love does not cast out, but strengthens. The highest angel must stand in fear of God. The great and glorious majesty of Jehovah must cause even those pure and bright spirits to fear before him. The seraphim, whom Isaiah saw in the temple, "covered their face" (6:2.) However high, then, faith may rise, fear will be its constant companion; the greater the faith, the stronger the fear; the more sweet the confidence, the more will fear work with it. So that, the higher the soul rises in blessed confidence, the higher will fear mount up with that faith, so as to keep it from ever soaring on the wings of presumption. Fear is, as it were, a ballast to faith; and thus, however high faith may mount, godly fear and holy reverence of God will mount up side by side with it; and though faith may penetrate into the very presence of God, it will not be deserted by this blessed companion; for reverence and godly fear will accompany it even to the throne room of the King of kings. The Apostle therefore says, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which

cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. 12:28, 29.) It is this blessed companion that so distinguishes true from false faith; the confidence that God gives his people, from the daring presumption of those dead in a profession. These have no filial fear, no reverence of God, no trembling apprehension of his dread Majesty; but they make to themselves wings of vain confidence and presumption, and soar aloft on these self-constructed pinions, till they fall from the heaven of their own imagination into the awful ocean of never-ending woe.

This filial fear dwelt in the human nature of Jesus. "The Spirit of the Lord," we read, "shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord." (Isa. 11:2, 3.) With every other grace of the Spirit, the "fear of the Lord" was in Christ's human nature. So that, in proportion to the fulness with which he was anointed, was the fulness of the holy fear that dwelt in him.

4. Another part of this heavenly treasure is, faith. For it is only so far as God gives us faith that we can spiritually realize the things that the Lord has prepared for those that love him. There is this difference between the faith of the operation of the Spirit of God, that dwells in a regenerate heart, and vain-confidence—that true faith ebbs and flows in the soul, but vain-confidence stands always on a level. Faith is a fountain that gives out, more or less, gushing water, but vain-confidence and presumption are always at one and the same stand. They resemble the water in the London Docks, which has no ebbings and flowings like the River Thames, but is shut in by gates, so as always to preserve the same level. And you know what is the nature of water that neither runs, nor ebbs and flows; it is always stagnant, and often stinking. And so with vain-confident professors: they have no afflictions, and no consolations; are never cast down by the temptations of Satan, and never raised up by deliverance and manifestations. Their religion preserves one con-

stant level; they can always believe, and always confide, always see their interest, always talk about religion, and always say, "My Father and my God." Their soul knows nothing of the ups and downs that God's people experience.

True faith I may call the grand tidal wave of the soul. I will endeavour to explain the expression. We see the River Thames day by day ebbing and flowing. What causes this change? You answer, "it is produced by the sea in the Channel alternately coming up and retiring." It is a true explanation. But what makes the sea of the Channel alternately come up and retire? There is what is called, "a grand tidal wave," that comes across the Atlantic Ocean, which, as it ebbs and flows, affects all the minor tides of the neighbouring seas; and thus the tide of the Channel, and that of the River Thames, ebb and flow in unison with this huge Atlantic wave. In the same way faith is the tidal wave of the soul; and all the graces and fruits of the Spirit ebb and flow just as faith rises, or just as faith sinks. If faith rises in the soul, all the graces and fruits of the Spirit rise with it; light increases, life is deepened, the fear of God strengthened, hope brightened, and love augmented. And when this great tidal wave of faith falls in the soul, all the minor tides of the Spirit's graces fall in unison with it. Thus when faith recedes and becomes low in the soul, all the other graces of the Spirit sink with it; consolation ebbs out altogether, hope recedes to a narrow streamlet, life dwindles to a scanty current, and love is reduced to a shallow channel. And as in the Thames we see, at low tide, the muddy banks which the stream has forsaken, so as faith sinks to a low ebb in the soul, there seems little else left but the mud and mire of corruption. But what makes the grand tidal wave itself move? There is a cause for that also. It is drawn up by, and obeys the attraction of the sun. And is not this true spiritually of the grand tidal wave of faith in the soul? Is it not drawn up by the Sun of Righteousness, as the natural sun draws up the wave of the ocean, and makes it ebb and flow? And when that glorious Sun ceases to draw up faith, does it not ebb and sensibly sink in the soul, as the natural sea sinks when the sun

5. Hope also—I mean a "good hope through grace," arising out of the Spirit's work in the soul and from a divine testimony in the conscience, a hope that rests not upon the opinions of men, but upon the mercy of God—this "good hope through grace" is also a part of the heavenly treasure.

6. And so with Love; for the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, producing love to the Lord and love to the Lord's people, makes a man rich indeed. This divine gift is, indeed, a conspicuous part and main branch of the heavenly treasure which God puts within the soul.

In fact, grace, with all its various fruits, communications, and gifts; especially, Christ in the heart, the hope of glory, revealed and made known there by the power of God, form this treasure. He who possesses it is rich indeed. And though he be a pauper, whose lot is to live and die in a Union Workhouse; to be thrust when dead into an elm shell, and buried at the expense of the parish, with no follower to his lowly grave, and no tombstone to mark the date of his birth and death; yet the riches of this poor despised man far exceeds those of the most opulent banker that rolls in his carriage, or of the wealthiest peer who lives and dies an enemy to sovereign grace.

II.—But the Apostle tells us where this treasure is lodged: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." These earthen vessels are our bodies, those miserable tabernacles of clay; as we read, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Cor. 5:1.) But what an unsuitable receptacle for such a treasure! What a mean casket for such a jewel! Christ in the heart, the hope of glory; light, love, and immortality; the earnest and the first fruits of eternal bliss, and of that glory which will make the saints shine brighter than the stars for ever and ever;—that all this unspeakably rich treasure, which neither the tongue of men or angels can describe, should be lodged in a poor, crippled, aching,

diseased, corruptible body! O what a disparity between the casket and the jewel! What a difference between the precious treasure and the contemptible vessel in which it is deposited!

But what do we understand by the expression, “earthen” vessel? It means a vessel made of clay, common clay; an earthen pitcher, such as stands in every poor man’s cottage. What do we gather then from this idea?

1. First, that of great meanness. What vessel can be so common as one made of clay? It is not a porcelain, or china vase that the Apostle speaks of, compounded by all the skill of Wedgwood, and gilded and painted, such as a nobleman puts for ornament on his mantelpiece; but a common, earthen vessel, made of baked clay. Is not this true in grace? Whom for the most part does the Lord cause to be partakers of this treasure? Those whom men admire? The beautiful, the noble, the learned, the wealthy? Few of such are the Lord’s people; but he has chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith; those who have nothing to recommend them in the eyes of the world, and possess nothing in outward appearance to attract the admiring sense and reason.

2. But again, if we look at the expression “earthen vessel,” it denotes something frail. How soon the earthen pitcher is broken at the well! Our poor tabernacles, how frail they are! How soon can sickness cut them down! A piece of falling timber, a blow from a passing carriage, may at once break to pieces this frail tabernacle! Health, strength, and vigour are no security: a raging fever in a few days may cut off the strongest man, or what is called “an accident” may in a moment deprive him of life. I believe, for the most part, the Lord, in his providential dealings with his people, makes them know the frailty of their clay tabernacles. Very few of the living family have strong healthy bodies; nearly all of them are afflicted with some ailment or disease; and many have lingering complaints, so as scarcely to know a single day’s ease from pain, so that nearly the whole of their lives they are kept alive by miracle, and yet are immortal till their work is done.

3. Another idea is that of corruption. Earth, clay, dirt, are words nearly allied to each other; the expression, “earthen vessel,” may well then refer to our earthly, fallen, sensual nature.

4. Another idea contained in the figure may be, that the earthen vessel leaks; it cannot hold wine or milk put into it. Now, is not this true with respect to the good things which God puts into the heart? If we have a sweet frame, we cannot keep it; if we have a blessed feeling we cannot retain it; if we hear well under a sermon, it soon leaks out. At least it is so with us in the country; though I believe in London they have a patent method of glazing their vessels to prevent their leakage; for I understand there are preachers and professors here whose strength, wisdom, comfort, and confidence never leak out. I myself have never yet discovered this secret; I have not yet learnt how to compound this patent glaze; for I find the sweetest feelings soon leak away, and leave the soul as dry as ever.

III.—But the Apostle tell us, why it is, that the treasure is put into earthen vessels—“that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” That is the reason which the Holy Ghost gives, why the treasure is put into the earthen vessel. If they were put into golden vessels, then “the excellency of the power” would not be of God: gold being a vessel unconsumable by fire, would of itself keep the treasure unharmed. If the casket were indestructible and unconsumable, it would not want the power of God to preserve the treasure there. But it is put into an earthen vessel, into a frail tabernacle, a poor weak body, a feeble frame, for this express purpose, that the casket may not glory in its power to hold the heavenly treasure. If we had power in ourselves to retain what God gives; if we could keep the faith that God communicates, maintain the hope that he inspires, preserve alive the love which he sheds abroad, nurture the sweet frame, or cherish in our bosoms the divine sensations that God the Spirit enkindles there, “the excellency of power” would be of us; and we should “sacrifice to our own net, and burn incense to our own drag.” We should not know whence

the power came; we should not believe that God was the author and finisher of faith in the soul, and of every atom of hope and love in the heart. But when we find and feel that the treasure is in an earthen vessel, defiled with sin; in a frail heart, perpetually leaking out the wine which God communicates, then we begin to learn that grand and important secret, that “the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us.” If we see the light, we know it must come down from God into our conscience, for we cannot create nor keep it. If we feel life, we cannot preserve it. If we find faith in exercise, we know not how to retain it. If we have hope, we are sure that God is the author of it, and that he too must keep it alive. If we have any love, God, we know, gave it, and he alone can keep it in lively exercise. But were the casket at all in proportion to the treasure it contains; if the Spirit of God dwelt in a pure and spotless soul, free from frailty, imperfection, or backsliding, so that there were no workings of a depraved nature and of a sensual, filthy heart, we should begin to think that “the excellency of the power” was of us; and we should glory in our own strength, wisdom, righteousness, and knowledge, and the actings of our own faith, hope, and love. But this the Lord will not suffer. “Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.” (Jer. 9:23, 24.)

But when the Lord puts this treasure into earthen vessels, and we find that except the Lord keep alive his work in the soul, according to our feelings, it goes out; that we have no more power to retain it, than we had power at first to create it; then we learn to ascribe to him every good we receive; and that wretched presumption, self-righteousness, and self-conceit of which our hearts are full, get their death-blow. It becomes stamped on our feelings that “the excellency of the power” is not of ourselves; that what we are,

we are by God’s making; what we have, we have by God’s giving; and what we know, we know by God’s teaching.

But observe the words, for they will bear looking at: “The excellency of the power.” It does not merely say, “power,” but “the excellency of the power.” As though the Apostle would call our minds to observe the excellency, the surpassing excellency of this power. It would not require (so to speak) so much power to be displayed on God’s part, were we not what we are. If we were not so deeply sunk in carnality, it would not require “the excellency of the power” to make us spiritual. If we were not so buried in the world, it would not shew forth the excellency of God’s power to make us heavenly-minded, and draw our affections upward. If we were not so full of unbelief, if our hearts did not continually breed infidelity, questionings, doubtings, and fearings, it would not require such “excellency of the power” of God to communicate the gift of faith to the soul. If we never desponded through the temptations of Satan, the besetments of our vile nature, and the many difficulties met with in the way, we should not feel that we required “the excellency of God’s power” to keep alive a good hope in the soul. If we never felt cold and dead in our affections, and as unable to bring forth one spiritual desire as to create a world, we should not want “the excellency of the power” displayed in communicating to our souls heavenly love and affection. If we had no trials and perplexities, and did not find that we could not muster up a grain of patience to bear them, we should not feel our need of “the excellency of the power” to support us under them. If we were never distressed in our minds, and felt that we had no power to speak peace or comfort to our souls, we should not want “the excellency of the power” to be of God to comfort us. And so we might say of every other grace. So that the more we are led into this divine secret, that this treasure is in “earthen vessels,” and the more we feel the disparity between the casket and the jewel, the more we see “the excellency of the power” of God; and how that excellency is displayed in the various circumstances by which we are surrounded; in the leadings

of God's providence, and in his dealings with us in grace. God is a jealous God; and he will not share his glory with man: he will have all the glory to himself. But you and I are such base wretches, that we would rob the Lord himself of his glory, if he did not teach us otherwise. If he did not open up to us the depth of our corruption, and shew us the depravity that lurks and works in our carnal minds: if he did not cover our faces with shame; if he did not put us in the furnace to burn out our pride, and drag us through the water to drown our hypocrisy; if he did not humble us under a daily sense of our frailty and feebleness, we should soon want to sit down on the same throne with the Lord, and share the glory of salvation with him. But when we carry about with us such repeated evidences of our base original, and see and feel what earthen vessels the treasure is lodged in, we come to this conclusion, that we have no light, life, faith, hope, love, nor any one good thing unless God give it us, and work it in us; unless it come from his hand, and is wrought in our soul by his divine operation. And thus we learn, that "the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us." But if I could always keep a sweet frame, or nurture a pleasant feeling; if I could always command the Spirit of God; if I could go when I pleased to the Bank of heaven, draw a cheque, and receive over the counter the amount I wished, how could I know that "the excellency of the power" is of God? But the more deeply we sink into creature helplessness, and the more experimentally we are acquainted with creature weakness, the more we learn that "the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us." It is to teach us this, that we so often feel the chisel and mallet, chipping and hacking off all the patent glazing that presumption and vain-confidence would fain smear over our vessel. And is it not a mercy to have this "covering which is not of God's Spirit" stripped off? to know nothing except what God teaches us; and to have nothing from day to day, and from hour to hour, but what God works in us?

But there is one more remark to which I must call your attention, and that is, that the treasure is not defiled by the earthen ves-

sel. Gold and silver, those precious metals, take no injury, receive no spot of corruption from the vessel in which they are contained: let them be buried in the damp earth, no tarnish or rust form upon them. So spiritually, the grace of God in the heart, surrounded as it is with corruption, is not tarnished by it; the heavenly treasure is not contaminated, though lodged in an earthly vessel. Christ in the heart is not defiled by the inward workings of depravity, and by the base thoughts that strive perpetually against his grace, any more than the gold of the Bank of England is defiled by the dark and damp cellars in which it is stowed. And what a mercy it is, that our corruptions cannot tarnish the grace of God; that our unbelief cannot mix with, and adulterate the faith of God's elect; that our despondency cannot spoil and ruin a gospel hope; that our deadness, darkness, coldness, and rebellion cannot mingle with and defile the love of God in the soul! This heavenly treasure remains still as unpolluted and pure as when God first put it there; being a part of "the divine nature," it remains uncontaminated by the filth and corruption that surround it. Is not this a mercy for God's tried people, that spiritual knowledge, living faith, gospel hope, heavenly love, and the fruits and graces of God's Spirit in the soul can never be defiled; but, like the streams of a fountain, are ever gushing forth in pure water? What a blessing it is, that the pure grace of God in a man's heart cannot be contaminated by the filthy streams that are dashing from a vile nature against it, like the torrents of water from a fire-engine against a burning house, but remains as pure as when God the Spirit first breathed it into the soul.

Now, may not this clear up to some poor child of God here why it is that he is so tried and exercised; why he has so many desponding thoughts, why his soul at times sinks so low, and why it is that he is so tossed about, harassed, burdened, and plagued with the darts of infidelity; why he feels so little Godward; and why he feels so much of nature, sense, and reason working in him? It is because you have the treasure in an earthen vessel. That is the reason. But do you not sometimes find that there is a treasure in your heart,

something you would not part with for a thousand worlds? Something spiritual, something heavenly, something holy, something blessed, something that lifts up your heart Godward, something that brings eternal things near; and something that at times enables you to trample upon the world, all its riches, all its honours, and all its pleasures? If you feel this, you have a treasure, though lodged in an earthen vessel, that “the excellency of the power may be of God,” and not of you; that he may have all the glory, and that you and I may not be able to take one atom, one grain of praise to ourselves.

And this, too, is the reason why so many of God’s people carry about with them a frail, weak, and afflicted tabernacle;—that they may not take pleasure in the things of time and sense; and to shew them that their affections are not to be set here below, but where Jesus sits, at the right hand of God.

I here close my labours for this year among you, this being my Farewell discourse. And I do sincerely desire that the Lord may bless Zoar; for I have felt, I believe, a measure of spiritual union and communion with the Lord’s people who attend here. My soul’s desire, then, is, that the Lord would shine upon, and be with you; that he would come up with the men of God whom he is pleased to send to stand up, from time to time, in this pulpit; and manifest more and more, that he is present here to make the place of his feet glorious, and to bless you of a truth.

75 Gifts For The Rebellious

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road. London, on Lord’s Day Morning,

August 18, 1844

“Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men: yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.”

Psalm 68:18

The doctrines of grace are of no benefit to us, as individuals, without an experience of grace; nor, on the other hand, can we have any true saving experience unconnected with the doctrines of grace. The two are so closely united, that they never can be dissociated in the hearts of God’s people. The doctrines of grace are the bones of the Bible, and the bones also of all spiritual experience. And just as our bodily frames, without those inward joints and levers which we call bones, would be but a mass of useless and immovable flesh; so all experience, as what is called such, unconnected with and dissociated from the doctrines of grace, would be but a useless mass of corruption. But, on the other hand, how useless would be the bones in our body, without the brain, heart, lungs, muscles, nerves, and all the wonderful apparatus of our natural frame! What an unsightly object a skeleton is, though every bone be in its place! It is only fit for a museum, to lecture hospital students upon.

But when those bones are clothed with muscles and sinews; when that amazing apparatus of internal life and sensation, action and motion, when eye and ear, touch and taste, and all that curiously-wrought frame which we possess, are added to the bony skeleton, then the union of the two forms a living man, who breathes, moves, and acts, by virtue of that natural life, which God has breathed into his nostrils. Now, so it is spiritually. To have nothing beyond a few doctrines in the judgment is to be like a skeleton in a glass case at Guy’s Hospital. There is in it no eye, though there be the vacant orbit; no ear to hear, though there be the bony apparatus; no inward heart to beat, no heaving lungs to breathe, no subtle nerves to run through every part, and communicate sensation to all. Thus a man may have the complete scheme of the doctrines in his head. yea, not a bone out of its place, and yet be so lifeless, dead, and dry, as to be fit only to be hung up in a museum. Ministers who preach what is called “experimental truth” are often misunderstood and misrepresented, as if they secretly slighted the doctrines of grace, because they warn their hearers against mere-

ly receiving them in the judgment, and because the main drift of their preaching turns upon the teachings of God in the soul. Many who are ignorant of this heavenly teaching, misunderstand and speak against them, because they are not perpetually holding up the dry skeleton, and shewing how every bone fits in its place: and because they dwell more upon the eye, the heart, the lungs, and the internal movements and sensations of spiritual life, as wrought by the hand of the Holy Ghost. I have thought, therefore, that a few words to clear up this misunderstanding would not be out of place, and might serve as an introduction to lead us to the text, in which we have a grand cardinal, fundamental doctrine set forth, and a blessed experience springing out of it.

That cardinal doctrine, that fundamental point, is, the ascension of Jesus. "Thou hast ascended on high." This fundamental point, the ascension of the Lord of life and glory to be a risen Mediator at the right hand of the Father, is here clearly stated; and yet, not drily as a mere abstract truth; for the benefits and blessings which spring out of it, are declared in connection with it; and thus it becomes clothed with the experience of these blessings in the hearts of God's people.

With God's blessing, then, we will look at the text as it lies before us. And as there are several clauses in it, we will endeavour, if God enable us, to travel through them one by one, and trace them out in an experimental manner. There are in it five distinct clauses—"Thou has ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also; that the Lord God might dwell among them."

I.—The first point spoken of in the text is, the ascending on high of Jesus.

As the soul is led and taught by the Spirit, it follows the Lord through all the various acts and sufferings of his life. The first spot to which the Holy Ghost takes the poor sinner is the cross of Jesus. That is the first real saving view we get of the Lord of life and glory—the Holy Ghost taking the poor guilty sinner, laden with the

weight of a thousand sins, to the foot of the cross, and opening his eyes to see the Son of God bleeding there as a propitiation for sin. To be brought there by the power of the Holy Ghost, and receive that blessed mystery of the bleeding, suffering, and agonizing Son of God into our hearts and consciences, is the first blessed discovery that God the Spirit favours us with.

But we pass on from that to see Jesus sleeping in the sepulchre; for we have to die ourselves, and we want to see the Forerunner who has entered into the grave for us. We want to feel that we can lie down in the grave, and see that narrow bed in which our body will one day be stretched, in a measure perfumed by Jesus having lain there before us. And when we have travelled from the cross to the sepulchre, we then go a step further—to the resurrection of the Lord of life and glory. On the third day, we view him by faith springing out of the sepulchre in which he lay entombed, rising up in glory and power for our justification.

And thus we see in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus the hope of the soul for a blessed immortality. But we do not tarry there; as the Lord the Spirit gives us eyes to see, and moves our heart to feel, we travel one step further—that is, to the ascension of the Lord of life and glory; not tarrying on earth (for he tarried not there), but mounting up to see him sitting at the right hand of the Father, as the Mediator between God and Man, as the divine Intercessor, as the glorious Head of grace, as communicating out of his own fulness gifts and graces unto poor and needy souls, who are living in daily and hourly bankruptcy. These want to receive perpetual supplies of life, light, and grace out of his fulness, to keep them in the way wherein the Lord has set their feet.

So that the ascension of the Lord Jesus up on high, and his sitting at the right hand of God, when received into the conscience under the power of the Spirit, is not a dry doctrine, not a dead bone of a withered skeleton; but is so connected with all the feelings of our heart, with all our misery and ruin, with all our wretchedness, with all our guilt, with all our daily wants, with all our hourly necessi-

ties, that, when led by the Spirit's teaching to look at this Mediator at the right hand of the Father, it becomes a truth full of blessed sweetness and power to the heaven-taught soul.

By what steps do we usually embrace the truth as it is in Jesus? First of all, for the most part, we receive it as a doctrine; the judgment being more or less informed, the eyes of the understanding being enlightened to see it in the word. The doctrine for some time may be floating in our mind: but after a time, as the Lord leads us more into a knowledge of our own hearts, and into a deeper feeling of our necessities, he lets down the truth from our head into the heart, and it then becomes a truth. It is very sweet to have a doctrine turned into a truth. But after a time, we want something more than a truth: we want it as a blessing. When we are brought into pressing straits and severe trials, we need the doctrines, which we first received into our minds as truths, now to be blessed by a divine application to our souls. Thus, what we first knew in our judgments as a doctrine, is afterwards received in our conscience as a truth, and then is applied to our very heart of hearts as a blessing; and so we find God's word, and eat it, to the joy and rejoicing of our souls.

Thus it is with respect to Christ's ascension. We receive it first as a doctrine, as a great and glorious part of the scheme of salvation; then we begin to see, as we are led more and more into a knowledge of it, what a wonderful truth it is, to have a Mediator at the right hand of God; to have an Intercessor pleading, by the efficacy of his atoning blood and justifying righteousness, for poor, needy, guilty souls. This draws out the faith, hope, and love of the heart to this ascended and interceding Mediator; and then, as the Lord the Spirit reveals the virtue and efficacy of this glorious Mediator in the guilty conscience, the truth becomes a rich, unctuous, and savoury blessing.

So that far from experience casting out the doctrines of grace, it only leads the soul into a vital acquaintance with them; and we might as well think of saving our lives by drawing the bones out

of our body, as of blessing our souls by casting out the doctrines of grace: yea, we daily feel more deeply the need of the doctrines being brought into our heart by divine power; we feel them more to be the stay and support of our soul, as the arm I am now raising is stayed and supported by the bones which God has placed there.

"Thou hast ascended on high." When sin, shame, confusion, darkness, and all the wretched workings of a depraved nature stand up like so many barriers betwixt our guilty souls and God, and the reality of there being a risen Mediator at the right hand of God the Father drops with a measure of divine power into the heart, then what a blessing the doctrine becomes, that there is such a Mediator, through whom guilty, bankrupt souls can find access to, and acceptance with that God whom they have been taught to fear!

II.—"Thou hast led captivity captive." The Holy Ghost here gives us, if I may use the expression, a glimpse of the triumphant procession of Jesus. Though hid from mortal eye, there was a triumphant procession, in which Jesus returned to glory; and to this we have allusions in scripture. For instance, we read there was a chant, which sounded through heaven, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in" (Ps. 24:7). So Paul speaks, "Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). The apostle is here alluding to a custom in ancient times of giving a conquering general a public triumph when he returned home. On these occasions they were always attended with a long procession of prisoners; and they used to reserve the conquered kings and princes to grace their triumph, considering that the higher the rank of their captives, the greater was the glory of the conqueror. The apostle, then, alluding to this, represents Jesus as "making a shew of them openly," that is, exposed to public view (as the conquerors at Rome), "the principalities and powers" whom he had spoiled, "triumphing over them," and dragging them as captives at his chariot wheels. The same idea is contained in the text, "Thou hast led captivity captive."

By “captivity,” we are to understand those who exercised tyranny over others during the time they were allowed to reign. So that when Christ led captivity captive, he led bound in chains and fetters those who had kept in bondage and hard imprisonment, such as he came to redeem.

Let us, then, take a glimpse of some of those whom the Lord triumphant led captive. For instance,

1. There is the law. And does not the law bring bondage into every soul that knows its spirituality? We know not the purity and spirituality of God’s law in the conscience, till we are brought into bondage by it. For this is the grand mark of the law, that “it gendereth” (or begetteth) to bondage (Gal. 4:24). Now that it “gendereth,” or “begetteth,” shews that there is a vital power in it; that it is not a dead letter: for a dead letter gendereth not. There must be life in the parent, in order to give life to the offspring. So when the law gendereth to bondage, it as a living principle produces guilt and fear in the conscience, and thus casts the soul into bonds and imprisonment.

Some of the Lord’s people are not able clearly to trace out in their soul’s experience whether they have passed through this work of the law upon their conscience. They cannot perhaps just put their finger upon the precise time, nor discern precisely its operation upon their soul; they cannot draw out an experience such as they read in books, and hear others of God’s people unfold. This tries and exercises their minds, whether they have known anything of the law as working wrath in them; for they feel that the Law must be known in its spirituality and power as well as the Gospel.

The word of God gives us several tests as to the operation of the law upon a man’s heart. One I have mentioned—that it “gendereth to bondage;” another is, that “it worketh wrath” (Rom. 4:15); a third, that “by it is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20).

Cannot you trace out these effects upon your soul? Have you never felt guilt and bondage before God; so that you have been shut up in a dark prison, out of which you could not come forth

into the liberty of the gospel; so shut up and imprisoned, that nothing but the Lord’s own word sealed upon your conscience could set you free? Here is a mark that points out one of the Lord’s prisoners, “a prisoner of hope;” that he will not let himself be delivered, if I may use the expression, by false keys; he will not suffer any but the Lord himself to deliver his soul; and all other deliverers he looks upon as forgers that come to his prison cell with pick-locks. He knows that if not delivered by the Lord he will have, like a prisoner escaped and caught, to go back again—and have heavier chains put on him—to be put into a closer and darker cell than the one out of which he had fled. Such a soul has known something of the bondage of the law in his conscience. We read, that the children of Israel in Egypt “sighed and groaned by reason of the bondage.” Again, “Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee: according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die” (Ps. 79:11). Thus the quickened soul groans before God under guilt, bondage, hardness of heart, fears of death, and a thousand tormenting doubts how the scene will end. These things imprison the soul as in bonds and fetters of iron. And he that has known these bonds and fetters knows something of the spiritual application of the law to his conscience.

Now from this captivity none could ever be delivered except Jesus had risen up on high. The broken law never can pronounce a gaol delivery; therefore not a single prisoner could ever have come out of the condemned cell, but all must have remained in a state of bondage and wrath for ever, had not the Son of God obeyed its demands and suffered its penalties, and thus brought in an everlasting righteousness.

2. Again. Death! O what a captivity does the fear of death at times exercise over the tender consciences of God’s people! There are some professors who affect to live always above the fears of death. But it is to be feared that in most cases this confidence rather resembles the hardihood of many a felon who has to swing before the doors of Newgate, than the sweet peace, which the Lord at

times gives to his tried people. This boasting confidence does not arise from any divine testimony dropped into their consciences by the power of God; that is another matter. It is in many a hardened recklessness, resting on the letter of truth, the fruit of ignorance and carnal insensibility, not the living assurance of faith; and thus, though it takes another form, springs from the same root as the vain-confidence of the felon. The Lord's people, who have been brought solemnly to feel what eternity is, what a holy and just God they have to do with, and that they have deserved a thousand hells, often painfully know, especially if their tabernacles be weak, what it is to sink very low under fears of death. When all is dark within and gloomy without: when they see not their signs; when there is no sweet testimony of interest in the blood and love of the Lamb: when unbelief and infidelity seem to carry all before them: when their families and circumstances all arise before their eyes: and Satan sets in like a flood to overwhelm them with a thousand terrors—in these seasons, Death, cruel Death exercises a sad captivity over them.

Now the Lord of life and glory has "led captivity captive." He "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). To accomplish this, the Son of God came into the world, as we read, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same: that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil: and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14, 15). The scriptures, therefore, do not speak of God's people dying; they call it "falling asleep." Thus it is written of Stephen, though he expired battered and crushed with stones, that "he fell asleep" (Acts 7:60).

So the apostle exhorts the Thessalonians, "But 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" (1 Thess. 4:13, 14). Jesus, the Forerunner, has passed through the portals of the grave. He has perfumed that narrow bed by his sacred body lying in it; and has risen out of it "because that it was not possible that he should be holden of it." "The sting of death is sin;" He has put away sin, and thus extracted the sting. "The strength of sin is the law;" He has fulfilled the law, and thus destroyed its curse. Thus, through the resurrection and ascension of the Lord of life and glory, the ransomed can sing this song when the Holy Ghost leads them into the experience of it. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

3. Sin, inward sin, the lusts of our depraved nature, the corruptions of our carnal mind, and all the oozings forth of that vile puddle, of that internal sewer (for no London sewer ever carried into the Thames filth to be compared with that which chokes up at times our hearts) bring sad bondage into the conscience of those who fear God. Some people think very lightly of sin. But I will tell you the character of those who think so. We have it pointed out to a Tee in the Book of Proverbs, "Such is the way of an adulterous woman: she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness" (Prov. 30:20). That is just the character of some persons in a profession of religion. They think lightly of sin: they will do the most inconsistent things, break through every precept and every check of conscience, and plunge recklessly and heedlessly into the worst of transgressions: and then feel no concern. They feel no godly sorrow; there is no rolling upon their beds at night, no great drops of tears gushing down their cheeks, no sobs as though their very hearts would break. O no; they say, "we are in the covenant; sin cannot damn us; sin cannot harm us: therefore why should we be troubled about it?"

But the Lord's people, those really taught by God's Spirit, have their consciences made tender; and these know what captivity sin

exercises over them, and what trouble it causes them. Our lot, if we are God's people, is to have trials and troubles; and some have trials enough to make them sigh and groan sometimes nearly all the day long. Our poor tottering tabernacles, providential trials, family afflictions, unkind friends, slanderous and cruel enemies, the accusations of Satan, together with the gloom of our minds and the sinkings of our hearts, all form an accumulated weight of affliction. But none of these trials bring into such bondage, or lie so heavy on the mind, as the painful feelings produced in the conscience by the daily and hourly workings of sin in the carnal heart. Our roving eye, our filthy imagination, our depraved nature, our backsliding, adulterous, idolatrous heart, is a greater burden to our souls than all our other troubles and trials put together.

Supported by the Lord, we can bear afflictions; but our depraved heart, in its rebelliousness, filth, and infidelity, robs the conscience of peace, because it fights against the Father, rejects the Son, and grieves the Spirit: and thus causes a Three-One Jehovah to hide his face and testify his displeasure. But the Lord has led this captivity captive. Sin shall not condemn us, if we have an interest in the Son of God. He has "made an end of sin." O that faith could follow him in this! "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). What a glorious path for faith to mount up to her ascended Lord! When faith is in living exercise, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus is no dry doctrine, no mere bone in the skeleton: but, clothed with experience, becomes a holy feast to the soul full of marrow and fatness.

If we could but view by faith the Lord of life and glory ascending on high as the risen Mediator, as the great High Priest over the house of God, leading captivity captive;—dragging as his vanquished prisoners the law that curses and condemns—death which has filled us with so many fears—and sin which has caused us so often to sigh and groan—if, I say, we could but take a faith's view

of the ascended Mediator, and see him lead captive those enemies of our souls, it would be no dry doctrine, but would drop into our hearts as a shower, and fall like dew and rain on the parched soil.

III.—"Thou hast received gifts for men." What men? All men? Why, if that were the case, they would all have it—would they not? Suppose a person were to lodge in a banker's hand a sum of money for all the children of one family; and the banker were not to let the eldest or the youngest have one penny of it—should we call that banker an honest man? Would not honesty consist in this, to give every penny of that which was entrusted to his charge to the persons over whom he was made trustee, and for whose advantage he received it? To say then, that all men are interested in the gifts of God, would be to make the Lord Jesus Christ a dishonest Mediator at the right hand of the Father. He would have received gifts for all, and yet does not give them to all; has received grace for all, and does not bestow grace upon all; has received eternal life for all, and does not give eternal life to all; has received pardon for all, and does not make known pardon to all! Surely this doctrine would make the blessed Lord of life and glory at the right hand of the Father to be dishonest and unfaithful to his trust. I could not venture to use a word that would be applicable to him, supposing such a doctrine could be substantiated: I would not give utterance to it, even in thought. If he is, as we know he is (blessed be his Name!), "full of grace and truth," would he not give to the last mite everything put in his hands? Would not his loving heart and sympathising bosom deal out every grace and gift stored up in his fulness? And will one intended recipient be omitted? Will one person be passed by for whom mercy was designed?

When then it is said, he "received gifts for men," it is put generally for some men. It does not say, 'all men.' There is a sweet ambiguity to my mind in the words "received gifts for men," because it is as men that we receive them. The Holy Ghost does not expressly state whether some, few, or many are intended. It is literally, "for man," for a fallen child of Adam, for ruined man; that we, feeling

our need, our frailty and weakness, our sinfulness and helplessness, might come to Jesus as the fallen children of a fallen parent to obtain pardon and peace.

But what has he received? Gifts. These are freely bestowed by the Father; lodged in him as the all-sufficient Mediator; and communicated out of his fulness to the sheep of his fold. But of what use are gifts except to those who need them? You know, if a person does not want anything, a gift is an insult. You would not venture to offer a sixpence to a nobleman rolling by in his carriage. It would be an insult; not a gift. But a poor starving beggar would receive with gratitude what the wealthy nobleman would throw away with contempt. Is not this the case spiritually? If I want nothing; if I am sufficient in myself for everything; if I am strong, holy, righteous, wise, going to heaven easily and comfortably—what do I want of the Lord's gifts or graces? What do I want of divine communications to my heart and soul?

And is it not true literally and naturally, as I am sure it is spiritually and supernaturally, that the more deeply we are sunk in poverty, the more the gift is needed, and the more the gift is valued? The preciousness of the gift rises just in proportion to the want of the person to whom it is given. Look at it spiritually. When my eyes stand out with fatness, and I have more than my natural heart can wish: when I have as much religion as I can hold, and tower to heaven in vain-confidence (though, through mercy, God never lets me get there), yet supposing I could get there, what should I need of the gifts dropping down into my heart from the fulness of the Son of God? What need of light, life, grace, and mercy—what need of the divine presence—what need of any one heavenly communication? But the more deeply I sink into soul poverty and soul wretchedness: and the more I feel of my thorough ruin and insolvency—do I not want all the more, and prize all the more, the gifts of grace which are treasured up in the fulness of Christ to supply that necessity?

Now the Lord God Almighty foreseeing the destitution of his

people, and foreseeing the depths of ruin and misery into which they would sink; foreseeing the fall of our first parents and all its dreadful consequences, appointed this Mediator, and lodged in him, in his divine fulness, all spiritual gifts, graces, and supplies for the wants of his people. Therefore, we read, “And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). It is out of his fulness that everything is received to save, bless, and comfort the soul.

But what are those “gifts?” Time will scarcely allow me to go through them all; yet I cannot pass by the words without specifying a few.

1. The gift of faith, for we read expressly, “it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). This is the grand master-grace of the soul; it is the grand wheel, which moves every other wheel in the heart; it is the eye, the ear, the hand of the new man of grace. Only so far as we have faith, and the Lord draws out this faith in exercise, have we any true spiritual feeling. But what makes me prize the gift of faith? It is knowing so much and so painfully the inbeing and inworking of unbelief. Is not this the case naturally? What makes me prize health? It is having a poor weakly tabernacle. What makes me prize rest? Fatigue. What makes me prize ease? It is pain. What makes me prize food? It is hunger. What makes me prize the cup of cold water? It is thirst. By these feelings, I not only know the reality by the want of it, but also enjoy the blessing when communicated.

It is just so spiritually, as naturally. What can I know of faith, except I am exercised (and exercised I am more or less daily) by the workings of unbelief, infidelity, questionings of the reasoning mind, and all the spawn of an unbelieving heart? As the soul is tossed up and down (and often it is tossed up and down on this sea of unbelief) it learns to prize the harbour of faith. And when the Lord mercifully communicates a little faith to the soul, and faith begins to realize, feel, experience, and feed upon the truth as it is in Jesus, then we know what faith is by the possession of it. We want two things to teach us the enjoyment of things. We want hunger

to teach us what an appetite for the loaf is: and we want the loaf to teach us the sweetness of bread, we want fatigue to teach us the sweetness of laying down our bodies on a soft bed: and we want the soft bed to teach us how sweet rest is. We want pain and sickness to teach us the want of health: and we want health to teach us the enjoyment of health. And so spiritually. These two feelings are so united and locked into each other; the one is such a wondrous mortice, and the other such a wondrous tenon; they so fit into, confirm, and strengthen each other, that neither can be spared.

What a mercy it is that the Lord has the gift of faith to bestow! Here are poor souls toiling, troubling, labouring, groaning, sighing, oppressed with unbelief, that great giant in the heart, who has slain his thousands and tens of thousands. How our souls sometimes sink down under this wretched unbelief! But how we prize the faith all the more when it comes! How all the sinkings make the risings higher—and all the sadness makes the change more blessed! As the tossings to and fro of the sailor upon the sea, with all the perils and sufferings of the voyage, make the calm harbour so pleasant; so all the tossing up and down of unbelief endears the holy calm of living faith to the soul.

2. But the Lord has the gift of hope also to bestow. What a blessed grace that of hope is! Men despise hope in our day. They are like the nobleman, who would throw the sixpence in your face; nothing will do for him under a thousand pounds, or a large estate. Many who profess religion are like this nobleman, who perhaps has all his estates mortgaged, and is really not worth a penny: but he cannot descend from the heights of his grandeur to own himself an insolvent. So many of these high and lofty professors despise a good hope through grace, and nothing will do for them but assurance; though when we come to the Spirit's work upon the conscience, they have never felt the inward witness of the Holy Ghost that they are the children of God. The Lord's people prize everything that God communicates with power and sweetness to the souls. I have often been glad to feel the springings up of a gospel hope, in the

absence of clearer testimonies.

How the scriptures speak of “a good hope through grace:” and call it “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil!” What a blessed grace must that be which thus enters into the very presence of Christ! How too, the word of God speaks of it as the twin sister with faith and love (1 Cor. 13:13); and declares, that it “maketh not ashamed,” because it springs out of the “love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost.” (Rom. 5:5.)

Now we learn what “a good hope through grace” is, by being tossed up and down on the waves of despondency, and almost at times sinking into despair. Evidences so darkened, the heart so shut up, the mind so bewildered, sin so present, the Lord so absent, a nature so carnal, sensual, idolatrous, and adulterous—no wonder that amidst so many evils felt or feared, the soul should at times sink into despondency. But at such seasons the blessedness of “a good hope through grace” is found; and when this anchor is cast into and enters within the veil, taking hold of the blood and righteousness of the great High Priest, how strongly and securely it holds the ship, so that it shall not be utterly overwhelmed in the billows of despair!

3. Love, too, is another gift, which the risen Mediator has received, that he may freely communicate it out of his fulness to his people. And we must be brought to feel that it is a gift. Could we produce or keep it alive in our own hearts, we should burn incense to our own skill or our own care. But when we often feel as hard as the very pavement on which we tread; and when we can no more create one feeling of love towards Jesus, his people, his cause, or his truth, than we can touch with our finger the comet in the sky; nay, what is worse, when we feel not merely the want of love, but enmity, we are convinced by painful experience, that the least feeling of love is the gift of the Lord.

Some perhaps will scarcely believe that a child of God can feel enmity against Christ: but his carnal mind is unmitigated enmity

against him. And O, what a cutting feeling it is for a follower of the Lamb to have a principle in him which hates Christ—hates, bitterly hates his Person, hates his holiness and purity: which could join in the cry. “Crucify him, crucify him,” and push and strike him with the Roman soldiers and the Jewish rabble. Unless painful experience convinced us that there was such a dreadful principle within, we could not believe that there was this devilish enmity in our heart against him whom our souls desire to love and adore. But what should we know of the pure and precious gift of love if we were not thus experimentally convinced that we could not create it? And when given, must it not be tried? It is the trial of love that makes it manifest.

How often it is so with the mother of a family. She has, perhaps, a number of children, five or six, and she does not know which she loves most. But perhaps the Lord lays his afflicting hand on one of them, and the child is likely to die. How soon the mother begins to feel the yearnings of love toward her sick child! She did not feel this while the child was playing about; but directly the Lord lays his hand upon it, and sickness comes, then what love the mother has—love which she never knew before! So with our partners in life: how many hours may pass away without our particularly thinking upon them, while there is nothing to call forth our love; and perhaps, the husband and wife (I do not speak here experimentally) may have been jangling and wrangling, instead of being mutually kind and affectionate. But if the Lord lays his hand of affliction upon one of them, how soon all these things are dispersed, like the clouds before the rays of the sun this morning!—how soon love and tenderness flow in, and all unkind feelings are forgotten! So with the soul that feels enmity, coldness, deadness, hardness, carnality, perverseness, and aversion to everything holy and heavenly.

These exercises try love. How many poor children of God are obliged to drag as it were their bodies to chapel! How often have I come into the pulpit with a thousand rebellious feelings, and

wished I was anything but a preacher! But when we begin to feel a little life in our soul, and the heart is melted and softened by the goodness of the Lord, we sing a different note, and say. “How good it is to be here! O wretch, wretch, to have such an aversion to those things which my inmost soul desires to love! What a vile creature was I to loathe and be weary of the Lord, and of these heavenly realities in which I know all my happiness really to consist!” But what know we about love, if we have not all this enmity, carnality, and coldness to try it? When we have been exercised with all these wretched feelings, and the Lord begins to drop into our hearts a little mercy and grace, and to draw forth our affections unto him, we then begin to feel what a sweet thing love is.

Love is the sweetest balm man can taste in this life. It is so naturally. There is a sweetness in love. When we love our wives, our children, our friends, there is a sweetness and tenderness in the very feeling, that is—as moralists say of virtue—its own reward. Coldness, dislike, envy, prejudice, jealousy, suspicion, peevishness, quarrelling—these sparks of hell burn and torture every spot on which they fall. And so, if ever there is a hell in a man’s bosom, it is when full of hatred against God and his people. But if ever we feel a foretaste of heaven, it is when the Lord kindles some meltings of love, some drawings of affection toward Jesus and to them that are his. Then enmity and prejudice flee away; and we feel as if we could take all the people of God into our bosom, and say, “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”

And so with every other grace, such as filial fear, meekness, humility, godly sorrow, contrition, self-abasement, patience, prayerfulness, watchfulness, heavenly-mindedness, and every other fruit of the Spirit: they are all gifts which Jesus has received as the risen and ascended Mediator, and which he has to bestow upon those who feel their need of them.

IV.—But we cannot pass over the next clause of the text, “even for the rebellious also.” Blessed be God for these words! My friends, what would become of your souls and of mine, if God’s gifts and

graces were for the pious, religious, holy and consistent? My soul could have no part nor lot in that matter, I am sure. But “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom. 9:16). We cannot erect a ladder of piety, and clamber up into the presence of God by becoming, by our own strength, wisdom, and righteousness, what is called decidedly religious and serious. Before we can rise up, we must fall low. We must sink down into a sense of our own ruin and helplessness, feel our thorough want of everything good and Godlike, have the secrets of the charnel-house we carry about with us opened up to our view: and then, when sunk to the lowest, be lifted by the Lord himself up out of this abyss of ruin. O that just suits the poor, guilty, filthy wretch, who has nothing but rags and ruin to call his own, and at the same time it enhances the glory of the Mediator, and puts the crown upon his revered brow!

“For the rebellious.” What a painful thing it is to be rebellious! Would to God I were never so! I would be submissive; I would be patient; I would be meek; I would be gentle; but to be rebellious—there is hardly any feeling worse than rebellion to a man whose conscience is made tender in God’s fear. To have rebellion against a holy and wise God; rebellion against his dealings with us in providence; against his teachings in grace; because we have not more of the light of his countenance: because we have not more and clearer testimonies and manifestations! We know in our judgment that God cannot err in any of his dealings, and yet to find at times such awful rebellion against God—O how painful it is! The least trifle can work up rebellion. It does not want a storm or a gale to lift up its proud waves. The slightest breath, the faintest breeze that blows, will at times stir up the billows of the rebellious heart, and make it swell with tumultuous heavings. Nay, the heart at times, like the sea in an earthquake, will work itself up into rebellion, without the least breeze to ruffle it.

Even when all things are smooth in providence, and the Lord is showering down his temporal mercies, rebellion will arise. As the

very warmth of the sun which ripens the fruits of the soil makes the beer ferment and turn sour in the cask, so the sun of providence often sets rebellion at work. “Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked.” Now, this is what makes it so grievous. What a trying thing it is to you parents, when you have done all you can to feed, clothe, and educate your child, and been uniformly kind and affectionate towards him. to find that this perverse offspring will do nothing else but fume and sulk, and plague you with his rebellion continually. This is just a picture, an outline, of what our hearts are by nature: perpetually fuming, sulking, fretting, and rebelling against the Lord: though perhaps they have been cut down by guilt about it, and have fallen down bleeding before God under a sense of vileness and horrible baseness.

But what a mercy it is to the poor souls that groan and grieve under a rebellious heart, that this ascended Mediator has received gifts for them! It is not your patience, meekness, and good temper, nor your gentle and quiet disposition, that bring down grace into your hearts; but God the Father has lodged all the graces and gifts of the Spirit in his dear Son, and they are given to you because you have an interest in his blood and righteousness. The Lord teaches us this. If we were always patient, meek, holy, submissive, never harassed by the Devil, and never felt the workings of corruption, we should begin to think we had some power to please God in ourselves, and should slight and neglect a precious Saviour. As Bunyan said of himself, before the Lord shewed him what he was, “I thought I pleased God as well as any man in England.” But when taught by painful experience what a depraved nature and rebellious heart we carry in our bosom, when the Lord lets down a little mercy and grace into our soul, we then know the blessed quarter whence it comes, and learn to abhor ourselves and bless his holy name.

V.—But after all, the chief beauty of the text, the grand mystery of it, is contained in the last clause, which time will not allow me to unfold, even if I had the ability, for it is the crowning point:

“That the Lord God might dwell among them”—that the Lord God might have a temple in which he will dwell, a sanctuary to fill with his glory, a people to shew forth his praise, a heart in which he himself might live and lodge, and, if I might use the expression, find himself a home. What a mystery is couched in that language of Isaiah, “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.” (Isai. 57:15.)

O what a mystery that God should have two dwelling-places! The “heaven of heavens,” that “cannot contain him,” and the humble, broken, and contrite heart! But in order that the Lord of heaven might have a place in which he could live and lodge, God gives to his people gifts and graces: for he cannot come and dwell in the carnal mind, in our rebellious nature, in a heart full of enmity and wickedness: he therefore makes a lodging-place for himself, a pavilion in which the King of Glory dwells, the curtains of which are like the curtains of Solomon. His abode is that holy, divine nature, which is communicated at regeneration—“the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” Thus Christ dwells in the heart by faith (Eph. 3:17); and is in his people, “the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). And this made Paul say, “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: 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). This is the object of God’s dealings—that the Lord God might dwell in his people; that there might be a union betwixt the church and her covenant Head: “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:23). This is the grand sum of all God’s dealings, the unfolding of the grand enigma, the solution of the incomprehensible mystery, “God manifest in the flesh”—that the Lord God might dwell in his people; “I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Cor. 6:16) and thus glorify himself by filling their hearts with

his grace and glory, as Solomon’s temple was of old, and that they might enjoy him, and be with him when time shall be no more. This is the reason why he received gifts for the rebellious; this is the grand key to all the Lord’s dealings with the soul, and all his mysterious leadings in providence—that the Lord God might dwell in the hearts of his people here, and be eternally glorified in them in a brighter and a better world.

And to what conclusion does this lead us? To this—that only so far as we have received gifts into our heart and conscience out of the fulness of the Mediator, only so far does the Lord God dwell in us, and only so far have we any evidence we are among his people. Therefore we must take the two things in connection. Want will not do alone—riches will not do alone; unbelief will not do alone—faith in the doctrines will not do alone. But when riches meet want, pleasure meets pain, food meets hunger, water meets thirst, balmy blood meets a guilty conscience, and the robe of righteousness meets the naked soul—then the soul is humbled and God glorified. And this is the grand end of all God’s dealings and all God’s dispensations, that the Lord God might dwell in his people. It will be the glory and bliss of heaven: and eternity itself will never fathom that mystery: for till we have the line of God to measure it, we never can have a true, right, and perfect conception of it.

76 The Only Safe Protection, and the Only Sure Refuge

Preached at Eden St. Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on
Wednesday Evening,

August 21, 1844

*“Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under
the shadow of thy wings.”*

Psalms 17:8

The Scriptures were revealed for the instruction and consolation of the church of God in all time; and therefore, there cannot be any experience in the soul so deep, nor any so high, which may not be traced in them. But all God’s people are not led into much of

the experience we find recorded there; there are depths into which all do not descend; there are heights to which all do not mount. All the people of God, for instance, cannot adopt such language as we find in some of the Psalms. "Mine iniquities have gone over mine head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease; and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken; I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart." (38:4-8.) I do not mean to say, they may not have some sensations similar to those here described; but all are not able to declare (at any rate, in some stages of their experience), that they have gone into all the depths of feeling therein expressed. So again: "While I suffer thy terrors I am distracted." (88:15.) "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." (42:7.) I do not mean to say, that all the Lord's people do not enter into a measure of the feelings therein set forth; but all the children of God certainly do not go down into the same depths of soul trouble, that we find some of the saints experienced as set forth in the Scripture. And so likewise, we may find heights of joy, praise, and exultation experienced by the Bible saints of old, that do not find a present parallel in the hearts of many of God's people. I do not say, that the time will not come, when they may sink into those depths; or that the period will not arrive when they may rise up to those heights; I merely look at it as a matter of present observation, as an existing fact, that there are heights and depths of feeling recorded in the Scripture, to which all the children of God do not equally sink, and to which they do not all equally rise.

But there are experiences, or parts of experience, traced out in the Scriptures, which do meet, more or less, with a response in the bosom of every one taught of God:—experience, which being the teaching of the Holy Ghost, is as real, as saving, and as complete as the other; and yet, not equally deep; nor equally high; but more upon a level with the average of God's people, and thus specially

adapted (if I may use the expression), to "the middle classes" of God's family. There are many passages of holy writ which drop into the very heart and conscience of all who know something of divine teaching, and yet have not been plunged into the depths, nor raised up into the heights that others of God's saints are experimentally acquainted with. Some parts, for instance, are clothed in the language of prayer; and how these express the feelings of a soul taught of God! How many of the Psalms are almost entirely taken up with breathing out the desires of the Psalmist! What a man of prayer David was! And how the Holy Ghost has seen fit to record in the Scriptures of truth the breathings of his soul, that we might, when we find similar breathings, have a testimony in our conscience that we are under the same teaching; and thus find a parallel in our hearts with what we there read as felt and experienced by one of God's saints. So that all the elect family, so far as they are living under the teachings of the Spirit, can come in, each in their own measure, with the petitions, the breathings, the longings, the sighings, the hungerings, the thirstings of the saints recorded in the Scriptures; though they cannot all mount up, or sink down, into the experience contained in other parts.

For instance, in the text, we have a petition breathed out from the soul of the Psalmist; and this petition divides itself into two branches: one, that the Lord would "keep" him; and the other, that the Lord would "hide" him. Everyone taught of God to know his own heart, and to feel his own weakness, let him have sunk into the lowest depths of conviction, or mounted up to the greatest heights of spiritual transport; or let him be weak and feeble, and know but little either of the bright side or of the dark:—all the children of God, I say, who know the weakness of their own heart, and the awful sin that lurks and works there, and who feel that they have no power to keep themselves, can all come and join with one heart and one voice in these words—"Keep me as the apple of the eye." And if they know anything of the experience of being brought into a measure of nearness to God, they can also join in the latter part

of the text—"Hide me under the shadow of thy wings."

But you will observe, that the Psalmist not merely breathes forth a desire to be kept, and to be hid, which is the leading branch of each petition, but he also (if I may use the expression) points out to the Lord the way in which he wishes these blessings to be communicated. He does not say simply, "Keep me;" but he adds, "as the apple of the eye;" he does not cry merely, "Hide me," but he also adds, "under the shadow of thy wings;" feeling that it was not enough to be kept, unless he was kept "as the apple of the eye," and not sufficient to be hid, unless he was hid "under the shadow" of the divine "wings."

With God's blessing, then, I shall endeavour this evening to trace out the experience contained in these two petitions; and show, if the Holy Ghost enable me, what it is to be "kept as the apple of the eye," and what it is to be "hid under the shadow of God's wings."

I.—Now, before a man can sincerely and honestly breathe out this prayer, "Keep me," he must have had a certain divine work wrought in his conscience. There is nothing easier than to take scriptural language into our lips; but whenever God the Spirit makes a man honest, he strips away from him all prayers that do not spring out of a feeling heart. He not only beats out of our hands liturgies, collects, and all formal, man-made prayers; but he also strikes out of our lips the very petitions that we find in the word of God which do not correspond with the feeling of our soul. So that, if our hearts have been touched by God's Spirit, and thus made honest and sincere before him, we can no more use scriptural prayers, nor join in with the minister when he prays, for if we have not more or less of the feeling which he or they express, than we can use written prayers or dry and dusty forms. If then we would really take into our lips, with scriptural and experimental feelings in our hearts, this petition, "Keep me as the apple of the eye," there must be, as a preliminary to breathing forth this prayer, a certain, special, and particular work of grace wrought in our conscience; or we cannot say, as David does in the first verse of this Psalm, "Give

ear unto my prayer, O Lord, that goeth not out of feigned lips."

1. Before then we can rightly breathe forth the prayer, "Keep me," we must have been taught spiritually something of our own helplessness to keep ourselves. We shall but mock God, if we ask him to keep us, and yet are not fully persuaded, that without his keeping we shall surely fall. Until, therefore, the Spirit of God has wrought in our conscience an experimental feeling of our complete helplessness, to use this petition, "Keep me," will but "come out of feigned lips."

But how does the Lord, for the most part, show us our helplessness? By allowing us from time to time to come into those circumstances, where we find temptation more than a match for us. The Lord is not the author of sin—God forbid; but he takes care that we shall know by painful experience we have no power to keep ourselves, except he specially interpose by his own miraculous hand. And thus, in his providence, he permits us to come into certain spots and states where we have to learn most keenly our inability to stand for a single hour, unless we are upheld by divine power. That was the way in which God dealt with Job. He had to teach him a certain lesson, his own helplessness; and to show him also the self-righteousness that was working naturally in his proud heart. But O, what a way he took to teach Job this lesson! He permitted all those overwhelming circumstances to come upon him, which not only roused up the peevishness of his heart, of which he before was comparatively ignorant; but he shewed him also how completely helpless he was to keep himself, and how unable to stand, except the Lord himself supported him by his own power. Now if we know anything of ourselves, we know this, that whenever the Lord has left us for a single moment to our own strength, we were unable to stand; that when any temptation presented itself suitable to our carnal mind, and God withheld his power to keep us, into that very temptation we fell headlong. I do not mean to say, that it was into some gross outward sin. We may learn what sin is, without falling headlong into the pit; we may draw near enough to the edge of the

sewer to know its noisome smell, without tumbling into it; we may slip and stagger upon the brink, without falling actually into the filthy pool. But all God's people are made to know their natural proneness to evil; and seeing and feeling how infallibly they must fall, and how they always have fallen, when God did not specially preserve them, they come at length to learn their helplessness, not as a matter of doctrine merely, but as a truth in inward and heartfelt experience. It is thus wrought in them as a divine conviction, that they cannot stand a single day nor a single hour, except the Lord himself miraculously and supernaturally support them. A spiritual knowledge, then, of our complete helplessness is one prerequisite, one needful preliminary, before we can breathe forth the first branch of the petition in the text—"Keep me."

2. Another requisite is, to know what a dreadful thing it is not to be kept; and to see and feel the horrible evil of those things from which we desire to be preserved. This is produced by the Lord's raising up his fear in our hearts, and making our conscience tender before him. And when he thus gives us to see the horrible nature of sin, he causes us to groan and sigh, and at times almost bleed under the painful sensations that the guilt of sin produces when it is charged home upon the conscience. Many speak of those who contend for the life and power of God in the soul, both ministers and hearers, as though they were always indulging in, and gloating over corruption; as though all their preaching and conversation, and all they love to hear and speak about, were but the internal workings of evil; and as though they considered him the greatest Christian who knew the most of nature's depravity. Now I say boldly, that there is no man who knows anything of the evil of sin, who desires to be kept from the power of sin, who groans and sighs under the burden of sin, and who hates sin "with perfect hatred," except him who has that vital experience against which so many darts are thrown. The man who merely has the doctrines floating in his head, has no inward abhorrence of evil; he has no groaning of heart under the power of sin; nor has he any desire

(except for the sake of his own reputation) to be kept from falling into it. Those only who, by seeing light in God's light, know the workings of inward corruption, feel what a horrible thing sin is; and they are the only people who desire to be kept from falling into it; for they alone experimentally possess that fear of God working in their hearts which makes them to "hate evil," and which is in them "a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." I say, then, it is a libel upon those who preach experimentally, and set forth the work of God the Spirit in the soul, to say that they encourage and indulge sin. If they are taught of God, as they profess to be, they know inwardly and painfully what a horrible thing sin is; they groan and cry, as the greater part of their daily experience, under the weight and burden of sin; and they alone are constantly and continually sighing to the Lord to deliver them from the power and dominion of it, and to purge their consciences from dead works to serve the living God. Nay more, the experimentally taught people of God are the only persons who in any measure are delivered from the power of sin. A man, then, must know what a horrible and hateful thing sin is, before he will cry to the Lord to "keep" him from it.

3. Again. He must also know what it is to have experienced some putting forth of the Lord's power in his conscience, upholding him from falling into those sins into which he would have tumbled headlong had not grace interposed. There is a kind of despair which seizes hold of a man's heart who has never been manifestly kept by God. Sin has come before him—he has fallen into it, and has repented of it; sin has come before him again—he has again fallen into it, and again repented of it. This alternate sinning and repenting at last produces a feeling of despair; as we find the Prophet speaking—"Thou saidst there is no hope; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." (Jer. 2:25.) If a man keeps falling, falling, falling, and never finds the power of the Lord put forth to uphold him, it at last breeds in him a spirit of infidelity as to whether God is really willing to keep him; every such successive

fall opens up the way for another; and every repeated instance of the Lord not keeping him makes him doubt whether he has the disposition to preserve him from sin. But on the contrary, wherever the Lord has appeared, in any manifest way, to keep a man when he has been walking upon the very brink and edge of temptation, and some portion of Scripture has been sent home to his conscience, or some special help has come from the Lord in the hour of need, it raises up a sweet hope, and encourages his soul to plead with him that he would keep him more and more; so that he can say with Paul, "Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day." (Acts 26:22.)

So that these three things at least, not to mention others, must be wrought by a divine power in the conscience, before we can ask the Lord to keep us. We must know our own helplessness to keep ourselves; we must feel the exceeding evil and bitter character of sin, so as to make us groan and cry from the very bottom of our heart to the Lord to keep us from it; and we must have found, from time to time, that the Lord has appeared, kept, preserved, and restrained us from falling into sin, when we should otherwise have rushed headlong into the foulest and basest crimes.

"Keep me." But what did the Psalmist want the Lord to keep him from? In breathing forth this desire, he must have seen all the enemies of his soul arrayed against him. He must have viewed the number, craft, and strength of his foes, and felt himself a poor, weak, defenceless, helpless babe before them. It is this feeling of helplessness that makes us cry to the Lord for help. As long as we think we have a grain of strength of our own, as long as we can depend in the least degree upon any supposed wisdom or righteousness in ourselves, we never can, except with "feigned lips," cry, "Keep me." But the more thoroughly and completely we are emptied of self-confidence, self-dependence, self-wisdom, self-strength, and self-righteousness, the more singly and simply, the more sincerely and ceaselessly, will the prayer be breathed forth—"Keep me."

1. We need to be kept from the world; and we never need to be kept from it so much as when we fear it least. We need to be kept from the world daily and hourly; but we shall never ask the Lord to keep us from it till we have felt its ensnaring spirit. Now, it is not so much the society of the world, as the spirit of it, that defiles our conscience. A man may go into the midst of the world, if business or necessity call him, and not be infected or contaminated with it; and at other times he may sit alone in his chimney-corner without speaking a word to a worldly person, and yet find the spirit of the world stealing upon and overpowering his heart. I have known, in times past, what it was to breathe out my soul to the Lord, with earnest desires after him, in the midst of worldly company. Though we would not go needlessly into it (for "who can touch pitch without being defiled?") yet it is not so much the society of the world, when we are thrown necessarily into it, as the spirit of it getting hold of a man's heart, that he has so much reason to dread. For when the spirit of the world gets within us, I am sure it will deaden our conscience, and harden our heart toward the things of eternity; it will make the Bible little else than a book which we have no interest to read; it will shorten all our prayers to God; it will put a damp upon all the pantings, breathings, and longings of our soul heavenward. Therefore, just in proportion as the spirit of the world acts upon and prevails over us, just so much is all spiritual feeling damped in the soul. These two spirits never can both be at the same time predominant; where the Spirit of the Lord reigns and rules, it overcomes the spirit of the world; and where the spirit of the world prevails, it damps, for a time, the actings of the Spirit of God. When we feel, then, what the spirit of the world is; when we awake out of our dream, like Nabal of old from his drunkenness, and the fumes of intoxication have been dispelled, (for sometimes we get so intoxicated with it, and the spirit of the world has such possession of us, that we do not know we are under its influence,) we then see its mud and mire upon our clothes, and know painfully where we have been wallowing. Perhaps some heavy affliction, or cutting

conviction, some moment of solemn meditation, or some awakening feeling created by God himself in our conscience, brings us out of that sad state of intoxication into which we have so heedlessly fallen. We then begin to see what an awful, what a dreadful thing it is to be entangled with the love of the world. We perceive how insensibly its spirit has been creeping upon us; we feel how it has well nigh eaten out the life of God in our souls; what a crust of searedness, so to speak, it has brought over our conscience, and how it has deadened our heart to divine things. And when we get a little delivered from the spirit of the world, when the Lord indulges our souls with some sweet meditation, or some spiritual pantings and sighings after him, how we hate ourselves that we should ever have been so entangled in its spirit, and how we desire that that foul spirit should never regain possession of us!

2. But again. Of all opponents that we have most to fear, and of all enemies whose arts and arms we have most reason to dread, (I believe I shall find an echo in every God-taught bosom here) surely self is the greatest foe; and self is never so great a foe, as when it is most concealed. We can guard against the open enemy; it is the secret foe whose attacks we have most to dread, and against whom we have most reason to guard. We can defend ourselves against the soldier that wears the uniform of the enemy; but it is the traitor in the garrison whose insidious arts are most to be feared. So it is with respect to our own evil heart—that traitor within the camp, that secret renegade within the walls, who is continually plotting how to deliver our heart's garrison into the hands of the enemy.

For instance, this evil heart of ours will sometimes work in a way of presumption; lifting us up to vain-confidence, inspiring proud and conceited thoughts of ourselves, damping all that humility, that godly fear, that lowliness of mind, that contrition of spirit which at times we have experienced, and lifting us up into a sort of careless, reckless, Antinomian vain-confidence. We get into this spirit of vain-confidence sometimes we scarcely know how, but it is very much connected usually with the spirit of the world;

and if that spirit is working in a man's heart, if he has some sound and scriptural form of religion, some Calvinistic profession, no ground seems so good for him to take as that of vain-confidence. If he be exercised with doubts, fears, and misgivings, they will damp the spirit of the world within him; but if he take the ground of vain-confidence, he has not a single check. The ground of eternal security in Christ, of the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, of the certainty of the salvation of the elect, and of his own interest in Christ as one of the elect—a man may take all that high position, and have his heart filled with worldliness. But when he comes to be exercised with doubts and fears and sinkings, they and the spirit of the world cannot work together; but the highest fleshly confidence will work well with the spirit of the world. The people of God sometimes begin to feel this spirit creeping over and stealing upon them. They have not had so many trials lately; things in providence have gone well with them; Satan has not thrown so many fiery darts into their minds; they have had a little ease, and have been able to “swallow down their spittle,” as we read in Job; there has been a cessation of arms, a short truce with the enemy. Now this is the time for the soul to get lifted up into vain-confidence. But when we awake from the dream, and see how, with this spirit, searedness of conscience came on, and how we no longer discovered the presence of evil in things wherein we saw it plainly before, we begin to feel what a dreadful enemy to our souls this vain-confidence and Antinomian presumption is, and to cry, “Keep me, Lord, from this empty religion.” Whatever doubts and fears the soul is exercised with, these are felt to be better than a calm, easy, confident state without the shinings-in of God's countenance;—a state of security not springing from any divine testimony within, but resting upon the bare letter of the word, or standing in mere notions and opinions, quite distinct from the work and witness of God the Spirit in the soul.

Oh! the deceitfulness of our heart! Who can fathom the depths of our native hypocrisy? What language can paint, what tongue

can describe the workings of our base heart, or the treachery of our fallen nature? When a child of God begins to take a solemn review of the past, and sees how in a thousand instances his vile heart has deceived him; how it always has betrayed him whenever he trusted in it, and never did anything else but lie; how desirous he is to be kept from being entangled and overcome by the wickedness and treachery of his depraved nature! We begin at last to look upon our hearts just as a master does upon a servant whom he finds is perpetually telling him lies; he looks upon him as an unprincipled wretch, on whom he cannot place the least dependance, and of whom he will gladly get rid as soon as he possibly can. So when we find our heart has made such strong resolutions of amendment, put such a good face upon matters, and yet, day after day, has been telling us such awful and abominable lies; we begin after a time to look upon it, as the master does upon the dishonest servant, with a feeling that it is only seeking an opportunity to deceive and pillage us, however it may use the language of truth and honesty. And like the master who has discovered that he has been under the power of this lying servant, as we get more and more acquainted with the lies and hypocrisy of our deceitful nature, we are anxious to be kept from the power of it, that this treacherous heart may not have the dominion over us.

Sometimes, on the other hand, we are afraid of the despair that springs out of these unbelieving hearts of ours. There are two vast shoals upon one of which many gallant barks make shipwreck—the shoal of presumption, and the shoal of despair. What a course have the vessels of mercy to steer between these rocks and how continually they are edging the very brink of these reefs! What a dexterous steersman it must be to guide them safely!—Aye, none can steer them through but the Lord himself sitting at the helm. How perpetually is the frail vessel nearing the shoal of presumption or of despair! How does a vain-confident spirit one day fill our mind, and the next day a desponding spirit sink our soul! How we are towering one hour on the wings of vain-confidence, and the

next hour falling into almost the lowest pit of despondency! Now the soul taught of God dreads as much to be left to despair, as it dreads to be given up to presumption. It knows there are these two shoals, on which so many noble vessels have struck; and O how it fears lest it should one day or other be wrecked on one of these rocks!

But in fact, if my ability enabled me to enumerate all the evils by which we are surrounded, all the enemies that threaten our soul's peace, all the snares spread for our feet, all the entanglements Satan is laying in the way, all the dangers felt and feared, it would be to occupy the whole evening. I shall therefore pass on to consider the way in which the Psalmist begs the Lord to keep him: "Keep me as the apple of the eye." If I may use the expression—and I do it with all reverence—he directs the Lord how to keep him; or rather, he points out to the Lord the way in which he wishes to be kept.

But what is meant by the expression—"the apple of the eye?" I am not very fond of touching upon what a word is in the original, whether Greek or Hebrew, because it often springs from nothing else but pride and vanity in the speaker; and after all, those who indulge in it most are usually least acquainted with the subject. But I cannot, in this instance, forbear mentioning its original meaning. It is, literally, "the little man of the eye;" and there is something very significant in the expression. If you look into the eye of a person speaking to you, you will see your own image reflected in it in miniature; and the Hebrews, from that circumstance, call the seeing part of the eye "the little man" of the eye. "The apple of the eye" then, in the original, means, not the white, but the retina, the seeing part of the eye. The white of the eye is, I understand, nearly insensible to pain. A person was telling me the other day, that on being operated on for cataract, he suffered scarcely any pain when the knife was passed through the white of the eye. But "the little man of the eye," the seeing part of that wonderful organ, we know, is most sensitive. Now David asked the Lord to "keep him as the apple of the eye;" that is, with all that tenderness and care which

the Creator has displayed in preserving this most important organ.

In order to illustrate this figure, let me direct your attention to a few particulars connected with the structure of the natural eye; not that I am well acquainted with its anatomy; but I wish to point out how the God of nature has protected this delicate organ, that I may show from it some of his dealings in grace. Look, for instance, at the bony orbit, in which the eye is lodged. If our eye had not been lodged in a deep and bony cavity, how exposed it would have been to every blow! I myself am a standing instance of it. When I was at school, one of my school-fellows threw a clothes-brush at me with great violence, which struck me just in the corner of the eye. Had it not been for this bony arch, which received the stroke, my eye would probably have been destroyed by the violence of the blow. The God of nature, then, has lodged this important and tender organ in this strong and deep bony cavity, in order to preserve it from injury. Here we see something of being “kept as the apple of the eye.” Look also at the noble, projecting pent-house over our eye that the God of creation has constructed—how our forehead, with the jutting eyebrow, preserves the eye from injury by a downward blow, and prevents the sweat of our brow, (for “in the sweat of our face” we have to eat our bread,) from running into and annoying it. And look at the thatch, that to serve the same purpose the Lord has set over the eye; and observe the delicate curtain of the eye-lid, that drops over it, to preserve it from dust and other annoyances; which also keeps it moist and sensitive, and wipes away, as if instinctively, any film which might gather over it. How fringed too it is with the eyelash, which breaks the violence of the light, and acts as a net-work against dust and flies! I trust to be excused hinting at these natural things, as in order to catch the beauty of the figure, it is necessary thus to see for a moment how the Lord has protected our natural eye with such a wonderful apparatus. What skill has the Architect of our frame displayed in preserving this tender and important organ.

And observe also how sensitive he has made the eye! How

immediately the curtain drops when danger threatens! and how, when sleep falls upon us, and we lie at rest upon our pillow, the wise Contriver of our bodies has caused that close-fitting lid to fold over the eye, that no injury may befall it in the unguarded hours of the night! Now I do not mean to say, that the Psalmist was an anatomist; for my remarks have all been connected with the outward defences of the eye, which are open to any person’s observation, and not with the inward structure, which to understand requires dissection; but, no doubt, he had a view of the carefulness and wisdom with which the Maker of the eye had preserved it, that made him breathe forth this petition—”Keep me as the apple of the eye.” That is “Lord show to me spiritually the same protection, the same tenderness, the same wisdom which thou hast displayed in preserving my natural eye-sight.”

In what sense, then, does the Lord “keep us as the apple of the eye?”

1. Do you not observe how this bony arch that the Lord has made preserves the eye from accidents and blows that might fall upon it? This is an external defence. And do we not see how the Lord is perpetually hedging up our way in providence, in order to preserve our souls from being entangled in the snares into which we should otherwise fall? The Lord keeps us most wonderfully. Sometimes, when temptation comes, we have not the will; sometimes, when the will comes, we have not the opportunity. The Lord guards us specially by his providence. As in his wisdom he has guarded our eye naturally by this bony orbit, so in his providential care he has kept us from a thousand evils. If all the Lord’s people could speak, and tell honestly what they had passed through, how they would trace their preservation even from open sin to some unexpected circumstance in providence! Perhaps, a knock at the door, a child coming into the room, or an unexpected visit from a friend, has broken a snare, into which they would have fallen headlong, had not that circumstance intervened. Just as the Lord in his wisdom has preserved the eye by this bony arch, which you

will observe is an outward protection, and quite distinct from the sensitiveness of that organ, so does he from time to time keep us from falling into sin by his providential dealings with us. And it is a mercy to be kept at any rate, and in any way; it is a mercy to be kept from falling, though it be as a child is kept from falling into the fire by the tall iron fender; it is a mercy to be kept from falling, even though it be as a lunatic by a strait waistcoat, or by the iron bars before his windows. Open sin is so dreadful a thing, that it is a mercy to be kept from it in any way, or by any means, however severe, that the Lord may employ.

2. But what the Psalmist seems chiefly to point to, is the sensitiveness of the organ. This is an internal defence. How sensitive our eye is! Directly danger threatens it, how immediately the fringed curtain drops over it! And if dust, sand, or any foreign matter get into our eye, how uneasy, how miserable, how troubled we are till it is dislodged! So spiritually. David seems here to refer to the conscience; for as our eye is sensitive naturally, so a conscience made tender by God's Spirit is sensitive spiritually. Does a foreign body—sand, dust, lime—tease and irritate the eye naturally?—He would ask the Lord to keep his conscience so sensitive, that sin, temptation, and evil might distress it, just as much as any foreign body distresses the eye when it flies into it. "Keep me as the apple of the eye:" let my conscience be made and kept as tender, as sensitive, as fearful of the approach of evil, as circumspect, as watchful—and if evil do come, if sin do enter, let it be as distressed, as uneasy, till the guilt of it be removed, as ever "the apple of the eye" is under the intrusion of a foreign substance. In being "kept as the apple of the eye," then, he desires not only to be kept with all the care that God has bestowed upon the eye—not only with all the wisdom that he has displayed in preserving it externally—but also with all that wonderful apparatus of internal sensitive tenderness, which he has endowed it with, that it may be "the light of the body."

3. If our natural eye be darkened or impaired we stumble. We have lost that which directs our feet; that light which guides us

in the road wherein we are to walk. So if our conscience, which is the eye of the soul, becomes hardened, darkened, crusted over, dimmed by cataract, we are unable to walk spiritually in the path pleasing to God; we stumble headlong into sin, mistake the course, and wander out of the way, just the same as we should if we had lost the important organ of sight naturally. Therefore, when the Psalmist said, "Keep me as the apple of the eye," it is as though he said, "Lord, show forth all that power, all that wisdom, all that tenderness, which thou displayest in keeping my natural organ of sight; for if my soul be darkened, I must go astray."

Now will not this find a responsive echo in our bosom, if our conscience be made tender in God's fear? Shall we go recklessly on, if we know any thing of the prayer, "Keep me as the apple of the eye?" Shall we say "Sin cannot harm us, sin cannot damn us, sin cannot cut us out of the covenant; it does not matter what we do, think, or say, for we belong to 'the election of grace;' there is no harm in this indulgence; there is no evil in that gratification; good men have done this or that?" Will there be in our hearts or lips any such reckless, hardened language, if we know any thing of the meaning of the Psalmist's prayer? Who would expose his natural eye to a blow, when he knows the consequence? Who would wish the providence of God to be removed from keeping this important organ of natural sight? Who would plunge his eye fearlessly and recklessly where angry swords are flashing on every side? Who would open it to the arrow of the archer? Who would expose it to the rifle of the marksman? Who would lay it bare to stones and darts flying around it in all directions? Now if a man, spiritually, see that he is surrounded with instruments of destruction; if he discover that swords are flashing on every side, darts cast in every direction, and snares and temptations are on every hand, any one of which may darken his spiritual sight; if he know and feel these things, can he go on in a daring way of reckless presumption? If he breathe forth the words, "Keep me as the apple of the eye," is it not an appeal to the divine wisdom, the divine care, the divine tender-

ness, and the earnest desire of his soul that the Lord would exert all that wisdom, care, and tenderness over him? But there is much lodged, far more than I can express, and doubtless far more than I feel, in this prayer, "Keep me as the apple of the eye."

II.—"Hide me under the shadow of thy wings." This is the second branch of the petition that the soul of the Psalmist breathed forth in the words of the text.

He here makes use of another figure. The former plea was to be "kept" and he told the Lord how he wished to be kept,— "as the apple of the eye;" this petition was, that he might be "hid," and he tells him how he wishes to be hid—"under the shadow of thy wings." As the first was a figure in nature, and referred to the eye; so the second is another figure in nature, and refers to the protection that a bird exercises over her young. The Lord uses the same figure, when he says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." (Matt. 23:37.) We read also (Deut. 32:11) of "the eagle fluttering over her young, and spreading abroad her wings." We have the same figure used here. "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings." The soul is breathing forth in expressive language its desire to be hid under the shadow of God's protecting wing, as a young bird, or the tender chicken, is covered and hid beneath the fostering wings of the mother hen.

But before we enter into the figure, we will look at the expression—"hide me." "Come, my people," we read (Isa. 26:20), "enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself for a little moment." There is much contained in the word "hide."

1. It implies, in the first instance, separation. If a man be hidden under the shadow of God's wings, it presupposes that the Lord has separated him unto himself, and keeps him distinct from all others as one of his "peculiar people." If we are hidden naturally, it indicates a coming out from other persons; for we cannot be hidden if we are in a crowd. Solitude is a hedge and a bar from the world. "Hide me," then, implies an inward separation of heart and spirit:

and this is a feeling which every God-taught soul earnestly desires. How much religious gossip there is, where this inward separation of heart and spirit is never seen! How much so-called religious conversation, in which the grace of God never manifests itself! And finding, as many of the living family do, what barrenness and death enter their conscience from this idle conversation (of which so many churches, alas, are full), it makes the greater part, or at least the most spiritual part of God's people lead a solitary and separate life. They find that they can no more go into professing company without defilement, hardness of heart, and searedness of conscience, than they can go into the profane world; nay, even less so, because in the world they are more upon their guard. When in the society of worldly people, they watch their lips and guard their words; but with the professed followers of Jesus they give themselves more licence. So that when the Lord's spiritually taught family have felt and groaned under this, it brings their to desire to be "hidden," brought out of the professing world, and kept solitary and separate.

2. But "hide me" has another signification. The wrath of God is coming upon the world. The Son of Man will appear in his glory, and then the vials of divine vengeance will be poured out to the uttermost upon a guilty race. Now "hide me" is the desire of the soul to be brought under safe protection; to be delivered from this general approaching ruin, this universal, overwhelming destruction; and to be led into that spiritual knowledge of, and that spiritual communion with, the Lord of life and glory, that the soul shall find a refuge in him till the calamities are overpast.

But there is something more which we must enter into in order to get the full meaning of the expression—"Hide me under the shadow of thy wings." "Under the shadow of thy wings!" What ideas are conveyed by this figure?

1. Is not protection one? When the tender brood see danger at hand, and flee for refuge under the wing of the mother, is not protection the leading feeling that brings them there? When the

bird of prey, the hawk or the kite, is in the sky, and about to pounce upon the brood, does not the mother utter a peculiar cluck, at the sound of which they all run and nestle themselves under the shadow of her wings, and there are secured? Doubtless the Psalmist had some reference to this. When he said, "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings," he saw dangers in prospect, he perceived "the Prince of the power of the air," that bird of prey hovering over him, that unclean vulture, about to pounce upon his soul; and feeling as defenceless from his attacks as the tender chicken from the pounce of the hawk, the desire of his soul was to be brought into safe shelter, under the shadow of God's wings.

2. But it implies also nearness. When the tender brood get beneath the maternal wing, what a nearness there is between the mother and her offspring! How near her bosom is to them! and how near are they to her bosom! And no doubt, naturally, there are mutual sweet sensations connected with the nearness of the mother to the offspring, and the nearness of the offspring to the mother. As then the mother naturally feels a delight in having her child near to her breast, as the child clings to that warm shelter that it may be near to the maternal bosom; so the soul, in desiring to be "hidden under the shadow of God's wings," seeks nearness to him, and spiritual access to his presence: not to be at a distance from him, not to be shut out from his overspreading wing, not to be driven into darkness and gloominess as a forlorn outcast; but to be brought nigh unto, and be favoured with sweet communion with the Lord. And every soul taught of God feels that there is no "hiding" short of this; that a man cannot hide himself from the presence of the Lord, though he fly unto the very ends of the earth; that all that man can do will not avail him in the day of wrath; that all his own refuges are refuges of lies; that his own righteousness will leave him unsheltered; that all mere forms, rites, and ceremonies will leave his head bare one day for the thunderbolt of divine vengeance; that there is no effectual protection from the wrath of God, except by being hid in Christ, and thus brought into near and

immediate communion and communication with the Lord of life and glory. And as he has seen the tender brood hiding themselves under the maternal wing, so he longs to be hidden under the shadow of God's wings, not merely to escape the coming danger, (that is but a selfish motive which all have,) but to be brought into special nearness that he may lean on the bosom of his Lord.

3. But there is also another idea connected with the figure; which is that of fostering, or what is called "brooding." When the tender chicken comes forth from the egg, it would soon perish and die, were it not for the fostering warmth of the mother, as she spreads her wing over it. How the little shrinking ones cower beneath those warm wings!—And as she spreads herself over them, her warmth nurtures them, diffusing itself through their whole system, and insensibly strengthening their weak and tender frame. So spiritually. We have no warmth in ourselves; we may try to rub our evidences together, as Indians get fire by rubbing together sticks; we may obtain sparks but nothing else; a little light but no warmth. Would we be warm—would we feel our souls, our hearts, our spirits, burn with love and affection—we can only get inward and spiritual warmth by coming near its almighty Source! The consumptive patient flies to the warm climates of the South, to get, if he may, a temporary respite from the death that threatens him; he does not turn his prow to the frozen climes of the north; he knows, the farther he goes from the sun, the more does ice hold the earth in perpetual chains: when he seeks for a more genial sky, he goes towards the sun. So the soul never can get warm by leaving the Lord, and plunging into the world; all there is chilliness, iciness, and death. Would we be warm? We can only be so by coming near to the Almighty source of life, light, and heat; by getting nigh unto the Sun of Righteousness, as the chicken creeps under the mother's wing, and draws near her breast. Would the Lord warm our cold hearts? He brings the soul near to himself; and warmth out of his covenant fulness enters into and strengthens the heart.

4. But what an effectual protection it is! When the infant

brood are hidden beneath the maternal wing, what weapon can strike them? They are safe from every enemy; the arrow must pass through the bosom of the mother to wound them; and until she is slaughtered upon the spot, the chickens under her wing remain in a place of perfect security. So spiritually. If the soul be hidden under the shadow of God's wings, it never can be pierced there; and as long as the Lord lives, the soul must live, for it lives in nearness to and communion with him.

5. And again, how all the family are brought into mutual contact, when the mother hen spreads her wings over them! There is no foreigner, no stranger, no enemy there. She only nurtures her own brood; she has no anxiety or solicitude for the brood of other birds; but all the fondness of her maternal bosom is spent upon her own offspring. So spiritually. When the soul says, "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings," it is longing to get into that sweet and blessed spot, where the Lord manifests himself in all the tenderness and affection of his paternal relationship, and gathers together all his children into love and communion with each other. There is no pecking each other with beak and claws when they are all safe under the shadow of his wings.

What a safe and blessed spot this is! "Under the shadow of thy wings!" It seems to us at times a mercy to be brought under the shadow of God's ordinances, under the shadow of the experimental preaching of the word. And I dare say, some of you, who are teased and tormented with the cares of the week, are glad sometimes on the Lord's day, to get under the shadow of this little roof, to catch some droppings of the word of life into your hearts. But what is all this compared with getting under the shadow of the Almighty? That is whither Ruth fled; as Boaz said to her, "A full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust!" (Ruth 2:2.) And here is safe refuge, here is sure consolation, and every thing that the soul can long for or enjoy. No spot is nearer heaven, and no spot more desirable, than where the Lord "hides us under the shadow of his wings." No evil

can hurt us there.

And if we get near the Lord, will there not be some communication of the Lord's presence to our souls? If we touch the marble chimney-piece, is there not a sensation of cold? and if we touch the warm stove is there not a sensation of heat? Whatever we touch, is there not sensation communicated out of it? So, would we get near the Lord?—it is to get warmth from the Lord. But to go from him, to rush into the world, to run into paths of sin, to flee to formal religion, to bury ourselves in the lusts of our depraved nature—what is this but to dip our hands in ice, and expect to get heat? It is by being "hid under the shadow of God's wings," that we can alone find shelter, protection, and warmth.

How much then is contained in these words! O! I feel to have been merely like a child dipping a cockleshell into the sea, and taking up a few drops. We can but dip, as it were, a cockle-shell into the Scripture, or into any text of Scripture. We cannot exhaust the mine of deep experience contained in any one passage like this. We are like the miner in Cornwall, who may extract a lump or two of tin or copper out of a vein of the mine; but how deep the mine extends itself, beyond the power of his skill or strength to penetrate! So with the Scriptures of truth; there are such veins of experience in them—veins so rich, and that lie so deep, that it requires one well and deeply taught in the things of God to be able to strike a pickaxe even into any part of them.

We have seen then but a little of what is contained in the petition of the Psalmist before us this evening. We have not had all his trials; we therefore cannot enter into the depth of feeling with which he breathed it out. We have not had all his consolation, we have not equally felt the power of divine grace: and therefore we can only glean a little, a feeble measure, just a few hints and scraps, and mere gatherings-up of the rich experience here poured forth. But still those of us who fear God can say, each in our measure, "Keep me as the apple of the eye." If we know any thing of divine teaching, of the evil and misery of sin; and of the sweetness of be-

ing kept from its filth, guilt, and power; if we dread to fall before night comes on; if we know that none but Jesus can keep us; if we long to be kept by him, and feel the blessedness of it, surely we can in a measure join in with this simple cry—"Keep me as the apple of the eye."

And if we have ever felt any measure of nearness of access to the Lord, any sweet sensations communicated out of him, any sympathy from his bosom, any light from his countenance, any love from his heart; we can also breathe out, at times—"Hide me under the shadow of thy wings." This is the only sure keeping, and this is the only safe hiding. And sure I am, that the words of the text (I say nothing of my exposition of them; if not agreeable to God's will and word, let all I have spoken "with stammering lips" this evening be dispersed to the winds of heaven);—but sure am I that the words of the text, which the Holy Ghost has written, will meet with a response in every God taught bosom: "Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings."

And will they, can they be breathed forth in vain? Is not Jesus "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever?" and will not the Lord, who inspired that prayer in David's bosom, and heard it too, if he has breathed the same into our hearts, hear it also?

I am sure then I cannot leave you with a better prayer than this: "Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings." And sure I am, it will be our prayer, and our desire, if we know any thing of divine things by divine teaching. We shall feel that there is no keeping like God's keeping, and no hiding like God's hiding; that all we have done to keep ourselves has only issued in disappointment; and all we have done to hide ourselves has only exposed us more to the thunderbolts of divine vengeance. So that being beaten out of house and home, and driven from every other refuge, we at last come to this safe and simple shelter—"Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings."

77 The Christian Warfare

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on Lord's Day Evening,
August 28, 1844

*"Having the same conflict which ye saw in me,
and now hear to be in me."*

Philippians 1:30

A partaker of grace carries with him the most undeniable evidence that he is a partaker of grace. It is as much stamped upon him, as the coin that comes from the Mint is stamped with the Queen's image. And though there are counterfeits under a profession of grace, as there are forged coins in the marts of trade, yet, sooner or later, in each case, the base metal will have a nail struck through it, and be fastened to the counter. But as there is no rule so general which does not admit of some exception, so there may be grace in the heart of one who wears at present but a doubtful appearance.

I have sometimes in my own mind divided the professing church into three classes. First, there are those of whom we have no doubt that they are partakers of the grace of God; secondly, there are those of whom we have as little doubt that they are entirely destitute of grace; and thirdly, there are those of whom we at present stand in doubt whether they have or have not the grace of God in their hearts. But, as really and truly there are but two classes in the sight of God, the elect and the reprobate; so, sooner or later, such persons, however doubtful they may at present appear, will be made manifest and brought to the light; and it will be made plain to the heart and conscience of God's children whether light and life have been communicated to their souls, or whether they have a name to live whilst dead. If the doubtfuls in the camp have been enlisted by the Lord of hosts, they will be made manifest in God's own time and way "as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." They will be brought into closer and severer conflict; their bow will

abide in strength, and the arms of their hands will be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; whilst the renegades and deserters, though armed and carrying bows, will turn back in the day of battle.

The Apostle Paul, after an absence of three or four years from his last visit, wrote this epistle to the church of God at Philippi. Through the whole epistle the greatest tenderness and affection run; but particularly in the first chapter does he tell them what were the feelings of his heart toward them; and endeavouring to comfort them under their afflictions by assuring them that the very hatred of their adversaries was “an evident token of their salvation, and that of God;” and that this high privilege “was given them, not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for his sake,”—he adds, as one engaged with them in the same battle, “Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”

There are some men who appear at first to run well in a profession of religion. They start as Calvinists, but after a time become thorough Arminians; and even ministers professing truth have been known to commence with free grace and end with free will. So that you can never depend on such persons for one year after another. But it was not so with this man of God, the Apostle Paul; he says, “Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” He came to them from the very first with an experimental knowledge of the truth; he kept nothing back in doctrine, experience, or practice that was profitable for them. He did not come as a tried and tempted man at one time, and then all lightness and frivolity at another. He was the same man in private that he was in public.

Nor did he exalt himself as having attained to so high a standing in faith as to be wholly free from conflicts, and so superior to all others of the Lord’s family. But he speaks of himself and them, as “having the same conflict;” as in the same circumstances, passing through the same trials, temptations, and difficulties, and obtaining the same deliverances, as they once saw in him at hand, and

now heard to be in him when afar. There was no mistake about it. It was not drawing a long hypocritical face in the pulpit, like a tragic actor, and there squeezing out a tear; while full of mirth and carnality in the vestry and the parlour. But they saw that this man of God had a conflict in his bosom. He carried about with him from place to place in his own person a most undeniable testimony that he was a possessor of that grace of God, which is opposed to and opposed by the world, the flesh, and the devil. So that all who knew him were eye and ear witnesses of that conflict which was perpetually going on within him.

With God’s blessing, then, let us attempt to trace out what this conflict is. And may the Lord graciously enable me to take up this evening a few of the “stumbling blocks” out of the way; and point out some of the blessed leadings and teachings of the Spirit of God in the consciences of the Lord’s people.

The elect people of God, while in a state of nature know nothing of an inward spiritual conflict with sin. The strong man armed keepeth his palace in the heart, and his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he, in the hour of regenerating grace, comes upon him and overcomes him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted; and from that moment the conflict begins.

But what kind of conflict is it? It is a conflict between nature and grace, between the flesh and the spirit. When we are in a state of nature, there is no spiritual conflict; there may occasionally be powerful workings of natural conscience; but there cannot be any spiritual conflict, such as the Holy Ghost sets forth in Gal. 5:17: “The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” This conflict, peculiar to the quickened elect, commences with the first communication of spiritual life, and never ceases till body and soul part company. The leading feature of this conflict is—that it is a conflict with sin; but not necessarily nor in every case with outward sin. Those who have no experience of the inward warfare, or of the conflict which the people

of God are engaged in, have no idea of sin beyond those open acts into which its bewitching allurements are continually drawing Adam's fallen children. When therefore they hear a minister trace out the work of grace upon the conscience, and describe the almost unceasing conflict which the child of God passes through, they cannot understand his meaning, or discover his aim. Many mistakes are made in this matter; but one of the greatest is, to mistake the opposition made by the natural conscience against sin, for the spiritual conflict between grace and nature.

Many persons have been brought up as it is called religiously; and having been trained up in a profession from childhood they have been kept from running riot into open evil by the restraints and examples of parents or guardians. Their conscience, therefore, not being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, they experience an inward opposition to outward acts of sin before commission, and a measure of remorse after. This accusing conscience they mistake for the inward striving of the Spirit. But they deceive themselves. They mistake the shadow for the substance. There is no painful struggle in them between nature and grace. Such persons may have a certain degree of tenderness in their natural consciences, but they are utter strangers to spiritual conflict. Their case is accurately described by the Apostle, Rom. 2:15: "Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing, one another."

There is one feature which distinguishes the conflict of nature against nature from the conflict of grace against nature—which is—that those who are engaged in the spiritual conflict are fighting a winning battle; whilst those who have but the natural conflict are fighting a losing battle. Where nature opposes nature the principle of the opposition daily becomes weaker and weaker; and sin eventually, sooner or later, gains complete mastery over them. Sin, that unwearied General, is continually either thundering at their gate by storm, or undermining their wall by sap; and every unsuccess-

ful resistance provokes and paves the way for another assault. Thus gradually, and almost insensibly, their hearts become hardened; their consciences get seared, and sin gains in the end a complete victory over them: if not vessels of mercy, so they will live and so they will die, and perish in their sins.

But whoever is made a partaker of grace has a heavenly principle implanted, a spiritual life communicated, and a divine faith breathed into his soul, which is ever kept alive and strengthened by the power of God the Spirit. The Lord himself fights his battles. It is with such, as Jahaziel said to the children of Judah (2 Chron. 20:15, 17) "The battle is not yours, but God's. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord." God's family therefore always fight a winning battle; though they may meet with many reverses, yet at every successive defeat they get fresh strength; and thus resemble the fabled heathen giant, who every time he was thrown to the earth, rose up with renewed power to wrestle with his antagonist. By defeats and falls, I do not mean open, flagitious acts of sin. There is the lusting eye and wandering heart, the proud thought and covetous desire, the filthy imagination and perverse temper, the carnal mind and backsliding nature. All these are inward enemies, and entangle and cast down where outward sin does not prevail.

Inward falls are very different from outward falls, and the lusting after sin from living or wallowing in it; for those who through grace are raised up from a death in sin cannot live any longer therein. While engaged in this conflict, the soul will frequently be overcome by its enemies, yet it will be raised up again by grace from every defeat. Sorrow and shame will fill the bosom; tears and prayers will plead at the footstool of mercy for pardon for the past, and for divine keeping for the future. The more watchful and the more inveterate will the soul be against the sin that has cast it down, and more determined in its opposition against its attacks; and its own weakness having been so painfully and practically learnt, the more simply will it look to and lean on the Lord of life and glory

that His strength may be made perfect in weakness. Thus, fighting a winning battle, the believer comes off victorious at last through Christ's strength. "Thanks be unto God," says the Apostle, "which always causeth us to triumph in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:14). "Blessed be the Lord, my strength," cries David, "which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight" (Ps. 144:1). "Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37). "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. 12:11).

Now you that have no experience of this inward conflict between grace and nature, are fighting a losing and not a winning battle. Do the various falls and slips of the child of God harden his heart, sear his conscience, make him careless and indifferent about sin, and render him more willing to fall at the next temptation that presents itself? Do they not rather give him fresh cause for godly sorrow, contrition of spirit, brokenness of heart, and genuine repentance; cause him to trust less to self, and look more simply to the Lord to strengthen him by his grace and power in the inner man?

But, with God's blessing, let us look a little more closely and deeply into this conflict. When I was a boy, during the stirring period of the Peninsular war, I had frequently to read the Gazette to an old gentleman who had been in the Navy. I did not then comprehend the anxiety he evinced that I should read to him the various evolutions and manoeuvres, the attack, defence, and all the dry details of the battles and sieges as they then appeared to me. So spiritually; to a man dead in sin, it can be no gratification to hear detailed the various matchings and counter-marchings of the soul in the spiritual conflict; he has no ear to hear it, nor any real sympathy with it. It is more dry and wearisome to him than the Gazette used to be to me. But how different is it to one who has had to fight hand to hand, and foot to foot in the spiritual battle! He wants to hear of the combined force and the movements of the enemy;

he wants clear details of the various defeats and victories, fleeings and pursuings, sinkings and risings, fears and hopes, reverses and successes; and thus to discover, under the blessed Spirit's teaching, whether he is enlisted in that army of saints which, however frequently overcome, is yet marching on to assured victory.

The great conflict between nature and grace,—nature in strict and close alliance with an ungodly world, and backed by all the secret plottings and open assaults of Satan, and grace, secretly strengthened, upheld, and carried through by the invisible and yet invincible power of God. So that, though nature and grace appear to be the only combatants, the battle spreads its array far beyond the present scene. Invisible combatants, and each far more mighty than the soul, are engaged in this battle. The soul is, so to speak, but the battle-field, where heaven and hell, Christ and Belial, are engaged. When Peter fell, it was because Satan sifted him as wheat; when Peter's faith still failed not, it was because Jesus sustained it. The victories of Christ are victories over Satan: and the heart of his people is the palace out of which the strong man armed is cast out, and kept out by one stronger than he. The Apostle says, "We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (1 Cor. 4:9). Angels are looking down as spectators of the battle scene, to behold with admiring wonder the manifested glory of the Son of God displayed in managing the conflict and gaining fresh victories here below.

1. If the conflict be between nature and grace it will be carried on between the opposing powers of these two principles. Is not spiritual light one of the branches of grace in the soul? "The entrance of thy words giveth light." (Ps. 119:130, 36:9) "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now ye are light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). "To turn them from darkness to light" (Acts 26:18). "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." But no sooner does light shine out of the fulness of him that filleth all in all, than a conflict immediately commences with

that darkness which is in our carnal mind.

Nature and grace can never form an alliance; nor can the quickened soul mingle light with darkness. And yet the light that is in him is like the first breakings of the light of day; it is so apparently intermingled with darkness, that you can scarcely tell where the darkness ends or the light begins. But wherever the true light is implanted, though it has to struggle against the power of darkness, yet it will be as sure ultimately to conquer it, as the light of day to triumph over the shades of night. But whilst light and day are struggling together, there is no stumbling then upon the dark mountains of unbelief and infidelity. Every part of the Scripture shines with clear demonstration that it is the truth of God: and a sweet light is reflected from the Scriptures upon the soul. The people of God have to cry out and groan under the conflict between the two opposite principles. Sometimes, for instance, how solemnly and sweetly we are brought to see and feel the power and reality of spiritual things; at such times, how plain the truths of God appear! and how clearly the way of salvation is opened up to us through the Person, blood, and justifying righteousness of the Son of God. But alas, at other times, what darkness have we to grapple with! How all our evidences are beclouded; and all traces of what was once felt, tasted, and handled of the word of life seem swept away! How all landmarks appear removed, and the whole soul seems enveloped in, and overwhelmed by the mist and fogs of unbelief and fear! Darkness and light are opposing principles. So that darkness struggles against light, as error against truth, nature against grace, and sin against a conscience made tender in God's fear.

The two opposite principles will work. For they are not two inert principles. They are not like stones in a road, that might lie there motionless to all eternity but for outward displacement; nor are they like the corpses of two once opposed armies, buried in the battle-plain beside their rusty swords, with hand and blade alike in the dust. But, on the contrary, these two principles are ever in op-

position in the heart of a child of God; they are perpetually fighting and struggling; each aiming to give the death-blow to the other, each determined never to be conquered, but to gain the victory.

2. But is not spiritual life also an inward fruit of union with Christ. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). As then spiritual light conflicts with natural darkness, so does spiritual life struggle with natural deadness. Darkness and deadness become manifested by light and life. And that is the reason why the Lord's people feel so much deadness. Is not all religion at times felt to be a burden? Sometimes in London when I am about to go into the pulpit, and see the people flocking to hear, I wonder, when I feel it such a burden to preach, and would rather take a walk, what can cause them to crowd into a hot chapel to sit and hear on a summer's evening like this. But whence springs this burdensomeness? Does it not arise from our carnal minds, which can never do anything but fight against the life of God in the soul? Does not all experience prove this? A gracious man cannot collect his divine thoughts on divine things for five minutes together. Perhaps scarcely sixty minutes will pass away before some carnal thought, some inward roving of the mind carry the heart to the ends of the earth. If he take up his Bible, sometimes he can scarcely keep his attention alive through half a dozen verses; under preaching, his mind will often be as careless and carnal as if all religion were a fable; and if he attempts to pray, his heart will be full of worldliness and wandering. It is not so in other things. The man of the world can attend to his business; he can sit down, and scheme and calculate without confusion. Some here can read through a newspaper without one roving thought, who could not get through the first chapter of John's Gospel without wandering. But why is this? Because of the deadness of the carnal mind, which struggles against the inward life of God, and only manifests itself when opposed by this life. But there will also be a struggle on the opposite side.

Life will strive against death, as well as death against life. A dead soul does not and cannot feel this; the living soul alone can be engaged in this strife. Next to the guilt of sin on the conscience, and the temptations of Satan, is this deadness in God's way a grief and burden to God's family. O how painful is it to them to feel these wandering desires; and this indifference to read, meditate, hear, and pray! But the very existence of the burden shows the existence of life. You might tie a ton weight round the neck of a dead man, and he would not feel it. A loaded wagon might go over his chest, but it would not make him feel, though it broke every bone of the body. And so it is spiritually. A man dead in sin feels no burdens, knows no weights, utters no groans, heaves no sighs. And, if a professor, he can sing and talk, preach and pray, enjoy what he calls his cheerful piety, and never know anything of the burdens which a living man feels in the things of God.

3. But again. Whenever the Lord works with power on the conscience, he plants his fear in the heart. It is "the beginning of wisdom," and "a fountain of life," whereby the soul "departs from the snares of death." This blessed grace of God, godly fear, is the inseparable companion of divine life. But this grace of the Spirit will always have an antagonist. What is that? Why the love of sin in the carnal mind. Some people tell us, "they do not love sin." If I were disposed to use rough language, which I am not naturally or spiritually, I should say "they were liars." I am sure the carnal mind can never do anything but love sin. The carnal mind can no more live out of the element of sin, than a fish can live out of the element of water in which it swims, or the bird out of the air in which it flies. Every thought of the carnal mind is sin, and every movement of man's depraved nature is toward sin; and it never can be otherwise. Sin it loves, and in sin it wallows as its element. Sin was not originally in our nature, for that would make God the author of sin; but, since the fall, every thought of the carnal mind is a departure from the will and word of God. Such is the Lord's own testimony. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,

and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5).

Now, the fear of the Lord in a tender conscience is the grand antagonist to this love of sin in the carnal mind. For where would not the love of sin drag us—into what filthy puddles would it not plunge us—into what awful depths of evil would not our depraved nature carry us headlong, unless we had this fountain of life, the fear of the Lord, implanted in a tender conscience? But how these two principles should be in constant collision and perpetual conflict, is what we cannot always understand; why we should love sin, and yet hate it—feel the bare lustings of carnal nature after everything that is vile and filthy, and yet be crying and groaning to the Lord to keep us from evil that it may not grieve us. It is because the fear of the Lord, as a living principle, makes a man spiritually hate that which he naturally loves, and thus keeps him from those evils which his base nature would hurry him into.

This is a subject which a man cannot understand nor enter into but from experience. We can hardly therefore wonder that many persons misunderstand or misrepresent what gracious men deliver on this point. Hence, without directly stabbing their moral character, they use certain words and phrases, which they bandy backwards and forwards, and hurl as a kind of stigma upon men of truth. They deal with them as slanderers with a virtuous and modest woman; who dare not charge her with any immodest word or act, but throw out insinuations against her character which they do not and cannot prove. For instance; there is that common phrase, aimed at all who enter into the inward conflict, that by so doing, they "gloat over corruption." What does that insinuation mean? Those who make use of it intend to convey, that the Lord's servants, who preach the truth experimentally, so describe the base workings of depraved nature as to dress it out in an attractive garb, to catch the lusting of an idolatrous heart and eye. But I say, those are the men who do this, that speak of sin in a light and presumptuous way. If they are base persons under an experimental ministry, we

cannot help it; there will always be ungodly characters in visible churches, as in the Apostle's days, whose glory is in their shame.

But no man or minister, who knows by divine teaching anything of his own heart, will ever speak of sin in any other way but as that horrible thing which is hateful to God, and grievous to his own conscience. Nay, instead of delighting in describing the workings of sin, a man of God will rather show the actings of godly fear against it; how sin is kept under; how it is mortified and crucified, and how by the grace of God the soul is delivered from its guilt and power. It is not naked sin that the man of God loves to describe, sin apart from the workings of grace—that he leaves to those ungodly characters who are pandering to the lusts and passions of men; but what he describes is the conflict against sin, and the pantings, breathings, hungerings and thirstings of the living soul oppressed by this cruel enemy. His desire is to trace out the work of grace in the heart and conscience of God's people, and to show the reality of its operation upon them by cleansing them from all evil. If this be "a gloating over corruption," or a dressing up of sin in a pleasing form, I am greatly mistaken; nor do I believe that any man, who knows himself, his own heart, or anything of sin as causing his conscience to bleed; still less, who knows anything of the fear of God, or the life of God in the soul, will ever deck out sin or corruption in any other garb but in that which God has described it in his holy Word. It is the fear of God in blessed exercise that fights against these base lustings and workings of a depraved nature; and the power of God is made manifest in delivering the soul from being entangled in its snares.

Hence there must be a conflict. If I have never known anything of the workings of sin, I have never known what it is to have the fear of God as a fountain of life to depart from it. There must be two antagonistic parties to a conflict. One army may march one way, and another army may march another, but there will be no conflict till they meet; it is when both come upon one plain that the battle follows. So spiritually; if all is corrupt nature, there is no

conflict; if all were grace, there would be no conflict; but having a nature which is sinful, which loves sin, and can do nothing else but sin, and yet having a living principle of grace which wages war and fights against sin, there is an experimental, inward, and spiritual conflict perpetually going on between these two principles. And this it is which so tries the people of God who know this conflict. "O," say they, "if I had not these base workings, filthy imaginations, and vile thoughts; if I could be but spiritually-minded; if I could be but holy; if I could but enjoy uninterrupted communion with, and if my heart were a copy of the image of Jesus, O what sweet testimonies then I should have, and what clear victories I should gain over this enemy, sin! But these base workings and filthy desires of my corrupt heart bring me into such bondage, cause me such misery, so distress my soul, and so darken all my evidences." Why, you know, there would be no conflict, if you had not a base nature. It is the company of the two armies that you carry in your bosom that produces this spiritual conflict. If you had no such exercises, burdens, and sorrows, you would be dead in sin, or dead in a profession.

Carnal professors know nothing of this conflict; their inbred iniquity is never opened up to them by the Spirit of God; they know nothing of the awful nature of sin, with its abominable and deceitful workings; nor have they ever felt their consciences wounded by it, causing them to groan and sigh out in their trouble, as is the case with God's people. They are totally ignorant of the depth of this mystery; and therefore they throw aside all experimental statements of truth, as preaching up and "a gloating over corruption." This is to act like a drunken scavenger, who, perceiving a well-dressed lady in the street, takes up a shovel-full of filth and throws it all over her, and then calls her a filthy creature, when his own drunken insult has made her so. So to speak against men who preach experimental truth, and say, they gloat over corruption, what is it but to play the part of the drunken scavenger—first, to throw the filth over them, and then say, "What filthy wretch-

es!” Some men seem to cut off ministers’ heads as remorselessly as Henry VIII those of his Queens: but God is the judge; he will shew who is right, and who is wrong: he will make manifest who know the truth by divine teaching, and who profess it only to pervert it.

4. But again. Wherever the grace of God is in the heart there will be living faith. “True faith’s the life of God,” Hart says, if the life of God be in a man’s soul, he must have faith; though it may be weak; as the Lord said to his disciples; “O ye of little faith;” and Paul, “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations” (Rom. 14:1). Feeble faith, little faith, weak faith, if it be true genuine faith, it is the work of God in the heart. This true faith will be proved, and more or less brought into exercise by the operation of the Spirit of God. So that living faith will soon find an antagonist. Is it not so in a natural battle? Every soldier has to meet his man, and is brought more or less into the engagement. And so it is with respect to every grace implanted in the heart by the Spirit of God; it will find an opponent; it will have an enemy to grapple with, hand to hand, and foot to foot.

What battles with faith but unbelief? What feel we of unbelief, except by the actings of faith against it? and what know we of faith except by the opposition that it meets with from the actings of unbelief? As some one has justly said, “A man that never doubted never believed.” Unbelief in the carnal mind is constantly struggling against that living faith which God the Spirit raises up and keeps alive by his own mysterious power. But we are not grieved and distressed by the workings of unbelief till the Holy Spirit communicates a measure of saving faith; and then immediately the conflict begins. Not but that a man dead in sin may be unbelieving, doubtful, and sceptical. Nay, he cannot be otherwise. Unbelief and infidelity are the strongholds of Satan in the heart. They are born with us, grow up with our growth, and are strengthened with our strength. But we do not sigh and groan under the secret power that unbelief exerts over us, nor do we feel the subtlety of this antagonist, till the light and life of God are felt in our hearts. Nor

can we ever see its crooks and corners, and how it interlaces and intertwines itself through and around all the fibres of our carnal mind, till we begin to feel the strugglings of a living faith. Light alone manifests its various hues, as the sun shining upon a piece of shot silk discovers colours not seen in the shade.

Now the more that faith acts in the soul, the more will unbelief work against it. Faith, if I may use the expression, puts life into unbelief; as the Apostle said of the law that it put life into sin. “For I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom. 7:9). “The strength of sin is the law” (1 Cor. 15:56). Sin lived and worked there before, but the spirituality of the holy law put fresh life into it, gave it new strength, and stirred up its secret enmity. Unbelief in a dead man’s soul is like the patience of many so-called patient men or women; they are wonderfully patient and good-tempered, so long as nothing rises up to thwart them; but only let any circumstance arise to vex them, immediately they are in a rage, and then it is soon evident that their evil tempers are not dead and buried. And so, with unbelief, how quietly it will lie in a professor’s bosom! But when living faith comes into the conscience, when the new tenant makes an entry into the house, how the old inhabitant of the tenement, unbelief, begins to rage and storm! Immediately that grace lays claim to the possession of the heart, the unbelief of our carnal mind is manifested and brought to light, and unfolds its baneful principle by “bringing forth fruit unto death.”

If you watch and it is good to watch the movements of your mind, you will find there never was a single acting of living faith in your conscience which did not rouse up, and was not attacked by unbelief, either at the time, before the time, or after the time. Every acting of living faith in your soul has had to fight hand to hand with unbelief. Did faith ever receive any testimony from God that unbelief was quiet under? Did not that envious wretch, that quarrelsome inhabitant of the old tabernacle, grudge you the morsel? Was not his growling temper stirred up, like a sullen dog in

a kennel, when, by the secret actings of living faith in the heart, you received at any time a token for good? Did not this wretch, unbelief, growl and snarl, whose den and kennel is in our carnal mind, and who can no more bear to see a morsel given to living faith, than the ill-tempered cur can bear to see a morsel of meat given to any other but himself without being filled with envy and spite. Thus sooner or later, at, before, or after the time, not a single testimony, not a single truth, not a single evidence, not a single act of divine teaching will pass by unsuspected or undoubted, but the envious growling wretch will bristle up like the dog in a kennel, and bark at the actings of living faith in a man's soul. Now, what a conflict is this to living faith to have to carry about with him such an ugly cur as this, one that he can neither hang, drown, or starve, for he will neither hang, drown, nor starve, one who has nine lives, yea, may I not say nine thousand lives, and one whom faith can never get rid of till life ceases, and the body drops into the grave. What a plague to the living soul to have these continual barkings of unbelief to annoy it! When at times it would read or hear, to have this dog incessantly barking; when it would draw nigh the throne of grace to enjoy a little of the Lord's presence, and feel a little of the unction and power of his truth, to have this cur in the carnal mind from time to time discovering his enmity and wrath against what God mercifully gives us.

Those who have not a living faith know none of these exercises; they can go and hear ministers who preach them into presumption and vain confidence, who discuss some knotty point of divinity, explain some mysterious text, or unfold some intricate passage; and they can go away pleased, smiling, and flattered. They think how strong they are in faith: they never call in question whether they have received any tokens or testimonies from God; they have no secret groans and sighs before the Lord, nor any rolling about on their beds at night on account of condemnation felt in their souls: but they can lay their heads quietly on the pillow, and go to sleep with all the ease imaginable. But the living soul finds the

conflict perpetually going on in his bosom, and he cannot live a single day without knowing, more or less, something of the inward struggling of these two armies.

5. So also with hope and despondency. Will not these two principles battle with each other, and produce much suffering to the soul in this mysterious conflict? Yes, surely: for no sooner has the Lord raised up some sweet testimony, and dropped into his heart that blessed hope which enters within the veil, than in a little time despondency and doubt begin to work within. "How do you know," asks despondency, "that the blessing is real? Is there not such a thing as excitement and delusion in religion arising out of a deceitful heart? Look at So-and-so! See what a profession they once made; the work seemed deeply rooted in them, and yet they have turned away. And how do you know that will not be your case?" Thus the gloom of despondency often pervades the mind, and the soul is unable to rejoice in hope till God is pleased to communicate it again to the conscience.

Now a gracious man cannot deal with his hope as a wealthy man deals with his money, who goes to his banker, and draws a cheque for as much as he wants. The graces and fruits of the Spirit are not thus at our disposal. The conflict would then cease. There would be none of those gloomy doubts, desponding feelings, sinkings of soul through the hidings of God's face, and the coming forth of the beasts of prey, all which are perpetually fighting against every testimony that God gives to the soul. It is surprising how, in dark seasons, every circumstance, however trivial, will give life to this despondency. Perhaps, some friend whom we esteem highly may look coldly upon us, and does not now speak as cordially or shake us by the hand as warmly as he formerly did—how soon despondency begins to draw out a long brief, and file a bill of charges! Or, perhaps, he hears of one who has a deeper and clearer experience and a brighter testimony than his own—how soon he begins to fear that he has not a good hope through grace, that it has not been wrought in his heart by the power of the Spirit, or that he

has not had sufficient testimonies from God in his conscience. But as Bunyan sweetly describes it in his *Pilgrim*, the oil of grace is continually poured on the work begun in the heart, to maintain and keep up the life of God. A good hope through grace will again spring up through the Spirit's witness.

6. And so with love and enmity. Are you never tried with enmity against the people of God? Do not all sorts of envious workings rise up at times in your carnal mind against them? Do you not at times feel as though you had no love or affection to the people of God, and would sooner go a mile out of the way than meet with one of them? But, at other times, when the Lord drops some sweet testimony into your heart, how you want to speak with them, and what long letters you write to your spiritual friends in your mind, which pen, perhaps, never commits to paper. When, at such seasons, we sit on our chair or lie on our bed, what long conversations do we in spirit hold with those whom we love among the Lord's family. How you can then love the servants of God, who have traced out your experience, and gone into the secret workings of your heart—how you think you could tell them the very deepest and most secret of your feelings! But at other times, when the heart is filled with suspicion and enmity, and jealousy and envy work, this affection and love to the Lord's people are well-nigh swallowed up and buried in the waves of this troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. Now what is all this but the conflict going on in the soul between love and enmity?

7. Again. Prayerfulness and prayerlessness are two other combatants perpetually struggling in the living soul. Sometimes the heart is full of prayer and spiritual desires; and at other times it is unable to bring forth a single prayer or a single desire Godward. What struggles are thus continually going on! Prayerlessness, recklessness, and a sort of hardened determination not to seek the Lord's face, sometimes seek to get the mastery; and then again, softness, tenderness, and contrition, flowing forth in breathings and supplications, win the day.

8. And is it not so with carefulness and carelessness? Who at times so careful, who at times apparently so careless as the Lord's family? Now, watching every movement of the heart, eye, tongue, and hand; now heedless of paths that should most alarm a tender conscience. And yet, strange to say, careful in the midst of carelessness—careless in the midst of carefulness; so fluctuating moment by moment, as nature or grace prevails, that a man will do in an instant what he has been crying out in his soul against for half an hour, and then tear himself away from the very sin that his heart had longed after for weeks.

I might thus trace out, did time permit, a conflict between every grace in the new nature and every corruption in the old. But I would observe, that the Lord's people are more tried with this inward conflict than with anything else, more especially when first brought into it. The work of grace is at times so obscured by it, that you will not be able clearly to see the Lord's dealings with your soul. So that under these feelings you may have resolved many times not to hear the preached word of God, or read the Bible, or go to prayer, or make any profession at all. Nay, perhaps you may have tried to keep your resolutions; and when the busy toils of the week are over, and the Lord's day morning has come, in your extremity, you may have almost determined to take a walk in the Park, or enjoy the beautiful prospect from Hampstead Heath, and not go to the chapel any more. But you could not be long in this mind. Park enjoyments and Hampstead prospects soon fell to nothing, for you were sure they would bring you into deeper despondency and wretchedness; and you were glad to get among the Lord's people again. And then, perhaps, when under such feelings, you have come to hear the word, you have received a sweet testimony from the Holy Ghost, so that your soul has been dissolved into contrition, and you have said, "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand; I had rather be a doorkeeper in thy house, than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps. 84:10).

Now there was a conflict to be seen in the Apostle Paul. It could

be seen in his ministry, in his life, and in his conversation. He carried it about with him in every place to which he travelled. When the Christians who came to Philippi brought tidings of his preaching at Ephesus they saw that he was the same man there. He was the same at Rome, as he was at Colosse. He did not go to Ephesus with one tale, and to Corinth with another; but he was universally the same. And what is a man worth, who is not the same; but who sometimes gets into a pulpit, or endeavours to do so, by hiding and trimming a little of God's truth? But it was not so with Paul, nor is it so with any true servant of God. What would you think of me, if I were one thing at Stamford, and another at Oakham; one thing at Zoar, and another thing at Eden Street? So that, if a man does not stand up and preach the same thing at different places, bringing out of the treasury of an honest and good heart things new and old; but is merely striving to please men, and fill the chapel, he is not a sent servant of God.

Now, Paul says, "having the same conflict." Ministers, then, that preach have the same conflicts, the same trials, the same experience as the Lord's living family.

They all have the same conflict, though it may differ in degree, time, and quantity. And this it is that makes a man an experimental preacher. And you, my friends at Eden Street, let me charge you never to depart from experimental preaching, for nothing else would do your souls good. If the place will not stand upon that foundation the sooner the roof and the walls fall in, and the Cause comes to nought, the better. Let an experimental ministry be continually kept up in this pulpit, and then there will be no room for any other. For when a man once finds the sweetness and power of it, he will say, "By this I can live, and by this I can die." For myself, I would sooner stay at home, and read the Bible and Hart's Hymns, than hear any other than experimental preaching from the lips of men. It is not having a large chapel well filled; but it is experimental preaching, conveying light, life, and power, by the blessed teachings of the Spirit of God, that will bind heart and heart together.

And when God's people are thus knit in heart and judgment, by feeling and knowing the power of truth in the heart; and when men, taught of God, come into this place, and preach under the teaching and unction of the Spirit, they will each have the solemn approbation of God in their conscience.

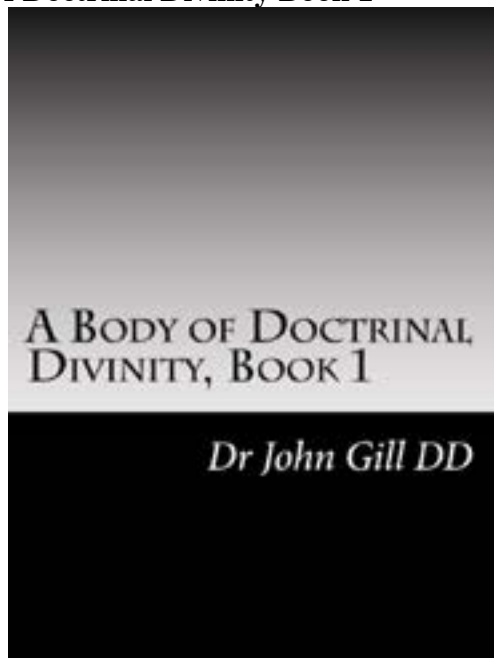
But you must not expect that things will go on smoothly; there must be a conflict. You leading men will have a conflict. Do not think you will be able to come and take your seats comfortably without inward and outward opposition. The devil will stir up enemies; things will arise to disturb your peace; and at times clouds and darkness will so rest upon you that you will scarcely know what to think of the Cause or yourselves. But if your eye be single to God's glory, he will bring you through all triumphantly; like a ship, which at sea may be tossed on the waves, and yet comes into the harbour of safety at last. Depend upon it, the nearer it lies to your heart, the more you will have a conflict. We do not naturally care about people we know nothing oh they may live or die; they may be married or buried: but it is those that lie near our hearts for whom we care, and feel an interest. And so, the more love you have to God, his truth, and his servants, the more you will know of this conflict; but the more conflict and trouble you have had, the more joy and praise you feel to the Lord when he has safely brought you through all.

Now, do look, you that profess religion, at what is going on in the chambers of your heart! Look and see if any inward work is going on. Or, are you satisfied with merely a knowledge in the judgment, whilst you know nothing of the inward work of the Spirit in the heart; are satisfied with a name to live, with being members of a church, having a sound creed, and hearing certain ministers? Have you any inward exercises, difficulties, sorrows; a conflict perpetually more or less going on? If you have, you are the Lord's people, and he has engaged to bring you triumphantly through. You are fighting a winning battle, and shall come off more than conquerors through him that hath loved you; to whom be all the glory, honour,

and praise both now and ever.

FURTHER PUBLICATIONS

A Body Of Doctrinal Divinity Book 1



A System of Practical Truths

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Black & White on White paper

176 pages

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BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

THIS IS BOOK 1 Treating The Subjects:

Of God, His Works, Names, Nature, Perfections And Persons. And

Contains:

Chapters

1 Of The Being Of God

2 Of The Holy Scriptures

3 Of The Names Of God

4 Of The Nature Of God

5 Of The Attributes Of God In General, And Of His Immutability In Particular.

6 Of The Infinity Of God,

7 Of The Life Of God.

8 Of The Omnipotence Of God.

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10 Of The Wisdom Of God.

11 Of The Will Of God And The Sovereignty Of It

12 Of The Love Of God

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15 Of The Long suffering Of God.

16 Of The Goodness Of God.

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19 Of The Joy Of God.

20 Of The Holiness Of God.

21 Of The Justice Or Righteousness Of God.

22 Of The Veracity Of God.

23 Of The Faithfulness Of God

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25 Of The Blessedness Of God.

26 Of The Unity Of God.

27 Of A Plurality In The Godhead, Or, A Trinity Of Persons In The Unity Of The

Divine Essence.

28 Of The Personal Relations; Or, Relative

Properties, Which Distinguish The Three Divine Persons In The

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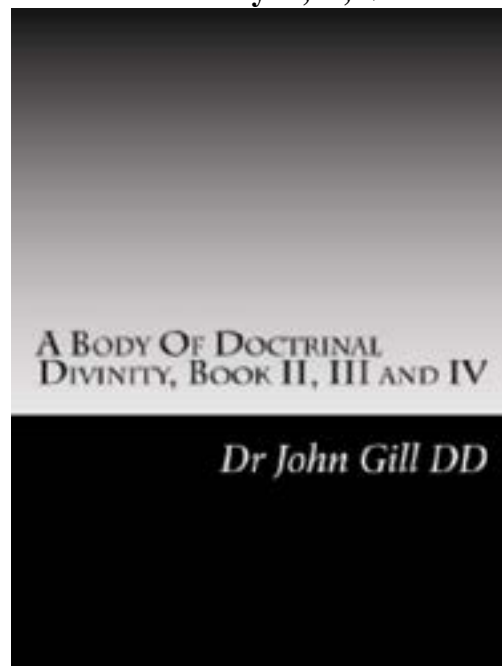
29 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of

The Father.

30 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of The Son.

31 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of The Holy Spirit.

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity II, II,IV



A System Of Practical Truths

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The contents of Book II treats the subject of Of The Acts and Works of God

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Chapter II Of The Special Decrees Of God, Relating To Rational Creatures, Angels, And Men; And Particularly Of Election.

Chapter III Of The Decree Of Rejection, Of Some Angels, And Of Some Men.

Chapter IV Of The Eternal Union Of The Elect Of God Unto Him.

Chapter V Of Other Eternal And Immanent Acts In God, Particularly Adoption And Justification.

Chapter VI Of The Everlasting Council Between The Three Divine Persons, Concerning The Salvation Of Men.

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Chapter X Of Christ, As The Covenant Head Of The Elect

Chapter XI Of Christ, The Mediator Of The Covenant

Chapter XII Of Christ, The Surety Of The Covenant.

Of Christ, The Testator Of The Covenant

Chapter XIV Of The Concern The Spirit Of God Has In The Covenant Of Grace.

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Chapter 7 Of The Ascension Of Christ To Heaven

Chapter 8 Of The Session Of Christ At The Right Hand Of God

Chapter 9 Of The Prophetic Office Of Christ

Chapter 10 Of The Priestly Office Of Christ

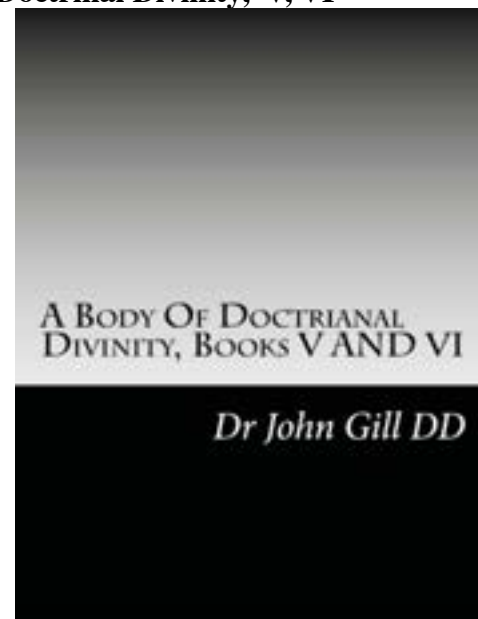
Chapter 11 Of The Intercession Of Christ

Chapter 12 Of Christ's Blessing His People As A Priest

Chapter 13 Of The Kingly Office Of Christ

Chapter 14 Of The Spiritual Reign Of Christ

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, V, VI



A System OF Practical Truths

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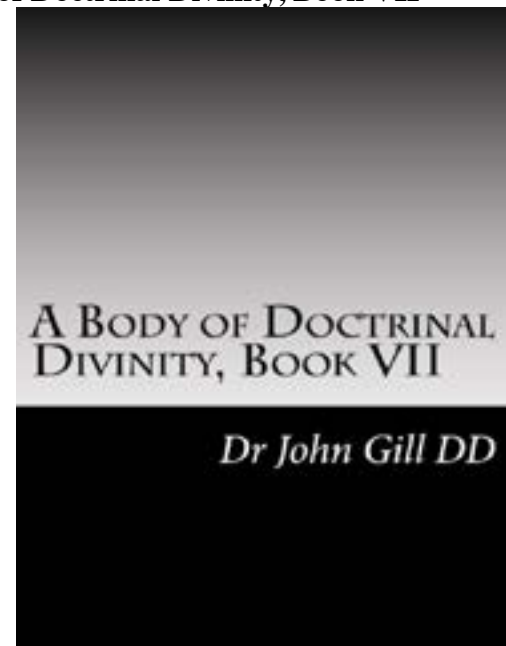
Chapter 11 Of Regeneration

Chapter 12 Of Effectual Calling

Chapter 14 Of Sanctification

Chapter 15 of the perseverance of the saints

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, Book VII



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Chapter 7 Of The New Heavens And Earth, And The Inhabitants Of Them.

Chapter 8 Of The Millennium Or Personal Reign Of Christ With The Saints On The New Earth A Thousand

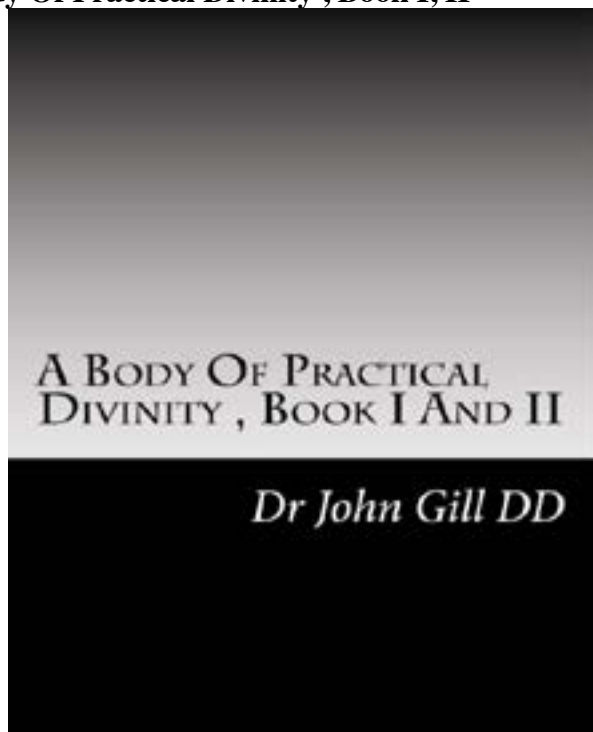
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Chapter 9 Of The Last And General Judgment

Chapter 10 Of The Final State Of The Wicked In Hell

Chapter 11 Of The Final State Of The Saints In Heaven

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Chapter 7 Of Trust And Confidence In God

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Chapter 9 Of The Grace Of Love

Chapter 10 Of Spiritual Joy

Chapter 11 Of Peace And Tranquility Of Mind

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Chapter 16 Of Resignation To The Will Of God

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Chapter 24 Of Communion With God

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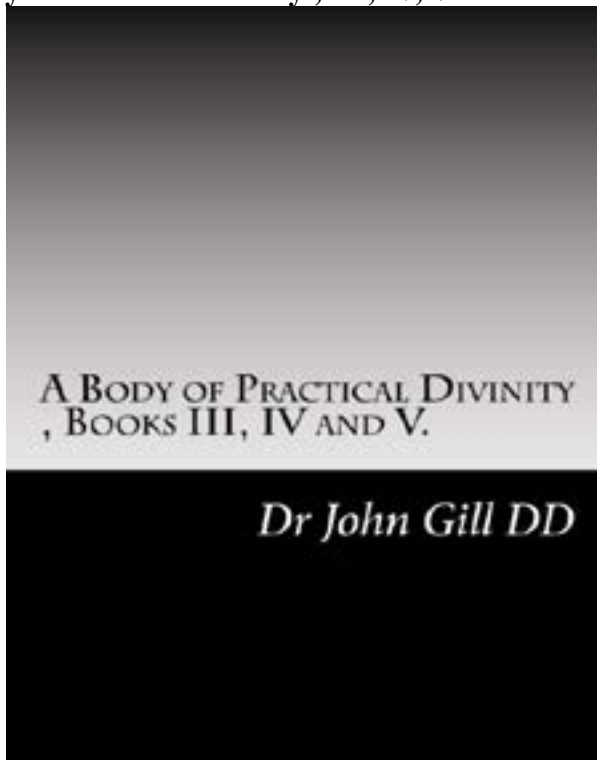
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Chapter 5 Of The Office Of Deacons

Chapter 6 Of The Discipline Of A Church Of Christ

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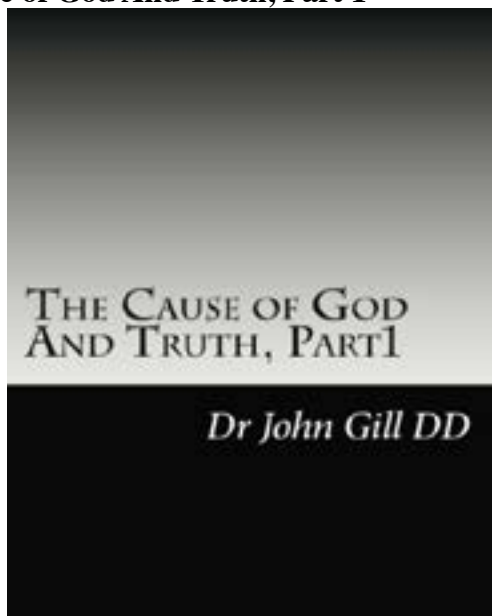
The Proof Of This Custom Only From The Talmuds And Talmud-
ical Writers

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The Cause of God And Truth, Part 1



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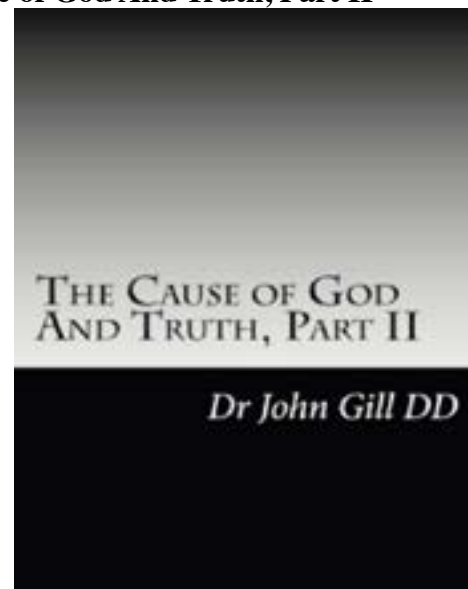
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 Revelation 3:20.

The Cause of God And Truth, Part II



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BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

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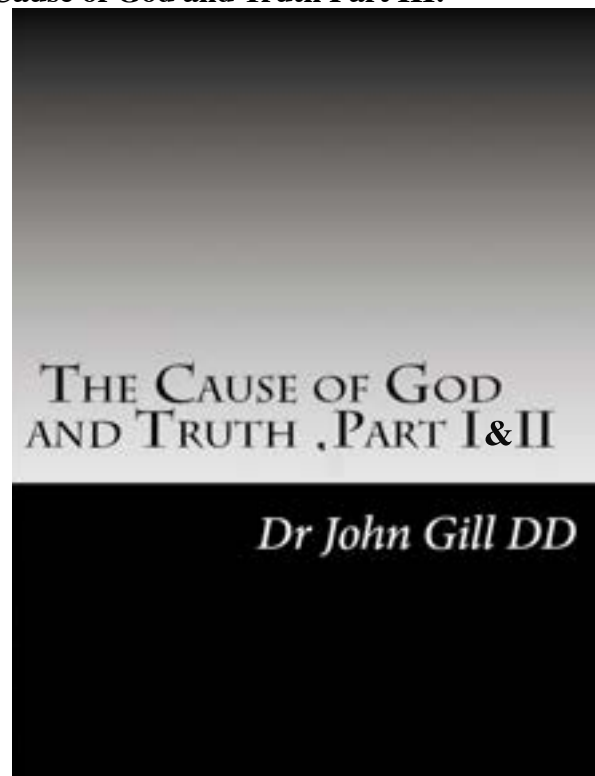
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John 14:16.

John 10:28.

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The Cause of God and Truth Part III:



The Doctrines of Grace

Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Authored by David Clarke

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This book contains John Gill's answers to Dr Whitby objections to The Doctrines of Grace under the following heads.

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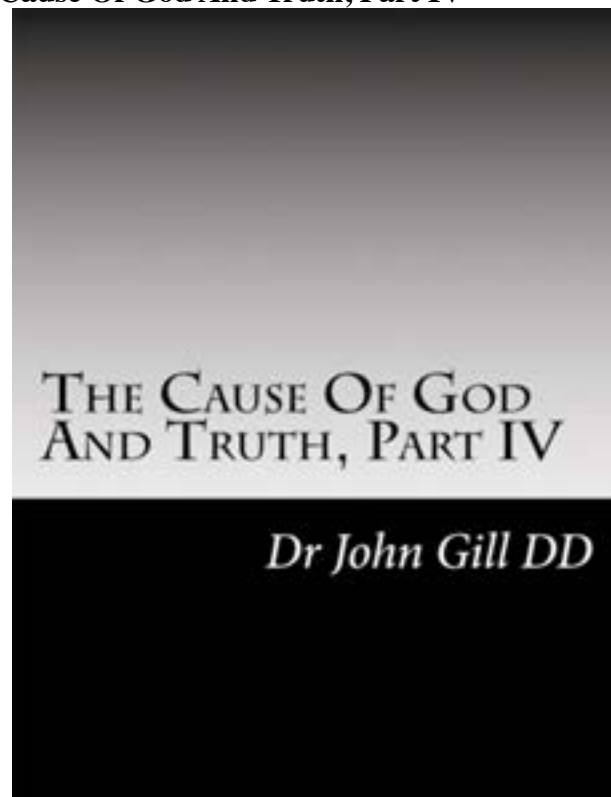
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The Third Part was published in 1737.

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The Third Part was published in 1737, and is a confutation of the arguments from reason used by the Arminians, and particularly by Dr. Whitby, against the above doctrines ; and a vindication of such as proceed on rational accounts in favour of them, in which it appears that they are no more disagreeable to right reason than to divine revelation ; to the latter of which the greatest deference should be paid, though the Rationalists of our age too much neglect it, and have almost quitted it ; but to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them.

In this part of the work is considered the agreement of the sentiments of Mr. Hobbes and the Stoic philosophers with those of the Calvinists, in which the difference between them is observed, and the calumny removed ; to which is added, a Defence of the Objections to the Universal Scheme, taken from the prescience and the providence of God, and the case of the Heathens.

The Fourth Part was published in 1738, in which the sense of the ancient writers of the Christian Church, before the times of Austin, is given ; the importance and consequence of which is shown, and that the Arminians have very little reason to triumph on that account.

This work was published at a time when the nation was greatly alarmed with the growth of Popery, and several learned gentlemen were employed in preaching against some particular points of it ; but the author of this work was of opinion, that the increase of Popery was greatly owing to the Pelagianism, Arminianism, and other supposed rational schemes men run into, contrary to divine revelation, This was the sense of our fathers in the last century, and therefore joined these and Popery together in their religious grievances they were desirous of having redressed ; and indeed, instead of lopping off the branches of Popery, the axe should be laid to the root of the tree, Arminianism and Pelagianism, the very life and soul of Popery.

This is Part 4 of 4 parts, and a new edition, with some alterations and improvements, is now published by request.

This work contains:

Chapter 1 Of Predestination

Chapter 2 Of Redemption

Chapter 3 Or Original Sin

Chapter 4 Of Efficacious Grace

Chapter 5 Of Perseverance

Chapter 6 Of The Heathens

A Vindication of The Cause of God and Truth

This work contains: