

J.C. Philpot

Sermons

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Strict and Particular Baptist 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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78 The Malady And The Remedy

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London

1845

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness; that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

Romans 3:23-26

There are two points that every gospel preacher should never cease to enforce upon the consciences of those who desire to fear God. One is, the utter fall of man; and the other, the complete salvation of the elect through the blood and righteousness of Immanuel. In these two points there must be no trifling, no compromise. On the one hand, the fall of man is never to be set forth in any other way but as thorough and complete; and on the other, the recovery by the mediation and work of the Son of God must be set forth as entire and as complete as the fall. If the fall be half way, the recovery will be but half way; but if the fall be to the very deepest centre of ruin, guilt and misery, then the recovery will be to the very highest point of glory, salvation and bliss. Thus, like tenon and mortice, they fit into each other, and the one moves side by side with the other. So that in preaching we cannot separate the utter fall of man from the complete salvation of those who are interested in covenant love and blood.

In the text the apostle in the most decisive manner declares the utter ruin of man. Of the elect, in common with the whole of Adam's fallen progeny, he asserts in the most direct and decisive terms: “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” He shows here the fall of man in two distinct points of view. First, “All have sinned.” All God's people before they are called by grace,

before made new creatures by the operation of the Spirit of God upon their hearts, before quickened into divine and spiritual life—of them it is true, all have sinned. Does not conscience bear a responsive echo to what God the Spirit has here declared? Does not conscience in a living man's bosom strike in with this solemn testimony? Who in this congregation that fears God can stand up, look the Almighty in the face, and say: I have not sinned? John says: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

All the election of grace know and feel themselves to be sinners, when righteousness is laid to the line, and judgment to the plummet; when the sins that they have committed are brought before their eyes, and laid with weight and power upon their consciences. Many of the Lord's family have been gross sinners, the vilest of sinners, before the Lord touched their hearts by His grace—perhaps living in drunkenness, swearing, lying, thieving and adultery! Many of the quickened family of God—when they look to the rock whence they were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence they were digged—know that they lived in the commission of open sins and iniquities! But all the Lord's people have not been open, coarse, profane sinners, in this sense of the word. Guardians, parents, morality and various influences have so operated that some at least of the Lord's family have not been left to commit gross open sin. But are they one whit better? In the eye of man they are. But in the eye of God are they one whit better? If the unclean glance is adultery—if the angry thought is murder—if the rising pride of the heart be a dethroning of God from His pre-eminence—if God weigh the intents of the heart—if His all-seeing eye judges men by motives—if the very thought of foolishness is sin, and the very secret movement of the heart towards evil is in the sight of God stamped with awful and horrible iniquity—who can escape the charge of being a sinner in God's sight?

But the apostle adds another word, that none may escape; he throws an ample net and encloses all that float in the stream; he

will allow none to swim through its meshes. He therefore says: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." There is a stroke to cut you down! You may say you have not been an open sinner; no one can charge you with drunkenness, whoredom, theft, blasphemy and other sins that men commonly indulge in. But see how this word cuts you down to the ground in a moment! "Come short of the glory of God."

What is it to come short of the glory of God? It is to act without a view to His glory. Now everything that we have ever done which has not been done with a single eye to God's glory, has the brand of sin stamped on it. But who in an unregenerate state, who, as the fallen son of a fallen parent, ever had an eye to the glory of God? Did such a thing ever enter into man's natural heart as to speak to God's glory, act to His glory, consult His glory and live to His glory? Before ever such a thought, such a desire can cross our breast, we must have seen Him who is invisible; we must have had a view by faith of the glory of the Three-One God; we must have had an eye given us by the Holy Ghost to see that glory outshining all creature good. Every movement, then, of the selfish heart, every desire to gratify, please and exalt self, is a coming short of the glory of God. This stamps all natural men's religious services with the brand of sin. It leaves the religious in the same awful state as the irreligious; it hews down the professing world with the same sword that cuts down the profane world. When men in a state of nature are what is called "religious", is their religion's end and aim the glory of God—the glory of free grace—the glory of the Mediator between God and men—the glory of the Holy Ghost, the only Teacher of God's people? Take it at its best, its brightest shape, is it not another form of selfishness, to exalt their own righteousness, and climb to heaven by the ladder of their own doings? And is not this a coming short of the glory of God? But besides that, the very glory of God requires that every one accepted in His sight should be without spot, speck, stain, or blemish. A pure God cannot accept, cannot look upon, cannot be pleased with impurity; and just

in proportion to the infinite purity and ineffable holiness of Jehovah, must all impurity, all carnality, all unholiness and the slightest deviation from absolute perfection be hateful and horrible in His sight.

Now who can say that he has ever brought forth a righteousness which can bear this close inspection? Who can say he has cleansed his heart and hands from evil? Where, where is the bosom in which sin has not made her nest? Where is the mind that is free from "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life"? Where is the heart that is a pattern of the image of the Lord of life and glory? But if we come short of this in any one particular—if we deviate from it for a single moment of our lives, for a single breath we draw—we fall immediately under the curse of an avenging law. Thus this awful sentence in a moment sweeps away man's righteousness, as the north wind sweeps away the mists: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Ga 3:10 By one blast of this north wind of God's terrible justice, the works of man, and all his righteousness are swept away as an unclean thing, and he stands naked, shivering and guilty before a holy and tremendously just Jehovah.

Now this all the election of grace are brought more or less to feel. It is a solemn and indispensable preparation of the heart for mercy;—it is the introduction by the hand of the Spirit into the antechamber of the King of kings. It is the bringing of the soul to that spot, that only spot, where grace is felt, received and known. It is therefore, utterly indispensable for the election of grace, for all the ransomed and quickened family of God to have this felt in their conscience, that they have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. What painful sensations and piercing convictions are experienced in every conscience that has felt the weight of sin, by knowing experimentally the purity, holiness and righteousness of Jehovah discovered to the heart!

But how this prepares the soul for, something better and brighter! Did the fall of Adam take God unawares? Was it not foreseen by

His all-prescient eye? It was. God permitted the Fall to take place according to His own wise appointment, that there might be established on the foundation of the Fall His own glory—that there might be a righteousness brought in as far superior to Adam's righteousness, as heaven is superior to earth, as the sun outshines the faintest and feeblest twinkling star. Therefore it was necessary for the display of grace, for the manifestation of the mercy and favour of God to the chosen race, that the Fall should take place. By the Fall, the mercy, grace and wisdom of God were to be displayed in the salvation and glorification of His own peculiar people.

This leads me to the second part of the subject set forth so amply, so clearly in the words of the text. "Being justified freely by His grace..." What does "grace" mean? What is its spiritual significance? It means, simply, favour; and favour irrespective of the worthiness or worthlessness of the party toward whom that favour is shown. Grace is the free flowing forth of infinite condescension and tender love from the bosom of Jehovah to a chosen race, irrespective of all that should be found in them that might provoke God to withdraw His favour from them utterly.

1. The sovereignty of grace is one of its most blessed features: that it chooses freely its own objects; that it never consults the will of man, but visits those objects that infinite wisdom and infinite mercy has seen fit to select. Man, rebel man, may kick at the sovereignty of grace, and accuse the holy Jehovah of injustice in the exercise of this sovereignty. But I believe His dear family will all be made to bow to it sooner or later with holy admiration and heartfelt adoration; and instead of rebelling against it, this will be the feeling of the soul when grace visits the heart: "What! me, Lord?" How it humbles, melts and dissolves the heart into contrition and brokenness before God, ever to believe that grace should be fixed upon so worthless and so vile a wretch! And the deeper we sink into a knowledge and feeling of our base original, the more shall we admire and adore the sovereignty of grace in choosing us, and bringing us to a knowledge of God and of His Son Jesus Christ

whom He hath sent.

2. But besides the sovereignty of grace, there is its freeness; that it flows freely forth from the bosom of God; that it wants no conditions to be performed by the creature, requires no good hearts, demands no good lives—though it makes good hearts, and though it makes good lives when it comes; but in the first instance, when it flows freely forth from the bosom of God, it demands no good heart, and no good life, on the part of the favoured object; but flows freely forth—as freely as the air flows in the bosom of the sky, as freely as the river pours forth its stream into the bosom of the sea.

3. Another feature of grace is, it is superabounding. O sweet and blessed word! that grace superabounds over all the aboundings of our sin; that however high the tide of sin may rise, there is a springtide of grace that flows over all; that however deep the waves of corruption may appear to be—deep beyond the fathom-line of human intellect—yet there is a sea of grace deeper still, an unfathomable ocean of eternal mercy and eternal love, as far beyond all the demerits of the creature, as the creature is lower than Jehovah "the God of all grace."

Now, this grace—in its sovereignty, in its freeness and in its superaboundings—is manifested chiefly in two things; one is, in setting forth a complete propitiation—the other, in bringing in a spotless righteousness.

What do we want as sinners? What does conscience crave when guilt lies upon it? Is there anything so suitable, anything so precious, as redemption and propitiation? Both are implied in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ: "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation."

But what is propitiation? By propitiation we are to understand, a sacrifice acceptable to Jehovah, by which God, or rather His attributes are propitiated; whereby God can be favourable, whereby mercy, grace, pardon, can freely flow forth. Now sin, and the law condemning sin, barred out, barred back, the favour of God. They

were the opposing obstacle to the love of God. For God cannot, as God, love sin and sinners; therefore, the sin of man, and the holy law of God, the transcript of His infinite and eternal purity, barred back, so to speak, the favour of God. It was needful, then, that this barrier should be removed, that a channel might be provided through which the grace and mercy of God might flow: in a word, that sin might be blotted out, and that the law might be accomplished and fulfilled in all its strictest requirements; or, as the text closes it, that God “might be just”—retaining every righteous attribute, not sacrificing one of His holy perfections—and yet, though just, perfectly just, “the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” But how was this to be effected? No seraph, no bright angel could ever have devised a way. It lay locked up in the bosom of the Three-One God from everlasting; and that was—that the only-begotten Son of God, who lay from all eternity in the bosom of the Father, “the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Person,” should become a bleeding Lamb—the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world Re 13:8;—that He should take into union with His own divine Person, human nature, “the flesh and blood of the children”—pure, spotless and holy—and offer up that nature, that body which God prepared for Him, a holy sacrifice. When He came into the world the sacrifice began, and every holy thought, every holy word and every holy action, in suffering and performing, that passed through His heart, dropped from His lips, or was performed by the hands of the only-begotten Son of God, when He was upon earth, was part of that sacrifice. But the grand consummation of it the offering up of that body especially was, when it was nailed to the accursed tree, and His blood was shed to put away sin. Now, this is the propitiation, the redemption, the sacrifice—the way, the only way, whereby sin is expiated—the way, the only way, whereby sin is pardoned.

But in order that this blessed sacrifice and atoning propitiation may pass over to us; that its value, validity, efficacy and blessedness may be felt in our consciences; there must be that wrought

in our souls whereby it is embraced. The only salvation for our souls is the propitiation made by Jesus upon Calvary’s tree. There is no other sacrifice for sin but that. But how is that to pass into our hearts? How is the efficacy of this atoning sacrifice to be made personally ours? It is by faith. Does not the Holy Ghost declare this by the mouth of the apostle? “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood.”

Now, this is the turning point in the soul’s salvation. This is the grand point to have decided in a man’s conscience before God. This is the Cape to be doubled by every one that sets forth upon the sea of salvation. Before he can double this Cape, he is driven back by storms, and tossed by winds; and often he fears lest he should be engulfed in the billows. But when, by living faith, he is enabled to double this Cape, to see the propitiation through the blood of the Lamb, to feel his very heart and soul going out after, and leaning upon, and feeling a measure of solid rest and peace in the blood of the sacrifice offered upon Calvary—then he has doubled the Cape of Good Hope, then he has passed into the Pacific Ocean from the stormy Atlantic; and then he begins to receive into his conscience a measure of the favour and grace of the Lord God Almighty.

But before we can see the efficacy of Christ’s atoning blood, we must see by faith the Person of Immanuel. There all our faith centres. If we have never seen Jesus by the eye of faith, what is our profession worth? Is not this life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent? Does not the apostle say: “Let us run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus?” Was not this the bent of the apostle’s soul and heart?—“Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before.” Was he not straining every sinew pressing forward to “know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings?” Was not that the goal to which the heavenly minded man was urging his course—to know the bleeding Lamb of God, to feel the power of His resurrection in his heart, and to be led by the divine Spirit into secret communion with His

sufferings, so as to have a measure of His suffering image stamped upon his tender conscience? Before then we can have faith in this atoning blood, we must see the glory of the Person of the Lord of life. Said John: "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Were your eyes ever anointed to behold the glory of Jesus? Did your faith ever contemplate—did your hope ever anchor in—did your love ever flow forth to the glorious Person of Immanuel? Was He ever precious to your soul? ever "altogether lovely" in your eyes? so that you could say: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Now, if as convinced of your sin against God you have seen this Person by the eye of faith, you have had faith flowing out of your soul to His atoning blood; for His atoning blood derives all its value, all its validity, and all its efficacy from its being the blood of that glorious Person. Upon that atoning blood we then view infinite dignity stamped, as it is the blood of the Person of Him who was God-Man; and we then see the dignity, immensity and glory of the Godhead of Jesus stamped upon the sufferings and blood that flowed from His pure Manhood. When we see that by the eye of faith, what a rich stream does it become! what a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness! what value is stamped upon it to purge and cleanse the guilty polluted conscience!

Now, when this is known and felt, the soul is justified; justification passes over from the mind of God into the bosom of the sinner. He never was, in the mind of God, in an unjustified state; but he was so in his own conscience and as touching the law, and as regards his standing as a sinner before the eyes of a holy Jehovah. But the moment he is enabled by living faith to touch and take hold of the atoning blood of the Lamb of God, justification passes over into his soul, and he becomes freely justified, pardoned and accepted, through the blood of sprinkling upon his conscience; and he stands before God whiter and brighter than snow, for "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin."

But, you will observe, the apostle does not necessarily connect

assurance, nor does he necessarily connect consolation the highest consolation, that is with faith in His blood. There is many a poor, trembling, doubting, fearing sinner who has faith in Jesus' blood, and yet has not experienced the full liberty of the gospel. He has believed in Jesus, and yet has not received into his heart that Spirit of adoption, that Spirit which beareth witness with his spirit that he is a child of God. He has fled for refuge to the hope set before him in the gospel; he has believed in the Name of the only-begotten Son of God; he has looked to the atoning blood of the only sacrifice God accepts for sin; and he has felt in a measure—not perhaps a full measure, not in a measure that altogether satisfies—but he has felt a measure of peace, pardon, salvation and love flowing into his bosom through that atoning blood. It has been "precious blood" to him. Faith may not have been very powerful—who shall define its extent? it may not have lasted long—who is to define its duration? but if ever that blood has been seen by the eye of living faith, and rested upon for eternal life, and a measure of peace has been felt through the sprinkling of it by the Holy Ghost on the conscience—that soul has received justification; it has passed over from the mind of God into that sinner's heart and conscience.

But the apostle adds: "That God might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Thus, wherever the blood of the Lamb has been looked unto and believed in, there the righteousness of God, which is "unto and upon all them that believe," is freely communicated. Pardon through blood, and justification through righteousness, always go together. They are parts of the same salvation; both branches of the finished work of the Son of God. Whoever receives pardon through blood, receives justification through righteousness; for it is "unto all and upon all"—imputed unto, clothed upon—"them that believe." Then what a wonderful termination of all! "That God might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Are they not wondrous words? Are weightier, more wonderful words to be found through all the Bible? "That He might be just and the justifier of him which belie-

venth in Jesus.”

Does not the justice of God stand arrayed against the sinner? Does not the justice of God condemn him in his minutest thoughts, in his most secret motives, in every word of his lips, every conception of his heart, every action of his hands? Can this divine attribute be sacrificed? Can God in the slightest degree, for a single moment, cease to be just? If He ceased to be just, He would cease to be God. If one attribute of the divine character could suffer the most momentary eclipse; if the faintest shade of darkness could pass over the character of Him who dwelleth in the light, which no man can approach unto—He would cease to be the infinite, eternal Jehovah. No. The things of time and sense may fall into ruin; the sun may drop from the sky; the heavens may be rolled back like a scroll, the earth and its elements be dissolved by fervent heat, and the inhabitants thereof die in like manner; every star may fall from its sphere, and every planet vanish from its place—but Jehovah stands unchanged and unchangeable amid the wreck of ages, and amid the universal dissolution of all transitory things. He cannot for one moment sacrifice one of His attributes. Every created thing, every finite intelligence, must sooner be annihilated, than Jehovah sacrifice or suffer the slightest tarnish of any one of His eternal attributes.

Yet God can be just, infinitely just, scrupulously just, preserving His attribute of justice unchanging and unchangeable, and still be “the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” The way in which this was effected will take endless eternity to understand and a boundless eternity to admire and adore. That the only-begotten Son of God—He who is equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost—should come down to this lower world, take upon Him the form of a servant, be made in the likeness of men, become a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”—suffer, groan, agonize, bleed and die—in order that the justice of God might still stand, and the salvation of men still be secured; that the mercy of God might flow forth unimpeded by the demands of unblemished

justice—what a subject for eternity itself, not to exhaust, for it is inexhaustible, but to explore. Thus, by the mediation of the Son of God, justice was maintained in all its inviolable integrity. Nay, more, the justice of God was highly magnified thereby: for when the Lord of life and glory was “made of a woman, made under the law,” and fulfilled the solemn requisitions and holy demands of that law, as the Scripture says, He “magnified” it and “made it honourable;” He stamped an eternal dignity and immense and unspeakable value upon the law, by condescending to obey and fulfil it. So that, so far from the justice of God being diminished, it was rather heightened and magnified by the mediation of the Son of God. Thus He not only is just in the highest sense of the word, but He also can be and is the “justifier of him, which believeth in Jesus.”

But what is meant by the expression “the justifier?” It means that God can count man as righteous, can freely pardon his sins, can graciously accept his person, can impute to him righteousness without works and can bring him to the eternal enjoyment of Himself. And who is the character that He thus brings to Himself by justifying him? “He that believeth in Jesus.” What simplicity, and yet what sweetness and suitability is there in the gospel plan! Say it ran thus: “That God might be just, and yet the justifier of him that worketh, that pleaseth God by his own performances, that produceth a righteousness satisfactory to the eyes of infinite purity.” Who then could be saved? Would there be a single soul in heaven? No: such a word as that would trample down the whole human race into hell. But when it runs thus: That it is the mind and purpose of God, His eternal counsel which cannot pass away—that He is the “justifier of him which believeth in Jesus”—the poor, the needy, the exercised, the tempted, the distressed and the perplexed, that believe in Jesus, that look to Jesus and rest in His Person, blood, righteousness and love for all things—that these are justified, that these are pardoned, that these are graciously received, and saved with an everlasting salvation—how sweet, how suitable, does the

gospel that declares this become to the living, believing soul!

Now you must know—if conscience is honest in your bosom—you must know whether you have ever believed in Jesus, or not. Such a mighty revolution can never take place in a man's soul without his knowing something about it. Memory can chronicle a number of insignificant events—birthdays of children, marriage days, trifling occurrences of childhood and youth. And shall memory not chronicle that important era in a man's life, that mighty revolution whereby he passed from death unto life, whereby he was manifested to be a saved soul by believing in the blood and righteousness of the only-begotten Son of God? Have you never had glances, glimpses, views, sights and discoveries of the Son of God in His beauty? As you have lain upon your bed, as you have sat by your fireside, as you have heard the word preached, as you have read the Scriptures, as solemn feelings have been raised up in your heart from time to time—has there been no seeing by the eye of living faith the once-crucified but now glorified Immanuel? What! no panting after Him? No longings? No intense desires, no sweet communications, no precious tastes, no divine discoveries, no heart full of love toward His Name? Surely, if you are a believer in the Lord of life and glory, some of these things in a measure—I dare not set up a very high standard in these things—but surely some of these things in a measure have passed in your bosom. Now, if you have known what it is thus to go forth in the exercise of living faith upon the only-begotten Son of God, God has justified you; for He is the justifier, the acceptor, the approver, the pardoner of him which believeth in Jesus. “Who is he that condemneth? It is God that justifieth.”

“But O” say you and I say so too “my guilty conscience often condemns me—my backslidings often condemn me—my inward and outward slips and falls often condemn me—and my own heart often proves me perverse!” It is so, to our shame and sorrow. But shall these things alter the eternal purpose of God? Shall the inward condemnations of conscience cancel the grand act of

justification on the part of Jehovah? Shall doubts, fears, sinkings, despondencies and exercises stretch forth their hand to blot the believer's name out of the book of life? Shall they dash away the validity and efficacy of the blood of sprinkling, nullify the work of the Son of God, and prove the Holy Ghost a liar? They may tease and harass, they may distress and perplex and it is good to be exercised about them, but they shall not eventually condemn, for “there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” He that believes in Jesus is passed from death unto life, from condemnation unto justification.

Is any other gospel worth the name? Is any other way of salvation so called, though really the way of death and damnation worth a glance? Is not this the only way? and do not all other ways terminate in disappointment and despair? What a mercy it is that there should be such a way! What are we? Are we not, in ourselves, lost sinners? Is there any hope for any of us under the law, in our own righteousness, by our own performances, or through our own resolutions? Are not all these things as the spider's web? But is there not a glorious Mediator at the right hand of the Father? Is there not seated on a throne of grace a great High Priest over the House of God, able to save to the uttermost? And does not this once crucified but now glorified Jesus, graciously speak to every sin-troubled bosom and every exercised heart: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?” Is it not better to trust in His Name, to look to His blood, to shelter beneath His righteousness, and to yield up our heart's affections into His sacred hands and keeping, than to trust in a name to live, to a form of godliness, to our own intentions, our own hearts, or our own works? I am sure the Lord will bring all His people here—though often by “terrible things in righteousness”—by cutting up and cutting to pieces every delusive hope, every presumptuous claim, every vain-confident expectation—and by enabling them, with simplicity and godly sincerity, and in the actings of that living faith of which He Himself is the author and finisher, to give them-

selves, wholly and solely, up into the hands of the Lord of life and glory, to be saved by Him with an everlasting salvation.

The Lord in mercy make it more and more manifest! We are perplexed sometimes because our faith is so weak and wavering. But the question is not whether our faith be weak and wavering, but whether it is genuine. That is the grand question to have decided. You may have strong faith, so called, and it be nothing but awful presumption: you may have weak faith, and yet that faith be genuine.

The Christian often cannot see
His faith, and yet believes.

I believe there is often more real faith, more genuine trust more heart-felt confidence in the poor, exercised, plagued, tempted, distressed people of God than in those who stand upon a lofty pinnacle, who never doubt their interest, and think nothing worthy the name of faith but strong assurance. There is often the strongest faith where that faith is the most deeply tried; there is often the most simple, implicit and childlike confidence when it seems as though one blow would dash every spiritual hope to atoms. We see this in the woman with the issue of blood, who touched the hem of the Lord's garment—in the leper who kneeled down before Him, and said: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean"—in the Syrophenician woman, who begged for a few crumbs from the Master's table—and in the centurion, who only wished a word to be spoken, for he was sure that word would produce a healing effect. We see that all these were trembling and fearing characters; yet the Lord declares of the centurion, that He had not seen so great faith, no, not in Israel. And instead of cutting them off as weak in faith, He commended the strength of it.

And thus you may find when all things are most against you, your faith then though tried will be most strong; and perhaps, when all things seem for you and you think your faith is sailing on a fair sea, there may come a storm which shall sadly try it. But whether your faith be weak or strong—whether your consolation

be great or small—this is the great point to have decided by God's testimony in an honest conscience—whether we have faith at all. Have we one grain, one spark, one particle of living faith? If we have we are as safe and as secure as the strongest believer.

The Lord shine upon His work where begun, mercifully carry it on, and shed abroad that perfect love which casts out all fear, and bring His people to this blessed spot—to be "determined not to know anything among men save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

79 The Unction Of The Holy One

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, Lord's Day Afternoon

June 8th, 1845

"But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things"

1 John 2:20

The life of John, the beloved disciple, was prolonged to a very late period; and we see the wisdom and goodness of God in thus prolonging his life, that he might be a standing bulwark against the errors and heresies which overflowed the primitive church. When the Lord of life and glory was upon earth, all the bent of Satan's malice was against him; but when, according to God's elect purpose and counsel, Satan had put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ into the hands of the Jews, and the Son of God was nailed to the accursed tree (for Satan was outwitted by his own invention and out-shot by his own bow); then when Jesus had ascended into heaven, all the power of Satan was turned against his disciples. When he could not touch the Head, he aimed his arrows at the members; and no sooner did the Lord pour out upon the church the gift of the Holy Ghost in great measure on the day of Pentecost, than Satan immediately introduced all manner of error and heresy to harass the church. Now, through the kind providence of God, the life of John was prolonged to bear testimony against these errors and heresies; and thus this blessed apostle was a standing tes-

timony against the errors that came in like a flood. In the chapter from which the text is taken, John addresses himself to the church of God as divided into three distinct classes. There are the weak and young, whom he calls "little children." There are those who are established in the divine life through exercises, trials, temptations, and through corresponding blessings; these he calls "young men." And there are those whose lives are verging upon eternity, who have received many testimonies of God's goodness and lovingkindness, and have thus become "fathers."

Speaking, then, to the church of God as thus composed, he puts them in mind of those seducers and heretics who had crept into the church. He says, "Little children, it is the last time" (that is the last dispensation): "and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists." They had heard of "antichrist," and they supposed that "antichrist" was some single person; the man of sin that was to rise. "No," says the apostle, "There are many antichrists." All that are opposed to Christ, all that deny the story of his Person, the efficacy of his work, and the power of his blood, these are antichrists, because they are all against Christ. Now these antichrists were formerly among them, members of their churches, walking, apparently, in Christian fellowship. The apostle therefore says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us." They could not receive the love of the truth because their hearts secretly loathed it. They could not endure Christian experience, because they possessed it not, nor could they submit to gospel precepts and Christian discipline, because their affections went out after the world. The truth of God, the pure truth, did not suit their impure, corrupt minds; so they went out from the church, they separated themselves, and thus abandoned the communion and community of the faithful; for "if they had been of us," in heart and soul, knit together in the bonds of the Spirit, in real spiritual union and communion, if they had thus "been of us, they would no doubt. have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they

were not all of us." Separating from the company of God's people is a testimony that such are not of God's people, and they make it manifest that they never were in heart and soul united with the family of God when they withdraw themselves from them. But the apostle would here rather infer, "How came it to be otherwise with you?" What has preserved you faithful when others have proved unfaithful? What has kept you still leaning on and looking unto a crucified Immanuel when others have trampled on his blood and turned after idols? Was it your own wisdom, your own ability, your own righteousness, your own strength? No; not so! "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." This is what he implies, "ye have an unction from the Holy One." It is that which has kept you, it is that which has taught you. "Ye little children, young men, and fathers, ye have an unction from the Holy One," and by that unction "ye know all things."

With God's blessing, then, this afternoon I shall endeavour to take up the words of the text as they lie before me, and show,

I. What it is to have an unction from the Holy One.

II. How by virtue of this unction from the Holy One we know all things.

I. Let us look at the simple figure contained in the text. Unction signifies literally anointing. It is indeed the same word, and is so rendered a little lower down: "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (verse 27). It has probably some reference to the oil or ointment which in those hot countries was employed to anoint the body, and keep it in health. But besides this there is a reference to what we read in Exod.30:22-33, where God commanded Moses to make a holy anointing oil by which the tabernacle and every vessel in it was to be consecrated; prefiguring the special anointing of the Holy Ghost on the hearts and consciences of God's people. So that as no vessel in the tabernacle was holy until it had been anointed

with the consecrating oil, so no soul is holy till it has received the unction from the Holy One. No prayer, no praise, no service no sacrifice, no ordinance can be holy unless it be touched with this pure unction and divine anointing of the Holy Ghost. Now there is a divine suitability and peculiar figure here made use of:

i. Oil is of a softening, suppling nature. It is applied to the body to soften and supple it. So spiritually, the unction, or anointing of the oil of the Holy Ghost makes the conscience tender. Wherever that unction comes, it takes away the heart of stone, and gives a heart of flesh. It removes impenitence, unbelief, waywardness, perverseness, self-righteousness, and self-conceit; it softens and supples and makes tender the heart and conscience, so as to fall under the power of the truth. Until the Blessed Spirit by his sacred operations upon a man's heart supples it and softens it in this way, the truth never falls with any weight or power on it. And this is the reason why hundreds hear truth without any effect; not being anointed with this unction from above, the heart of stone is not taken away, that evil heart of unbelief which rejects the solemn truth of God. But when the Blessed Spirit brings the secret, mysterious, and invisible, yet powerful anointing oil of grace into the heart, it receives the truth as from God; and truth thus coming from God penetrates into the soul. The law sounds its curses; but they never touch the conscience till the unction of the Spirit attends it. The gospel holds forth its blessings; but without this unction they never come with savour and power into the soul. Christ is spoken of in Scripture as being to some "a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isa.53:2). And why so, but for the want of this unction of the Holy Spirit. Wherever the unction is in a man's conscience it will always make that conscience tender. So that if you see any man, whatever profession he may make, who is bold, presumptuous, daring, and self-confident, be assured that the unction of the Holy Ghost has never yet touched his heart; he has but a name to live whilst dead. Now do you watch for this in

professing men and women, and in the ministers whom you hear, whether you see in them this soft, tender and meek spirit. If totally absent the unction of the Holy Ghost has not yet come upon them.

ii. Again, unction or anointing oil is of a penetrating nature. When ointment or oil is rubbed on anything it penetrates into the substance beneath. It does not lie on the surface; it penetrates below the surface into the very substance of that to which it is applied. So it is spiritually with respect to the unction of the Holy One on the heart and conscience. In the case of most persons who have truth in the understanding, but it is not brought into the heart by divine power, the effect is superficial. There is no depth of vital experience in their hearts; thus they resemble the stony ground hearers of whom we read in the parable of the sower: "Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away" (Matt.13:5,6). In their case the Word has not, as a two-edged sword, pierced even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of the joints and marrow, nor has it so sunk into their consciences as to be a discerner of the thoughts and intents of their heart. But the unction of the Holy One, the internal teaching and operation of the Spirit penetrates into every heart to which it comes. It does not merely lie on the surface; it does not merely change the creed; it does not merely alter the life. It goes deeper than creed, lip, or life; it sinks into the very roots of the conscience. If your religion has never penetrated below the surface, it lacks this grand test of having come from God. The religion of God consists in the unction of the Holy One which goes beneath the shell and the skin; which works down to the very bottom of man's heart and opens it up and lays it bare before the eyes of him with whom he has to do. It is by virtue of this unction that our secret motives are discovered, and the pride, self-righteousness, presumption, self-seeking, and all that depravity that ferments in a man's heart are laid open. It is by the penetrating effects of this divine light

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and life in a man's soul that all the secret workings and inward movement of his heart are discovered and laid bare. A man can never loathe himself in dust and ashes, never abhor himself as the vilest of the vile until this secret anointing oil touches his heart. He will be satisfied with a name to live, with an empty profession, till this teaching of God the Spirit goes through every mantle and veil, and searches into the very vitals, so as to sink into the secret depths of a man's spirit before God. He is never thoroughly honest to God or himself till the unction from the Holy One makes him see light in God's light.

iii. Again, unction, or oil is of a spreading nature. It diffuses itself, as it is termed. It is not confined to the little spot where it falls, but it extends itself in all directions. So it is with the unctuous teaching of the Blessed Spirit in a man's heart. It spreads itself through the soul. The Lord therefore compares it to leaven (Matt.13:33). How does leaven act? It is very small in itself, a little lump; but when put into the large mass of meal, it diffuses itself through every portion of it; so that not a single crumb of the loaf is unaffected by it. Thus wherever the unction of the Holy One touches a man's heart it spreads itself, widening and extending its operations. It thus communicates divine gifts and graces wherever it comes. It bestows and draws out faith and gives repentance and godly sorrow, causes secret self-loathing, separation from the world, draws the affections upwards, makes sin hated, and Jesus and his salvation loved. Now if you had a child, and were very anxious for its growth, you would not like to see the child's arm and leg grow, and the other members remain as they were. You would not like to see its head growing much faster than the body; you would soon be afraid lest, the child die of water on the brain. And yet you will find some professors that grow only in one thing; they never grow in simplicity, prayerfulness, spirituality, watchfulness, and heavenly-mindedness. Their faith, if we are to believe their own statements, grows very much, but we never see the other graces and fruits of the Spirit grow with it. But such

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a monstrous growth as this is not the growth of the new man of grace. That grows equally in all its parts, and every member bears a harmonious proportion to the rest. If faith increase, hope and love grow, and when faith, hope, and love grow, humility, spirituality, and simplicity, deadness to the world, and every other grace and every other fruit of the Spirit grow in the same proportion. Wherever the unction of the Holy Spirit touches a man's heart it diffuses itself through his whole soul, and makes him wholly a new creature. It gives new motives and communicates new feelings; it enlarges and melts the heart, it spiritualises and draws the affections upwards, and brings about what the apostle declares as the effects of union with Christ: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor.5:17). Of this sacred anointing John says that it teacheth of all things, and is truth, and is no lie. Without it all our religion is a bubble, and all our profession a lie; without it all our hopes will end in despair. See to it, then, you that fear the Lord, or desire to fear him, whether you can find any of this unction from the Holy One resting on your heart; any secret melting down of your spirit before the Lord, any breathings of affection into the bosom of Jesus, any overpowering and overwhelming sense of that love which passeth knowledge; any inward longing to enjoy him and delight yourself wholly and solely in him?

Now this unction of the Holy One will be felt only as the Lord the Spirit is pleased to bring it into your soul. It may be but once a year, once a month, or once a week. There is no fixed time for it to be given; but just at such a season and in such a manner as God sees fit. But whenever it comes into the heart, its operations and effects will be the same, the feelings it creates and the fruits it produces will be the same. O what a mercy to have one drop of this heavenly unction! To enjoy one heavenly feeling! To taste the least measure of Christ's love shed abroad in the heart! What an unspeakable mercy to have one touch, one glimpse, one glance, one communication out of the fulness of him who filleth all in all!

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This sanctifies all our prayers; this sanctifies the preaching, this sanctifies the ordinances, this sanctifies our public worship, this sanctifies the persons, the sacrifices, the offerings of all spiritual worshippers; as we read: "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost" (Rom.15:16). It is the sweet unction of the Holy One that knits the hearts of the people of God together in indissoluble bonds of love and affection. By this unction from the Holy One we know the truth, believe the truth, love the truth, and are kept in the truth day by day and hour by hour. Is this the grand thing that your soul is longing after and pressing forward to enjoy? In the secret sinkings or in the secret risings of your spirit in the inmost sensations of your heart towards God, is the unction of the Holy One, the divine anointing of the Holy Ghost the chief thing you are looking for? Without this unction of the Holy One we have no tender feelings towards Jesus, no spiritual desires to know him and the power of his resurrection, without this unction we have not a single breath of prayer, nor one spiritual panting or longing in our soul. The Lord's people have often to walk in a state of darkness; by this unction from the Holy One they are brought out of it. By this unction from the Holy One they are supported under afflictions, perplexities, and sorrows. By this unction from the Holy One when they are reviled they revile not again. By this unction from the Holy One they see the hand of God in every chastisement, in every providence, in every trial, in every grief, and in every burden. By this unction from the Holy One they can bear chastisement with meekness, and put their mouth in the dust, humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God. Every good word, every good work, every gracious thought, holy desire, and spiritual feeling do we owe to this one thing: the unction of the Holy One.

It is a solemn thing to have an unction from the Holy One, and it is a solemn thing not to have it. It is a solemn thing to live under

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this sweet anointing; but what a solemn thing to have a profession of religion and to know nothing of this sweet anointing! If in the great day those only will be saved who have had this unction of the Holy One, where will thousands be who have had but a name to live? If this be true, as it is, where will thousands be in the last day, when the Judge will sit upon the great white throne? But if the unction of the Holy One be upon a man he is a consecrated vessel of mercy; wrath, justice and the law cannot touch him; the anointing oil is upon him, the blessing of God rests on his soul, and he is safely hid in the hollow of God's hand from the wrath that is coming upon the world.

II. "And ye know all things." What does the apostle mean by that? Does he mean that they actually know all things, all the realms of science; all the varied departments of art? O no; the Lord's people are a very poor people, and usually a very ignorant people in matters of human knowledge. Nay; they are ignorant for the most part of the various branches of human knowledge. It is not their province to know what the learned men of this world pore over, and rack their brains about; such knowledge is not for their comfort or spiritual profit. It is a mercy to be ignorant of what the wise men of this world consider the only things worth knowing. Nor does it mean that they know all gospel mysteries. Many of God's people are ignorant of nice points in divinity, and many a professor dead in sin and living after the course of this world is much clearer in the letter of Scripture and in the grand scheme of salvation than some of God's poor, brokenhearted family.

But by this expression we may understand that they know all things profitable, all things needful, as the apostle Peter says: "All things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet.1:3). What are, then, some of these all things?

(i) They know themselves. A knowledge of oneself is indispensable to salvation. If a man does not know himself he cannot know God; if a man does not know himself he cannot know the Son of God. To know and see oneself in one's true colours as poor, mis-

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erable, filthy, guilty sinners, lost, undone children of Adam, with a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, with a nature thoroughly depraved, helpless, and hopeless, thus to know ourselves would stop all boasting. It would stop all thinking himself better than others, and effectually pull down all creature-righteousness, if a man once had the unction of the Holy One upon his heart and conscience, making himself known to himself.

By this unction from the Holy One we know our sinfulness, our awful, desperate, abominable sinfulness; by this unction from the Holy One we know our hypocrisy, our awful, desperate hypocrisy; by this unction from the Holy One we know our obstinacy, our perverseness, our alienation from God, our proneness to evil, and our horrible aversion to good; by this unction from the Holy One we know that we deserve the eternal wrath of God, that by nature we are at an infinite distance from his purity; that we are altogether as an unclean thing, and that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. If a man is not rooted and grounded in the knowledge of self, he never can be rooted and grounded in a knowledge of Christ as a Saviour: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Therefore if a person does not know himself lost, nor groan, nor sigh on account of being lost, all that Jesus is, and all that Jesus has for poor lost sinners is hidden from his eyes. This is the reason of there being so much profession without possession; so much of the letter without the Spirit, so much doctrine without the power. But when we are taught by the Blessed Spirit to know ourselves to be lost, ruined, and undone, then we want to know there is a Saviour, and such a Saviour as alone can save us out of our lost condition. No wonder that men despise the Person of Christ, no wonder that they deny his eternal, underived deity; no wonder that they deny the eternal Sonship of Jesus and the personality and operations of God the Spirit; no wonder they trample underfoot the divine mystery of the Trinity. They have never seen themselves; they have never groaned under a burden of sin; never had a knowledge of self in its ruin and de-

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pravity.

(ii) Nor can we know the purity and spirituality of God's holy law, but by this unction from the Holy One.

(iii) Nor can we know that the Scriptures are true, or that God has revealed his mind and will in them except by virtue of this unction from the Holy One (iv) Nor can we know there is a Jesus, a divine Mediator, an Immanuel, God with us, but by virtue of this unction from the Holy One. We may have correct views and sound notions; we may have speculations floating on the brain; but humbling meltings and dissolving views of the Son of God in his sufferings, and agonies we cannot have but by an unction from the Holy One. To see the stream of atoning blood from his sacred body, to see his glorious robe of righteousness, justifying and covering the sins of his people, to see the Holy Mediator interceding at the right hand of the Father, and to have the soul dissolved under the sight and feeling of the mystery of Christ as a God and Saviour, nothing but an unction from the Holy One, the anointing oil of the blessed Spirit upon the heart, can give us this knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal.

(v) Nor can we know the pardon of our sins, but by virtue of this unction from the Holy One. We cannot know that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, but by virtue of the unction from the Holy One.

(vi) Nor can we know the liberty of the gospel or the sweet manifestations of the Lord of life and glory, nor can we walk at large, as David speaks in Psalm 119:45 (margin), nor can we enjoy the sweetness and blessedness of a gospel deliverance but by this anointing. We cannot come out of darkness into light, bondage into liberty, coldness into warmth, but by the unction from the Holy One. Nor can we know what the favour of God is, nor this loving-kindness of a tender Father, nor his watchfulness over his children as a most affectionate Parent, nor the shedding abroad of his love in the heart, nor the inward witness of the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry, Abba, Father, but by virtue of the unction

of the Holy One.

(vii) Nor can we know what it is to have a heavenly home, a harbour of rest and peace, a blessed mansion above where tears are wiped from off all faces, but by virtue of this unction. How needful, then, it is, how indispensable for a soul that stands on the brink of eternity, that is exercised and troubled at the sight of death and judgment, to know whether he has any unction from the Holy One resting on his heart and conscience! But if he has the unction from the Holy One, there will be fruits and effects, there will be holy panting and desires; the heart will not be always barren, dark, and unfruitful; it will not be always grasping after the things of time and sense. There will be something in the soul as distinct from these things as light from darkness, and heaven from earth. There will be a humility, a brokenness, a tenderness, a contrition, a spirituality of affection as different from the spirit of the world as Christ from Belial. This unction of the Holy One touching a man's heart and conscience will make him more or less manifest as a new creature; it will make spiritual religion more or less the element in which his soul lives and moves; it will transform him, as the apostle speaks, "in the renewing of his mind;" old things will pass away; yea, all things will become new; with it he is happy; without it he is a wretch.

With this unction from the Holy One all is plain, blessed, and clear; without it all is dark, perplexed, and confused; with it there will be a savour in reading the Scriptures, and they will be sweeter to the soul than honey and the honeycomb; without it the Scriptures are nothing but a riddle, a weariness, and a burden. With it prayer is sweet and delightful to the soul, and prayer, and preaching, and hearing are, alike, blessed; without it all is dark and embarrassed; we feel not the importance of the things we are hearing and speaking. With this unction from the Holy One the ordinances of God are blessed; we see a grandeur and a beauty in the ordinance of baptism, and a sweetness in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. With this unction from the Holy One the people

of God are highly prized as our chief companions; without it we care not for them, and feel as though we would rather go out of their company than get into it; with it eternal things are weighty and precious, the only things worth seeking or having, without it eternal things fade away, and the things of time and sense occupy the mind; it is engaged in the world, and eternal realities are out of view. O what a difference in a man's soul when he has this unction and when he has it not! When the unction rests upon a man's heart it makes as great a change as when the sun rises and night disappears; as when the spring comes and winter rolls away with its cutting blasts.

Now do you think you know the difference? Does this find out your religion? Have you these inward changes, these alternations, darkness and light, summer and winter, day and night, seed time and harvest, cold and heat; these are figures of the work of God on the soul. We need both. The corn needs the winter as well as the spring and summer. We need night as much as day; the sun as much as the absence of it. So spiritually; we need unction, and sometimes we need the withdrawing of the unction, because we should get proud, as Hart speaks:

"The heart uplifts with God's own gifts
And makes e'en grace a snare."

Now if you have ever felt in your soul the least drop of this unction you are saved. The little children to whom the apostle wrote, saying, "their sins are forgiven," were but weak and feeble, but with that unction everything had come to cover their sins. The feeblest, therefore, the most trembling, most doubting and fearing, the most exercised, the most self-condemned, if they have but the least drop of this unction from the Holy One on their souls, are pardoned sinners, and shall be with Christ in glory. When Moses consecrated the vessels in the tabernacle, it was not the quantity of the anointing oil that he put on which sanctified them; if he dipped his little finger in the oil and just touched the vessel it was as much consecrated as if he put both his hands in the anointing oil, and

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rubbed it all over. So spiritually, the least touch of this unction from God the Holy Ghost upon the conscience, the least drop of this holy oil falling from the Spirit on the heart, sanctifies, and fits it for heaven.

80 Faithful And Just To Forgive

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Tuesday evening, June

24th, 1845

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”

1 John 1:8, 9

In the text John puts two conditional cases; and by them addresses himself to two distinct characters. We will therefore look:

I. At the first case: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

II. And then, if God enable us, we will look at the second: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

I. There are two characters who say they have no sin. One is a self-righteous Pharisee; the other, a fleshly perfectionist; both of them ignorant of the teachings of God in the law and in the gospel; both deceived, though each in a different way. In the instance of the self-righteous Pharisee, he says that he has no sin; not that he would be altogether so arrogant as to deny the very existence of sin in his heart or in his life; but that by his obedience, by his righteousness, and by his consistency, he has made such a compensation for his sins that the balance of his good deeds completely outweighs the balance of his evil deeds. Now such a person deceives himself, and how? He is ignorant of the real nature of sin; he looks merely at a few external actions, and is unacquainted with the filth and depravity that works within. He is deceived, because he has not had the application of God’s holy law in its

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spirituality and curse to his conscience, which makes sin known; for “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom.3:20). The depths of sin have not been discovered to him; the secret workings of it have not been laid bare. He has never seen it held up in the light of infinite, unblemished purity; he has never seen light in God’s light. God has never set his sins in array before him. If he had, the man would know he was nothing but sin from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot. There is therefore no truth in him. The truth may be in his judgment; but were it in his heart and conscience, it would lay bare the horrible evils of his depraved nature.

On the other hand, there is another character, who thinks he has attained to perfection; that by some exercise of his own strength, and by some cultivation of what he thinks is the grace of God in him, he has attained to such a degree of holiness that he no longer sins. The inward iniquity of a depraved nature is a burden to a living soul; but no burden at all to one dead in sin. If then any say, “We have no sin, we have preserved our lives from every blemish; there is no evil word spoken, no evil action committed by us;” what are we to say? We must answer in the language of the apostle that such a one is deceived; he does not know the plague of his own heart; the core of his corrupt nature has never been laid bare; the inward fountain of iniquity perpetually flowing forth, has never been discovered. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” II. We will pass on, however, to consider the second branch of the subject, which enters more into the case of those who fear God. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Before we can confess our sins, we must know and feel them; we must experience their guilt, their filth, and their dominion. Now this is the most painful lesson that a child of God can ever learn in this life. All men have to drink more or less of the cup of natural and providential afflictions; and the children of God frequently drink more deeply of this cup than others; but in addition to these, they have what is far deeper and more cutting. They

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have to endure spiritual troubles; and among them to see and feel their guilt and sinfulness before a holy and pure God.

i. But what is it discovers to them the wickedness of their hearts, lips, and lives? It is light. Light makes all things manifest. In God's light we see light. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph.5:14). Now this light comes from him who is eternal and essential purity, who is infinitely spotless and holy. And more than that; who is not only holy in himself, but who hates unholiness in others; and not only hates it, but is determined to show his displeasure and vengeance against it. A ray of his light must come into our consciences before we can know and feel that we are sinners before him.

ii. But there are times and seasons when there is not only light to see, but life to feel. These two go together, as the Lord himself says, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). They are twin sisters; they are like the rays of the natural sun: though each ray consists of seven colours, all the seven colours meet together, and form one beam. So light, life, faith, and all the graces of the Spirit come into the heart at the same time, and yet may be divided into distinct branches, though all are blended harmoniously together. Life then is needful to feel; and as this life works more powerfully, we feel more deeply; as this life works more feebly, we feel less deeply. Why is it that the very same sins that sometimes cut us up, and fill us with the greatest self-loathing, at others we can scarcely feel at all? Why is it that sometimes what is called a "little" sin will cut us more than at other times what is called a "greater" sin? Why; it is just in proportion to the working of divine life in the soul. It is pure, because it comes out of a pure fountain. It must therefore always testify against sin, must always groan under it, must always hate everything opposed to its pure nature.

iii. But besides light and life in the soul, we must have faith, in order that we may believe the testimony of God in our consciences. If I had no faith to believe the eye of the holy God was

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looking down into my heart, and that he was solemnly displeased with transgression, I should have no feeling. So that light, life, and faith are all intimately blended together to produce feeling. Every groan and sigh, every sensation of distress, trouble, and bondage that a soul feels on account of sin, is a testimony that it is possessed of living faith. Those who are dead in sin do not believe that God is angry with them; they do not believe that God by sending his dear Son into the world and nailing his sacred body by the hands of wicked man to the cross, gave a most solemn testimony of his displeasure against iniquity.

iv. But again, besides faith we want power. We may feel sin deeply, and yet not have power to confess it. "If we confess our sins," the text declares. If I justify myself, there is no confession; if I am vain-confident, there is no confession; if I am shut up in sullen indifference, there is no confession; and if I am overwhelmed with despair, there is no confession. In order that confession should come, there must be power given to the soul, a softening, melting, humbling, and breaking down of the hardness of the heart. Sin will not bring confession. Nay: what says the Scripture? "Lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb.3:13). The tendency of indulged sin is to harden a man's heart; and then there will be no confession; for confession implies a melting and humbling of the soul before God. In fact, there is no real confession till God touches the conscience with his finger, and thereby melts and breaks it down. Then indeed there will be confession; but the power to confess all will never take place but under the application of pardoning love. It is atoning blood felt in the conscience that makes a soul unreserved in confessing. There is no free unbosoming of the heart, there is something kept back, till free pardon flows into the soul. At the same time, I wish to observe that confession is necessary as a preliminary for pardon, as well as experienced after pardon. Though when pardon comes, it gives power to make greater confession than before, yet confession is a needful preliminary. We cannot expect to have our sins pardoned, if we do not confess

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them. Confession first, and pardon after.

But how do we confess our sins? Is it a mere acknowledgment with our lips that we have sinned? That is not confession; that is acknowledgment. Confession is something deeper; it is mingled with sorrow, with contrition, with penitence, with self-loathing, with real trouble of heart, that we have been entangled in the sins that we confess. None but God can give this. No man ever confessed his sins unreservedly before God gave him the power. But when the soul is enabled to confess its sin it is not one sin it confesses, nor two sins, nor twenty sins; it confesses all that are brought to its remembrance. You will find that God in making his people confess their sins will even lay on their conscience sins well-nigh buried in forgetfulness, sins of years past, sins well nigh swept out of the memory. When the Lord indulges a soul (and I am sure it is an indulgence, though often a very bitter one) with power to confess, it is no burden. There is a sweetness, though a bitterness in it, a sorrow mingled with joy. But what are the sins that pain us most? Those which we have committed since we have known the grace of God in truth. The sins we committed before he called us out of darkness into light, the Lord does not usually, after pardon received, lay again on the conscience; but it is the sins we have committed after we have known the God of all grace; the backslidings and lustings of a depraved nature; the base workings of a wicked heart; the many foolish actions that we daily commit; the wandering desire, the roving, the polluted imagination, the evil thoughts, this is what grieves, and distresses a conscience made tender in God's fear. These sins will be confessed. Repentance cannot be put on one side. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). Paul preached "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). There must be sorrow felt in the soul for sin; there is no pardon except preceded by confession. God that cannot lie has said by the mouth of his inspired apostle, "If we confess our sins." If we are enabled to put our mouths in the dust, acknowledge them, and bewail them,

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and bewail ourselves for being entangled in them; if we, then, confess our sins he will forgive them. Will he then taunt us with them? Will he make use of our very confession to stab us with more deeply? No! His promise runs thus, and O what a promise it is! "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Look at the words, "our sins." He does not say how many, he does not say how few; he does not say how long, he does not say how deep must be our repentance; but "if we confess our sins," what we have felt, what have been laid on our conscience, what we have groaned under as sin, "if we confess our sins," acknowledge them, and lament over them and spread them and ourselves with them at the footstool of mercy, and supplicate forgiveness for them, "He is faithful and just to forgive us" them all. But let us with God's blessing look a little into this clause: "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins;" for there is a fund of infinite sweetness and blessedness in the words. "He is faithful." God does not rest his promise of forgiveness upon his mercy merely; though the forgiveness of our sins does in fact flow through the mercy of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But the Lord the Spirit in the text has not put it on that basis, but on God's faithfulness. That takes a wider sweep than his mercy. I will tell you how. Every act of vengeance that God has executed is a display of his faithfulness. Every lost spirit, and every undone soul in hell is a mark of God's faithfulness; but they are not marks of God's mercy. If we are to have a heavy door, we must not have a slight hinge for it to swing upon. We must have a hinge as ponderous in proportion as the door. Apply this to the subject. What a basis it is on which the forgiveness of sin rests, the faithfulness of a covenant-making, covenant-keeping Jehovah! It is as though it ran thus: God has promised to forgive the sins of those that confess them. Can he deny his word? Can he forego his infinite veracity? Has he not promised in his eternal covenant to receive as sons and daughters all whom his dear Son should die for? To forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no more? To that covenant he will be faithful. Heaven and earth shall pass away;

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but not one jot or tittle of that covenant can pass away.

He is faithful also to his own dear Son, who is “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person” (Heb.1:3); faithful to his pledged word that he would pardon sin for his sake; faithful to his atoning blood, when he viewed the sacred stream that washed away all sin on Calvary; faithful to his obedience to the law, whereby it was satisfied both in doing and suffering; faithful to his resurrection, and ascension, and present intercession at his right hand, as the great High Priest over the house of God. So that not merely God’s mercy (though that cannot fail, for it is to be built up for ever, Psa.89:2), but his faithfulness, his promises, his perfections, the purity of his own spotless holiness are pledged to forgive the sins of every one that confesses. What a broad foundation is this for a poor, lost sinner to stand upon! What an ever-flowing fountain for him to come to and slake his thirst at! What “a large room” (as David speaks)! “Thou hast set my feet in a large room” (Psa.31:8). What a large room it opens for a poor sinner to take shelter in the covenant faithfulness of a covenant Jehovah! We expect man to be faithful. Does not grace make a man honest and faithful? And shall the God of all grace, who gives the reflection merely of his grace in the heart of a sinner to make him faithful—shall the God of all grace not be faithful, if those who have a little grace are faithful? He has promised, and will he not perform? His very perfections are pledged to do so. What a broad foundation, then, it is for a poor sinner to stand upon who confesses his sins that God is faithful to forgive them!

But the apostle adds another word, a word that, if anything, is more surprising, more astounding, to reason than the word which precedes it: “and just.” It is a wonderful thing that faithfulness should be on the side of forgiveness. It is a still greater thing that justice should be upon its side. What would not justice be out of Christ? Would not justice out of Christ be wrath, vengeance, and destruction? But through the wonder-working atonement, through the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh,

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through the astonishing scheme of salvation by redeeming love and blood, justice is now on the side of forgiveness. It is as though the apostle argued thus: Justice has been completely fulfilled, and all its demands accomplished to the very letter. It demanded punishment, and it has had punishment; it required vengeance, and it has had vengeance. It called for complete satisfaction to all its requirements, and it has had it; and not merely had it sufficiently, but had it super-aboundingly. As grace superabounds over the aboundings of sin, so justice has superabounded over the claims of the law.

Look at the infinite dignity of him who obeyed the law, that God should become also man, and as man obey his own law. What dignity does it put upon it! What an infinite fulness does this put upon every act of obedience! The law was given to man; and if man could have fulfilled the law, it would have been amply satisfied. But when God-Man fulfilled the law, he not merely satisfied it, but he gave it infinite dignity. I will endeavour to illustrate it thus. Suppose there were some office which could be adequately performed by a nobleman; but instead of that nobleman performing it, the sovereign performs it. Will not that give dignity to the office, make it shine more brightly, than if the nobleman had performed it? So spiritually; if Adam had obeyed the law, the law would have been satisfied; if the creature could render it obedience, as it was given to the creature, it would have been enough. But when the Creator obeyed it, when Immanuel, God with us, performed what the law demanded, then his obedience gave it infinite merit and stamped it with everlasting dignity. As we read, “He will magnify the law, and make it honourable” (Isa.42:21); that is, by clothing it with his own divine obedience. So that God is not merely faithful to his word, but also just, infinitely just, scrupulously just, perfectly just, in forgiving sin; because he can forgive it by virtue of the obedience which his only-begotten Son has paid to the law. O what a view is this! What an ample scope it offers, what a large room it sets before a poor sinner! That God is not only faithful, but also just to

forgive us our sins! How we forget this! How ignorant we are of it! We sin, we feel it a burden; it presses the conscience; the soul falls down before God and confesses it. But, yet in all this how little eye there is to the spotless obedience of the Son of God! How much more we look at our confessing, our humbling, our self-loathing, than to the spotless obedience of Jesus! We are such self-lovers, such self-conceited creatures, that we are more enamoured of our own polluted doings than of the spotless obedience of the Son of God. Yet if there be any forgiveness, it is only extended to us on the footing of Christ's obedience. Our confessions cannot draw it forth; and yet God will have us to confess, that we may have forgiveness poured into a clean vessel. We must be humbled in order to be raised up, and know the bitterness of sin in order to know the sweetness of pardon.

"He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." What? All? Every sin that we have committed? Sins of thought, sins of look, sins of action, sins of omission, sins of commission, sins in infancy, sins in childhood, sins in youth, and sins in old age? All the base lusts, all the filthy workings, all the vile actions, all the pride, all the hypocrisy, all the covetousness, all the presumption, all the envy, hatred, and malice, all the aboundings of inward iniquity, forgive them all? If God forgives one, he forgives all; if he retains one, he retains all. Either the whole weight of a man's sin will be tied about his neck as a mill stone, to sink him into perdition; or all his sins will be as completely blotted out from the remembrance of God as though they had never been committed. The Scriptures therefore compare it to a cloud: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins" (Isa.44:22).

But some will say, "Does God forgive no more sins than we confess?" I want to know what the proportion of the sins that you confess bears to the sins that you do not confess? Or the proportion of the sins you recollect to the sins you forget? Have you not committed thousands of sins that you have forgotten, which God has not? Do we not sin with every breath that we draw? Is not every lustful

desire sin? And is not every proud thought sin? And is not every wicked imagination sin? And is not every unkind suspicion sin? Every doubt sin? Every act of unbelief sin? And every working of a depraved nature sin? How often do we remember and confess to God the sins thus daily, hourly, minutely, and momentarily committed? We might as well think of counting the stars in the midnight sky, or the sands that strew the coast of the sea, or the waves that come dancing to the shore, as to think of confessing all the sins of heart, lip, and life, that we have committed. We committed sin when we sucked our mother's breast; we committed sin as soon as we were able to stammer out a word; and as we grew in body we grew in sinfulness. Is not this the Scripture testimony: "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen.6:5). Will God, then, only forgive those sins that we confess! Woe to us! Woe to us! If those sins only are remitted which we acknowledge. One sin banished angels from heaven, and turned them into devils. One sin drove Adam out of Paradise. One sin involved the whole human race in one universal condemnation, and would have sunk all into the depths of perdition, had not the Son of God come forth as a Mediator. Then every sin must be forgiven to a child of God, or he could not stand before infinite Purity. He must be covered from head to foot with a robe of spotless obedience before he can sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. "He is faithful," then, "and just to forgive us" all our sins, if he do but give us grace and power to confess them.

But it adds, to sum up the whole: "And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Cleansing applies not only to the purging away of the very existence of sin from the eyes of God, through the blood and obedience of his only begotten Son, but also to cleansing the conscience from the filth and guilt of it. I believe that the words, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," refer not only to the cleansing of the persons of the elect from sin by Christ's blood and obedience, but also to the cleansing of their consciences from its guilt. Observe the words: "If we walk in the

light," that is, in the light of his countenance, in the light of his manifested forgiveness, "as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). It is when we walk in the light of God's countenance, in the light of pardoning mercy, in the light of superabounding grace, that the blood of Jesus Christ sprinkled upon the conscience experimentally cleanseth from all sin, from its filth, guilt, and dead works.

But some may say, "I have confessed and acknowledged; I have lamented and bewailed my sins; but God has not pardoned me." Do you think your confession has been from the bottom of your heart? Do you think it has been with godly sorrow? With real self-abhorrence? Has there not been some secret justification, some hidden self-righteousness working at the bottom? Has it been full and free? If so, it may account for the delay. But the Lord may see fit to delay even where confession is full and free. Our part is to wait in quiet submission. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope" (Lam.3:26-29). And yet "he is faithful and just." He keeps the time in his own hands, for he hath reserved the times and seasons in his own power (Acts 1:7). But as sure as a poor soul is enabled to confess, in God's time pardon will be sealed in his heart. "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psa.130:4); and God will fulfil these words to the very letter: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

81 The Afflicted Remnant And Their Confiding Trust

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street. London, on Lord's Day Morning,
July 6, 1845

"I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord."

Zeph. 3:12

Jerusalem was the centre of the worship of the only true God from the day that David brought thither the ark (2 Sam. 6) until she rejected the Lord of life and glory, and brought upon herself that sentence, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 28:38). For this reason, Jerusalem became a type and figure of two things: first, of the true church of God, his own elect family; and secondly, of the visible church. In those passages for instance, where we read, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Ps. 122:6); "Put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city" (Isa. 52:1); "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem" (Isa. 40:2)—in these, and similar passages, Jerusalem is addressed as representing the spiritual church of God. But, on the other hand, there are many passages where she is spoken of in language only applicable to the outward professing church; as in the beginning of this chapter, "Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!" (Zeph. 3:1).

In the text, we find Jerusalem personally addressed. And the Lord declares that he "will leave in the midst of her an afflicted and poor people;" and that this afflicted and poor people "shall trust in the name of the Lord." By Jerusalem, then, in the text, is not meant the true church of God, the inner sanctuary; but the outer court, the visible church, as including the invisible. And the Lord says of this professing church, of this outward visible congregation, that he will leave in her midst, a circle within a circle, a peculiar people, whom he describes under two distinct marks.

In endeavouring to unfold this portion of God's word, I shall notice three particulars connected with the text:

I.—The solemn declaration of the Almighty, that he will leave in the midst of the professing church a people.

II.—The character of the people whom the Lord thus leaves in the midst of Jerusalem, "an afflicted and poor people."

III.—That they shall be brought to "trust in the name of the

Lord.”

I.—God here speaks in the solemn exercise of his sovereignty, “I will leave.” It is no matter of chance, or of uncertainty. It is a solemn declaration, which God, who cannot lie, has given, and which He will therefore surely fulfill.

But we may observe two things connected with this solemn declaration: one is, “in the midst of her.” The words clearly intimate that “all are not Israel who are of Israel;” that the outward court forms a bulwark to the inner; that the visible church incloses in its bounds the invisible. Thus, we are to expect to find the people of God in the midst of the professing church, and yet completely separate from it; wrapped up in it, as the kernel is wrapped up in the nut; yet as distinct in essence, in peculiarity, and in flavour, as the kernel is from the shell which surrounds it. It is also hidden by the professing church in the same way as the kernel is hidden by the shell; and yet so hidden that though the eye of man sees it not, yet it lies naked and open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

But the expression, “I will leave,” carries with it also a peculiar signification. The Lord does not say, ‘I will put in the midst of her,’ but ‘I will leave in the midst of her.’ The word is connected with the idea of a remnant, as we read in the next verse, “The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid” (Zeph. 3:13). The inner portion, therefore, bears a small proportion to the outer: “two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof.”

Now it will be the concern of every one taught of God to know whether he belong to the outward, or to the inward church: whether he be one of that peculiar people chosen before all worlds, whom God leaves as a remnant in the midst of the outward church, or whether he has the mere form of godliness, while destitute of the power.

II.—And this leads me to the second branch of the subject, which is to describe the spiritual character of this peculiar people left as a remnant in the midst of professing Jerusalem: for the Lord in his word, for the comfort of his people, has given signs and marks by which they are peculiarly distinguished.

The Holy Spirit, in the text, has stamped these two marks upon them: 1. that they are “an afflicted and poor people:” and 2. that “they trust in the name of the Lord.”

The first mark that he stamps upon them is, that they are “an afflicted and poor people.”

1. They are “an afflicted people.” The Lord’s people, in common with the rest of mankind, have to drink of the cup of temporal sorrow. This, then, is no distinguishing mark of their being the people of God; for “Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” But what is the effect of these temporal afflictions upon them? Temporal afflictions, however long, however deep, however aggravated, carry with them no evidence that those on whom they fall belong to the peculiar people of God; but the fruit and effect which spring out of these afflictions bear a decisive stamp. When afflictions come upon the men of this world, there is no sanctifying effect produced through them.

2. Affliction leaves them just as it found them. Did I say so? It leaves them worse than it found them. Their hearts are hardened rather than softened by the afflictions they are made to pass through; and their troubles, instead of driving them to the Lord, only serve to drive them farther and farther from him. They thrust them into rebellion, or into the world, or more deeply into sin, into suicide, or into despair. So that there is this marked distinction between temporal afflictions as befalling the children of men, and temporal afflictions as befalling the children of God—that temporal afflictions leave the children of men just as they were, in nature’s darkness and in nature’s death; whereas the temporal afflictions that fall upon the people of God bring with them a sanctifying and fertilizing effect. For instance:

Many of the Lord's people are afflicted in their bodies. In this they share with the children of men at large. The wards of the hospital, and the sick chamber, are not tenanted only by the children of God: the men of this world have their share of bodily afflictions. But bodily afflictions produce in the latter no spiritual fruit. Sickness and pain do not, cannot change the heart. But the bodily afflictions that God's people have to pass through, often produce in them a sanctifying effect. When God blesses and works by them, they separate us from the world: they bring before us the solemn realities of eternity: they lead us to look more narrowly how we stand before God; they purge out false faith, false hope, false love; they sift our evidences to the very centre; they bring us more into the presence of a heart-searching God, that we may lay ourselves open before him; they embitter sin to us; they bring death nearer to view; they quicken prayer; they stir up a spirit of supplication in the heart. And in these afflictions the Lord is at times pleased to manifest himself peculiarly to the soul. Many a child of God on a sick bed has found more of the presence and favour of the Lord than ever he knew before; and has had reason to bless God to the latest breath of his life that he had been pleased to afflict him, and chose that season in which to manifest his goodness to his soul.

Others of the Lord's family are afflicted with providential trials. The world have these as well as they; but the providential trials that the children of men are exercised with never drive them to God; they often, yea, usually drive them deeper and deeper into sin; they drive them into debt, to drink, and other bad courses, to drown their worldly cares, and often bring them eventually to the gallows and the scaffold. But the providential trials that the Lord's people have to pass through shew them what before was hidden from them, that there is a God of providence. Those who see him only as the God of grace see but one side of the Lord's face. But the providential circumstances the Lord's people are called to pass through bring more conspicuously before their eyes the other side of the Lord's countenance—that of providence. When they see how

God appears for them in their temporal circumstances, it causes the sweet flowings forth of faith and love towards their kind Parent; and this endears him to them more closely.

There are also family afflictions. These, the Lord's people have to pass through as well as the world. But family afflictions are not sanctified to the men of this world: they disunite instead of bringing together: they make the home miserable: but never bring into their hearts any looking to the Lord to heal the breach. But the Lord's family who have to pass through family afflictions often find a profit in them. Idols are dethroned, worldly affections are restrained: and that peace which they cannot find in the bosom of their families they are led to seek for in the bosom of their God.

Thus those temporal afflictions which passing over the men of the world are as the thunderbolt to strike, are to God's people a fertilizing shower, causing them to bring forth fruit to his honour; and thus the same cloud which hangs in vengeance over the men of this world, and with lightning-flash often hurls them into perdition, drops down fatness upon the children of God.

But there are other afflictions of a far deeper, far more cutting, and far more painful nature than any of those temporal afflictions which the Lord's people may be called upon to pass through—these are spiritual afflictions. The Lord's people are peculiarly circumstanced. I have endeavoured to shew that they have temporal afflictions in common with the rest of mankind; yet they have them in a peculiar way, as being sanctified to them. But spiritual afflictions are peculiar to them altogether; and, if we may give a balance of profit, we must assign a far greater share to spiritual afflictions than we can to temporal.

The weight of guilt upon the conscience; the distressing sensations that sin produces when God the Spirit charges it home upon the soul, is one of the afflictions which God's people are called to pass through. Indeed, without knowing the affliction of a guilty conscience for sin and for having transgressed against the Lord, no man can know the healing balm of the gospel. God's consola-

tions are reserved for, and abound in proportion to these spiritual afflictions. So that he that would fain draw his neck out of the collar of affliction would also draw his neck out of the fulfillment of God's promises in giving consolation. The feeling of having sinned against God must lie heavy on every conscience made tender in God's fear. It is the first mark of life; and not merely the first mark of life, but it runs through the whole of a Christian man's experience. Does he daily sin? He is daily so far as God lays it upon his conscience afflicted in consequence of sin. And the more that the fear of God works in his soul, and the more that his conscience is made and kept tender and alive, the more is he afflicted by the sin which he daily and hourly commits. All the Lord's people suffer under this affliction: some indeed more deeply and perpetually than others. But just in proportion as the Lord would make the soul fruitful in his ways, does he afflict it with a deeper knowledge of sin, that it may prize the gospel more, receive pardon more graciously and abundantly, and bless God for the very stroke that has struck most deeply into the conscience.

Temptations form another source of spiritual affliction to God's people. The Lord's family often, in passing through temptations, think themselves different from all others. They can scarcely believe that any of the children of God are tempted as they are—that such vile thoughts, such base desires, such carnal imaginations, such wicked lusts, should work in the minds of others, who appear to them to be holy and spiritual. And it is often a weighty part of the affliction that it is peculiar: for the Lord's people, especially in their younger days, before they have learnt how others are similarly exercised, often write bitter things against themselves in consequence of these temptations. Temptations to infidelity, to blasphemy, to renounce the cause of God and truth, to commit the vilest sins painted in the imagination, to pride, hypocrisy, presumption, and despair: these various temptations lie heavy on a tender conscience, and cut deep just in proportion to the depth of godly fear within.

The daily conflict that we have to maintain in our souls against the world, the flesh, and the devil; the struggle of grace against nature, and of nature against grace; the sinkings of the one, and the risings of the other, that are perpetually going on in the souls of God's people—this ceaseless conflict is an affliction that the Lord's people are all called on to pass through.

But what profit is there in all these afflictions? Does God send them without an object in view? Do they come merely, as the men of the world think, by chance? No. There is profit intended by them. The apostle unfolds this very clearly in Heb. 12:10, where he says, our fathers “for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure: but God for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.” The branch cannot bear fruit except it be purged: the love of sin cannot be cast out: the soul cannot be meekened, humbled, softened, and made contrite: the world cannot be embittered: the things of time and sense cannot be stripped of their false hue and their magic appearance, except through affliction. Jesus is a “root out of a dry ground:” there is “no form nor comeliness in him,” except just in proportion as afflictions exercise our souls, and the Spirit through them draws us into nearness of union and communion with him. Our greatest blessings usually spring from our greatest afflictions: they prepare the heart to receive them; they empty the vessel of the poisonous ingredients, which have filled it, and fit it to receive gospel wine and milk. They are made blessings in this respect also, that they stir up in us a “spirit of grace and of supplication;” that they draw forth and manifest the fruits and graces of the Spirit, which God has implanted. They are to us what the plough and the harrow are to the soil; they cause a preparation of heart in order to receive the consolations of the gospel. God, therefore, having chosen Zion in the furnace of affliction, “leaves in the midst of her an afflicted people.” To be then without these afflictions, these griefs, these trials, these temptations, is to write ourselves destitute of grace. But our coward flesh shrinks from them. We are willing to walk to heaven; but not to walk thither in God's way. Though we

see in the scripture, and in the experience of others, that the path to glory is a rough and rugged way; yet when our feet are planted in that painful and trying path, we shrink back; our coward flesh refuses to walk in that road. God therefore, as a sovereign, brings those afflictions upon us which he sees most fit for our profit and his glory, without ever consulting us, without ever allowing us a choice in the matter. And he will generally cause our afflictions to come from the most unexpected source. Our afflictions usually come upon us like a thunder-storm. We are looking into the wind for afflictions: but God causes them to come from precisely the opposite quarter. A trial therefore generally comes in a way most cutting to our feelings: in the way that of all others we should least have chosen: and yet in a way which of all others is most for our profit.

But how are we to know whether afflictions do profit us? We sometimes mistake in this matter. We imagine that afflictions are necessarily connected at the time with manifest blessing. If the manifestations and consolations of divine love do not come at the very time with the affliction, we are often disposed to believe that the affliction has passed over our head without profit. But we are not so to measure afflictions. Affliction is one thing, consolation is another. Affliction is to prepare the heart for consolation; but when and how the consolation shall come, God has not laid down any rule in his Word. Do the afflictions we pass through humble us? They do us good. Do they deaden the love of the world in our hearts? They do us good. Do they purge out hypocrisy? They do us good. Do they bring us more earnestly to the throne of grace? They do us good. Do they discover to us sins that we have not before seen? They do us good. Do they penetrate into our very hearts? Do they lay bare the corrupt fountain that we carry within us? Do they search and try us before a heart-searching God? Do they meeken and soften our spirit? Are they accompanied with a pouring out of the heart before God? They do us good. It is necessary that this preparation work should be done before the consolation comes.

It is like a surgeon dealing with a diseased place. How painful the operation! How deep the knife cuts! How long it may be before the wound is healed! Yet every stroke of the knife is indispensable. He would not do his duty as a skilful and faithful surgeon if he did not dissect it to the very bottom. As pain before healing is necessary, and must be produced by the knife; so spiritually, we must be wounded and cut in our souls, as long, and as deeply as God sees needful, that in his own time we may receive the consolation.

2. But there is another word which the text contains as descriptive of the character of God's people, that is, poor; not necessarily, not always, poor in temporal circumstances. Not but that the great majority of God's people are poor; not but that God has "chosen the poor of this world rich in faith." But we should give but a literal exposition of the text, did we confine it to temporal poverty; we must view it higher; we must look at its spiritual bearing, and interpret it as the Lord himself speaks, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Now the Lord has declared, he will leave in the midst of Jerusalem a spiritually poor people. Are they so by nature? O no; they are not so by nature. They are not brought down into the depths of soul poverty except by the Almighty himself. They are by nature rich in their own eyes, as the Laodicean church esteemed herself. It is the work of grace upon their hearts that makes them poor; it is the stripping hand of the Spirit of God in their conscience that reduces them to poverty and ruin before the throne of mercy. And we become rich spiritually, not by adding to our natural stock, but by losing it. We become free by going to gaol. We have our debts paid by becoming bankrupts. We become partakers of the riches of Christ's grace and compassion by sinking down into the depths of soul beggary.

But the Lord's people are spiritually poor in two ways. They are poor actually; and they are poor in spirit. They are poor actually as to divine attainments. They are poor in faith, so as not to be able at times to muster a single grain. They are poor in hope, for often

their frail bark is tossed by the waves of despondency. They are poor in love, for often they cannot feel a spark of affection towards the Lord or his people. They are poor in spiritual-mindedness, for they cannot raise up their affections from earth to heaven. They are poor in prayerfulness, for often they cannot heave forth a single sigh or cry to God. They are poor in strength, for they cannot stand against temptation, and are unable to produce in their souls one gracious desire, one spiritual feeling. Thus actual poverty makes them poor in spirit. It is not like the actual poverty of man naturally, which is carefully disguised and cloaked over; but those who are poor actually are poor in spirit before God. They feel it, and are often exercised about it, and distressed in their souls because they are so poor. They would be rich, but cannot produce in their hearts any true riches. And this conviction of their own poverty makes them poor in spirit before God. They cannot come to him "rich, and increased in goods;" their cry is rather, "My leanness, my leanness; woe unto me!"

III.—This leads me to the last mark which God the Spirit has stamped upon the Lord's people—that "they trust in the name of the Lord." Is there no connection between these two points? Is there no spiritual bond between their affliction and poverty, and their trusting in the name of the Lord? Yes: the closest. They would not trust in the name of the Lord, if they were not afflicted and poor. The Lord himself brings them to trust in his name—that is the object of his dealings with them. But they cannot be brought to trust in his name except by being afflicted and poor. I will shew you how. Until they are afflicted in their bodies, circumstances, or families, they are hanging upon the world. They are seeking to gather a crop of happiness from nature's polluted soil: they are trying to re-enter into that earthly paradise from which their first parents were driven: they hope to die in their nests, and multiply their days as the sand. And this leads them from the Lord. They cannot trust in his name as long as they are seeking comfort outside of him.

So also with respect to their spiritual afflictions. There is no trusting in the name of the Lord until sorrow and affliction have done their work in the heart. We are looking to our own righteousness, strength, wisdom, and holiness. Whilst these remain unbroken, there can be no inward, heart-felt faith; no simple reliance, no implicit confidence. These afflictions, and this poverty, then, by purging out of our hearts false faith, empty confidence, and delusive expectations, bring us, in the hand of the Spirit, to trust only in the name of the Lord.

But what is meant by the expression, in the text, "the name of the Lord?" By "the name of the Lord," we are to understand the Lord's revealed perfections; whatever he has declared concerning himself. But more especially are we to understand by "the name of the Lord," the only-begotten Son of God; as he said to Moses, "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions; for my Name is in him" (Ex. 23:20, 21); that is, my essential attributes; all that "I Am," the great "I Am," is all in him. So that, to "trust in the name of the Lord" is to trust in what Jesus is and what Jesus has for the benefit of his people.

"The name of the Lord," then, comprehends all that God has revealed concerning himself: and all that dwells in Jesus Christ. It therefore comprehends the glorious Person of Christ, the Object and Centre to which all God's people turn: Immanuel, the Mediator between God and man: the great High Priest over the house of God: the Saviour of the lost, the Hope of the hopeless, and the Help of the helpless.

Now, our afflictions when sanctified, and our poverty when felt, prepare the heart to trust in Jesus. Why? Should we trust in him, if we could trust in ourselves? Should we hope in him, if we could hope in ourselves? Should we hang upon him, if we could hang upon the creature? But we do trust in ourselves, we do hope in ourselves, and we do hang upon the creature, till we are cut off. The

Lord finds us hanging upon self, the world, the creature—glued and riveted to them all. He therefore cuts asunder this natural union, and brings us out of it, that we may have a felt union with the Lord of life and glory. He takes us out of the old olive tree, and grafts us into the good olive, to receive of its root and fatness. But can this be done without being cut off, and thus having our natural union broken asunder? We remain upon the old stock; we still grow upon the old tree; we bear nothing but the rank berries of the wild olive tree, till the sharp grafting knife comes to cut the soul from the old stock, and graft it into the Lord of life and glory. These afflictions therefore are needful, that by them we may be cut off the old stock, and grafted into the new olive tree. You complain that your afflictions are so deep, your trials so cutting, your temptations so severe! They must be cutting, deep, and severe. Till they have broken in twain the old union—till the scion is fairly cut off, there is no grafting into the new stock. Therefore they must be deep; for is not the natural union deep? They must be sharp: for is not the natural union close? They must be cutting, and felt to be cutting; for when the scion is cut from the old olive tree, does it not bleed at every pore? There cannot be separation without cutting. Will the skilful gardener, when he takes out his knife to graft the scion, make but a slight incision in the bark? That is but playing; that is what a child might do with his penny knife. There is a work to be executed, a result to be brought about: sap is to flow into the scion. And that cannot be effected without separation and grafting into the new stock. Therefore, by these afflictions and exercises the old union is cut through. And when the old union is cut through, the blessed Spirit grafts us into a living union with the Lord of life and glory.

We are brought to trust in his Person. And O, what sweet views does the Lord sometimes indulge the soul with of the glorious Person of Immanuel! What sympathy, compassion, and tenderness does the soul see in him, “who is over all, God blessed for ever,” the great High Priest over the house of God! What beauty and glory

did my soul see in him when I lay on a sick bed since I saw you face to face! Thus, when the beauty of Immanuel is seen by the eye of faith, a measure of his grace experienced in the heart, and he becomes the centre of all our hopes and wishes, how do the affections, feelings, and panting desires of the soul flow to, and centre in him!

They are brought also, in trusting in the name of the Lord, to trust in his blood, that blood which “cleanseth from all sin”—the blood of “Immanuel, God with us”—that holy, that healing blood, which sprinkled on the conscience makes it whiter than snow. O the virtue, the validity, the efficacy of Christ’s atoning blood upon a poor sinner’s conscience! This atoning blood is a part of “the name of the Lord;” and the poor and needy—the tempted, tried, afflicted, exercised, and distressed children of God—are brought by their sorrow, affliction, and trials, in the hands of the Spirit, to trust in this atoning blood as cleansing them from all sin.

And what a beauty and glory do they see also in his justifying righteousness, What a comely robe, what a refuge, what a harbour, what a shelter to the soul exposed to the thunderbolts of divine vengeance! They are brought to trust in this righteousness; and by trusting in it, to “trust in the name of the Lord.”

They are brought to trust also in all the perfections of God, as revealed in the face of Jesus Christ—to trust to his unfailing faithfulness to his sovereign purpose; to the stability of the eternal covenant; to the promises spoken by his mouth; and to the words that dropped from his expiring lips, “It is finished!” In trusting to these heavenly certainties, these immovable foundations, they “trust in the name of the Lord.”

And in trusting to the sympathy, tenderness, condescension, lovingkindness, in a word, to the heart of Immanuel, they are trusting also “in the name of the Lord.” Thus they trust in the compassion and sympathy that dwell in the bosom, and gush in overflowing streams from the heart of the Lord of life and glory.

But who needs this tender pity and sympathy? The destitute,

the afflicted, the exercised, and the disconsolate. Is it not so naturally? The healthy, the mirthful, the gay, the lively—do they want sympathy, tenderness, affection, bowels of pity? They want them not. But the distressed, the afflicted, the sorrowful, the mourning, and the desponding—these need sympathy. Is it not so spiritually? What can our souls know of the sympathy, the compassion, and the tenderness that flow forth from the broken heart of Immanuel, unless we are in circumstances to need his sympathy, his pity, his love? Our afflictions, therefore, and exercises bring us into the situation to draw them forth: as the infant draws forth the milk from its mother's breast, so to draw forth into our hearts the sympathy and tenderness of Immanuel. In trusting to this sympathy, and in hanging upon this tenderness, we "trust in the name of the Lord."

And everything that the soul sees in Jesus, every grace, beauty, and loveliness that the eyes of the understanding behold in him, when the heart is touched by the Spirit—to trust in all these, is to "trust in the name of the Lord." In a word, all that Jesus is, and all that Jesus has; the whole of his divine nature, the whole of his human nature, the whole of his complex nature as God-Man—all that Immanuel was in eternity, and all that Immanuel will be to all eternity—all his glorious fullness able to satisfy the wants of all his church as her risen and glorified Head—all is comprehended in one word, "the name of the Lord." This is the strong tower, into which the righteous run, and are safe.

But how do we trust in him? We cannot trust in him till we know him. Do I trust a man whom I do not know? It would not do in this metropolis. I must know a man to trust him. So spiritually. We must know that the Lord deserves our trust before we can put our trust in him. We must have proved his faithfulness before we can fully rest upon him. In a word, "trust" implies this—though we cannot see the object of our trust, yet we rely on him from the knowledge we have of his faithfulness. It is like the wife, who has implicit confidence in her husband: he is away from her: but her confidence in his faithfulness fails not. It is the confidence of a

child in his parent, which ceases not, though the child be at school, and separated by many miles. It is the trust of friends when divided by distance. Trust does not require sight: it relies upon the Object trusted in from what we know of him, though present sight and present experience be denied. It is so spiritually. It is a poor trust that requires sight. "We walk by faith, not by sight." The nature of faith is to trust in the dark, when all appearances are against it: to trust that a calm will come, though the storm be overhead: to trust that God will appear, though nothing but evil be felt. It is tender, child-like, and therefore is an implicit confidence, a yielding submission, a looking unto the Lord. There is something filial in this: something heavenly and spiritual; not the bold presumption of the daring, nor the despairing fears of the desponding: but something beyond both the one and the other—equally remote from the rashness of presumption, and from the horror of despair. There is a mingling of holy affection connected with this trust, springing out of a reception of past favours, insuring favours to come: and all linked with a simple hanging and depending of the soul upon the Lord, because he is what he is. There is a looking to, and relying upon the Lord, because we have felt him to be the Lord; and because we have no other refuge.

And why have we no other refuge? Because poverty has driven us out of false refuges. It is a safe spot, though not a comfortable one, to be where David was, "Refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul" (Ps. 142:4). And until refuge fails us in man, in self, in the world, in the church, there is no looking to Christ as a divine refuge. But when we come to this spot, "Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living" (Ps. 142:5)—'If I perish, I will perish at thy feet—my faith centres in thee—all I have, and all I expect to have, flows from thy bounty—I have nothing but what thou freely givest to me, the vilest of the vile'—this is trust. And where this trust is, there will be a whole army of desires at times pouring themselves into the bosom of the Lord: there will be a whole array of pantings and longings venting themselves into the bosom of

“Immanuel, God with us.”

But this trust must be tried. It is so naturally. We cannot trust persons till we have tried them. And if we have tried them, and proved them unfaithful, we will not trust them. What is our nature to be trusted in? Man, a poor dying worm is not to be trusted in for anything: and God makes us to feel that none are to be trusted but himself. Thus, by afflictions and by poverty of spirit communicated by them, he leads us to trust only in his name. And this trust will never be put to confusion. This expectation will never be cut off. We may have to walk in darkness, much darkness: yet there will be a secret looking unto, and enquiring of the Lord in the midst of the darkness, that will not be disappointed. “He that believeth shall not make haste.”

In this congregation there are, doubtless, those who know what it is to be afflicted—doubtless, those who know what it is to be poor in spirit. Now, my friends, just look at the tendency of these afflictions; at the fruit, which springs out of them. Do look at this point—What have they done for you? That is the point my eye is fixed upon as regard myself. What do afflictions do for me? What is the fruit produced by them? Have they brought you—have they brought me—to this one thing—to trust in the Lord—to come more simply, more singly unto him who is “able also to save to the uttermost?” Have they drawn forth a larger degree of submission to his will—a greater measure of reliance and confidence in him—a more frequent and closer communion with him—a more simple hiding ourselves in him, as having none other to hide ourselves in? Now, if our afflictions and trials have not produced this, I am sure it will often bring us to a stand to know what good they have done us. It is a thing, which has often tried my soul. The afflictions of body and mind, which I have had to pass through often seem to leave me just as they found me. I can bear afflictions when they do me good: nay, in my right mind, I would rather have afflictions and temptations, however sharp and cutting, if they do my soul good, than be at ease in Zion, and settled on my lees. But this often

tries my mind—they seem to do my soul so little good. Yet this I have felt them to do they make me to trust more in the name of the Lord. There is a weaning effect produced by them; a more earnest searching of heart: a more simple looking to him who alone can guide and keep. There is a cutting of the thread of the world: and embittering of the things of time and sense: more fervent desires after God’s favour and presence: and tenderer confidence raised up in the name of the Lord as all my heart’s desire.

These are some of the marks and evidences of the children of God. Have, then, your afflictions, trials, and exercises brought you to feel more earnestness of heart; given you more simplicity of purpose in the depths of that conscience into which none but the eye of God can look; led you to see more in Jesus than ever you saw before; to cleave more with your heart to that which before you viewed only in your judgment? Then they have done your soul good; they have stamped upon you this mark, whatever men may say or think, which God has put upon his own sheep, and by which they will be known in the day when he maketh up his jewels—“I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.”

82 The Conqueror’s Inheritance

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

July 6th, 1845

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.”

Revelation 21:7

The Scriptures, describing the path of the Christian, represent it under various figures, but all implying opposition to the path he takes. For instance, it is sometimes spoken of as a conflict: “Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me” (Phil. 1:30). Sometimes as a race: “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). Sometimes as a fight: “Fight the

good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:12). Sometimes as a struggle: “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Heb. 12:4). Sometimes as a contest: “If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully” (2 Tim. 2:5).

All these figures bear upon this one point, that the path of a Christian is one of internal and external opposition. But there is more to be observed than this. It is not a fight without a victory; it is not a conflict without success; it is not a race without reaching the goal; it is not a struggle that ends in the defeat of the contender. A victory is represented as the termination of the battle. “Nay, in all these things,” saith the Apostle, “we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37). The Lord, in the Book of Revelation (2 and 3), in each of the addresses to the seven churches, assigns a distinct promise “to him that overcometh.” A gracious promise is also contained in the text: “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.”

In looking at these words, my endeavour will be, first, to describe what it is to overcome; and then, if the Lord enable, to unfold the twofold promise which is given to him that overcometh: 1. “He shall inherit all things;” and 2. God will be his Father, and he shall be God’s son.

I. In endeavouring to unfold what it is to overcome, we must premise a few observations. Observe, then, that this overcoming is not by our own strength, by our own wisdom, or by our own righteousness. The kingdom of God is not promised to anything done by the creature. The Apostle lays down a certain rule in the text before quoted: “If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully” (2 Tim. 2:5). In other words, it is not a bare striving, but a striving according to certain rules. But these rules are spiritual rules, and being spiritual rules, exclude everything of sense, reason and nature. Now man, in an unregenerate condition, whether he be in a state of profanity, or in a state of profession, has no spiritual knowledge of the way by which to

overcome. He may strive against his lusts, he may endeavour to overcome those things that conscience bears testimony against, but he is not crowned, because he strives not lawfully. He strives in his own strength, contends in his own wisdom, and trusts in his own righteousness. Such strugglers and such overcomers (if overcomers they ever are) are not crowned, because they strive not according to the rules laid down in God’s Word. This at once excludes all creature righteousness, human wisdom and natural strength. This takes the crown completely off the creature, and puts it on the head of the Redeemer.

There are certain rules, then, laid down in the Scripture, according to which we are to fight and to overcome. For instance, the Lord of life and glory is held out in the Word as our pattern: “He hath left us an example that we should follow His steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). He fought the battle before us, and He gained the victory, not for Himself only, but for His people; and He has left us here below to walk in His footsteps, and to overcome in the same way as He did; as we read, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne” (Rev. 3:21). All striving, then, and all overcoming which is not in the steps of Christ, and precisely (in a measure) in the same way in which Jesus strove and overcame, is not the overcoming which is crowned with God’s approbation.

But let us look at a few of the enemies whom the Lord overcame. Remember that His enemies are our enemies; that as He fought we must fight; and that as He overcame we must overcome.

1. First, then, He overcame the world; as He told His sorrowing disciples: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

But how did the Lord overcome the world? Was it by taking up the sword of the conqueror, or by appearing in the majesty of the Father? No; it was by a state of humiliation and abasement; by emptying Himself so as to become “a worm, and no man”; by

being made “a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;” by being buffeted, spit upon, despised, and crucified. Thus He overcame the world; not by taking the world’s weapons, but by contending against the world with spiritual weapons—the weapon of obedience to His Father’s will, the weapon of sorrow and suffering, of shame and contempt. He overcame the world by not being of it. He did not gain the victory by desolating the world with judgments as a triumphant conqueror, but by setting up a spiritual kingdom of faith, love and obedience.

2. He overcame Satan; for 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” (Heb. 2:14). And He said to His disciples, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (Luke 10:18). How did He overcome Satan? Did He meet him upon the battlefield, and (as He might have done, being “God over all, blessed for evermore”) crush him with one look? He met him not so, but He passed through the territories of death; and by suffering, by obedience, by the cross, by bowing His head and giving up the ghost, He “destroyed him that had the power of death.” He conquered not with a carnal, but a spiritual weapon, even obedience in suffering unto death.

3. He also overcame the law, though He was “made under the law,” and subject to it. In overcoming the law, He took away its curse and condemnation; not by putting it aside, but by obeying and fulfilling it, by magnifying and making it honourable. Thus He overcame the curse and the condemnation by being Himself made a curse, and being Himself made a condemnation; enduring in His holy soul and holy body the vengeance of the Almighty due to the transgressors.

I put this example of Christ before you to shew that if we are overcomers, and in overcoming inherit the blessing, we are to walk in these footsteps. Poor vain creatures, blind wretches! we are thinking of overcoming in our own strength, in our own wisdom,

in our own resolutions, and in our own righteousness. This is not the way. “The battle is not yours, but the Lord’s.” We are to do as it was said to those of old: “Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; set yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord” (2 Chron. 20:17).

Observe, then, the promise is “to him that overcometh.” We have enemies to overcome. Who, and what are they? We can scarcely enumerate them all; we will therefore content ourselves with naming a few.

1. There is the world, that great enemy of our soul’s peace. How are we to overcome it? The Christian must either overcome the world, or be overcome by it. If he be overcome by the world, he will be condemned with it; but he that overcomes it will be saved by Him that has overcome it for him. In this battle we are losers before we are gainers; we are vanquished before we are victors; we lose our life before we find it; we flee before we shout the song of victory. All this is to teach us our weakness. Could we overcome the world, its temptations, its allurements, its riches, its honours, its praise, and its glory; could we overcome it standing upon the basis of our own strength, our own wisdom, or our own righteousness; we should “sacrifice to our own net, and burn incense to our own drag.” And instead hereafter of singing “the song of Moses and of the Lamb,” we should sing the song of our own attainments, our own strength, our own wisdom, our own righteousness, of our own good hand and our own good sword which had carved for us the victory. But such a sound of creature exaltation will never be heard in the courts above; no notes are chanted there but those of praise to the Triune God. As the clink of the hammer was not heard in Solomon’s temple, so the noise of creature praise will never be heard in the courts of heaven. Therefore, if we overcome the world, we must overcome it by faith; as we read, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5). Defeats lead to victories, losses to gains, surprisals to watchfulness, and ourselves being overcome leads even-

tually to ourselves overcoming. How? Why? That we may learn the grand secret of spiritual warfare; the strength of Jesus made perfect in our weakness. When we experience a little measure of the love of God, taste a little of the beauty and glory of the Lamb, feel the heart melted and watered by the blessings dropping down from above, this purges out the love of the world, and enables us to overcome it by the Spirit of God working in the soul, when we could never overcome it by any resolution, any strength, or any wisdom of our own. What read we? “They overcame.” How? “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). These were their weapons—the blood of the Lamb sprinkled upon the conscience, the word of His testimony felt in their heart, and a loving not their lives unto the death.

2. Again. There is sin; and every person must be either overcome by sin, or he must overcome it. There is no neutrality in this warfare. It is either being conquered, and being condemned as conquered; or conquering, and being crowned as victors. But all God’s children, until they are taught better, fight against sin in their own strength. They know not, at first, the power of sin in them, the power of lust, the power of pride, the power of rebellion, and the power of temper; in one word, the power of corruption. And being ignorant of the consummate craft, skill, and maneuvering policy of this inward enemy, sin, they are sure to be defeated, because they fight not in the Lord’s strength against it. Yet, strange though it may appear, it is necessary to be overcome that we may overcome. Generals have gained battles often by defeats. Defeats have led to victories, where success would only have flushed and led them into the ambush; when reverses have made them wary and skilful. So spiritually, we only know the power of sin by being vanquished, overcome, got the better of, and laid low. This cuts down creature righteousness and strength. And then, when we feel the guilt of sin in the conscience, and its dominion in endeavouring to obtain the mastery over us, we are brought out of

self to look unto the Lord of life and glory, that we may receive out of His fulness that pardon which blots out its condemnation, and those supplies of grace which alone can enable us to fight against it. We can never overcome sin but by “the blood of the Lamb,” and “the word of His testimony”—“the blood of the Lamb” purging the conscience from the guilt of it, and “the word of his testimony” communicating a secret power to conquer it.

3. But again. There is overcoming one’s own spirit. “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Prov. 16:32). What a foe to one’s peace is one’s own spirit! And what shall I call it? It is often an infernal spirit. Why? Because it bears the mark of Satan upon it. The pride of our spirit, the presumption of our spirit, the hypocrisy of our spirit, the intense selfishness of our spirit, are often hidden from us. This wily devil, self, can wear such masks and assume such forms; this serpent, self, can so creep and crawl, can so twist and turn, and can disguise itself under such false appearances, that it is hidden often from ourselves. Who is the greatest enemy we have to fear? We all have our enemies. But who is our greatest enemy? He that you carry in your own bosom; your daily, hourly, and momentarily companion, that entwines himself in nearly every thought of your heart; that suggests well nigh every motive; that sometimes puffs up with pride, sometimes inflames with lust, sometimes inflates with presumption, and sometimes works under feigned humility and fleshly holiness.

Now this self must be overcome; for if self overcome us eventually, we shall perish in the condemnation of self. God is determined to stain the pride of human glory. He will never let self (which is but another word for the creature) wear the crown of victory. It must be crucified, denied, and mortified; it must be put off, that so Jesus may be put on; that in the denying of self Jesus may be believed in; and that in the crucifixion of self there may be a solemn spiritual union with Him that was crucified on Calvary. Now, are we overcoming self? Are we buffeted? What says self? “Buffet

again.” Are we despised? What says self? “Despise again; retort angry look for angry look, and hasty word for hasty word; ‘an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’” But what says the Spirit of God in a tender conscience? “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21).

The way to overcome self is by looking out of self to Him who was crucified upon Calvary’s tree; to receive His image into your heart; to be clothed with His likeness; to drink into His spirit; and “receive out of His fulness grace for grace.”

But what are the weapons in this spiritual warfare? We need weapons offensive and defensive to fight in these battles.

1. One weapon is faith. By faith we stand, by faith we fight, by faith we conquer; as we read, “Through faith they subdued kingdoms.” Not by their own strength or wisdom: “For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but Thy right hand and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favour unto them” (Psa. 44:3). How does faith fight in this battle? By fleeing, all helpless and defenceless, to seek shelter and refuge in Jesus. Faith deals with invisible, eternal realities, with inward strength communicated in a secret way from Jesus who dwells and reigns within the veil. Faith prevails by looking and fleeing to Him, by committing the cause into His hands, by pleading with and cleaving to Him with full purpose of heart, and thus receiving out of His fulness. Faith does not stand upon its own foundation, or fight in its own strength; if it were so, it would still be self in another form. But faith, like a poor defenceless woman, flies to the Husband for shelter, strength and defence; and thus fights in His wisdom, His strength, and His righteousness.

2. But prayer is another weapon. True prayer is the pouring out of the heart and soul before the Lord; committing all one’s cause into His hands who judgeth righteously; panting and groaning after His presence, and venting forth the troubled spirit into the bosom of God. The Lord brings all His people here. He shews them

how helpless they are without His help; how hopeless without His hope; how wretched without His consolation; how eternally lost without His sovereign favour! And He kindles and raises up these panting desires after Himself, that He may communicate Himself in all His glorious fulness to the groaning, crying and panting soul.

3. But another weapon is the Word of God. This is the only true blade—“the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” If we have battles to fight; if we have enemies to overcome; if we have corruptions to subdue; if we have lusts to conquer; whatever conflict, external or internal, we are engaged in, let us never think for a single moment that God will own or bless any weapon but His own Word, “the Word of His testimony,” in the heart and conscience; the Word of truth dropped by the Spirit into the soul. We can never overcome temptation but by the Word and the testimony; we can never mortify self but by the Word and the testimony; and we can never receive anything out of Christ’s fulness but through the channel of God’s testimony.

II. Now the promise is absolute: “He that overcometh shall inherit all things.” Let me ask you two questions to bring matters to a nearer compass. Have you ever had any enemies to encounter? Does your soul know the difficulties, the exercises, and the perplexities of a conflict? “It does,” answer you. “I do know,” says the living soul, “what it is to have, more or less, a daily, and sometimes an hourly, conflict with sin, corruption, temptation, and the world.” Good. Let me ask you another question: “Do you ever overcome in this battle? You say that you are fighting. Is it all defeat? Is there never any victory? Is there never any success? Is corruption never mortified? Does temper always overcome you, or lust cast you down? Pride, peevishness, impatience, unbelief, hypocrisy, do these always bear the sway in your heart? Surely you are deceived if you think you have a conflict, and find yourself always overcome.” Is there a promise merely to the fighter? It is true we must fight, but does the promise belong merely to the battle? Does not the promise belong to “him that overcometh”? Read the Lord’s own testimo-

ny in the second and third chapters of the Revelation. Is the promise made to the fighter, or is the promise made to the conqueror? “But,” say you, and that justly, “I am often overcome.” But do your defeats lead to victories? What is the effect when sin overcomes you? When temper, when pride, when lust, when hypocrisy, when corruption, in its various shapes and forms, overcome you, are you cut? are you grieved? are you distressed? are you troubled? Do the eyes overflow with tears of sorrow? Does the bosom heave with convulsive sobs of penitence and remorse? “Yes,” say you, “it does.” Then you are not overcome. That is the secret of victory. These things shew that there is an internal principle in your bosom that flies out of self, to lay hold of the strength of Jesus. I will tell you when a man is overcome—when he sins and feels no sorrow; when his lusts captivate him, and he is never filled with shame before God; when his pride, his ill-temper, his unbelief, his covetousness, exercise unchecked sway over him. “There is no conflict then; no tear from his eye, no sob from his heart, no groan from his conscience. But to be sorrowing and mourning, sighing, groaning and panting after the Lord; these are so many victories. They may come to us as defeats, but actually they are so many victories, because they lead us on to conquest. They purge us of self, they overcome our self-righteousness, they empty us of that leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy, and they prepare the heart, by meekening the spirit and softening the soul, to receive a glorious and precious Jesus in all His fulness.

Now, the promise runs to such: “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.” Let us look at these two promises.

1. “He shall inherit all things.” When? In eternity? Yes. But only in eternity? Oh no! In time also. There is a twofold inheritance, though one and the same—one in time, another in eternity; one the first-fruits, the other the harvest; one the earnest, the other the full sum. There is an inheriting here below, and an inheriting above; and he that never receives any portion of his inheritance

below will never receive an inheritance above. Now, just in proportion as we overcome are we put in possession of this inheritance. What are we to inherit? Riches, glory, honour, power, praise? These are worldly things; let the world enjoy them. In inheriting “all things,” we are to inherit the things of God—the favour of God, the love of God, the mercy of God, the glory of God; all that a covenant God gives in giving Himself; peace here, glory hereafter; pardon below, salvation above; the beginning of rest on earth, the fulness of rest in heaven.

Now, whilst we are overcome, there is no being put into possession of this eternal inheritance. Does sin overcome us? Do we inherit pardon in being overcome? No; we inherit shame and confusion, guilt, fear, and wrath. When we consult our own temper, our own spirit, our own pride, our own worldliness, our own profit, do we inherit the image of Christ, the meekness of Jesus, the favour of God, the dew of the Spirit, the compassion of Jehovah? No; we feed upon ashes; the clusters are the clusters of Sodom, and grapes of gall. Let us have our pride gratified; does it put us into possession of a heavenly inheritance? Sorrow, shame, confusion follow. Are we overcome by our lusts? Do we gratify them? Do we fill our carnal heart with the enjoyment of them? What do we inherit? Love, pardon, peace, salvation, bliss? No; distress, shame, remorse, confusion, trouble, fear, doubt, despondency, the wrath of God in the conscience. Do we seek the exaltation of self in its various forms, that dear self may be honoured, admired, gratified, fed? Do we then inherit all things? the favour of God, the testimony of mercy, the consolations of the Spirit, the dew of heaven? No; we inherit nothing but the inheritance of fools, which is shame and folly. But do we overcome in God’s strength, in God’s name, in God’s righteousness? We begin, the moment that we overcome, to be put into possession of the inheritance. What is the inheritance? Is it not peace and pardon, the image of Christ, the “rivers of pleasure, which are at His right hand for evermore”? Is not this inheritance the goodly land flowing with brooks of honey, milk, and wine? Do

we not, just in proportion as we overcome, drink into a portion of the inheritance? Do I overcome the world? Am I separate in spirit from it? Is its love cast out? Are its allurements opened up to me in their true colours? Do I overcome it by believing on the name of the Son of God? Directly I overcome it, I begin to drink into the eternal inheritance, into the kingdom of heaven, which is opposed to and incompatible with the kingdom of earth. I must be brought out of the world in heart, in spirit, in affection, that I may enter into the kingdom of heaven, and partake of the inheritance reserved for the saints. Do I overcome myself? Is self mortified, crucified, subdued, put off? No sooner do I put off self than I put on Christ; I must put off the old man to put on the new. When I put off self, I put on Jesus; and in putting on Jesus, I put on the earnest of an eternal inheritance, which is Jesus in His almighty, glorious fulness. Do I overcome my temper, my pride, my hypocrisy, the inward workings of self in all its hateful forms? Do I return good for evil? Do I turn the left cheek when the right is smitten? Do I humble myself under the mighty hand of God? Do I seek to know His will, and when known to do it? Am I contrite, brokenhearted, tender, softened, looking to the Lord, and to the Lord only? Do I sometimes thus overcome self? The moment that I overcome self, I begin to enter into the inheritance. The inheritance is the image of Jesus, for to that image we are predestinated to be conformed. Then no sooner do I overcome self than I put on the image of Christ; and in putting on the image of Christ I enter into the inheritance. Does sin overcome me, or do I overcome sin? If I overcome sin, it is not in my own strength, or by my own resolutions. I am lost there. But do I ever overcome sin by the fear of God in my soul, as Joseph did? Do I ever overcome sin by looking to the Lord of life and glory to sprinkle His blood upon my conscience? Do I ever overcome sin by the leadings and teachings of the Spirit in my heart? No sooner do I thus overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of His testimony, than I enter into the inheritance. So that there is a connection, a beautiful, an experimental connection, between

overcoming here below, and inheriting here below. But in order to enter into this inheritance, we must be perpetually reminded that we have no strength of our own. And thus our slips, our falls, our backslidings, our frailties (though we would not, dare not justify them), are mercifully overruled amongst the “all things” that work together for our good. They teach us our weakness, and by teaching us our weakness, lead us up to Christ’s strength: and by leading us up to Christ’s strength, to “inherit all things”: for in inheriting Him, we inherit all that He is to God’s people.

Those who know nothing of their own heart, of their own infirmities, of their own frailties, of their own inward or outward slips and backslidings, know nothing of the secret of superabounding grace, nothing of the secret of atoning blood, nothing of the secret of the Spirit’s inward testimony. They cannot. Only in proportion as we are emptied of self in all its various forms are we filled out of the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

Now you, perhaps, (I address myself personally to some poor tempted child of God, that in touching one, I may touch others) are a poor tempted creature, and your daily sorrow, your continual trouble, is that you are so soon overcome; that your temper, your lusts, your pride, your worldliness, your carnal corrupt heart, are perpetually getting the mastery. And from this you sometimes draw bitter conclusions. You say in the depth of your heart, “Can I be a child of God, and be thus? What mark and testimony have I of being in favour with God when I am so easily, so continually overcome?” Now I want you to look to the end. What is the issue of these defeats? Remember, it is a solemn truth, and one that we learn very slowly, that we must be overcome in order to overcome. There is no setting out with a stock of strength, daily adding to it, weekly increasing it, and then gaining the victory by our own resolutions, our own innate strength. Such feigned holiness may come under a gospel garb, may wear a fair appearance; but it only more hides the rottenness of the flesh. Then, remember this, that in order to gain the victory, we must know our weakness; and we can

only know our weakness by its being experimentally opened up in our consciences. We cannot learn it from others; we must learn it in our own souls, and that often in a very painful manner. But these painful sensations in a tender conscience lead a man more humbly, more feelingly, more believingly, to the Lord of life and glory, to receive out of His fulness. Thus every defeat only leads to and ensures victory at the last. Says the Apostle, "In all these things we are more than conquerors." How? Through our resolutions, through our wisdom? No. "Through Him that loved us." There is no other way, then, to overcome, but by the "strength of Jesus made perfect in our weakness."

Now, in "inheriting all things," we inherit the pardon of sin. But what can we know of the pardon of sin, unless we know what sin is by the rankling of it in our conscience? In "inheriting all things," we inherit the favour and love of God. But do not the favour and love of God flow through the channel of Immanuel's sufferings and obedience? And were not Immanuel's sufferings and obedience for transgressors? for "He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12); and it is a faithful saying, that "He came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10)—"to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). Then, if we are to know the favour and love of God, we must know it as sinners. It is a painful way. We would desire to inherit the favour of God as saints, as holy people, as truly religious characters, as having a form of godliness, as being what is called decidedly pious Christians. But to inherit favour through shame, through sorrow, trouble, perplexity, remorse and penitence, that it is not the path that nature loves to walk in. Yet God's favour and forgiving mercy, through the blood and obedience of Jesus, can flow, and do flow, only into a guilty sinner's conscience.

2. But we pass on to consider the next promise connected with overcoming: "I will be his God, and he shall be My son." What a promise! That the God of heaven and earth will be our God, our Father, our Benefactor, our eternal almighty Friend; and that we in overcoming shall receive the adoption of sons, shall be mani-

festes as the "sons and daughters" of the Almighty, and receive the inheritance reserved for the children of God! The promise runs in connection with "him that overcometh." If we do not overcome, the promise is not for us. The promise of sonship is connected with overcoming in the same manner as that of "inheritance" is connected with it. Do I want to receive into my heart the Spirit of adoption? Do I want to feel the love of God the Father shed abroad in my soul? Do I want to establish a blessed title to the inheritance that He giveth to His children? How am I to get it? How is it to be obtained? By making myself religious, becoming holy, subduing my lusts in my own strength? This sets me farther from God than I was before. This makes me a god to myself! If I be saved by my own holiness, by my own strength, by my own righteousness, I worship myself, and in worshipping myself I become my own god. This is idolatry, damnable idolatry; so that he who lives and dies in the worship of self will live and die under the wrath of God as an idolater. Then how am I to receive adoption? By overcoming—not in my own strength, but in the strength of the Lord of life and glory. No sooner do I thus overcome than I become manifestly a child of God. How are you to be known as children of God? By base lusts, by pride, by covetousness, hypocrisy, conformity to the world lying in wickedness? Are these the marks, the stamps upon God's sheep? No; honest conscience bears witness. How are you manifested as God's children, as lights in a crooked generation? By wearing the image of Christ. What was the image of Christ—blow for blow, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, revenge for revenge, evil for evil? No; that is not the mind of Christ, that is not the image of Christ. What was the mind of Christ? How did He act? "He committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously;" He obeyed the will of the Father in all things; He gave Himself up wholly and solely into the hands of God, that His will might be done in and by Him. If, then, there is this image of Christ in your soul, if you are a child of God, your pride (and you will have pride to your dying day), your hypocrisy (and you will never be free from it), and your worldly-mindedness,

will be your heaviest burdens. Corruptions do not prove that you are a child of God. But the faith of God's implanting, the hope of God's giving, the love of God's communicating; the meekness, quietness, humility, brokenness, resignation, tender conscience, godly fear, separation of heart and spirit from the world; communion with the Lord of life and glory, tasting His love and feeling His presence; these are the marks of sonship; and as we overcome, we enter upon it. If I am shut up in self, I inherit self; nothing more. If I inherit the world, I have no more than the world. If I inherit sin, I inherit death, which is the wages of sin. Nothing more. But if I overcome, if weak, helpless and defenceless, I yield myself up to the hands of the Lord, as clay in the hands of the Potter; not seeking my own will, but looking to the Lord to make known His will in my conscience, and to work in me that which is well-pleasing in His sight. If I have this, I have an evidence of sonship; and where that evidence is, there will be a further evidence of it in the Spirit of adoption, enabling the soul to call God "Father." And he that calls God "Father" here below, will call God "Father" above, where he will enter into the full enjoyment of it, and bathe in the consolations of Father, Son, and Spirit to all eternity.

Now there are two characters, perhaps more, here. There are those who are fighting in their own strength, and perhaps secretly congratulating themselves they are not as other men. No; they are wise, they are strong, they are righteous, they are holy. Now, be assured that this is not the way to overcome. Your victories are only defeats, and you will find one day, to your sorrow, that all your gain in self will end in shame and confusion of face. There are others here, poor, tried, exercised children of God, who are daily and hourly plagued with the body of sin and death; corruption and sin, carnality and guilt perpetually lurking and working in their heart. You are on the high road to victory; you cannot overcome in any other way. Depend upon it, we shall find out, if we are the children of God, sooner or later, that we cannot overcome in our own strength, or our own righteousness. Happy are we, if

we have learned this lesson, though by painful experience, through a humbling sense of our own helplessness and nothingness. Every feeling groan and cry, under a sense of our own nothingness and worthlessness, to a living and loving Lord, that He would be our "sun and shield"; every tender feeling of affection, and every submissive yielding up of the soul and spirit into His hands and keeping, is a sure pledge and foretaste of certain victory. We shall never be allowed to conquer in any other way; but if we are the Lord's, we shall conquer, we shall overcome; for the promise is made to such; but then, we shall never overcome but in His own way.

God, in mercy, beat out of our hands every weapon but His own. God, in mercy, bring us to that spot where He works in the broken heart and tender conscience. We are safe there. We may doubt, we may fear, we may be exercised and distressed in our mind; we may not see the chariot of the Almighty coming to our relief. But we are in a much safer, in a much surer, in a much better spot than when standing upon the pinnacle of victory in our own strength and wisdom. Do look at the words. The Lord lay it upon our hearts: "He that overcometh." There is no promise to anyone else: "He that overcometh shall inherit all things." Not one good thing shall fail; heaven here, and heaven hereafter; peace below, and peace above; the image of Christ now in his soul, and the image of Christ hereafter in soul and body. All the love of God, all the bliss of the saints, and all the happiness reserved at the right hand of God, where there are pleasures for evermore; all are summed up in that promise, shall "inherit all things." Present sonship, and future enjoyment of it, are also contained in the promise. All are limited to, and belong to, that one character; and that one character, sooner or later, comprehends every ransomed soul: "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son."

83 Spiritual Sickness And Health

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham on Lord's Day Morning,

June 22nd, 1845

"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth"

3 John 2

This epistle differs from most of the other epistles of the New Testament, in being written to an individual, to "the well-beloved Gaius," of whom we read elsewhere, "Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth thee" (Rom.16:23). This Gaius appears to have been a man of a very enlarged heart towards the children of God; for he was not satisfied with being the host of Paul, and entertaining him kindly, but his house and heart were both large enough to entertain the whole church of God at Corinth.

To this open-hearted and affectionate Gaius, John the apostle addresses his third epistle: "The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth." There was a difference in the form of the letters among the ancients compared with that observed by ourselves. Their custom was, not as ours, to put the name of the writer at the end of the epistle, but they placed their name at the beginning; and, next in order, the name of the person to whom it was addressed. We have an instance of this in the Acts of the Apostles, where we have an original letter preserved, which Claudius Lysias sent to Felix. He commences thus: "Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting" (Acts 23:26). This was the form of letter customary among the ancients. Claudius Lysias was the writer; he therefore puts his own name first. "The most excellent governor Felix" was the person to whom the letter was sent; his name comes next. But, besides this, it was the usual custom to add at the beginning a friendly greeting, the writer wishing his correspondent "health," what we should call something complimentary. We find the apostle Paul following this prevailing custom in all his epistles. He first puts his own name, and next that of the church or persons to whom he wrote; and then offers prayers to

God that he would bless them with mercy, grace, and truth. It was the custom then, at the beginning of the letter, to offer some short desire for the health of the correspondent, that being the greatest temporal blessing the writer could wish for his friend. We find the apostle John following this custom; and being a spiritual man, and writing a spiritual letter to a spiritual friend, he gives the usual salutation a spiritual turn. He does not write as a carnal writer would do, for example as, "The elder unto beloved Gaius, health," which was the usual form; but he gives this desire for his health a spiritual turn: "Beloved I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." It is as though he should say, "I wish thee temporal health, if it be the Lord's will; but, far more, I wish thee spiritual health. I wish thy circumstances to prosper, and thy body to be in health, as far as God sees fit to bestow; but only so far as is consistent with the health of thy soul. I wish it even as thy soul prospereth." As though again he should say, "I cannot wish thee temporal prosperity, if it be not good for thy spiritual welfare. But, if thy soul prospers and be in health, with this, then, I can wish thee temporal prosperity and bodily health."

In looking then at the text, I shall endeavour to show what soul-prosperity is. But, as we often see things more plainly by viewing their opposites, I shall, with God's blessing,

I. Show what soul-sickness is; and, in showing soul-sickness, endeavour to show the symptoms, the causes, and the cure of that sickness.

II. If the Lord enable, show what spiritual health is, and what are its symptoms and causes. Then, if the Lord apply the word with power, and bring it into our consciences, we may be enabled to see who are in a state of sickness and who are in a state of health.

But, before I enter into the subject, it will be right to premise a remark that my meaning may not be misunderstood. There are always persons glad to fix upon everything that may feed mere criticism. I shall, therefore, endeavour to lay down a few points by way of explanation, and to obviate all misconception of my meaning in

speaking of soul-sickness and soul-health.

1. Then we must bear in mind that man is a fallen sinner, in a state of sickness and disease. The Holy Ghost has given us a picture of this, where he says that “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 putrifying sores” (Isa.1:5-6).

2. When the Lord would make a man whole, he does not do so by restoring the soul to its original state of health. Adam had a healthy soul in paradise; but it was a health of nature, not of grace. Soul and body were alike perfectly healthy, because free from all defect; healthy, as having come pure and innocent out of the Creator’s hands. But when Adam fell, disease entered into his soul, at the same moment that sickness entered into his body. Death spiritual seized his soul; and the seeds of death temporal were planted in his body. Thus soul and body became alike subject to, and under the power of, disease. 3. When the Lord would communicate health to the soul, he does it by breathing into it a new nature, thereby implanting a divine principle, which is pure and spiritual, heavenly and holy; and which, therefore, is perfectly healthy and entirely free from the least taint of disease. And yet the old nature continues as corrupt as before. 4. I would observe that the soul, in our experience, is sickly or healthy, just in proportion as the corruptions of our fallen nature prevail over grace; or as the grace that is in the new nature prevails over corruption. When corruption prevails in the soul, it is sickly; when grace prevails, it is healthy.

I have given you these explanations that you may not misunderstand my meaning.

I. But I will go on to show some of the causes and symptoms of soul-sickness, and its cure. When the Lord begins a work of grace in the heart, and thus implants a principle of divine health, he teaches us painfully to feel that we are, by nature, corrupt before him. The very health which the Lord communicates to the soul,

by implanting in it a new and divine principle, makes us feel that we are sick; yet perhaps the soul is never so lively, so active, so vigorous, as when life is first communicated. What zeal! What earnestness! What prayerfulness! What deadness to the world! What strong cries! What longing desires! What vehement hungerings! What ardent thirstings there are in a new-born soul, the principle of life within being so vigorous and active! But usually, after a time, in the experience of God’s people, they find that this vigour, this activity, and this zeal, sensibly decline. They lose their zeal, their earnestness, their comforts, and their enjoyments; and the old corrupt nature seems once more to exert its power. Then the soul becomes feelingly sick. It is not that it becomes more diseased than before; but the revival of sin seems to cast its sickly shadow over all a man’s spirit.

But what are the symptoms of soul-sickness?

1. One is coldness, deadness, hardness, a want of life and feeling in the soul, so different from the zeal and activity that it once experienced. What a prevailing complaint, among the people of God, is their deadness, coldness, hardness, want of feeling in the things of God! And this attended with a sense of complete inability to raise themselves out of this dead unfeeling state! They seem as if they had been struck with palsy, a withering, paralyzing stroke, which prevents them from lifting up their hands in prayer, from looking unto Jesus, from walking and talking with him as in times past.

2. Carnality and worldly mindedness is another symptom of the soul’s being sick. It is a strange thing, but so it is, that when the soul is sick in the things of God, then is the time for the carnal mind, so to speak, to be in health. The more weak and enfeebled that the new nature is, the more active and vigorous is the old; and the more weak and enfeebled the old man is, the more active and vigorous is the new. It is a symptom, then, of soul-sickness, when the carnal heart is grasping after the things of time and sense. When covetousness and pride, worldly-mindedness, levity, frivolity, and thoughtlessness take such strong possession of a man’s heart that

he seems to have scarcely any desire whatever after the things of God, he may indeed be said to be sick.

3. Another symptom is prayerlessness. When the Lord begins a work of grace on the soul, he usually communicates a spirit of grace and of supplications. How prayerful a new-born soul is! What desires are then felt! What longings after manifested mercy! What hungerings and thirstings after righteousness! What power is felt in the heart to pour out its wants before the mercy-seat! Then the soul is healthy. But when prayer becomes a burden, and the heart is utterly unable to raise itself up from earth to heaven; when all spiritual desires seem to languish and fade away; when no hungerings and thirstings, no ardent desires, no pantings after the sweet manifestations of mercy are felt within, then indeed it is a symptom that sickness is spreading over the soul.

4. To find the Word of God without savour, sweetness, or power is another symptom of the soul being sickly. When, instead of taking down the Bible, and reading it with sweetness and pleasure, we let the dust gather on it, and allow the spider to spin its web over the cover, O, that is a sad symptom of the soul being in a sickly state! So when, in coming to chapel, the body is rather dragged there as a custom than from any real longing that the Lord would bless the Word with power to the soul, that is a symptom of the soul's being in a sickly state. When, instead of crying to the Lord that he would bless the Word, there is nothing within but sleepiness and indifference, so that we can sit asleep under the Word, and have no more care whether it come into our heart with power or whether it passes us by altogether, that is indeed a symptom of a sickly state of soul.

5. When we feel no affection to the people of God; when we do not desire their company; when we would rather go out of their way than meet them; when our hearts are not knit to them in the bonds of tenderness and love; when we spy out their faults, instead of covering their infirmities with a mantle of love; that is another symptom of a sickly state of soul. When backbiting and slander

prevail, and we feel a devilish pleasure in feasting on the infirmities and failings of God's dear children, O, that is a sad sign of the soul having backslidden from God, and being in a sickly state.

6. When we can substitute the letter for the power, and the form for the spirit, being satisfied with a name to live, that is another symptom of the soul being in a sickly state.

7. When we can be satisfied whether we have the Lord's presence or not; when we can go for days, and weeks, and months, without craving one smile, one intimation, one word, one whisper, one token of love; when we can be as easy in the Lord's absence as if he had never made his presence known; this is another symptom of the soul being in a sickly state.

8. When the ordinances of God's house are despised, and we see no beauty or sweetness in them; when we are glad to shun them; and get away from them, and even dislike the company of God's people because we see them spiritual and heavenly-minded; that is another symptom of the soul being in a sickly state.

9. When, instead of loving the more spiritual part of God's family, and those most who have most of God's fear in their heart, we rather cleave to professors, and to those who have not a clear and gracious experience, that is another symptom of the soul being in a sickly state.

10. When earthly things are pursued and heavenly things neglected; when the world rises in the estimation and Jesus and his blood and righteousness sink; when we can be comfortable with carnal people and take an interest in all the carnality of children and relations, and really feel more happy with them than with the broken, contrite people of God; when we can talk more about the business, the shop, the farm, and the railway than the real teachings of God in the soul; that is another symptom of the soul being in a sickly state. Are there no such sickly ones here, no such diseased souls who feel certain in their minds they are not what they used to be? Now, if you are in the state I have been describing, you are in a sickly, diseased state; and you know it, too, if you are a child

of God. Your conscience bears witness to it, and you sometimes cry out, "O that it were with me as in months past, when his candle shone upon my head, and when, by his light, I walked through darkness" (cf. Job 29:2,3). "I would rather," say you, "be in trouble than in this dead, lukewarm state. I read of the Laodicean church, of which the Lord said, 'So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth' (Rev.3:16). Am I a Laodicean, a deceived character, an empty professor? I, who have been slaying and backbiting at professors? What! Am I come to the same spot, as careless, as dead, and as stupid as they? O! What is the matter with my soul? Put forth thy hand, and work in me, Lord. Let me rather go through a thousand hells than be deceived at last. Let me have stripe upon stripe, rod upon rod, affliction upon affliction, though my coward heart shrinks from them, rather than be at ease in Zion."

These are a few of the symptoms of the soul's being in a sickly state. But what are the causes?

1. One cause is things in providence going well. Temporal prosperity and ease in worldly circumstances are one grand source of the soul being in a sickly state. When things are against us in providence, when the body is afflicted, when worldly circumstances are straitened, and the mind is troubled and exercised about it, the soul then is often in its most flourishing state. It resembles the two buckets of a well. When the bucket of temporal prosperity is sinking, then the bucket of spiritual prosperity is rising; and when the bucket of temporal prosperity is rising then, too often, the bucket of spiritual prosperity is sinking. Therefore, we need not wish to have health and strength or great success in temporal things, or the world to smile upon us, and to have everything that our carnal heart could wish. What does the Scripture say of such characters? "Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish" (Psa.73:7).

2. Another cause is the Lord's withholding his rod. It is strange to say, but most true, that we cannot do without stripes. The Lord

is obliged, so to speak, to drive us on by blow upon blow, stripe upon stripe, and stroke upon stroke; for, without these continual goads, we should not move a single step, but, like the sluggish ass, would rather turn aside to the hedges and ditches to crop the thistles, than trudge along the rough and narrow way. Therefore the Lord is obliged to give us blows and stripes to make us move forward in the path that leads to glory. Now, when the Lord withholds his stripes and does not rebuke as sharply with internal or external troubles, then the world, and the things of time and sense catch our eye and attract our wandering heart, and we crave something to feed our lusts with.

3. The withholding of the dew and rain from heaven makes the soul become barren before God. The soul can no more do without the dew and rain, the sacred operations and divine teachings of God the Spirit, upon the heart and conscience, than the natural soil can do without the dew and rain of heaven. We get parched, dried up, barren, withered, and unfruitful, when the dew and rain of the blessed Spirit do not descend into the heart.

4. Nay, more, sickness generates sickness. It is the same with health; health begets health. When part of our body is diseased, it affects the whole. So, as a person gets sickly in his soul, he gradually becomes worse and worse, unless that sickness be relieved. Thus, if the Lord spares his rod, and withholds his dew and rain, soul-sickness spreads and increases like the leprosy of old. And if the Lord did not, at last, put forth his hand, this sickness would terminate altogether in the death of the soul. In all sickness, whether natural or spiritual, there is a tendency to mortality and death. And if the Lord did not, in mercy, put forth his hand, and, by renewing the work, bring health into the soul, it would go on languishing and pining away.

But now let us take a short glimpse at the cure. We have looked at the symptoms, and we have seen some of the causes; now let us glance at the cure. The Lord cures us in two ways, though, after all, we may say, it is but one way. Yet, as far as our feelings are

concerned, it is in two ways: afflictions and the other is by his consolations. One is by the secret woundings and cuttings of the Spirit, and the other by the secret balm which he drops into the bleeding wound.

1. The first thing we must experience, if we have got sickly in the way I have described, is to have the wound cut into, before it can be effectually healed. We must have the affliction before the smile, and the rod before the kiss. The Lord has various ways of bringing this about. Sometimes he sends sharp convictions into a man's conscience, and thus awakes him out of sleep. He has been sleeping on the top of a mast, unmindful of the rolling billows beneath; and, but for God's preservation, one roll of the ship would have hurled him headlong into the sea. But the Lord brings sharp convictions into his conscience, wakes him up, and makes him wonder what he has been about. He is now astonished and ashamed at his folly; how he could so have backslidden from God; how he could have gone on so long with so little prayerfulness and so little spirituality; how everything holy and heavenly had become a burden, and yet, all the time, professing to be a child of God.

2. The Lord sometimes lays sickness on a man that he may show him his transgressions, that they have exceeded. He thus dealt with Hezekiah; and Elihu speaks of it as a usual mode of the Lord's dealing: "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out" (Job 33:19- 21). The Lord afflicts the body with disease, and brings before the eyes judgment and eternity, that he may awake him out of sleep, and show him how awfully he has backslidden from him.

3. Sometimes by cutting dispensations in providence, by taking away a child, cutting off a husband or wife, bringing down to poverty and distress in circumstances, the Lord cures sickness of

soul, the black blood of prosperity let out by the sharp lancet of adversity.

4. Sometimes the Lord drives away soul-sickness by sending a whole troop of fears into his heart, whether he is a hypocrite or not; sometimes by bringing cutting convictions under the preached Word, or through conversation with God's people; sometimes in reading, by bringing a sentence with convicting power into his heart to show him how little he is like a Christian. Sometimes he cures sickness by a frown on his countenance; so that when the poor soul would get near to the Lord he withdraws himself and veils his face. Darkness covers the face of God, and nothing but darkness is felt in the soul.

Now, by these and various other modes, the backslider in heart is filled with his own ways. The rod of affliction drives out sickness from the soul; as the wise man declares: "The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly" (Prov.20:30). But after these bitter purges have had a wholesome effect, in due time the Lord will manifest himself and restore to him the joy of his salvation, and will overrule this very sickness for his spiritual good. There is no throwing stones at people then. No; not at the greatest backslider. Humility and self-loathing prevail in the soul, and he walks softly before the Lord all his days upon earth.

II. But I pass on, with God's blessing, to consider what are the symptoms and, what are the causes of spiritual health: "Even as thy soul prospereth." The greatest blessing that God can bestow upon a man is to give him soul-prosperity. We cannot always believe this. We want to prosper in our bodies, in our families, in our circumstances, in that which feeds and gratifies its lusts. To obtain this we would, in our carnal mind, sacrifice all soul-prosperity. So base is our heart, so depraved is our fallen nature, that we would sacrifice the greatest spiritual benefits for a little ease and fleshly indulgence. But the Lord will not let his people rest there. He will, of his own free mercy and grace, cause their souls, in due time, to

prosper. Now when the Lord, by afflicting us, cures us, and thus revives us out of a state of sickness, he strengthens that principle of health which he at first communicated; and, as he strengthens that principle of health, the soul manifestly prospers and is healthy in the things of God. But, just in proportion as the soul prospers and is in health, the old man becomes weakened, the health of the one being mutually the disease of the other; nature decaying as grace prospers, and grace decaying as nature prospers. 1. One symptom of health is to feel the heart alive to the things of God. There is a being very cold, dead, and stupid, with the heart as hard as adamant; and there is such a thing as the soul feeling alive in the things of God. When we experience the power of eternal things, and feel them to be our element, our meat and drink, the desire of our heart and the joy of our soul, then the soul prospers; and as the soul prospers, every grace and every fruit of the Spirit prospers with it. It is just the same in soul-sickness. As one grace declines, all the other graces of the Spirit decline too; as faith grows weak, hope and love grow cold; but, as faith prospers, all the fruits and all the graces of the Spirit flourish and prosper with it. It is spiritually as naturally. If one limb of the body decays, the others decay with it; and when one member of the flesh is strong, the other members are strong with it. Now, when a soul is in a state of prosperity, the things of God are our element, and that which we feel most interest in. This is the thermometer of the soul. If the world, the things of time and sense, the cares and anxieties of this present life, most engage our minds, then it shows that the soul is sickly. But if the things of God, the precious realities in the Word of Truth, are the things that we chiefly think of, take most interest in, and give the most attention to, that is a sign and symptom of prosperity in the soul. When this is the case, every member of the new man, every grace and fruit of the spirit, is active and lively too. But how weak faith is when the soul is sickly. It is like the hand of a sickly man; it can grasp nothing; but when the soul is in prosperity and in health, faith is strong; it can take hold of the

promises in God's Word, can embrace the things of eternity, feel them to be solemn realities, deal with the Word of God as a divine revelation, and feed upon it as sweet to the soul.

2. So with prayerfulness. When the soul is healthy and vigorous, then prayer flourishes in the heart; it is no longer a burden to bend the knee, but prayer then flows forth freely. There is a spring in the heart, gushing out in living water; there is a thirsting, breathing, longing, and panting after the Lord; and these flow out of the heart; not of custom, not of necessity; but they flow freely like a fountain; gushing because they must gush; freely flowing forth out of the heart into the bosom of God.

3. Again, when the soul is alive to God, the reality of the truth of God is powerfully felt. We see the world to be a passing shadow, a dream of the night that affords no pleasure, that yields no gratification, that cannot fill up the aching void of the soul. But the Lord of life and glory, his blood, his righteousness, his grace, his truth, his love, are powerfully felt. They occupy and fill up this void in the soul, and everything connected with Jesus is sweet and precious. The savour of his good name is like ointment poured forth, and all that he is, and has, is blessed and sweet to the heart.

4. Again, in seasons of soul-prosperity we feel a sweet union with the people of God; especially with the more heavenly-minded, the deeply-taught. The more powerfully exercised, the nearer they are to us. Our heart flows out towards and feels a sweet union with them, a knitting together in the bonds of affection and love. We then hate the form of an empty profession, and feel no more in union with such than with the profane of the world. We then can cover the infirmities of God's children. There is then no picking out their faults and frailties; no rejoicing in their slips, falls, and backslidings; but rather tenderness, sympathy, and affection.

5. Again, when the soul is in prosperity we can bear affliction without murmuring or rebellion. Patience then has its perfect work; sweet submission to the will of God prevails; we can kiss the rod and him that appointed it, and bless God for the very affliction.

6. Humility, sweet humility in precious exercise, is another symptom of the soul being in prosperity. A humble heart, melted down to feel itself less than the least, the vilest of the vile, and the very chief of sinners.

7. Another symptom of soul-prosperity is spirituality of mind and heavenliness of affection. A heart going out after the Lord, trusting in him, looking to him, communing with him, enjoying his presence, walking in the light of his countenance, tasting his favour, seeing his glory, and being enamoured of his beauty. When a man feels this, his soul is in health; he is under the teachings of God the Spirit; he is like a watered garden; the scents flow out as the south wind blows, and the Word of God becomes to him like honey and the honeycomb.

8. When the man can look back, and see how the Lord has led him in providence; how he has appeared for him in time of need, and opened up doors which before were shut; when he can see the hand of God leading him, step by step, in the path he has travelled for years, and can bless the Lord for every crook, and cross, then his soul is in prosperity.

9. When, too, the man can see that the Lord has led him by a right way; when he has a clear view of the work of God in his soul, seeing the beginning clear, the carrying on clear, and looking in faith to the accomplishing of it; when he has bright marks and evidences of God's Spirit in his heart, then his soul is prospering.

10. When the man has the witness of the Spirit that he is child of God, a pouring out of his heart into his ear as a listening father, and a sympathising parent, then his soul is prosperous and in health. When as he walks he talks with God, enjoys sweet communion with him, prizes one smile from the Lord more than a thousand worlds; when he can delight himself in the Almighty; loves the Lord and the Lord only, and cleaves to him with purpose of heart, then his soul is in prosperity.

11. When the man's eye is single to God's glory, and his conscience tender in God's fear; when he hates the garment spotted

with the flesh; comes out of the world; walks in the Spirit; and lives, speaks, and acts to the glory of God in all things, then his soul is in prosperity.

12. When his temper is subdued, his pride laid low, his corruptions weakened, and his heart is a quiet principality where the King of Zion reigns, so as to enjoy pardon, peace, salvation, love, and blood shed abroad therein, then his soul is prosperous, and is in health. O what a difference when the soul is sickly and when it is in health! Of all wretched feelings to a child of God, a feeling of soul-sickness is the worst; and of all blessed feelings to a child of God, a feeling of spiritual health is one of the best. Especially if a man has ever enjoyed in his soul the presence and testimony of God, walked with the Lord, had his heart in some measure watered by the blessed Spirit, then he feels the sickness more. It is then the desire of his soul that the Lord would, by any means, make it to prosper. He counts spiritual prosperity to be the greatest blessing God can give, and temporal prosperity without spiritual prosperity little else but a curse.

Now the Lord brings about this state of spiritual prosperity sometimes by his rod and sometimes by his smile. We want both. We need the bitter medicine to purge out the filthiness, and we want the presence of God in the heart to make the soul prosper in his ways. All afflictions will not do; all smiles will not do. If the Lord were to give nothing but smiles, we should be like children pampered with sweetmeats. If we had not sharp afflictions and cutting convictions, we should argue thus: "What does it matter whether I sin or not? My backslidings do not provoke the Lord. It is all one how I live, speak, or act. The Lord smiles all the same." Thus, if the Lord were to throw his favours away, it would feed our pride and sinfulness. Therefore the Lord, to correct this cursed recklessness, fills the backslider with his own ways, teaches him to loathe himself by laying his rod sharper upon him, and makes him groan and sigh over his baseness, before he applies the blood of Jesus, which cleanses from all sin, and restores to him the joys

of salvation.

The apostle John, therefore, could not wish a greater blessing for his beloved Gaius than that “his soul might prosper and be in health.” What would it profit Gaius that the farm flourished, that the business was going on successfully, that money was coming in like water, if the Lord frowned, and his soul was sickly.

But if the Lord was prospering Gaius’s soul, watering it and making him fruitful, would he not, when he came to be stretched on the deathbed, bless the Lord for his dealings with him, however painful they might have been at the time; mercifully withholding those things which only feed the flesh, and giving him those which made his soul prosper?

84 The Houseless Wanderer

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

July 10, 1845

“They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way: they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul tainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out their distresses. And he led them forth by the right way that they might go to a city of habitation.”

Psalm 107:4-7

These words, at first sight, appear to refer to the wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness: but a closer inspection will shew that this view cannot be borne out by the context. If we look at the preceding verse, we read, “And gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south.” This is not applicable to the children of Israel; they were gathered only out of Egypt, not from the four quarters of the world. The text has no reference then to the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness; but describes, spiritually and experimentally, the dealings of God with the souls of his people.

This Psalm appears to me to be an epitome of the Lord’s deal-

ings with the souls of his children. In order therefore to set forth those dealings more clearly, and to trace out their diversified nature, the Holy Spirit, by the pen of the Psalmist, has given us in it a description of four distinct characters. When I say distinct, I mean, distinct so far as refers to the teachings of the Spirit in the soul. In all the Lord’s spiritual dealings with his chosen, there is unity, though not uniformity; similarity, though not sameness. And thus with respect to the dealings of God with his people, as traced out in this Psalm, there is a variety; and yet such a variety as is not inconsistent with the unity of the Spirit’s teachings.

There are four characters, then, whose experience is traced out in Ps 107; and in order to distinguish them more clearly, I may give each a name—a name borrowed from the circumstances of their case.

1. The wanderer Ps 107:2-9;
2. the prisoner Ps 107:10-16;
3. the foolish backslider Ps 107:17-22: and,
4. the spiritual sailor, or navigator Ps 107:23-31.

Though all these cases differ, yet there are three points in which they all agree:

1. they all are in trouble:
2. they all cry unto the Lord in their distress: and,
3. he delivers them all out of it in answer to their cry.

I shall, this evening, if God enable me, endeavour to trace out the character of the spiritual wanderer, as drawn by the pen of inspiration in the text. And in so doing, I shall not make any formal divisions of the subject; but take it up sentence by sentence, and clause by clause, as it lies before me—more in a way of exposition, than in a set, arranged sermon.

I.—The first thing said of the spiritual wanderer, and that from which I give him the name, is, “They, wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way.” A wanderer is the mark stamped upon this spiritual pilgrim. But how became he so? And what is the character of a wanderer, such as is described in the text? He may be known by

two marks

1. that he is houseless; and,
2. that he has lost his way.

1. But what made him houseless? Had he not a comfortable home in which he lived? Had he not once a place where he could find food and shelter? He had; and this was the world. That was his home; and the things of time and sense were his food. But when the Spirit of God entered with divine power into his conscience, he drove him out of his house, he banished him from this shelter; and, like Noah's dove, he cannot find rest for the sole of his foot upon the carcasses that are floating amid the waters of the deluge. He is no longer able to shelter in his own wisdom, righteousness, and strength. The pleasures of the world and the pursuits of business, that alternately amuse and engross the great bulk of mankind, have lost for him their interest. He can no longer find his element in these things. The inward teachings of God the Spirit have driven him out from them all by laying the things of eternity with weight upon his soul; and thus he has become a wanderer.

2. But there is another idea connected with a wanderer—that he has lost his way. When he was in the world, he had no difficulties: the path was so broad that he could not mistake it. But when the work of divine grace begins in a sinner's heart, he loses his way. He cannot find his way into the world: God has driven him out of it, as he drove Lot out of Sodom. He cannot find his way to heaven: because he at present lacks those clear testimonies, those bright manifestations whereby alone he can see his path.

This is his experience, then, that he has lost his way: having turned his back upon the world: and yet unable to realize those enjoyments in his soul that would make heaven his home. He has so lost his way, as to be often unable to go backward or forward; so lost his way, that whether he turns to the right hand or the left, he has no plain land-marks to shew him the path in which his soul longs to go.

But we need not stray from the text to find where the wander-

er is. "They wandered in the wilderness." The wilderness is a type and figure of what this life is to the Lord's people. There is nothing that grows in it fit for their food or nourishment. In it the fiery flying serpents—sin and Satan—are perpetually biting and stinging them; and there is nothing in it that can give them any sweet and solid rest. The barren sands of carnality below, and the burning sun of temptation above, alike deny them food and shelter.

But there is a word added which throws a further light upon the character of the wilderness. "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way;"—a way not tracked; a path in which each has to walk alone; a road where no company cheers him, and without landmarks to direct his course. This is a mark peculiar to the child of God—that the path by which he travels is, in his own feelings, a solitary way. This much increases his exercises, that they appear peculiar to himself. His perplexities are such as he cannot believe any living soul is exercised with; the fiery darts which are cast into his mind by the wicked One are such as he thinks no child of God has ever experienced: the darkness of his soul, the unbelief and infidelity of his heart, and the workings of his powerful corruptions, are such as he supposes none ever knew but himself.

It is this walking "in a solitary way" that makes the path of trial and temptation so painful to God's family. To be without any comfort except what God gives, without any guidance but what the Lord affords, without any support but what springs from the everlasting arms laid underneath: in a word, to be in that state where the Lord alone must appear, and where he alone can deliver, is very painful. But it is the very painful nature of the path that makes it so profitable. We need to be cut off from resting upon an arm of flesh: to be completely divorced from all props to support our souls, except that Almighty Prop which cannot fail.

The Lord's people are very apt to lean upon one another: they will rest upon anything so prone is our nature to look to and rest upon something visible before they will lean upon the invisible God. But the mark of the believer is, that he has to do with invisible

realities: that he is supplied with invisible strength, and upheld by an invisible hand. Were it not, then, that the people of God had to walk in this solitary path where none but the Lord can support or comfort their souls, they would cease to deal with these invisible realities, and lean more upon those things which sense and reason could comprehend.

But the Lord will take care that his people shall deal only with himself; that they shall have no real comfort but that which springs from his presence, and no solid testimonies but those which are breathed into their conscience from his own lips. And thus he puts his people into, and keeps them “in a solitary way,” that they may receive communications out of Christ’s fulness into their souls, just as much as though there were no other believers on the face of the earth. How many a gracious person is utterly unable to communicate the feelings of his heart to any one! And sometimes this burdens us. We want sympathy, pity, and compassion from men. But the Lord will not often suffer us to find this pity or compassion; or if we find it, he will not allow us to rest upon it. His object is to draw us away from the creature; to take us off from leaning on human pity and compassion; and to bring us to trust implicitly to himself, “whose compassions fail not”—to lean wholly and solely upon him, who is “very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” Thus the very circumstance of having to walk in a path of peculiar temptation and sorrow, which makes it to be “a solitary way,” is the very reason why that solitary way is so profitable.

II.—But there is another expression added, which helps to fill up the description of the solitary wanderer—“They found no city to dwell in.” Man is, by nature, a restless creature, and he wants some place of rest. The world rests in the shop, the farm, the pleasures and vanities of the passing day: men in a profession of religion without the power rest in a name to live: but the Lord has determined that his people shall find no rest but in himself. He is a jealous God. He will not suffer us to find any solid resting-place for our souls but in the Son of his love.

This, then, is the mark that belongs to the solitary wanderer—that “he finds no city to dwell in.” A city implies something, which is stable, with mansions, streets, shops, houses: something that has fixtures. But the Lord’s people, as they journey through the wilderness, find no such fixtures: there is nothing in this world that is sufficiently strong for them to lean upon; there is no city that spreads its charms before their eyes sufficient to satisfy them. This world can afford no resting-place for their weary spirit; they are not at home in it. Their minds may be occupied with business: their affections may be drawn aside after the things of time and sense; they may set up idols in the chambers of imagery; they may even endeavour for a time wholly to occupy themselves, as other men do, with the things of this world; but yet with all, “they find no city to dwell in.” There is nothing stable, nothing satisfactory; no rest, no peace. “All that cometh is vanity and vexation of spirit.” Should they sometimes attempt to rear up a city, sorrow, trouble, temptation, and grief sweep it away as soon as it rises up before their eyes: like a house of cards, one touch dashes it all to pieces. For the pilgrims of Zion there is in this world no city to dwell in; no suitable foundation to rest upon, except the Lord, who will not own nor bless the earthly city with which the citizens of this world are so much occupied and so madly in love.

Do you not find this in your experience, that there is an aching void in your souls, which nothing but the presence and love of God can fill? Are you not often restless at home, restless abroad: restless alone, restless in company? Is there not a desolate vacancy in your soul that the world cannot satisfy? Is not all confusion without the Lord’s presence: all darkness without the Lord’s light; and a feeling of dissatisfaction generally prevalent, except the Lord lift upon you the light of his countenance? This is a sure and infallible mark of the life of God in the soul.

III.—But there are other marks given in the text of the spiritual wanderer, which further serve to fill up his character. “Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.” Hungry after what? The things

of time and sense? The delicacies and luxuries that the world sets before them? No: they are spoiled for such things. Their hunger is after heavenly food, after eternal and spiritual realities, after the presence of Jesus, the love of God shed abroad in their heart, the blood of atonement sprinkled on the conscience, and the consolations of the Spirit experimentally enjoyed.

But hunger is a painful sensation. It is not merely an appetite for food; but hunger is an appetite for food attended with pain. So spiritually. It is not merely a desire after Christ that constitutes spiritual hunger. "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing" Pr 13:4. But it is a desire attended with pain; nor merely a wish for spiritual food, but also with such painful sensations, that unless this appetite is satisfied, the soul must perish and die. Nothing short of this constitutes spiritual hunger. There are many who say, I have a desire.' If it be a spiritual desire, it will be granted. But spiritual desire is always attended with painful sensations, which many are completely ignorant of who profess to have desire. "The desire of the slothful killeth him" Pr 21:25. Why? Because he rests satisfied with a desire, and never takes the kingdom of heaven by violence.

The expression "thirsty," in the text, conveys a still larger meaning. Hunger is more supportable than thirst. Persons die sooner when left without water than without food. Intense thirst is perhaps the most painful of all bodily sensations that a human being can know. The Spirit has therefore made use of this figure in order to convey the intense desire of a living soul;—that he must have Christ, or perish—must feel his blood sprinkled upon the conscience, or die in his sins—must "know him, and the power of his resurrection," or pass into the gloomy chambers of eternal woe—must have the presence of Jesus sensibly realized, and the love of God shed abroad, or else of all men be the most miserable.

IV.—But there is a word added, which throws a still greater light upon the subject—the sure effect and consequence of hunger and thirst—"their souls fainted in them." Observe, it is not said

their 'bodies,' but "their souls:" which shews that the whole description is to be understood spiritually: and that the Holy Ghost is not here describing natural hunger and thirst, but that which is wholly and solely supernatural. It was their hunger, and not having that hunger gratified—it was their thirst, and not having that thirst appeased, which made their souls faint within them.

Some of God's people think that they have only to desire, and as soon as they desire, that the blessing must come; that they have only to thirst, and no sooner do they thirst, than God is sure to send them a supply. But it is not so. Hunger and thirst are first to do a certain work. What is this work? To make their souls faint within them; to starve them out of all spiritual strength, and reduce them to the famishing point. And be sure that you have never hungered and thirsted aright, if your soul has never fainted: fainted through the weakness produced by the denial of spiritual food—fainted by reason of the difficulties which you have had to pass through—fainted through the burdens laid on your shoulders—fainted through the rough and narrow path which you have had to traverse. How many of the Lord's people have been brought to this spot, that they must give up all for lost! How many have sunk into despondency, because the Lord will not attend to them when they call upon his name—that he will not speak to their souls, though they have so often begged him to hear and answer—hat he will not take the burdens off their shoulders under which they are sinking—that he will not give them those evidences, testimonies, and smiles which their hearts are panting after!

But the Lord has a special purpose in all this. It is his object that their souls should faint within them. It was so with Jonah. "When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple" Jon 2:7. We must be brought to the fainting point. It is almost, to use a natural figure, as with persons ill of a fever or inflammation; they must be bled till the body swoons away. And so with spiritual hungerings and thirstings; they must go on until the soul faints; this is the intention

of them. Until the soul faints, it does not want support: the everlasting arms are slighted—the bosom of Jesus is not leaned upon. “Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples,” cries the Bride. Why? Because she was swooning away: not indeed, in her case, of hunger, but of love. When we faint, we want cordials: but cordials are mere drams, intoxicating drinks, unless to fainting persons. “He giveth power to the faint: and to them that have no might he increaseth strength” Isa 40:29.

V.—But we pass on to consider that which is the fruit of their wanderings, hungerings, and faintings—”Then.” Observe how this is the point to which all tends. All their previous exercises are to bring them to this solemn then. “Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.” It was these things made them cry. Until they wandered in the wilderness—until they felt it to be a solitary way, until they found no city to dwell in until hungry and thirsty their soul fainted in them—there was no cry. There might have been prayer, a desire a feeble wish, and now and then a sigh or a groan. But this was not enough. Something more was wanted to move the bowels of divine clemency. The case was not sufficiently urgent; the disease had not struck deep enough into the vitals to demand the hand of the heavenly Physician. The feeble prayer; the mere expression of desire, the falling down upon the knees, and uttering a few words, which so many are satisfied with—this was not sufficient.

Something more was wanted to draw forth loving-kindness out of the bosom of the compassionate Head of the church. A cry was wanted,—a cry of distress, a cry of soul trouble, a cry forced out of their hearts by heavy burdens. A reality, an urgency, a taking no denial, a fervent importunity, a holy wrestling was needed. There is no real cry in the soul until it is brought into these circumstances. Perhaps some of you are wondering why the Lord has not had compassion upon you. You read this and that person’s experience; and you wonder why the Lord has not appeared for you as he has appeared for others. Have you ever looked deeply into the cham-

bers of your heart to trace out the cause? Is not God faithful and willing to fulfil his promises to the very letter? Perhaps you have not been brought to that spot where real blessings and testimonies are needed. You have been hovering around the blessing, instead of earnestly crying after it. You have been sometimes going to it, sometimes going from it: sometimes casting half-hearted looks, sometimes venting half-hearted desires: and then wondering and wondering why the blessing has not come. But you must go into a deeper spot, into heavy trials, into more painful and distressing feelings, into more stripping and cutting sensations before the cry that brings deliverance can come forth.

A cry implies necessity, urgent want, a perishing without an answer to the cry. It is the breath of a soul bent upon having eternal realities brought into the conscience, or perishing without them. “Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble.” It is trouble that makes a man cry. I am a living witness to that. Nay, nothing but trouble will make a man cry. And therefore the Lord is obliged to send trouble into our hearts to produce it. Past troubles will not make us cry, and past blessings will not make us cry; past experiences, however deep, however high, will not make us cry. They affect us no more than the showers that fell last year. We must have present things to call forth present cries: we must feel present trials to bring forth present prayers. That is the reason why the Lord is perpetually sending troubles upon his people; perpetually wounding and distressing them. Not that he loves to see them distressed; not that he delights to see them in misery and sorrowing; but he knows that it is for our good; as we read, “But he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness” Heb 12:10. And thus it is he sends troubles into our souls, and afflicts us in body and mind, for the purpose of producing an effect upon us, which cannot be produced in any other way.

Now, do look at your experience in this matter, you that fear God. What are your prayers, when you have no trouble, no burdens, no exercises, no perplexities? Are not your prayers half-hearted? Is

there then any wrestling with the Lord? Is there any breathing of your soul into his bosom? I know from experience that we need troubles and trials, exercises and temptations, stripe upon stripe, and blow upon blow, to bring a cry out of our soul. What a mercy it is when there is a cry! Some of our troubles and trials stun us; and then we cannot cry. Some shut us up well-nigh in despondency and despair; and then we cannot cry. We cannot cry. Some drive us to rebellion, and to think that the Lord is dealing hardly with us; and then we cannot cry. Some make us sullen and reckless: and then we cannot cry. We cannot raise up a cry ourselves. We may be in the deepest trouble: and yet be shut up in sullen obstinacy. But when the Lord sends a cry in the trouble, he is sure, in his own time and way, to send deliverance out of it. Observe the words, "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble." Not before, not after, but in it. When they were in the midst of it: when trouble was wrapped round their head, as the weeds were wrapped round the head of Jonah: when they were surrounded by it, and could see no way out of it; when, like a person in a mist, they saw no way of escape before or behind: when nothing but a dark cloud of trouble surrounded their souls, and they did not know that ever that cloud would be dispersed:—then it was that they cried.

But what makes them cry? It is this solemn feeling in their hearts, that they have no other refuge but God. The Lord brings all his people here—to have no other refuge but himself. Friends, counsellors, acquaintance—these may sympathize, but they cannot afford relief. There is no refuge, nor shelter, nor harbour, nor home into which they can fly, except the Lord. Thus troubles bring us to deal with God in a personal manner. They chase away that half-hearted religion of which we have so much; and they drive out that notional experience and dry profession that we are so often satisfied with. They chase them away as a strong north wind chases away the mists; and they bring a man to this solemn spot, that he must have communications from God to support him under, and bring him out of his trouble. If a man is not brought to

this point by his troubles, they have done him no good. They have been like the clouds that have passed over the desert, and communicated to it neither fertility nor fruitfulness; they have been like the rain that drops upon the pavement, and is evaporated by the sun, producing neither fruit nor flower. But the troubles that God sends into the hearts of his people are like the rain that falls upon the fertile soil, causing them to bring forth fruit, and every grace of the Spirit to deepen and fructify in their soul.

VI.—"And he delivered them out of their distresses." What deliverance can there be except there is some distress to be delivered from? If there were a general gaol-delivery proclaimed through this kingdom, would that interest you and me? It would interest the poor debtor, the chained felon, and the groaning captive in his dark cell: but it would not interest you or me, who can walk abroad in the light of day. So what deliverance can we receive except we be in some trouble, some perplexity, some exercise, something that bows down the heart, or distresses and burdens the mind? Manifestations, testimonies, revelations, and gracious discoveries—these are all nothing to a man except he be in circumstances to need them. What is Christ, with all his glorious offices, what is his blood, what his righteousness, what his love, what his sympathy, to a man settled upon his lees, and at ease in Zion? There is in him no felt necessity for these heavenly realities. There is no groan and cry after them. There is therefore no precious communication of them. It is but a delusion, a deceit of Satan, to think that we can have deliverance except we are in troubles and trials out of which God alone can set us free.

Now, when the soul cries to God in his troubles, he is sure to deliver it out of its distress. But we must not always expect very bright and conspicuous deliverances. I know that such alone can fully satisfy a troubled soul; but we must not think there is no deliverance when it falls short of a powerful manifestation. The Lord does not confine himself to one way; and perhaps the very way to which we are looking for deliverance, is the very way by which it will not

come. It is a deliverance when the Lord supports the soul under trouble. It may not come with great peace and joy; but when there is a solid support that the soul can rest upon, and it feels a measure of dependence and leaning on the everlasting arms— that is a deliverance. What is deliverance? It is a bringing out of captivity. If, then, we are in distress, and any measure of relief is given in that distress, that is a deliverance. If we are in a state of felt weakness, and must sink without support, if there be a measure of support given, that is a deliverance. If we are in a state of rebellion, and a measure of meekness and submission is given, that is a deliverance, because it is a deliverance out of our carnal, worldly state. If in trouble the Lord secretly assures the soul that these trials are working together for its good; gives it faith to believe the word of promise, though sense, nature, and reason fight against it: and enables it to rest upon divine faithfulness, in the very teeth and in the very face of nature, sense, and reason—that is a deliverance, because it is a deliverance from leaning on our own strength, and trusting to our own wisdom.

When the Lord gives us a testimony that we are his, by raising up love in our heart, brightening our evidences, calling to our mind his past dealings with us, secretly assuring us that we are his children, and enabling us to lean upon him as upon a kind Parent—that is a deliverance, though it may not be accompanied with overflowing joy or superabounding consolation. To be delivered from our own spirit, our own temper, our own righteousness, our own violence, our own justification, from leaning upon self in any shape or form, is a deliverance. If there be a going out of self to the Lord, a putting away of fleshly weapons and a taking up of the spiritual weapons of faith and prayer, a leaning wholly and solely upon the bosom of a kind Jesus—that is a deliverance.

I do not say that these minor deliverances are to be compared with precious revelations, sweet manifestations, sheddings abroad of heavenly love, and the comforting testimonies of the Spirit of adoption. But do not consider that there is no deliverance, no re-

ception of strength, support, or consolation, till the soul feels these overflowing manifestations. I mention this, because some of the Lord's people are so looking after great things, that they put away little; and often forget what the Lord is putting the trial upon them for. His object in bringing them into trial may be not to raise, but to lower; not to give them sweet testimonies of his love, but to discover to them more and more of the depth of their corruptions; not to clothe them with salvation, but to clothe them with humility; not to reveal in them the blessed manifestations of love and blood, but to stamp upon them more of the mind and image of Jesus. The object of trouble, in the eyes of the Lord, is, to meek the soul, to purge the vessel from pride and presumption, and prepare it for the reception of a broken-hearted Immanuel. The Lord's testimonies and manifestations are not to exalt us; but they would exalt us if they were poured into a heart that had not been purged and emptied. The Lord's manifestations are to humble, melt, and soften down; to bring about union and communion with a broken-hearted Jesus. We need, then, perpetual trials, troubles, and exercises to purge the vessel of its baneful ingredients, and prepare it to receive the consolations that the Lord gives to those that call upon his name.

VII.—"And he led them forth by the right way that they might go to a city of habitation." Did not we read that "they wandered:" and that their wanderings were in a "wilderness," where there were no tracked paths? And did we not read that it was "a solitary way"? How, then, could it be "a fight way," where there was no way at all; where there was but a succession of ups and downs; and where the path of each traveller was so peculiar, that he scarce ever saw the footstep of a pilgrim before him? Yet the Spirit of God says, that it was "right way." Reason, sense, and nature, hold your peace. Nature never can understand how a way of trouble, of temptation, of exercise, of sorrow, of perplexity can be the right way. But God never meant nature, sense, and reason to understand it.

The Lord gives faith to his dear people, that his dealings may be

believed in, not reasoned upon; and he raises up this precious gift of the Spirit in their soul, not that they may confer with nature, sense, and reason, but that they may believe His own testimony in their heart and conscience. For this reason God leads his people by such paths as are directly contrary to nature, sense, and reason, in order to baffle them; for these loquacious talkers in a man's bosom are ever ready to thrust forward their arguments; and our foolish hearts are continually lending their ears to their subtle discourses. The wise God, therefore, leads his children in such paths that nature, sense, and reason are baffled, and obliged to hold their peace. If I may use the expression, they are outrun by God's dealings. They may come in, panting and out of breath, to understand them; but God will not explain his ways to such flip-pant rebels. There is one of his own blessed graces in the soul, one of his own heavenly gifts,—faith, that prudent handmaid, who has eyes to see, ears to hear, and feet to walk step by step with the Spirit's teaching.

By faith, then, only can we understand how it is "a right way." And when faith is in exercise, then it is known to be "a right way." Your losses, your crosses, your trials in providence, your afflictions of body, your perplexities of mind, your sorrows of heart,—all are then to you "a right way." 'Once,' say you, 'they were a labyrinth: I could not find my way through them: they were an enigma, which I could not unravel. But now I see that those things, which so puzzled, perplexed, and tried me, led to my greatest blessings. I could not,' say you, 'see the hand of the Lord at that time: but how plainly do I see it now? In that sickness, that painful dispensation, that agony of soul, that trouble of mind, that distressing path, how plainly do I see now that the Lord's hand was leading me!' Well, will it not be so for the future? Does God intend you should see it now? What saith the scripture? "We walk by faith, not by sight." But if you or I could see the issue of our troubles and trials: if we could believe that every temptation we were passing through was intended by God for our special good, it would take off half the

burden. But that would take off half its object. When God sends troubles and trials, he means them to be burdens. But if we could see the Lord's hand laying them on, half the burden would be taken off; and we should need fresh burdens to be added in order to complete the tale, and create that effect which the Lord means to produce.

When the Lord sends a rod, he intends that rod to cut deep into our flesh; when he lays on a burden, he means it to weigh us down; and when he lays on a trial, he means it to pain us to the quick. Trials not severe, temptations not harassing, exercises not perplexing—why, they are feathers, not troubles. It is like a person tying two straws together, and calling it a cross; or laying a pillow upon his shoulders, and saying, 'What a burden I am carrying!' It is because they are heavy, cutting, and perplexing that they are profitable. The weight is the stamp that gives them value; take away that stamp, and they are useless.

Yet, after all, it is "a right way." Does not scripture most emphatically declare, that "we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom"? If we walk then through much tribulation, it is "a right way." If you did not know your way to a place, and a person were to direct you, and say, It is a very rough path, my friend; there are high mountains and deep valleys, huge crags and deep precipices: the road is almost impassable; but it is the only road to the place which you have started for.' Then, if you were to see a broad road, almost as easy as a turnpike-road, would you not start back, and say, Surely I must have made a mistake: this is not the road pointed out? So spiritually. If our path is one of ease: if we are never burdened or distressed, must we not have gone out of the way?

It was a strait and narrow path, a road of tribulation, that the Son of God trod to the land of glory: but if ours be a smooth and easy path, must not this be the conclusion of every heart honest in God's fear, 'Surely we must be out of the road altogether?'

Strange creatures! that when out of the path we want to be in it: and when in the path we want to be out of it!

Uneasy when I feel my load,
 Uneasy when I feel it not!

Shrinking from burdens, yet condemned for not having them; trembling at trials, yet fearing because they do not come; wanting to walk in a smooth path, and yet when it comes, exercised because it is so smooth! And yet all “the right way.”

“He led them forth.” Forth out of the world—forth out of sin—forth out of a profession—forth out a name to live—forth out of everything hateful in his holy and pure eyes.

“To go to a city of habitation.” They had no city to dwell in here below; but they were journeying to a city of habitation above, whose walls and bulwarks are salvation, and whose gates are praise; where there are eternal realities to be enjoyed by the soul; where there is something stable and eternal; something to satisfy all the wants of a capacious and immortal spirit, and give it that rest which it never could find while wandering here below. If we have a city here, we want no city above; and if we have a city above, we want no city here.

This then must be our state and case; either to be pilgrims, journeying onwards, through troubles, to things above, or taking up our abode below; seeking heaven here, or heaven hereafter; resting upon the world, or resting upon the Lord; panting after the things of time, or panting after the things of eternity: satisfied in self, or satisfied only in Christ. One of the two must be our state and case. The Lord decide it clearly in the hearts of his people that they are on his side: and give us to know and feel that our very restlessness and inability to find food and shelter in the things of time and sense, are leading us more earnestly and believingly to seek after the things that have reality in them: that finding no city to dwell in here below, we may press forward to be manifestly enjoying testimonies of being citizens of that city which is above. “which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God!”

85 The Day Spring From On High

Preached on Sunday Morning, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street,
 London

July 13, 1845,

“Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us; to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Luke 1:78, 79

Unbelief is a damning sin where it reigns; but not a damning sin where it exists, and is opposed. In other words, it is the dominion, not the existence of unbelief in the heart, that excludes from the kingdom of heaven. The reprobate are an instance of the former; for they live and die under the power of unbelief; as the Lord said, “If ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). “He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). And the quickened elect are an instance of the latter.

We can scarcely find recorded two more striking instances of the existence of unbelief in the hearts of God’s people than that of Thomas, and of Zacharias. Yet the very unbelief of Thomas, in whose heart the spirit of infidelity worked so powerfully that he would not believe that the Lord had risen from the dead except he should “see in his hands the print of the nails, and put his finger into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into his side,” was doubtless overruled not only for the good of the church in all time, but for the good also of the unbelieving disciple, when his infidelity was effectually overcome by the power of the Lord communicating faith to his soul through the words, “Be not faithless, but believing.” His belief became all the stronger for having been so powerfully assailed.

And so, doubtless, it wag with Zacharias, who, as the penalty of his unbelief, was shut up for nine months in mute silence. For when the Lord loosed his tongue, “he was filled,” we read, “with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied” in that blessed hymn of praise which

we have recorded at the end of the first chapter of Luke's Gospel.

The question, then, is not whether we have unbelief in our heart, but whether this unbelief is resisted. If we have nothing there but unbelief, woe be to us! But if this indwelling unbelief is by a principle of grace opposed, resisted, and struggled against, the conflict will end eventually in victory.

We may notice three things in the text;

I.—A declaration of a most blessed fact—"The day-spring from on high hath visited us."

II.—The source and origin of that blessed fact—"Through the tender mercy of our God."

III.—Its divine fruits and consequences—"To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace."

I.—In looking at these three points connected with, and springing out of the text, I shall rather invert their order; and consider, first, the original spring and source of the blessings mentioned in the text. This is set forth in the words, "Through the tender mercy of our God." Mercy is the source and fountain of all our spiritual blessings. And O, how sweet, suitable, and precious is that divine attribute, mercy, to those who know and feel themselves sinners! There is no attribute, no perfection in the Godhead so suitable, so acceptable to those who are stung with guilt, as, that the Lord is "merciful and gracious" (Ex. 34:6); and that "there is forgiveness with Him that he may be feared." But we must ever bear in mind, that we can enter spiritually and experimentally into this divine attribute only in proportion to our felt need of it.

"Mercy is welcome news indeed To those who guilty stand;" but to no others. Before, therefore, we can see the depth, feel the sweetness, and drink into the preciousness of mercy, we must know by heart-felt experience that we are sinners before a holy and just God. And the deeper we are sunk into a knowledge of our state as sinners before God, the more are we in a situation to prize that blessed attribute, mercy.

But what is mercy? It embraces several particulars.

1.—It embraces a feeling of pity and compassion. But pity and compassion do not fill up the whole idea of mercy; for we read, that God's "tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9). Thus the Lord, in sparing Nineveh, "remembered even the cattle" (Jon. 4:11). And when he caused the waters of the deluge to assuage it was because he "remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark" (Gen. 8:1). There is in the bosom of their Creator mercy and pity even for the brute creation. As full of mercy. He also "relieveth the fatherless and widow" (Ps. 146:9); and "loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment" (Deut. 10:18).

2. We must, therefore, add to the idea of pity and compassion, another mark, that of pardon, in order to show what mercy is as extended to the family of God. For the Lord's people are sinners; and as such, being transgressors of God's holy law, need pardon and forgiveness. This, then, is the Lord's own description of himself; "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex. 34:6, 7).

3. But in order to complete the full description of mercy, we must ever view it as flowing through the blood and obedience of Immanuel. Mercy was not, like creation a mere display of an attribute of Jehovah. If I may use the expression, it cost the Godhead a price: "Ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20). It was not in the Father the mere exercise of compassion; it cost him the gift of his only-begotten Son. It cost the Son his own agonizing sufferings and death. It cost the Holy Ghost this price: that he should come and take up his abode in the heart of sinners, and should "bear with their manners in the wilderness." Thus mercy is not simply pity and compassion, nor is it the mere pardon of sin; but as flowing through the channel of Immanuel's precious obedience, it cost the Three-one God an infinite, unspeakable price.

But there is an expression in the text that heightens, and casts

a sweet light upon this mercy. It is there called tender mercy; literally, as it is in the margin, “bowels of mercy.” Not mere mercy; hut “tender mercy.” Not cold and naked mercy; but mercy flowing forth out of the bowels of divine compassion. Now nothing but “tender mercy” could ever look down with compassion upon the sons of men, or pluck out of the depths of the fall such ruined wretches.

How little do we know of what we really are in the sight of a holy God! We so swim in the element of sin; it is so our natural atmosphere, that we have no conception what it is in the eyes of a pure Jehovah, who live above this atmosphere. I will endeavour to convey my meaning by an illustration. We might be called to go out of the pure bright air into the dissecting room of a hospital, or to visit the cell of a prison, or, what is perhaps far worse, to dive into some of the haunts of poverty and misery that abound in this metropolis. What a sensation of disgust and recoil should we feel at witnessing the filth and stench! But the inhabitants feel it not; the pestilential atmosphere which they inhale in their cellars and garrets is not perceived by them; custom has rendered them insensible to it. It is the contrast with the pure air that makes us so susceptible of the change. So, the holy Three-One God dwells in an atmosphere of an infinite and eternal purity, which no finite being can comprehend; for the scripture says, “He dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto” (1 Tim. 6:16). But we sunken wretches, the loathsome spawn of a fallen parent, are so cradled and bred in an atmosphere of impurity; sin is so our element, which we draw in with every breath, and we are so habituated to it, that we by nature are as insensible of the pestilential atmosphere in which we dwell, as the fever patient of the smell of his close apartment. Thus, we cannot fully enter into the breadth, the length, the depth, and height of the tender mercy of God because we cannot fully enter into the depth of our fall. The deep precipice, the awful gulph, the bottomless abyss of man’s corruption can never be fathomed by the line of the creature. But just

in proportion as the Spirit of God affords us some dim and feeble views of divine purity; and contrasts that divine purity with the filth and impurity of our debased nature, do we begin to learn a little of what that mercy is which stooped so low as to under-bottom the depth of the fall, and place the everlasting arms beneath our polluted souls to extricate them from eternal perdition.

But to view mercy in its real character, we must go to Calvary. It is not sufficient to contrast the purity of God with the impurity of man. That indeed affords us some view of what mercy must be to reach the depths of the fall—a side-face of that precious attribute. But to see its full face shining upon the redeemed, we must go by faith, under the secret teachings and leadings of the Holy Ghost, to see Immanuel, “God with us,” grovelling in Gethsemane’s garden. We must view him naked upon the cross, groaning, bleeding, agonizing, dying. We must view Godhead and manhood united together in the Person of a suffering Jesus; and the power of the Godhead bearing up the suffering manhood. We must view that wondrous spectacle of love and blood, and feel our eyes flowing down in streams of sorrow, humility, and contrition at the sight, in order to enter a little into the depths of the “tender mercy” of God. Nothing but this can really break the sinner’s heart. Law and terrors do but harden, All the while they work alone; But a sense of blood-bought pardon Soon dissolves a heart of stone.

Law terrors, death and judgment, infinite purity, and eternal vengeance, will not soften or break a sinner’s heart. But if he is led to view a suffering Immanuel, and a sweet testimony is raised up in his conscience that those sufferings were for him—this, and this only will break his heart all to pieces. Thus, only by bringing a sweet sense of love and blood into his heart does the Blessed Spirit show a sinner some of the depths of the tender mercy of God.

II.—But we pass on to consider that solemn declaration, that blessed fact contained in the words—“Whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us.” There is a connection, you will observe, betwixt the “tender mercy of God,” and the visiting of “the

day-spring from on high.” The “tender mercy of God” is the fountain, and the “visiting of the day-spring from on high” is the stream.

Let us then endeavour, if God enable us, to unfold the mind of the Spirit in the words.

First. What is meant by the expression “day-spring?”

By “day-spring” is meant the day dawn, the herald of the rising sun, the change from darkness to light, the first approach of morn; in one word, the spring of the day.

But what is this “day-spring” spiritually? It is the intimation of the rising of the Son of righteousness. It is not the same thing as the Sun of righteousness; but it is the herald of his approach; the beams which the rising sun casts upon the benighted world, announcing the coming of Jesus, “the King in his beauty.” This expression was singularly applicable in the mouth of Zacharias. The Lord of life and glory had not then appeared; he was still in the womb of the Virgin Mary. But his forerunner, John, had appeared as the precursor, the herald of his approach, and was sent to announce that the Son of righteousness was about to arise. “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light” (John 1:6-8). All nations at that time lay in darkness, “Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people” (Isa. 60:2). But when the Lord of life and glory was about to appear upon earth, when he had already taken the body which was prepared for him; (Heb. 10:5), the very flesh and blood of the children (Heb. 2:14), which he was to offer as a propitiation for sin, “the day-spring from on high” had begun to dawn. God’s mercy, in the face of his dear Son, was just visiting the benighted world.

But there is another, an experimental meaning, connected with the words. “The day-spring from on high” is not to be confined to the approach of the Son of God in the flesh; but it may be extended to signify the appearance of the Son of God in the heart. I cannot be benefited by the appearing of Jesus in the flesh eighteen

hundred years ago, unless he come and dwell in my soul. “The day-spring from on high” which visited the benighted Jewish church will not profit us, except that same day-spring visits our benighted heart. “The day-spring from on high” is the manifestation of God’s mercy in the face of the Saviour. And when this “day-spring from on high” visits the soul, it is the first intimation, the dawning rays of the Sun of righteousness in the heart.

Now, “the day spring from on high” visits the soul with the very first divine intimation dropped into the conscience respecting the Person, work, love, and blood of the Son of God. Until this day-dawn beams upon the soul, it is for the most part ignorant of the way by which a sinner is to be saved. It has tried perhaps works of righteousness; and has toiled and striven to produce such holiness as God may be pleased with. But what has been the success of these endeavours? Have they issued in peace to the soul? Have they not rather plunged it more deeply into guilt and shame? Have they not proved the spider’s web, the hypocrite’s hope, a garment too short, and a bed too narrow? And yet this very striving and toiling to work out a righteousness has wrought a profitable effect: for being fully convinced by painful experience that it has none of its own, the soul is prepared to receive with faith the righteousness of the Son of God.

But the first “day-spring from on high” which usually visits the soul is from a view by precious faith of the glorious Person of Immanuel. Until we see by the eye of faith the glorious Person of “Immanuel, God with us,” there is no day-dawn in the heart. Now we may see the doctrine of Christ’s Person in our judgment long before we see it in our soul. There is a peculiar teaching of the Spirit in making the Person of Christ inwardly known. There is a holding up of his beauty and loveliness to the eye of the spiritual understanding; a removal of the veil of ignorance and unbelief which by nature covers the heart; a raising up of a living faith to go out of itself unto Him; a heavenly affection breathed into the soul whereby it clasps Jesus in the arms of holy embrace, and says, “whom have

I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.” This will be attended with melting of soul at the solemn sight, with admiration of his beauty, with adoration of his glorious Person—with the confiding of body, soul, and spirit into his keeping; with a solemn committal of all we are and have into his gracious hands, as able to keep that which we have committed unto him against that day—the day of his appearing. When the heart is thus opened, the affections thus drawn forth, the spirit thus softened, and the whole soul melted at a believing sight of the glorious Person of the Son of God, “the day-spring from on high” has visited the sinner.

But, in looking at the glorious Person of the Son of God, we catch a faith’s view of his atoning blood, and see it to be of infinite dignity. We see its unspeakable preciousness,—that it is the blood of the Son of God—that it is the holy blood, precious blood, sin pardoning, conscience-cleansing blood—that it is the only sacrifice offered to, and accepted by God the Father—that it is the only propitiation for sin—that there is no other way of salvation, and no pardon for sin, or true peace of conscience, but that which flows from its personal application. This leads the soul to look to, hang upon, trust, and confide in it, and to seek more and more after a spiritual manifestation and experimental springing of it. We thus discard our own righteousness, trample upon our doings, go out of self, and cast a longing, languishing eye towards that blood which “cleanseth from all sin.”

So also with respect to the glorious righteousness of Immanuel. When we can see by the eye of faith that it is “the righteousness of God,” because the righteousness of Immanuel, God with us; when we can realize how perfectly and completely Jesus has fulfilled the law, what a spotless obedience he has rendered to it, that he has magnified it and made it honorable, fulfilled all its holy requisitions and spiritual demands;—when we can catch a glimpse of this righteousness as “unto and upon all them that believe” and lay hold of it as all our justification in the eye of a holy God—when

this is seen and felt, the “day-spring from on high” hath visited us.

Every manifestation of mercy, every testimony from God, every mark and sign in our favour, every evidence that our spot is the spot of God’s children, every promise applied with power, every holy affection, every tender sensation, every filial dependence upon God’s faithfulness, every breathing out of the heart at the footstool of mercy, either is, or is connected with, the visiting of this “day-spring from on high.” Every ray of spiritual light, every sensation of divine life, every feeling of humility, every emotion of godly sorrow; whatever there is in the soul heavenly, holy and God-like, all arise from “the day-spring from on high” that hath visited us.

But what a sweetness there is in the expression, “visited us!” What is conveyed by it? One idea contained in it is, that it is the act of a friend. If I have a friend, and I visit him, my visit is a mark of my friendship and affection. Thus the word implies that there is a tenderness and affection in “the day-spring”—that it comes to us in a friendly manner, that it is not the wrath of God to destroy, but the mercy of God to save.

But another idea connected with the word “visit,” is that of unexpectedness. Is it not so sometimes naturally? We have an unexpected, visit. We may have been looking for our friend to call; but the time passes away, and no well-known rap is heard at our door. We wonder why our friend delays his coming so long. But perhaps, when we are least expecting it, the form of our friend appears. So spiritually. We may be longing and languishing, hoping, and expecting the visit of “the day-spring from on high;” but it does not appear; the Lord delayeth his coming; there is no intimation of his appearing, no putting in of his hand by the hole of the door, no looking in through the lattice, no glimpse nor glance of his lovely countenance. But perhaps, when least expected, and least anticipated; when the mind is so deeply sunk as scarcely to dare to hope, so shut up in unbelief as hardly able to vent forth a sigh, “the day-spring from on high” will visit the soul, and be all the more pre-

cious for coming so suddenly and unexpectedly.

III.—But this “day-spring from on high” visits the soul to produce certain effects. Two of them are specified in the text. “To give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death;” that is one: “to guide our feet in the way of peace;” that is the other.

1. “To give light to them, that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death.” Is this what “the day-spring from on high” visiting us is to do? Must we not then know something of the experience here described to be blest with the visit? Must we not feelingly know what it is to “sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death,” that we may receive those heavenly visitations which preserve our spirit? Let us see if we know anything about the matter. Never talk of God’s visits to your soul, or of the precious manifestations of the Son of God, if you have never known what it is to “sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death.” For these visits are only designed for such. They are the only characters that a precious Lord in mercy visits. And if we have never been there, all our hope is delusion, all our profession but a name.

But let us look at the words a little more closely. “To such as sit in darkness.” What is the darkness here spoken of? Is it merely what I may call moral darkness? natural darkness? No; it is not the darkness of unregeneracy; it is not the darkness of sin and profanity; nor is it the darkness of a mere empty profession. These things are indeed darkness, gross darkness; but those who are thus blinded by the god of this world never sit experimentally in darkness. They are like the Jews of old, who said, “We see; therefore their sin remaineth.” ‘We dark? we ignorant? we scorn the idea.’ Such is the language of empty profession. But the Lord’s own quickened, tender-hearted family often painfully know what it is to sit in darkness.

But whence does this darkness arise? Strange to say, it arises from light. Darkness as darkness is never seen darkness as darkness is never felt. Light is needed to see darkness; life is required

to feel darkness. There are children in Hungary born and bred at the bottom of a mine. Do these children ever know what darkness is, like one who comes down there out of the broad light of day? Were they not told there was a sun above—did not some tidings of the light of day reach their ears, they might live and die ignorant that there was a sun in the heavens. So spiritually. Man, born and bred in the depths of nature’s mine, does not know that he is dark; but when divine light enters into his soul, that discovers to him his darkness; for it is the light which makes manifest all things; as the Apostle says, “But all things that are reprov’d are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make manifest by the light” (Eph. 5:13). Thus, it is the light of God’s teaching in a man’s conscience that makes him know his darkness; and divine life in his soul makes it felt.

But what does darkness imply? The absence of every thing that brings light and peace into the heart. To have all our evidences beclouded; not to be able to see our signs; unable to trace out the way by which the Lord has led us; unable to realize the existence of the grace of God in our heart; unable to feel the actings of living faith upon the Son of God; unable to cast the anchor of hope within the veil; not to enjoy the inshinings of his gracious presence in the manifestations of his goodness and love—this is darkness. And O, how most, how the vast majority of the people of God thus walk in darkness, and have no light! I may venture to say, that ninety of God’s people out of a hundred walk more or less in darkness; and I may venture to say, that the feeling sensations of life, light and peace, compared to deadness and darkness, are nearly in a similar proportion.

But there is one word in the text which conveys to my mind much, that is, “sitting in darkness.” They are not represented as standing; that might imply a mere momentary transition from light to darkness. They are not represented as running; that might imply they would soon get out of the darkness. They are not represented as lying down; that might lead to suppose they were satisfied with

their darkness. But they are represented as sitting in darkness. Then surely they are not dead. Nor do they sit at ease and at rest; but are in that posture, because they can neither move backward or forward, nor turn either to the right hand or to the left.

In ancient medals that were struck when Jerusalem was led captive by the Romans, she is represented as sitting on the ground. The same thing is intimated in Ps. 137:1, 2. "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof."

Sitting was with the ancients the posture of mourning. Job "sat down among the ashes;" (Job 2:8); and his friends "sat down with him upon the ground." (Job 2:13) "Her Gates," says Isaiah (Isaiah 3:26), "shall lament and mourn; and she, being desolate, shall sit on the ground."

Sitting implies also a continuance in the state; a waiting, a watching, a desiring, a looking out for the light to come.

But again. There is another word added, which throws light upon the character of those who are visited from time to time with "the day-spring from on high." They sit not only in darkness, but in the shadow of death. How expressive this word is—"the shadow of death!" There are several ideas, in my mind, connected with the word.

We will look, first, at the idea contained in the expression "death." Death with respect to the family of God wears two aspects. There is death experimental in their hearts, that is, deadness in their frames; and there is death temporal—the separation of soul from the body.

Each of these kinds of death casts at times a gloomy shadow over the souls of God's people. The word is very expressive. They are not sitting in death: were they sitting there, they would be dead altogether; but they are sitting in the shadow of death. Observe, death has lost its reality to them; it now can only cast a shadow, often a gloomy shadow, over their souls; but there is no substance. The quickening of the Spirit of God in them has

destroyed the substance of death spiritually; and the death and resurrection of Jesus has destroyed the substance of death naturally. Yet, though the gloomy monster, deadness of soul, and that ghastly king of terrors, the death of the body, have been disarmed and destroyed by "Immanuel, God with us;" yet each of them casts at times a gloomy, darkling shadow over the souls of those that fear God. Is not your soul, poor child of God, exercised from time to time with this inward death? Deadness in prayer, deadness in reading the word, deadness in hearing the truth, deadness in desires after the Lord, deadness to every thing holy, spiritual, heavenly, and divine? Do you not feel a torpidity, a numbness, a carnality, a worldliness, that seem at times to freeze up every desire of your soul? I do. O how this cold, clammy monster death seems to wrap its benumbing arms around a man's soul! I have read of a voyager, who, whilst looking for shells on a desert rock, was suddenly caught in the arms of a huge polypus, a sea monster. The sickening sensation produced by this cold and clammy monster clasping him with his huge suckers, and drawing him to his jaws to devour him, he describes as being unutterable, and he was only rescued by the captain's coming to his aid with a knife. I may compare, perhaps, our frequent deadness of soul clasping its arms around every desire of our heart, to the clasping of this poor man in the clammy arms of the sea monster. How it benumbs and paralyzes every breathing of our soul Godward! How all prayer, all panting desire, all languishing affection, all spirituality and heavenly-mindedness, all solid worship, all filial confidence, all the fruits and graces of the Spirit are blighted and withered by the deathliness that we so continually feel! Yet it is but a shadow. Write not bitter things against yourself, poor tempted, exercised child of God, because you feel such deathliness and coldness from time to time in your heart. It will not destroy you; nay, it is life in your soul that makes it felt; and the more the life of God has been felt in your conscience, the more painfully the deathliness of your carnal mind is experienced. Do you expect that your carnal mind will ever be lively in the things of

God? What is it but a lump of death, a huge mass of ungodliness, which, like some Behemoth, upheaves its broad flanks continually in the heart? Yet the people of God are very often troubled in their minds by the gloomy shadow that this death casts over their souls. But this trouble is a mark of life. If I were dead, could I feel it! The worst symptom of the dead in sin is, that they do not feel it. But, whilst we feel it, whilst we sigh on account of it, whilst we hate it and hate ourselves on account of it—though it may pain and grieve, it never can destroy. It has lost its substance, though it casts its gloomy shadow.

But there is another death, which though it has lost its substance, casts a gloomy shadow also over many a Godfearing heart; that is, death naturally, the severing of body from soul. In seasons of darkness, when our hopes sink to a low ebb; when faith is almost expiring, and love has altogether drooped its head; when the Lord hides himself, and we cannot feel a sweet testimony of interest in his love and blood—what a gloomy shadow does death then cast over the soul! It is feared, it is dreaded; it becomes a king of terrors. And though a believer may have a sense of interest in the love and blood of the Son of God, yet he knows not how it may be with him in that solemn hour.

But do not we sometimes want dying faith before dying moments? And is it the Lord's way to give us a stock of faith in hand? Perhaps we look at death; and our souls shrink within us. We think of the anguish of our poor dying body; we view the sufferings of a sick bed; we reflect on a dear wife and family, of their providential circumstances, and a thousand things to distress and harass the mind; and we have no faith at the time to believe that God will so overrule and appear in these things, as in these miseries to manifest his mercies. But how is this? Why, we want to have dying comforts before we are brought into dying circumstances; and we want the Lord to favour us with a stock of comfort in hand, that we may live upon it before the time of trial. But it cannot be so. There would be no trial of faith, if it were so. When the souls of

God's people come into that dark valley, his rod and staff will comfort them; "and their strength," according to the promise, "will be equal to their day."

Now, it is for those who "sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death," that "the day-spring from on high" has come. They are the only persons who need it. How strange, that those who need it not, are the first to claim it; and that those who need it, are the last to believe it for themselves! What a strange mystery is the professing world!—that those for whom all the blessings are designed, whom God loves with an everlasting love, and designs to bring to glory, should be usually the last persona who can lay hold of God's mercy; and that those who have but a name to live while dead, a form of godliness whilst they deny the power, should be the first rashly and daringly to rush in and claim with sacrilegious hands those blessings which belong only to God's poor tempted people! Well might John, Revelation 17:6 when he saw the mystery of the scarlet woman, wonder with great admiration—well might he marvel, to see the true church driven into the wilderness, and the professing church in scarlet raiment, sitting as a queen; and saying, she should "see no sorrow:" But only as we are brought to "sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death," does "the day-spring from on high" visit us. And O, how sweet, precious, and suitable, is every dawning of hope, every day-star of mercy, every appearance of the Son of righteousness, to those who "sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death!" None others will have it; none others will prize it. Would we then drink of the sweetness contained in it, we must walk in that dark and dreary path. Would we see with our eyes, hear with our ears, touch with our hands, and taste in our souls the precious consolations of the Son of God, we must be brought to walk in that path of darkness, dreariness, and the shadow of death to which His consolations alone are suited.

2. But there is another word added, another result of the visiting of "the day-spring from on high"—"to guide our feet into the way of peace." The way of peace! Does not that comprehend all? Do

those that fear God want anything but peace? What do we want? The way of war, of enmity, of rebellion, of restlessness? No. We want the way of peace.

But what is implied in the expression? Peace implies two things. It implies, first, reconciliation from a state of enmity; and secondly, the felt enjoyment of this reconciliation in the heart. By nature we are at war with God. Our affections are entirely alienated from him. Enmity is the very element, the very breath of our carnal mind. We wander away from him, and far from the way of peace. Now when the Lord first begins to open up to us what we are, and what He is, and manifests the darkness of our minds, the enmity of our hearts, and the total alienation of our affections from him, he usually kindles in our heart also a desire to be at peace with him. We want to have peace with God; for we know that if we live and die his enemies, eternal perdition must be our portion. And I do believe from what I have felt in the matter, that one of the most cutting sensations of a child of God is, to fear that he is the enemy of God. Oh, where can he hide his guilty head, if he be God's enemy? O what a painful sensation, to think that the hand of God is against him! If so, the very brand of Cain seems set upon him. But when the Lord draws him to his throne, opens his heart, and gives him power to pour forth his soul in earnest breathings, how he longs to have reconciliation proclaimed, and pardon and peace sweetly enjoyed! Now, this reconciliation between an offended God and offended man could never be brought about but by the mediation of the only-begotten Son of God. The Son of God came forth from the bosom of the Father, where he had lain from all eternity, to reconcile the elect unto God, to lay down his life for them, that he might, by putting away their sins, bring them near to God.

But there is peace to be enjoyed in the soul, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding;" the dying legacy of a dying Lord, "Peace I leave with you; my peace give I unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27). A sense of reconciliation, a testimony of favour, a basking in the smiles of a covenant God; a

holy calm, a blessed tranquillity, experienced through the application of atoning blood and dying love—is not this the way of peace? But Jesus is the way; for he says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Do we wish to walk in the way of peace? We must walk in Jesus; for there is no other way. "He is our peace who hath made both one." "This man shall be the peace when the Assyrian comes into the land." He is the peace-maker and the peace-speaker. But by nature we cannot find the way of peace. It is said expressly, "The way of peace they have not known" (Rom. 3:17). Ignorant, alienated, dark, blind, we cannot, untaught by the Spirit, place our feet in the way of peace. But "the day-spring from on high hath visited us;" the holy, harmless Lamb of God, has died, and offered a propitiation for sin, has fulfilled the law, has brought in everlasting righteousness, has satisfied infinite justice, has reconciled the before apparently jarring attributes of God, and made way for peace and pardon to flow into the hearts of those that fear his name.

But we want guiding in the way. And when "the day-spring from on high" visits the soul, it guides the feet into the way. There is something very sweet in the expression. It does not drive, does not force, but opens a door, and enables the soul to enter in; discovers the way, and gives the soul faith to walk in it. Thus it guides the feet of the poor desolate, disconsolate pilgrim by heavenly teachings and divine leadings into the way of peace. It guides him into the knowledge of Jesus, into faith in his blood, into love to his name.

And where there is peace with God, there will be peace with one another. Where the love of God reigns in churches, there will be peace in churches. Where the love of God rules in Christians, there will be peace between Christians. It is our evil heart, our proud spirit, our rebellious nature, the workings of our carnal mind, that bring jealousies, jarrings, and strife. God the Spirit is not the author of confusion; and he only can guide our feet into the way of peace.

And all this flows out of the tender mercy of a covenant God;

Jehovah the Father, Jehovah the son, and Jehovah the Spirit, the Three-one God of Israel. Then it excludes all our good doings, nay more, it excludes all our misdoings. It opens a path for the wretched and worthless, for the poor and needy. It opens a way of salvation for the lost, pardon for the guilty, and peace for the weary. Can we expect it to flow into our souls through any other way? What was it that moved the divine Father to send his own Son into the world? Was it not the free mercy of God flowing forth from his bosom to his family? Then, what merit, what claim can his family ever have? Their misery is their claim. Their worthlessness, their sunken state, the depth of their fall—these things call forth God’s compassion. It is not what I have done for the glory of God; not what I am doing or trying to do; not my wisdom, my strength, my resolutions, my piety, my holiness. No; my misery, my helplessness, my worthlessness, my deeply sunken state, my fallen condition; which I feel only because of interest in the blood and love to the Lamb—this it is that makes me need God’s mercy; and this it is that qualifies me to go to God through Jesus to receive mercy; for “he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him.” Are you sifting in darkness, and the shadow of death—far from the way of peace, troubled, perplexed, exercised, confused? You are the very characters for whom Jesus came. Are not unutterable mercies locked up in the bosom of God for you? What is to exclude you? Your sins? No; God has pardoned them. Your worthlessness? No; there is a robe of righteousness prepared for you. Your demerits? No; the merits of Jesus are upon your side. Your unholiness? No; He of God is made to your sanctification. Your ignorance? No; He of God is made to your wisdom. These are no barriers. I will tell you what is a barrier self-righteousness, self-esteem, self-exaltation, pride, hypocrisy, presumption; a name to live, a form of godliness, being settled upon your lees, and at ease In Zion—these are barriers. But helplessness, hopelessness, worthlessness, misery—these are not barriers; they are qualifications; they show, when felt, that your

name is in the book of life, that the Lord of life and glory appeared in this world for; and sooner or later, you will have the sweet enjoyment of it in your heart; and then be enabled to adore him for his grace, and bless his name for glorifying his love and mercy in your free and full salvation.

86 The Hope of the Cast-down Soul

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

July 17, 1845

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God.”

Psa. 42:5

There is something singularly tender and pathetic in the enquiry that David here makes of his own soul. He addresses it as the faithful and tender companion of all his joys and all his sorrows—his treasure and his all. For if our soul be happy, we must needs be happy; if our soul be troubled, we must needs be troubled; if our soul be safe, we must needs be safe; if our soul be cast down, we must needs be cast down too. Not that there is any thought or feeling in man distinct from his soul—I mean not that. But David here addresses his soul, as being that which is the most precious part of man, redeemed at an infinite price by the blood of the Lamb; and the prosperity or adversity of which must ever deeply interest him.

In this pathetic and affectionate address to his soul, we may notice two things.

I.—The question itself—“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?”

II.—The encouragement that he addresses to his cast down and disquieted soul—“Hope thou in God.”

I.—It is evident from the very form of the question that David here puts, that his soul was “cast down.” If it were not “cast down, and disquieted in him,” the enquiry that he makes as to the cause of its disquietude would be utterly useless.

But we may take these words as applicable not to David only at the time he put the question, but as suitable also to the family of God who tread in the experience of David.

Let us look, then, at some of the things which cause the souls of God's people to be often "cast down" within them.

1. But, first, what is it to be "cast down?" It is to be depressed; to feel our soul bowed down within us; to be sunk low, in a low spot; to be brought off from presumption, false confidence, levity, profanity, pharisaism, and worldliness; and by the work of the Spirit upon us, to be brought into that low place, out of which nothing but the hand of the Lord evidently stretched out and his arm made bare can deliver us.

Now there are many things that cause the souls of God's family to be "cast down" from time to time within them.

1. The guilt of sin. If there be anything that casts the soul down more than another, that sinks it into a low spot before the throne of the Most High, it is the guilt of sin lying with weight and power upon the conscience. And when I speak of guilt, I do not confine it to the first convictions of sin produced by the law in the application of the spirituality of the commandment to the conscience: but I mean the felt sense of sin, as it pursues us all our journey through, as it perpetually rises up in our heart, polluting the conscience, and striving ever to regain the mastery. This it is that makes the guilt of sin lie with weight upon the soul. I do believe, from soul experience, that one of the greatest, if not the greatest burden and trial to the child of God, is the daily, hourly, minutely, momentarily workings of sin. The adulterous eye, the roving heart, the defiled imagination, the constant stream of iniquity polluting every word and thought, every feeling and desire, is and must be a burden to the soul, just in proportion as the fear of God lives and works in a man's conscience. And whenever sin gets the mastery over us, though it be but for a short time, (I am not speaking here necessarily of gross sins, or of outward falls; for sin in some shape or other is perpetually striving to rule within where it does

not rule without), guilt will as surely follow it as the shadow does the sun. But even where sin does not get the mastery, those whose consciences are tender in God's fear continually feel the workings of pride, hypocrisy, presumption, and self-righteousness; of carnal desires, of filthy lusts, of worldly-mindedness, and of every thing that is hateful and vile in the eyes of a holy God. Nay, do we not continually find how, in spite of all our desires, and all the resolutions we make (which are not wise in making) to the contrary, how instantaneously temptation sets fire to the combustible materials we carry within? and what an awful flame there is at times bursting forth in our carnal mind? These things, I am sure, will bring guilt, shame, and sorrow upon every conscience that is quickened to fear God; and just in proportion to the depth and working of godly fear in a man's soul will be the burden of sin from time to time upon his conscience.

2. Another thing that casts down the souls of God's family is the unceasing conflict which they have to maintain between that in them which desires to live under God's leading, and that in them which desires to live after the course of this world. In other words, the conflict betwixt nature and grace, betwixt the spirit and the flesh, will always cast down the soul in proportion to the intensity of the struggle. To be baffled, as we are hourly baffled, in all our attempts to do good; to find the carnality of our hearts perpetually obstructing every desire that rises in our bosom to be heavenly minded, spiritual, enjoy God's word, feel his presence, and live to his honour and glory; thus to have the tide of carnality and pollution perpetually bearing down every spiritual desire in the heart—must not that cast down the soul that covets nothing so much as to live under a sense of God's presence and favour? And that this conflict should be a perpetual and unceasing one; that we should have so little respite from it; that it should not be merely now and then, but more or less, in proportion to the depth of godly fear, always be going on in our soul—must not this cast down the poor soul that is the subject of it? I am sure it cast me down day after day, and

sometimes hour after hour, to feel such an unceasing and perpetual conflict betwixt that in us which is spiritual, heavenly, and holy, and that in us which is earthly, carnal, sensual, and devilish.

3. Another thing which casts down the soul is the hiding of God's countenance; the inability to realize his most gracious presence, or feel the manifestations of his most precious favour. How continually the souls of God's people are cast down by reason of their inward darkness! When the Lord is the light of their countenance—when he supports them by his gracious word and Spirit, they are not cast down. But when they cry, and he does not hear; when they pour out their hearts before him, and get no answer; when in spite of all the tears that wet their cheeks, and the convulsive sobs that heave from their bosom, there is no word, no testimony, no sweet inshining, no precious flowing out of his gracious presence and love—must not that make the souls of God's people to be cast down within them?

4. The temptations that the Lord's people are so painfully exercised with, is another thing that makes their souls to be often cast down within them. There is in the bosom of the child of God a holy principle—as holy as God is holy, as pure as God is pure—for it is God's own nature, that is, his communicable nature, as we read, 2 Pet. 1:4, "partakers of the divine nature." This pure nature must ever hate sin, must ever loathe that which is opposed to Christ's image, must always painfully feel the presence and power of everything that is opposed to its spirituality, holiness, and purity.

Now, when a man is assailed with temptations to blasphemy, to curse and swear, to doubt the truth of the Scriptures, to question the very being of God, to disbelieve the Godhead of Jesus, to commit the worst of iniquities, and these temptations are perpetually struggling and striving for the mastery in his heart—must not this cast his soul down? What life, what power, what tenderness, what reality can there be in a man's religion, if he can feel the waves of temptation roll over his soul, and he as hard under them

as a rock in the ocean? Is it not just in proportion to the depth of the work of grace upon a man's heart—in proportion to the spirituality and liveliness of the new man of grace, that temptations are painfully and sensibly felt? Filth is no burden to the filthy; it is the clean that feel the disgusting nature of filth. And so spiritually. Sin to the dead sinner is no burden; temptation to those who have but a name to live is no sorrow. But to the "pure in heart" who shall see God, to the spiritually minded, to the partakers of the divine nature, to those in whose bosoms the Lord of life and glory is enthroned to them, just in proportion to the depth of the Spirit's work upon their heart, must temptation ever prove a burden.

Must not then the people of God be perpetually alive more or less, to the power of temptation? Where is temptation? It is in my bosom. Every lust and obscenity, every unclean bird of night, every base and black reptile—do I not carry about in my bosom a cage of these hideous and ravenous creatures? And will these beasts of prey lie torpid and inert in my bosom? Will not my old corrupt nature work, and that powerfully—desire, and that actively? Will it not rage, and that often abominably within? If I carry, as I do carry in my bosom, a constant fountain of temptation; and if I have also in me a new principle that is born of God, and is conformed, in its measure, to the mind and image of Christ—must I not groan and grieve, being burdened by the temptations that are constantly springing out of my carnal mind? If I have any spiritual feeling, any tenderness of conscience, any divine life in my heart, any longing to bless and praise God, or any desire to fear him—will not my soul groan under temptation just in proportion to the depth of the Spirit's work in my conscience?

5. The many afflictions that the Lord's people have to pass through, is another cause of their souls being cast down. And the Lord means these things to cast them down. Afflictions and trials that never cast them down! Call them afflictions! it is but the name. The Lord in sending afflictions means them to do a certain work. We are high; they are sent to bring us low. We are often standing

upon the pinnacle of presumption and confidence; and the Lord sends these troubles to put us in our right spot. We are proud; they are meant to humble. We are worldly; they are meant to purge out of us this worldly spirit. We are carnal; they are sent to subdue this carnality. We are often straying from the Lord into bye-paths! they are meant to bring us by wholesome corrections into the strait and narrow path that leads to glory. Afflictions thereof which are not felt; that never exercise a man, and try his spirit—do not call them afflictions: they are not worth the name; to call them so is but hypocrisy and deceit. But if we “endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ”—if we are really among the afflicted people of God, we must expect at times to be cast down and burdened by troubles. Now the Lord sends afflictions for a special purpose; and this special purpose is, to cast down the soul, that he himself may have the honour of raising it up.

Many of the Lord’s people are deeply afflicted by bodily afflictions; and those who pass through bodily afflictions (I am a living witness to it) know how they depress the spirit and cast down the soul; and how they open the door for Satan to come in, with many doubts and fears, and many distressing trials and exercises. But how good it is to be thus laid low, and kept low! What a check it is to the spirit of levity, frivolity, worldliness, and folly that there is in our carnal mind! What heavy weights and burdens are needed to have this horrible and abominable levity and frivolity kept effectually down! Now a man cannot be very light and trifling who has a suffering body, and is continually depressed in his spirit by the bodily afflictions he passes through; nor can there be much room for lightness and frivolity in a man’s soul, when his poor body is racked with disease and pain. The Lord therefore sends these bodily afflictions upon his people, in order to mortify and subdue that wretched spirit of frivolity which is usually so active in them.

Others of the Lord’s family are cast down by heavy temporal afflictions. The Lord does not see fit that his people should have this world’s honours, riches, and prosperity; they could not stand

it. Riches, honours, prosperity, an easy path, do not suit the family of God. They puff up with pride, feed the spirit of worldliness, lead a man into bye-paths, and take him away from the company of God’s poor exercised family. The Lord, therefore, for the most part exercises his family with temporal afflictions, with poverty, with distressing circumstances, and thus casts them down, and keeps them down that they may not be lifted up and so drawn away by temporal prosperity.

Others of the Lord’s family have to pass through heavy family afflictions and trials. A dear wife is taken off; a beloved husband is torn from a wife’s bosom! a child is smitten down with the hand of disease; or else, the children, instead of being comforts, grow up to be burdens and sorrows to their parents. By these afflictions the Lord often casts down the souls of his people.

Others of the Lord’s people are cast down by their evidences being beclouded; by many anxious doubts and fears as to the reality of the work of grace upon their souls; by seeing and feeling so little of the love of God shed abroad in their hearts; by having the depths of their unbelief and infidelity open up to their view, and being thus made to fear lest “concerning faith they some day may make shipwreck.”

Many are the causes (each “heart knoweth its own bitterness”) why the souls of the Lord’s people are cast down within them; and this is the case, not only now and then, but more or less unceasingly. For they need continually to be put into a low place; they cannot bear much prosperity; they need to be well plagued and exercised, that they may prize divine consolation, and feel that nothing can support and bless them but the hand of God alone.

2. But David puts another question to his soul—not differing much from the first, but still having a slight distinction—“Why art thou disquieted in me?” The expression, “cast down,” refers more especially to present feeling; but the word, “disquieted,” refers more to the anxiety of the soul in looking to the future.

The causes of trouble in the heart of a child of God are often

of this two-fold nature. Not merely does present sorrow and affliction cast down the soul at the time; but it is disquieted at the prospect of the future. This ever will be the tendency of affliction and sorrow. Could we see the bow in the cloud, and feel assured the sun would soon shine forth, half the trouble would be taken away. But to see the whole atmosphere enwrapped in misty darkness; to view clouds rising upon all sides of the horizon; not to behold one ray of light piercing through the dark gloom—it is this which makes the soul not merely “cast down” for the present, but “disquieted” for the future.

Thus when under guilt, there will be disquietude until pardon is sweetly experienced. When under afflictions, there will be disquietude and doubts how the afflictions will terminate. When engaged in conflict with the enemies of our soul’s peace, there will be disquietude lest we should be worsted in the battle. When the body is afflicted with pain and disease, disquietude may be felt whether it will end in death. When family afflictions press down the mind, there will be disquietude what the result may be. In a word, whatever be the source of sorrow that casts down the soul, from the present trouble and present affliction there will be almost necessarily many an anxious glance towards the future, many a watching whether the cloud give any symptom of dispersion, many fears lest the thunder-storm, whose roar we hear in the horizon, and the flashes of which we perceive afar off, will not approach nearer and nearer, and burst wholly upon us. So that when the soul is cast down, distressed, and burdened, it is not merely so with what is taking place at the present; but suspicions and disquietudes arise as to what will be the issue, as to what we may expect, and as to what we may fear for the future.

How gracious and merciful was it of the Lord to cause the soul of David thus to be exercised! How kind and tender it was of him to cause him, by the pen of inspiration, to record in the sacred Scriptures his painful experience! We have reason to bless God for it. Many of the Lord’s dear family have had to take this enqui-

ry into their lips, and with a burdened heart, cry aloud, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?”

II.—But we will pass on to the encouragement that David proposes to his own soul. It was, as I hinted, the tender and affectionate partner of all his sorrows; and he desired it to be also the tender and affectionate partner of all his joys. “Hope thou in God.” He here addresses himself to his own soul, as though he would cheer it onward, as though he would hold forth to it some prospect of relief, as though he would lay the strong arm of consolation beneath it that it might not utterly sink, as though he would encourage it to look for better times, as though he would say, ‘My soul, cast not away all thy confidence’—”Hope thou in God.”

This will enable us to look a little at the foundation of the encouragement, strength and relief that David proposed to his soul—”Hope thou in God.” What is the source—what is the fountain of hope—of all true and spiritual hope—such as David here encourages his soul to look to?

“Hope in God” springs from various causes. We will endeavour to enumerate a few. But observe. There can only be hope in God, just in proportion as we are brought into a state to need it. The Lord throws nothing away in providence; and the Lord will throw nothing away in grace. Those who have deeply scrutinized the works of God as Creator have admired the simplicity and perfection of his creative hand; nothing is given that was not needed, nothing is withheld that could not be spared; no scantiness on the one hand, no waste or profusion on the other. So it is in the kingdom of grace, as in the kingdom of nature—no good withheld from them that walk uprightly, no superfluous good wildly lavished upon those who do not need it. Thus we must be brought by the Spirit into a state and case to need these encouragements in order that we may have them. Consolations without afflictions, liftings up without castings down, communications out of Christ’s fulness without previous emptyings, are but delusions. The one must be suitable and proportionate to the other. Preparation for God’s bounty is

indispensable. If that preparation do not take place, blessings suitable cannot come.

1. Thus, one source of hope in God springs out of the invitations that the Lord has given in his word to the poor and needy, to the exercised and distressed, to the burdened and sorrowful. For instance, the Lord says, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28.) "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." (Isa. 45:22.) "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37.) These invitations, addressed in God's word to certain characters, are applied from time to time by the blessed Spirit with dew and power to the soul, so as to encourage it to hope in God.

You will observe, that the Psalmist here encourages his soul to hope in God. Not in God's mercy, not in God's faithfulness, though both these are needed. But, if I may use the expression, he takes his desponding soul beyond the attributes of God to hope in the Person of God himself. So that, in order that there may be this hope in God, springing out of the suitability and preciousness of the invitation addressed to certain characters, there must be in the heart and conscience a personal knowledge of God—and this springing out of his own manifestations to the soul, and the communication to the heart of that precious faith by which the invitations are received into the affections as set forth in the Scriptures of truth. Now the effect of the suitability and preciousness of the invitations flowing into the heart and conscience is to raise up a hope in God. It may not be a hope that affords strong consolation; it may not be a hope that entirely overcomes despondency. But yet it shall be a hope that shall raise the soul up from the waves. It is something like a buoy at sea, or the life-boat in a storm; it may often be dashed by the waves that beat upon it, yea, so dashed as to be hidden by the foam. But let there be a subsidence of the troubled waters, let the waves and billows cease, then we see the buoy again; that sure mark of the anchor beneath is not sunk, though it

may be hidden for a short space from the view. Thus, hope in God springing out of the suitability, sweetness, truth, and preciousness of the invitations, as they flow with power into the conscience, supports the soul under the waves of doubt and despondency, although it may feel the foam often dash over its poor desponding head, and even fear that it may prove a castaway.

2. But there is a "hope in God" springing out of the past testimonies that he has given to the soul. And this is what David seems here especially to allude to. He says, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." In the land of Jordan, and the Hermonites, God had appeared conspicuously for David; and the little hill Mizar had been raised up in his heart and conscience by some testimony from God. He looked to that spot, and stood upon it as a foundation for his hope.

Now every intimation of God's favour that we may have received, every token for good that we may have experienced, every glimpse and glance, every believing view of a precious Christ, every feeling of the power of atoning blood in the conscience, and every manifest shedding abroad of divine love, is a testimony to which the soul may at times look; and if it could always look there, it would not be cast down and disquieted; nor would David need to raise up his soul and encourage it to hope in the Lord from past testimonies: I believe myself that when our testimonies are beclouded, we would look back for comfort to things we have gone through, but darkness rests upon them. It is with us as with Job; when he went forward, he could not behold; and when he went backward, there was darkness still. When the soul is cast down, testimonies are but dimly seen: If I may use so familiar an illustration, it is like passing through a deep cutting in a railway; we cannot see the country on either side, though there it is in all its blooming beauty. So, as we pass through the deep cuttings in the soul, we cannot see our Mizars, our Ebenezers. They are there; the testimonies remain the same: but just in proportion as we sink, do

we sink out of their sight. But David would encourage his soul to hope still in God; he would softly remind it of what it had sweetly experienced. This encouraged his poor troubled heart still to hope in God, looking for better times, and trusting that the Lord would shortly appear.

3. But again; “hope in God” will sometimes spring from a sight of scriptural evidence raised up by the Spirit of God in the heart. Observe, I draw a distinction between testimonies and evidences. All testimonies are evidences; but all evidences are not testimonies. The fear of God in a tender conscience; the sacrifices which a man has been enabled to make for God and truth; the hungerings and thirstings after Jesus; godly sorrow and contrition of soul; pantings, longings, and cryings after the Lord—these are evidences. But still, though evidences, we cannot rely upon them as we can rely upon testimonies. They are not strong enough to bear the soul up. We can see and admire them in others, and believe them to be in their case gracious marks of the Lord’s teaching; but when we look into our own bosoms, we cannot see these evidences as distinctly in ourselves as we see them in others. In others, we see the fear of God unmixed; in our own hearts, we seem often mingled with servile fear. In others, we see tenderness of conscience; but in our own case, we often feel hardness of conscience. We see others looking out of self; we feel our own hearts full of self. We see in others simplicity and sincerity; we feel in ourselves a corrupt and hypocritical nature. We see in others that which clearly bears the mark and stamp of God; we see in ourselves so very much that bears the mark and stamp of Satan, that we cannot read the mark and stamp of the Lord equally clear. So that the very evidences we admire in others, we cannot rest upon in ourselves, especially when these evidences are beclouded, especially when guilt, shame, and fear rise up in our heart, and cast a lowering cloud over these marks of the life of God in the soul.

But there are times when the Lord’s people are kept from utter despondency by the possession of these evidences. The pouring

out of soul in prayer, though it does not bring deliverance, yet often gives relief. The workings of a tender conscience cannot deliver a man from the feelings of guilt; but the workings of a tender conscience are an evidence of the Lord’s having begun and carrying on a work of grace in the heart. The pantings, longings, and thirstings after Christ in his beauty and glory—these are not satisfactory evidences oftentimes to the soul; yet they do at times relieve it from that despondency and despair into which it otherwise would sink. So that there are times and seasons when these evidences are so beclouded as not to appear as evidences; and again there are times and seasons when these evidences are shone upon by the Holy Spirit, and then they stand forth as evidences. I will illustrate my meaning by a simple figure. You travel in a dark and cloudy day in the country; you see but little of the steeples and towers of the towns and villages; they are all dark and gloomy. You travel through the same country on a bright and sunny day; the whole scene is changed, and adorned with beauty; the tall spires and towers of the towns and villages are lighted up with the golden rays of the sun, and the whole aspect of the landscape is changed. Yet its features are exactly the same on the lowering and gloomy day, as when they are rendered conspicuous by rays of the sun. So spiritually. Hungering and thirsting after God, godly fear, love to Jesus, simplicity, spirituality, heavenly-mindedness—these are all evidences. But there are times and seasons when dark clouds hover over us, when these landmarks in the soul of what God has done for us are enveloped in darkness. They are there, though they are not seen. But when the light and life of the Spirit, and the shinings in of God’s countenance illuminate the dark and gloomy heart, then these evidences stand forth, and shine in the blessed light of God’s favour and presence, as evidences of the work of grace in the heart, and then the soul is enabled by them to “hope in God.”

Now just in proportion to the “hope in God” will be the soul’s relief from being cast down and disquieted within. The reason that we are downcast often in our soul is because we cannot exercise

this “hope in God.” The anchor is still within the veil; the ship rides securely; it is not carried down the tide of sin; it is not borne down the stream of an ungodly world; the vessel is at anchor; and though the waves and billows that dash against its sides may hide the cable that holds the anchor, yet there is a secret power which keeps the ship in her place. The child of God never entirely loses his hope; he never utterly loses his trust in God; his faith never totally deserts him. What else is it that supports his soul from sinking into despair? What keeps him from plunging into the filth and abominations of his lustful heart? What preserves him from altogether giving up the very profession of religion? What keeps him from open blasphemy and infidelity? Is there not a secret power in his soul, invisible to himself, acting in a mysterious way, and holding him up, so that concerning faith he does not make shipwreck? Perhaps some of you have made a profession many years, and many have been the waves and billows that have passed over your head; and the longer you live, the more will these billows roll. Never expect to be long at ease; and if you are spiritually-minded, you cannot bear the thought of being at ease. I can speak for myself; I would sooner have trials, temptations, troubles, exercises, crosses, and sorrows—feel my soul kept alive by them, and enjoy the presence and favour of God in them, than be at ease in Zion, and settled upon my lees, or have all prosperity, and know no changes nor reverses. But who has raised up your soul amidst these waves and billows? Have you not sometimes been tempted to cast away all your confidence? Have you not sometimes been so cut up by guilt as to think you never could lift up your head before God and his people again? Have you not been so carried away, at times, by some master sin as to fear lest it break out and bring you to open shame? Have you never got weary of religion altogether; and feared a time would shortly come when you would be made manifest as an hypocrite? And have you not waded through many other inward and outward trials which I cannot enumerate? trials which none but a man’s own soul can know; for each heart knows its own bitterness—each one

is best acquainted with his own sorrows, burdens, and perplexities. We cannot breathe them all into the ears of our best friend. We admit our friend sometimes into the ante-chamber, into the outer court; but who has ever taken his friend into the inner chamber of his heart’s secrets? I never have, and never can. There are depths there that the eye of man never has looked into; none but the eye of God is privileged to look into the very ground of the heart. Child of God! is it not so? What then has kept you during all this storm? What has held you up secretly, when you have resolved upon some sin?—when you have contrived it, plotted it, planned it, and in a fit of wild despair at its vile workings in your heart, have felt that you would plunge into the sin to-day, if you jumped into hell to-morrow. What kept you? Was there not a secret power that held you up in this storm?

When doubts and fears and despondency almost made head in your heart, was there not a secret, “Who can tell?” a longing looking to the Lord, though you might be, with poor Jonah, in the very belly of hell, with the weeds wrapped round your head? and though you may have almost despaired of ever coming forth into the light and liberty of God’s countenance, what held, what kept you from utter despair? Was there not a secret breathing of your soul Godward? a mysterious laying underneath of the everlasting arms? a sensible going out of your whole soul and spirit into the bosom of Immanuel? Or when you have backslidden—(and who dare say that he has never backslidden in heart, lip, or life? What! No adulterous eye, no roving heart, no filthy idol that has carried you away captive, and cut you up with guilt and shame?)—but when in this backsliding state, what kept you from utterly abandoning the place where God’s word is preached, and turning your back upon the Lord’s people, and the cause of God and truth? What brought you upon your knees, made you confess your sins, and caused tears of sorrow to roll down your cheeks, and the sobs of contrition to heave from your bosom? What held you up in these storms? Was it not the mysterious, the secret workings and operations of God the

Spirit in your conscience, enabling your soul to hope in God; still to look to, lean upon, and pour out your heart before the Lord—to rely upon his word of promise, and to believe that whatever he might do would be right?

Now, by some of these encouragements would David support the affectionate partner of all his cares and sorrows, as well as of all his joys. He would cheer her up as she travelled the strait and narrow road, breathe into her ear a little encouragement, and not allow her to cast away all her confidence. He would still endeavour to lay his friendly arm underneath her, and support her in the rough and rugged path—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" Is the case altogether hopeless? Art thou utterly disconsolate? Is there not a faithful God to go to? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Are the fountains of his grace and love dried up? Is the love of his bosom exhausted and withered?—"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?" Is there not an ever-living, ever-loving Jesus to go to? Is there no blessed Spirit to support thee? Is there no kind bosom to lean upon? What! art thou like the world, that when they are cast down, the only relief (if relief it can be called) is to sink altogether out of their own feelings? No, my soul: (he would thus seek to encourage the affectionate partner of his sorrows and joys;) No; the case is not desperate with thee; it is not altogether lost and forlorn; while God the Father rests in his love; while the Saviour is in the presence of God for thee; while his blood can plead; while his love can comfort; while his presence can support; while his favour can bless, there is still encouragement for thee. "Why then, art thou cast down?" All these things are working for thy good; peace and joy can only spring out of trials and exercises. The people of God are predestinated to walk in the paths of tribulation: no "strange thing" has happened unto thee; nothing but what is the lot of saints. Have not the family of God trodden these paths before thee? Did not the Son of God travel this dreary road? Was he not made perfect through sufferings? Did he not pour out his heart to God in strong cries and tears?

Then "why art thou cast down, O my soul?" If these things were to destroy thee—if these griefs were to cut thee off without hope or help—if these trials were to crush thee in the dust without remedy—if these temptations were for thy entire destruction—then, my soul, thou mightest be cast down. But when thou hast such sweet encouragements, such gracious support, such abundant promises—such a God, whose truth cannot be impeached, whose mercies cannot fail—such a High Priest of covenant faithfulness and superabounding grace—such a Three-One God to lean upon—"why art thou cast down?" The present is painful; but will not the present pain be made up by future pleasure? The future is dark; but is not the Lord, who has helped hitherto, a present help; and will he not provide for the future? Has he not promised, "As thy day is, thy strength shall be!" Has it not passed from his faithful lips—"Thy shoes shall be iron and brass?" Dost thou not know that the mercies of God fail not—that they are for evermore? Then, "why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?" This is thy remedy. I know that thou art disquieted; and I know what thy poor dark, anxious bosom is heaving with. But still "hope in God," for there is no care or restless disquietude for which the Lord is not thy remedy.

How tenderly David—or rather, the Spirit of God in David—encourages his poor soul—"Hope thou in God." The soul's expectation shall not be cut off; Jesus still lives and reigns within the veil. "Hope thou in God." The time will come when "I shall praise him who is the health of my countenance and my God," adds the sweet Psalmist of Israel. "And believing I shall yet praise him; believing he is the health of my countenance; believing he is my covenant God and Father—I will hope in him, and not give it up; but still look unto him, and lean upon his everlasting arms which cannot fail, and his love that endureth for evermore."

Now is not this precisely suitable to the state and case of every child of God here who is cast down and disquieted? Does not the same God live and reign, who lived and reigned when Da-

vid wrote? Are not his consolations the same? Is not his love the same? Is not his faithfulness the same? O, it will be our mercy if our numerous causes for being cast down, if our numerous sorrows, anxieties, and disquietudes, lead us away from the creature to “hope in God;” and to believe that we shall yet praise him, “who is the health of our countenance and our God.”

87 Power Given To The Faint

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

July 20, 1845.

“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Isaiah 40:29-31

In order to understand the mind and meaning of the Holy Spirit in these words, we must take a glimpse at their connection.

We find, in the preceding verses, the Lord addressing himself to his people, and speaking to them as deeply exercised in their souls. But what was the source of their exercises? It was this—that their path was so dark and obscure. “Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?” The path in which the family of God were then walking was exceedingly perplexing. Their “way”—that is, the path they were taking—the way of the Spirit’s teaching in their conscience—the mode of the Lord’s dealing with their soul, was so intricate and obscure, that they could not believe it was a right way. The Lord had hidden his face from them, and did not shew them the nature or reason of his dealings with them. Infidelity, seizing hold of this circumstance, worked so powerfully in their hearts, that they burst forth into this cry, “My way is hid from the Lord.” Surely he cannot see the way I am taking, or he

would have appeared sooner on my behalf. “And my judgment,” that is, my cause, “is passed over from my God.” He neglects to take that notice of me which I seek at his hands; he passes me by as unworthy of his regard; he slights my cause, and rejects my prayer, as though I did not belong to him.

Now, in order to meet these exercises in the hearts of his people—in order to apply a suitable remedy for these workings of unbelief and infidelity—the Lord answers by appealing to their own experience—“Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?” However thou mayest faint, however thou mayest be wearied of him—whatever be thy hard thoughts concerning his dealings with thee—dost thou not know, that the everlasting God remains “the same yesterday, today, and for ever”—that he is not a changeable God, tossed to and fro like thyself; but that he “rests in his love,” and is ever the same;—that “he fainteth not” under the burdens which thou castest upon him; “neither is weary” of thee, though thou art often weary of him? And, with respect to this intricate path in which thou art walking, he adds, “There is no searching of his understanding.” He knoweth what is best for thee; and though thy present path is dark and obscure in thine eyes, it is bright and clear in his.

He would, therefore, urge this upon the conscience of his exercised and complaining child, “Thy part is to sit still, and wait till the deliverance appear; in due time, I will explain to thee the nature and reason of these mysterious dealings.” He then goes on still further to clear up the point by the words of the text: “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

If we look at the text, we shall observe, that there are two characters traced out in it. Of these, one is set forth by the expression

“youths” and “young men.” And not only is their character set forth, but also their destiny is described that they “shall faint,” and “shall utterly fall.” And, on the other hand, we have another, a spiritual character traced out, as one who “has no might,” and yet “waits upon the Lord.” And we find his destiny also pointed out. For as there is an end reserved for the one—an utter fall; so there is an end reserved for the other—a spiritual blessing.

I shall, then, if God enable me, endeavour this morning to trace out these two distinct characters, and shew the allotted portion and end of each.

We will begin with a description of the character pointed out by the expression “youths” and “young men;” and then shew what is their allotted portion and appointed destiny.

I.—By the expression “youths” and “young men” is implied a contrast betwixt the whole-hearted condition of the professing world and the fainting state of God’s family. Youth is the season of comeliness, vigour, and strength; and thus, figuratively and typically, the “youths” and “young men” are those professors of religion who have never been weakened and brought down by a work of the Spirit upon their hearts; but who retain all their natural comeliness, activity, and vigour. In the exercise of this activity and strength, these youths run a race, but not the race that God’s people run in faith and patience. In a word, the expression “youths” and “young men” describes unburdened professors, who have never had such a work of grace upon their hearts as has laid trouble upon their souls, or wrought penetrating convictions in their conscience. Never having been humbled in their souls, nor exercised in their minds, nor afflicted by a body of sin and death, they retain all their natural vigour. It has never been drawn away from them by the running sores of sin and guilt; they have never been drained nor exhausted of it by lacerating wounds in their conscience; and they thus preserve all that comeliness, youthful vigour, and beauty which have been battered down in the Lord’s afflicted family.

Now when the Lord’s people, exercised and tried in their souls, compare their deformity, ugliness, and wrinkles, with the comeliness of these unhumiliated professors, it is often to them a bitter contrast. They often see in unexercised professors much more zeal, consistency, earnestness, amiability, activity, and apparent devotedness, than they can see and feel in their own hearts; and, contrasting their own wrinkled and weather-beaten visages with their smooth and ruddy cheeks, they cry out, “My skin is black upon me; my flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust: my skin is broken and become loathsome” (Job 30:30.)

vii. And so with respect to the activity, strength, and vigour of these “youths” and “young men.” The Lord’s people have often no heart to “run with patience the race that is set before them.” Spiritual things, instead of being their solace and delight, are often their burden. The enmity of their carnal mind works up against divine realities; and so far from being active and zealous in them, they are often so burdened in the things of God, that they feel unable to do any one thing which is acceptable in His sight. But these “young men,” who have never seen the breadth, nor felt the spirituality of God’s law—who have never known their inward corruption, never been plagued with a body of sin and death, never exercised with the perplexities that God’s people are tried with—retain all that zeal and comeliness—those fleshly substitutes for vital power and godliness—which the exercised family of God once had, but have long lost.

There are those amongst the Lord’s family “whose senses are not as yet exercised to discern both good and evil,” and therefore cannot see the difference between pretence and reality, between nature in its highest form and grace in its lowest. When therefore one of these poor, burdened, exercised children of God contrasts his own want of zeal, earnestness, and activity—his darkness of mind, deadness of soul, and coldness of affection—with the earnestness and activity of many a zealous religionist around him, he is almost tempted to think that they are right and he wrong, and that they

will stand when he shall fall.

But how different are God's ways from our ways, and God's thoughts from our thoughts! How differently does he view these "youths" and "young men" from the admiration bestowed upon them by the professing world! What hollowness, deceitfulness, and hypocrisy does he see working under all this natural comeliness, strength, and vigour! How the Lord sees that all this strength is weakness, all this wisdom is folly, all this righteousness is hypocrisy, and all this earnestness and zeal is but fallen nature carrying into religion the same restless activity which cultivates the farm, or manages the shop—a buyer and seller in the temple, and not a spiritual worshipper in the sanctuary!

But what is the sentence which the Lord has passed concerning such? A sentence that we see, more or less, fulfilled every day. They shall all "utterly fall." In due time these comely and vigorous "youths," these strong and active "young men" will faint and fall. Though for a time they seem to run well, they never reach the goal. Sin, which for a time was dead in them, begins to revive; temptations that before never beset them, are laid in their paths; snares before hidden, they are now entangled by: their zeal, their earnestness, their activity gradually decline; and thus, long before they come to the end of the race, they faint, and are utterly unable to proceed any further. They give up their religion, often abandon even a profession, go into the world, fall into sin, and "concerning faith make shipwreck."

But even if some of them do not faint by the way, they "shall utterly fall." God never has sanctioned, and never will sanction any religion but his own divine work in the soul. All other wisdom he proves to be folly, all other strength weakness, all other profession but that which springs from his own work in the conscience to be "the spider's web" and "the hypocrite's hope." He has therefore determined, in his own sovereign appointment, that these comely and vigorous "youths" and "young men"—these active professors of religion—these unhumiliated and un-exercised ones, "shall utter-

ly fall;" and if it be not before, a death-bed shall unmask them; or, if they even proceed in confidence through the dark valley as we read in the Pilgrim's Progress of one that did so, yet the day of judgment will reveal them. God will discover them by shewing that they have been feeding upon ashes; and that a deceived heart has turned them aside; that they have had no interest in the love and blood of the Lamb, and no participation in the Spirit's teaching.

How different is the character, and how different is the destiny of the Lord's own family! How determined the Lord is to mortify the pride of man, to subvert all his purposes, and bring about his own counsels of infinite wisdom, in direct opposition to the wisdom of the creature! What would be our judgment? Would it not be this? That these "youths" so comely, vigorous, and strong—so earnest, active, and zealous in religion—would surely be crowned—that these would without doubt receive the prize? And could we believe that the faint and weary, the hopeless and helpless, should receive the blessing? But God, on purpose to disappoint and pour contempt upon all creature wisdom, has determined otherwise. He has decreed that there shall be no wisdom honoured but his own wisdom, no strength crowned but his own strength, no righteousness exalted but his own righteousness, no purpose accomplished but his own eternal sacred purpose. He therefore brings all his people by a secret, mysterious work upon their conscience into that state and case where he alone gets to himself all the glory.

II.—Bearing this in mind, we may be enabled more clearly to see the case and state of the Lord's people, as distinguished from the state and case of unhumiliated and professors. "He giveth power to the faint." This, then, is God's description of his people, that they are "faint." Until they are faint, there is no promise for them that God will give them power.

But what makes them faint? There are several causes.

1. One cause of their fainting is, the burdens that are put upon their shoulders. It is so naturally. If you carry a heavy burden a long way, you are pretty sure to faint before you arrive at your destina-

tion. So spiritually. The Lord's people have heavy burdens; sometimes guilt upon the conscience; at others, exercises perplexing them; passions striving for the mastery; an adulterous eye, and an idolatrous heart. These burdens make them faint and weary in their souls.

But what do we understand by fainting? It is a swooning away, so as to lose all knowledge of where we are; a falling down in a state of exhaustion, so as not to be able to move a step further. This is the case with many of God's family. They are often so weary and exhausted with the burdens they have to carry, that they are actually unable, in their own feelings, to move a single step further; they swoon away, so as to lose all consciousness of where they are and what they are.

2. Grievous wounds will make a man faint. So spiritually. The wounds of sin, the fiery darts of Satan, the arrows of God in the conscience, make the heart of many of God's children faint within them. They cannot move a step further; their very life-blood is drained away, and they sink down, and are unable to move forward from weakness and exhaustion.

3. Denial of food will also produce faintness. Hunger and famine soon exhaust the body. So spiritually. When supplies of grace are withheld—when heavenly manna does not fall—when God does not appear—when his testimonies do not drop into the heart—when love and blood are not applied—when, as the Prophet speaks, there is “a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it” (Am. 8:11, 12). This spiritual destitution makes the Lord's famished people faint and feeble, and their heart to sink and swoon within them.

But how strange it appears, before we are spiritually led into a knowledge of the Lord's wise and gracious dealings, that all this painful work in the conscience should be a needful, an indispens-

able preparation of heart to receive the gospel in its fulness, sweetness, and power!

What a mysterious way! That God's people should have to be emptied of all their strength, that the Lord may communicate his—that their very life-blood, their native stock of goodness, excellency, and wisdom, must be drained out of their veins, that the life-blood of Jesus may be poured into them! What a mysterious path! that we are not fit to receive any blessing till thoroughly emptied—that there is no deliverance till shut up in prison—no mercy till brought into misery—no manifested laying of the everlasting arms underneath the soul till it is ready to sink into the awful precipice of perdition! But were it not so, we should want to share the glory with God. It would be partly our strength, and partly God's; partly our own righteousness, and partly Christ's; partly our wisdom, and partly Jehovah's. Therefore, it is absolutely needful, however mysterious, for the glory of God, and the consolation and salvation of his people, that all our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness should be drained away, that the wisdom, strength, and righteousness of Christ should become manifestly ours.

III.—Now, when the soul is brought down to this spot and it may take years to bring it there; a succession of trials and troubles, difficulty after difficulty, stripe after stripe, blow after blow; many painful dispensations in providence, perplexing paths in grace, burdensome trials of body and soul may all have been needed to bring down the proud, stubborn heart with labour—but when at length the soul is brought into that state of poverty and destitution so as not to have a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or water out of the pit—then it is fit to receive power. “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.” They are not fit to receive God's strength till they are faint and feeble. Weakness is the only needful qualification; and this sense of weakness is wrought in their heart by the teaching and operation of the blessed Spirit.

But how does the Lord give “power?” The power that God gives

is quite distinct from our own. Our power is only another name for weakness; and therefore the sooner we lose it the better. But God's power is real power. It is not a fiction, like our own; not a delusion and a deceit, like the boasted strength of man; but there is a divine reality in it.

1. But "he giveth power" in various ways. Sometimes he gives power to persevere. It is at times with God's people as with Jonah. When Jonah was in the belly of the whale, when the weeds were wrapped about his head, and he was in his own feelings "in the belly of hell," yet he said, "I will look again toward thy holy temple" (John 2:4). He was not then brought out of the belly of the whale; yet in the belly of the whale, and in the very belly of hell, God gave him power to look to his holy temple. If God had not given him power, he would have looked into the very belly of hell in the horrors of despair, instead of looking again to his holy temple in the actings of living faith.

Thus the Lord often gives his people power to take a longing, languishing look at the blood and righteousness of Jesus; to come to the Lord, as "mighty to save," with the same feelings with which Esther went into the presence of the king: "I will go in; and if I perish, I perish." It is with them sometimes as with the four lepers who sat at the entering in of the gate of Samaria: "And they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die" (2 Kings 7:3, 4). And so the Lord's people are sometimes brought to this state—"If I perish, I will perish at his footstool." If he give no answer of mercy, they will still cling to his feet, and beseech him to look upon, and save them.

Now this is "power," real power. Despair would have laid hold upon their soul, if this secret power had not been given to them. Sometimes we learn this by painful experience. Our trials sometimes stun us, and then there is no power to seek or pray. But when

power is given, there is a pleading with the Lord, a going out of the heart's desires after him, and a fulfilment in the soul of the experience described by the prophet, "I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him" (Isa. 8:17).

2. He gives power to believe; for it is the work of the blessed Spirit to raise up living faith in the heart. He gives power to hope; for it is only so far as he communicates power, that we can cast forth this anchor of the soul. He gives power to love; for it is only as he gives power, that we feel any measure of affection either to the Lord or to his people. In a word, every spiritual desire, every breath of fervent prayer, every movement of the soul heavenward, every trusting in God's name, relying on his word, and hanging upon his promises, spring out of power communicated by the Lord to the faint and feeble.

3. Sometimes the Lord gives power by recalling past mercies and former dealings to the mind; by enabling the soul to look unto him "from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar" (Ps. 42:6); not to give up all its confidence, or cast the things God has done for it behind its back: but to take encouragement from the past to hope for the future. As the Church says, "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope" (Lam. 3:21). And as she pleads, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? 'Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?' (Isa. 51:9, 10). This is putting the Lord in remembrance (Isa. 43:26); and a making use of past favours to plead with him for more.

IV.—But there is another word added, "And to them that have no might he increaseth strength." The Lord's people are often in this state, that they "have no might." All their power seems exhausted, and their strength completely drained away; sin appears to have got the mastery over them; and they feel as if they had neither will

nor ability to run the race set before them, or persevere in the way of the Lord. Yet, even then, they have strength; for it says, “he increaseth strength.” It does not say, he gives, bestows, communicates strength; but “he increaseth strength.” How can this be? We must have power to feel our weakness, as dear Gadsby used to say, ‘We need power to sink.’ God must put forth his power to enable us to fall down into nothingness and helplessness. It therefore says, “he increaseth strength.” As though it would imply, ‘Is not the very power to sink down into creature weakness, helplessness, and nothingness, strength?’ It is so in God’s mysterious dealings. And therefore, “to them that have no might” in other words, those who are sensible in their own consciences that they have no power at all, who are completely exhausted of nature’s strength and wisdom to these “he increaseth strength.”

Now the Lord “increaseth strength” in a very mysterious way. He often drops strength stilly and secretly into the soul. We are not always to expect very great manifestations. This is not the way in which the Lord usually increases strength. His visits to the soul are often better known by their fruits and effects, and by looking back upon them when they are past, than by any immediate impulse. The strength given is more easily felt than the hand seen which communicates it. In this respect it much resembles the new birth, of which the Lord says, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth” (John 3:8).

One fruit and effect of divine strength communicated to the soul is, that it is enabled to persevere in the way of the Lord. “The righteous shall hold on his way” (Job 17:9). “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov. 14:8).

Now what has kept us to this day? Some of you here have made a profession ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years. What has kept us? When powerful temptations were spread for our feet, what preserved us from falling headlong into them? When we felt the

workings of headstrong lusts, what kept us from being altogether carried captive by them? When we look at the difficulties of the way, the exercise and the perplexities which our souls have had to grapple with, the persecutions from relations or superiors, the hard blows from sinners and saints that we have had to encounter—what has still kept in us a desire to fear God, and a heart in some measure tender before him? When we view the infidelity, unbelief, carnality, worldly-mindedness, hypocrisy, pride, and presumption of our fallen nature, what has kept us still believing, hoping, loving, longing, and looking to the Lord? When we think of our deadness, coldness, torpidity, rebelliousness, perverseness, love to evil, aversion to good, and all the abounding corruptions of our nature, what has kept us from giving up the very profession of religion, and swimming down the powerful current that has so long and so often threatened to sweep us utterly from the Lord and his people? Is it not the putting forth of the Lord’s secret power in our souls? Had we been without the fear of the Lord, in a mere profession, like the “youths” and “young men,” we should long ago have fainted, and utterly fallen. Can we not look back, and recall to mind our first religious companions, those with whom we started in the race—those whom we perhaps envied for their greater piety, zeal, holiness, and earnestness, and with which we painfully contrasted our own sluggishness and carnality, admiring them, and condemning ourselves? Where are they all, or the greater part of them? I can say, for my part, I should be very sorry to be in the places where most of them are. Some have embraced soul-destroying errors; others are buried in a worldly system; and others are wrapped up in delusion and fleshly confidence.

Thus, while the “youths” and “young men” fall into the snares of the devil, God, by putting forth his secret power in the hearts of his fainting ones, keeps his fear alive in their souls, holds up their goings in his paths that their footsteps slip not, brings them out of all their temptations and troubles, delivers them from every evil work, and preserves them unto his heavenly kingdom. He drains

them of all their strength, that he may communicate his own: and destroys the wisdom of the wise, and brings to nothing the understanding of the prudent, that he may get all the honour and glory to his own great name. He thus secures the salvation of his people by his own free grace; and whilst he hides pride from their eyes, he saves them by the only way that is suitable to them, and glorifying to himself.

V.—”But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.” This is another mark and feature of the Lord’s family. They are not only faint and feeble in themselves, and without might to do anything spiritually good; but they “wait upon the Lord.”

What makes them “wait upon the Lord.” Their very weakness, their very faintness, their very helplessness—these are so many instrumental causes which, in the hands of the Spirit, make them wait on the Lord. They “wait upon the Lord,” therefore, that they may receive out of his fulness those communications of light, life, and grace, which they have not in themselves. And only in proportion as they daily feel faint and weary, are daily sensible of their own weakness and helplessness, do they “wait upon the Lord.”

But before they can “wait upon the Lord,” they must have an experimental knowledge of him; they must have a view of him by the eyes of their spiritual understanding; feel the goings out of their heart’s affections after him: be assured in their conscience that he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto him; and feel a childlike dependence upon him as willing to save.

But the word “waiting” implies several things. It implies,

1. That we have faith to wait. Do we not often feel such infidelity working within that we cannot wait upon the Lord? When the spirit of infidelity comes in like a flood, what waiting is there upon God? Does not this subtle spirit effectually baffle all our attempts to wait upon him? Sometimes unbelief works. When we call upon the Lord, he hides his face, and covers his throne with a dark cloud. He does not give us that testimony which our soul is longing to receive; he denies those love-smiles and love-visits which our souls

are panting for. Unbelief immediately works; and we think it is of no use any more to wait at his footstool, or call upon his name. But after a time, faith begins to lift up its head, and then there is a going out of soul to the Lord, a pleading with him, a wrestling at his blessed footstool, a calling upon his holy name, a determination like one of old, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Gen. 32:26).

2. But waiting also implies humility. “As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us” (Ps. 123:2). There is humility in the waiting posture of a servant. And thus, true spiritual waiting upon the Lord is not a pressing forward, like a bold presumptuous claimant; is not an entering with sacrilegious haste into God’s sanctuary, nor intruding ourselves at his banquet an unbidden guest; but it implies a knocking at the door, a lying at his feet, a coming to his footstool. It is therefore ever accompanied with this feeling in the heart, that we are to be recipients of mercy; that we have no claim—nothing but beggary, poverty, and rags; and that what the Lord gives, he gives freely to his people as weak and worthless.

3. But “waiting” implies, besides, continuance and perseverance. It is not a mere calling upon the Lord to help, and then immediately leaving off; looking to him for a moment, and then forgetting him utterly; dividing the heart between God and the creature; expecting help one day from God, another day from man. The very word “wait” implies perseverance and fixed determination in the soul, that to him only will we look. The Lord by his mysterious dealings cuts us off from resting upon an arm of flesh. He will not suffer us to lean upon any friend, however near or dear; he will not let us look to any one but himself, for he is a jealous God; and therefore he keeps cutting off link after link, tie after tie, bond after bond; that not having any human comfort, we may seek consolation only in him.

Perseverance implies more or less of a constant waiting upon the Lord. This will therefore go on day after day, week after week, month after month: year after year, the soul will still be waiting upon the Lord. And what for? To receive out of his fulness those communications of grace, mercy, pardon, and peace—those visitations of his Spirit, those refreshments from his presence, those revivings of faith, hope, and love, those manifestations of his favour, the enjoyment of which the soul is looking for.

What a sweet instance we have of this humble spirit in the Syrophenician woman who craved but a few of the crumbs that fell from the children's table! (Mark 7:28) Self-abasement is a sure fruit of the Spirit's teaching in the soul.

Now to such the promise is given: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." The "youths" and "young men" never wait upon the Lord. Their proud hearts never were humbled to lie at the footstool of mercy; they were wise in their own conceit, and strong in their own strength; they wanted no divine testimonies, no love-smiles; these in their eyes were nothing but enthusiasm, bigotry, and a wild spirit. Therefore they went on in their own strength, and fell. But the Lord's people, being faint and weary in themselves, and little and lowly in their own eyes, wait upon the Lord; and these, the Lord says, "shall renew their strength;" that is, strength shall be given to them from time to time.

The very expression, "renew their strength," shews there are times and seasons when their strength fails. We cannot walk in the light of past testimonies; we cannot fight fresh battles with old strength; we cannot live this week upon last week's food. No; past deliverances will not do for present trials; past consolations will not help us through present struggles; the Lord therefore empties us from time to time of our nature's strength, and then renews our spiritual. How sweet and precious it is to have our strength renewed; to have fresh grace brought into the heart: to feel the mysterious sensations of renovated life: to feel the everlasting arms supporting the soul, fighting our battles for us, subduing our ene-

mies, overcoming our lusts, breaking our snares, and delivering us out of our temptations! How very rough and rugged the path may be to get the blessing! But how much sweeter the blessing is when it has come through that path! How very painful and mysterious it is to flesh and blood to have no strength! But how much sweeter it is when divine strength comes into the heart! For divine strength is of another nature from creature strength. It will not mix with it; it is pure and holy, and therefore will not blend with that which is impure and unholy. But those that "wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength." So that, in new battles they shall have new strength to fight; in fresh temptations, fresh power to overcome them; in present exercises, present grace to grapple with them.

VI.—But the text adds, "They shall mount up with wings as eagles." What a contrast! Where have we seen them? Perplexed, distressed, exercised, mourning, and crying. We have seen them so faint and exhausted, that they had no strength to move a step further. We have seen them bowed down with temptations, burdens, trials, perplexities, and difficulties; yet waiting upon the Lord; because they had no other help to go to, no other harbour to anchor in, no other refuge to flee unto. Now—what a contrast! "They shall mount up with wings as eagles"—the strongest, the swiftest, and the highest soaring bird; as though the Lord would take the strongest natural comparison to shew how their souls mount up.

But how do they mount up? In faith. It is said of the eagle, that he mounts up towards the sun; and that of all birds, he is the only one which can gaze upon the sun with unshrinking eye. So with faith in the soul. The Lord's people alone can look by faith upon the "Sun of righteousness," gaze upon a glorious Immanuel at the right hand of the Father, and see a precious Jesus ever interceding for them, and drawing them near to his bosom. And when this blessed Jesus communicates a measure of his love and blood to their consciences, and raises up and draws forth faith in his name, then the soul begins to mount up with these wings like eagles, soaring higher and higher, till it comes into the presence of God; mounting

up in higher and higher circles of spiritual flight, till it penetrates into the very sanctuary of Jehovah.

Now, has not your soul thus soared sometimes as upon eagle's wings? Have there not been those communications of divine life and light, those mountings of faith, those anchorings of hope, those goings forth of love, whereby your soul was enabled to mount up and find delight in Jesus, and felt his name, love, and blood precious? Have you not mounted up too, not only in the exercise of living faith and hope, but also of heavenly affection? Sometimes we are so fastened down to this earth, this vale of tears, this waste howling wilderness: so chained down to it, that we are like a bird with a broken wing, and cannot mount. We are swallowed up in the world, forgetting God and godliness. But are there not times and seasons when the soul is delivered from these chains and fetters—when earthly cares drop off from the mind—when our wings are new moulted, and fresh pinions as it were given—when the world and its temptations, sin and its snares are left behind, and there is a sweet mounting up in the feelings of heavenly affection? This is to “mount up with wings as eagles;” and the soaring soul never ceases to mount till it comes into the very presence of the Three-One God of Israel.

How different the religion of a living soul is from the religion of a dead professor! The religion of a dead professor begins in self, and ends in self—begins in his own wisdom, and ends in his own folly—begins in his own strength, and ends in his own weakness—begins in his own righteousness, and ends in his own damnation. There is in him never any going out of soul after God, no secret dealings with the Lord, no actings of faith upon the divine perfections. But the child of God, though he is often faint, weary, and exhausted with many difficulties, burdens, and sorrows; yet when the Lord does shew himself, and renews his strength, he soars aloft, and never ceases to mount up on the wings of faith and love till he penetrates into the very sanctuary of the Most High. A living soul can never be satisfied except in living union

and communion with the Lord of life and glory. Everything short of that leaves it empty. All the things of time and sense leave a child of God unsatisfied.

Nothing but vital union and communion with the Lord of life, to feel his presence, taste his love, enjoy his favour, see his glory—nothing but this will ever satisfy the wants of ransomed and regenerated souls. This the Lord indulges his people with. “They shall renew their strength.” They shall not be always lying groaning on the ground—not always swooning away through the wounds made by sin—not always chained down by the fetters of the world—not always hunted in their souls like a partridge upon the mountains. There shall be a renewal of their strength; and in their renewal, “they shall mount up with wings as eagles.”

2. “They shall run, and not be weary.” (Isa. 40:31.) What is this running? you say. There are three things spoken of in the text—flying, running and walking; and each of these things is spoken of as found in God's family. Sometimes they fly, when they mount up as upon the wings of eagles; sometimes they run; and sometimes they walk.

But what is it to run? David shall explain it. He says, “I will run the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart” (Ps. 119:32). Paul shall add his testimony; he says, “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1).

To run is to move with cheerfulness and activity in the ways of God; not always crippled by a paralytic limb—not always sinking under the burden of a depraved nature—not always swooning away under wounds, weights, and famine. Sometimes the Lord brings a measure of light, life, and love into the soul. There is then a holy activity, a cheerful obedience, a desire to glorify God, a seeking to know his will and do it.

This is not like the running of the “youths” and “young men”—in their own strength. They set out in nature's strength, and drop off in nature's weakness. But the Lord's people, “they that wait upon the Lord,” renew their strength—“they run, and are not weary.” For

the Lord's power rests on them. They are like Elijah, who girded up his loins, and ran before king Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel (1 Kin. 18:46). There was a divine power communicated to the prophet, so that, though the king rode in his chariot, Elijah outran him. So the Lord's people sometimes have strength given them, whereby they can make sacrifices for the Lord, and do his will with a cheerful heart. And in this running they shall not be weary; so long as the Lord communicates strength and supplies power, they are not weary in well-doing.

3. But there is another word added—"They shall walk, and not faint." Now walking is next to running, as running is next to flying. Walking implies a steady, progressive pace. It is not the same as the ardent mounting of the soul upwards, nor the cheerful activity of the soul running forward; but it is a calm, steady progression. The Lord sometimes gives his people a heavenly soaring, sometimes an active running, and sometimes a steady walking. All indeed are equally good: whether they fly, run, or walk, it is all to God's glory, and their own profit. When they fly, they would not run; when they run, they would not walk. They are contented with what they find; for they can only move as he works in them "to will and to do of his own good pleasure."

This walking, then, is a steady progressing in the things of God; a sober persuasion of the truth as it is in Jesus; a calm movement in the ways of the Lord; a living in peace with God, and in peace with his people; a walking in the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless; a going onward in that humility, integrity, godly fear, tenderness of conscience—that wariness, circumspectness, and uprightness of heart which become the true believer. Not precipitately running—"he that believeth shall not make haste." Nor is it a lagging behind; but a walking soberly and circumspectly in the things of God and truth. This was the happy state of the primitive church, "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).

But whilst they are in this vale of tears, we find the Lord's people in various states and cases. Many of their varied states and cases are traced out in that experimental part of God's word, which is connected with the text. For instance, some are saying, "My judgment is passed over from my God;" I cannot see where the Lord is leading me; all is perplexing, dark and distressing. Others are faint, exhausted, and swooning away through their burdens, difficulties, and perplexities. They cannot move a step further; but still they are in the Lord's path. Others of the Lord's people seem to have "no might:" they cannot even read the Word of God at times; they cannot seek the Lord's face, or call upon the Lord's name; they cannot believe, nor hope, nor love; yet they are in the Lord's ways, and are the Lord's people. Others may be waiting upon the Lord, looking to him, pleading with him, wrestling with him, putting their mouth in the dust, and pouring out their hearts before him; yet still in the way of the Lord, and where he would have them to be. Others may be renewing their strength; the Lord is giving them power, and their bow abides in strength; they are renewed with grace in their inner man that they may fight the battles of the Lord. These are where he would have them to be. Others perhaps are mounting up with wings as eagles; they are full of soaring desires, ravished with sweet and precious manifestations of love and blood. These are still where the Lord would have them to be. Others are running in the way of the Lord's commandments; moving actively in the path of cheerful obedience; the whole bent of their will is to glorify God; his will is their will, and they desire to be actively engaged in all that pleases him. Others perhaps are walking; not mounting with holy affections; not running cheerfully and eagerly; but walking with God in simple obedience to his word, with a tender conscience, desiring to know his will, and do it. This is still the Lord's teaching; they are still in the Lord's way. How different are all and each of these states from being a "youth" or "young man"—an unburdened, un-humbled, unexercised, unplagued professor!

Then, if we be the Lord's people, whatever be our state and case, it will end well—whether having “no might,” or “renewing our strength”—whether running or walking, it will all end well. All the Lord's people have these varied dealings through the work of the Spirit upon their hearts; for they shall stand in their lot at the end of the days, and see the Lord face to face in glory!

But woe be to us, if we are “youths” and “young men.” You may appear very comely; your religion may be dressed out in the newest and nearest garb; you may seem to be going on well in your own esteem and that of others. But, depend upon it, if this comeliness, zeal, and activity come from the flesh, it will end in your utter downfall. You will find a day will come, when you will not be able to proceed, and the end will be ruin and destruction.

Now, this does not cut down activity in the Lord's way. It does not cut down lively frames, panting hearts, zealous motives, a single eye to God's glory. God forbid. But it points out the right way.

We must faint first, and have “no might,” and be brought to our wit's ends, and then have the Lord's blessings communicated in the Lord's way. All that comes from nature must die. Nature's strength, wisdom, pride, and power must all vanish away, that the glory of the Lamb may endure for ever.

Therefore, in this way the Lord cuts down with the sword of the Spirit all that is of nature, and builds up all that is of grace. Nay more, he does not put down nature's activity, that the soul may be a sluggard; nor does he put down nature's strength, that the soul may be inactive. On the contrary, he extinguishes the taper, that the soul may enjoy the blazing light of the sun. He exhausts all nature's strength, that he may build up his own strength upon its ruins. He puts down the impostor, and raises up the saint. He puts down hypocrisy, and exalts his own truth. He takes the crown off nature's head, and places it upon his Son's. He thus secures to himself all the glory, and to his people all the good.

Thus, while on the one hand, he tarnishes the pride of nature's glory, he secures that his will shall be done on earth as in heav-

en, and gets to himself a revenue of eternal praise. So that, whilst viewed with a spiritual eye, we see how it honours God, we see also how suitable it is to man. And in our right mind, we would rather have burdens, exercises, and temptations, to have God with us, and his glory wrought out through them—rather run in the Lord's strength, than be left to our own strength and righteousness.

Thus, we see the Lord will eventually make it manifest that all is done for the good of the church; and all will end to his glory, who, as Father, Son, and eternal Spirit, is worthy of all honour, praise, and adoration, now and evermore.

88 The Solemn Appeal And Earnest Cry Of A Waiting Soul

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

July 20, 1845

“And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee. Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish.”

Psalm 39:7, 8

True religion is a solemn thing. And I firmly believe, that when God lays eternal realities with weight and power upon the conscience, He will make His people to know it to be a solemn thing. I do not mean to say, that there are not many times and seasons when it does not lie with weight and power upon the conscience. I am sure there are times with me when I seem to have no more religion, no more spiritual feeling, and can no more trace the work of God upon my conscience, than if there were no God, no heaven, no hell, no judgment, no eternity. But, through mercy, there are times and seasons when my heart is solemnized by the things of God; when they lie with that weight and power upon my soul, that I must feel them, whether I will or not.

Now it seems to me, that when David penned this Psalm by divine inspiration, he was in a peculiarly solemn frame of mind. I do not mean to say that he was not always in a solemn state of mind when he penned the Psalms. But there were, doubtless, de-

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grees in this matter. There were times when he was more solemn; there were times when he was less solemn. But, it appears to me, looking at this Psalm, and viewing it in its different bearings, that when he penned it, it was a time of peculiar solemnity with his soul.

It seems that he had brought guilt upon his conscience by the free and immoderate use of his tongue—a frequent source of condemnation to God’s tried family; and being stung with guilt on account of having been unable to bridle this unruly member, he breaks forth thus: “I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.” Ps 39:1 The ungodly had taken advantage of expressions that had dropped from his lips; they had misrepresented and misinterpreted the words that he had inadvertently uttered. And being wounded, not merely with the guilt of having spoken unadvisedly, but also with the misrepresentations that had gone forth, he determines to put a check upon his tongue for the future, he would keep his mouth with a bridle, while the wicked was before him. Nay, more than that, he felt he had sometimes spoken inadvertently before God—that there was need not merely to bridle his tongue before men, still more before the ungodly, but he was not free to give utterance to everything before the Lord.

He felt that in the multitude of words, even before the Almighty, there lacketh not sin. He therefore goes a step further, and says, “I was dumb with silence: I held my peace, even from good.” Ps 39:2—“I felt and found it to be the wisest way to give utterance to none of the feelings of my soul.” But did this do? No. There was a holy flame burning upon the altar of his broken heart. “My sorrow,” he says, “was stirred.” “If I spoke, I had guilt; if I was dumb, I felt sorrow.” “My heart was hot within me;” so that I could not keep my mouth, any better than my feelings under control: I was obliged to give vent to what was within. “While I was musing, the fire burned;” not merely was “hot” in my heart—

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not merely smouldering in the embers; but ready to blaze forth. “As I mused and meditated, and sat in solemn silence, revolving in my heart the dealings of the Lord, the flame smouldering in the embers burst forth; the fire burned.” Then, no sooner did the fire burn than the flame shewed itself—my mouth gave vent to the feelings of my soul, “Then spake I with my tongue.” What was this that burst forth? During his silence he had been meditating on various subjects; the solemn realities of eternity especially had been resting upon his heart, ‘Therefore,’ he says, viewing the shortness of life, ‘seeing what a poor dying worm I am—looking at the length of eternity, and the brevity of time,—’ Lord, make me to know mind end!’—let the day of death be before my eyes; let me not put it far away from me. “Make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am;” or, as it is in the margin, “what time I have here.” And then, looking at his own life, he says, “Behold, thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth”—no longer, no wider than the breadth of mind hand, which an insect, a worm may crawl over in the space of a few seconds. And my age, however long, if it be prolonged to the utmost verge of man’s life—“mine age is as nothing before thee,” the eternal infinite Jehovah. When I look around me, and view the state of man, “verily every man”—not myself only—but “every man in his best estate”—his wealthiest, his healthiest, his most prosperous condition—“every man”—whoever he be—“in his best state, is altogether vanity”—nothing more, nothing less. In looking around, he saw what the condition of the world was—what a shew, what a vain delusion! He says,

“Surely every man walketh in a vain shew!”—their pursuits, their acts, their pleasures, their desire their anxieties, their fears, are all equally vain. They are all in a masquerade—they are all deceiving themselves—they are all deluded by the arch magician—the god of this world hath blinded their minds. “Surely they are disquieted in vain.” Wordly cares, and temporal anxieties disquiet them; but surely it is in vain; they lead to no result; they bring forth no fruit;

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they do not terminate in their good, or in God's glory. And if I go to the rich man, who seems of all men to be the most envied, I see, says the Psalmist, "he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them." When he is laid in the grave, the riches he has been heaping up, and selling his soul to Satan for—who shall gather them? The lawyer, the broker, and the spendthrift may gather all he has heaped together, and scatter them like dust before the wind. And then he appeals to his own soul in the words of the text. This is the connection of the text with the preceding verses. He turns within. He had been taking a solemn survey around,—looking at man in his best estate—viewing him in his most beautiful form;—then he turns his contemplation to his own soul, and appeals to God and his own conscience for the truth of what he says, "Now Lord, what wait I for?" Do I differ from the ungodly? Have I the same mind as they? Am I pleased with the same things as they are? Am I heaping up riches, not knowing who shall gather them? Am I walking in a vain shew? "And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee. Deliver me from all my transgressions; make me not the reproach of the foolish?"

Looking at these words, we may observe there are four distinct clauses in them. Therefore, without making any other division, I shall endeavour to take them up as the Holy Ghost has revealed them, and consider them one by one, endeavouring to trace out the mind of the Spirit in them.

I.—We begin with the solemn enquiry, the direct appeal that he makes to the Lord. "And now, Lord, what wait I for?" Now that I have looked at others—at the condition of men at large—now that I have seen that mine own life is but a hand-breath—now that I have viewed the shortness of time, and length of eternity—now, Lord, to what resolution have I come in my own conscience—"What wait I for?"

Let us see, first, what he did not wait for—in other words, look at it negatively; and then see what he did wait for, and view it positively.

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1. Now what did he not wait for? What is meant by the expression "wait?" It implies the expectation of the soul after something—the desire of the heart to receive something. What did he not thus wait for? One thing that he did not wait for was, the good opinion of man. The good opinion of men is the all in all of some people's religion—the grand pivot on which it turns, the hinge on which the door of their profession swings. "What am I thought of? Do I stand high in the opinion of this or that person? Do the minister and people speak well of me? Do they endorse my religion, and stamp it with their approval?" O depth of rottenness! O wretched delusion; O spawn of a deceitful heart!—that a man should be looking at the good opinion which his fellow creatures entertain of him and resting the foundation of his hope upon the fickle, wavering opinion of a worm of earth! "No," says David, "I do not wait for that." The good opinion of men has often been obtained by the greatest of hypocrites, who have crept into churches for the basest purposes, and while honoured and well-esteemed, have had but a lie in their right hand. Whilst some of God's own tried, exercised, and perplexed family have been set at nought, despised, and trampled down, from the mistake of man's judgment. As Solomon says, "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth." Ec 10:7

2. In saying to the Lord—"What wait I for?"—he was not expecting to gain worldly advantage from his religion. if your religion stands upon worldly interest: if to advance yourself in lucre, in honour, in power, in the world, has been the root and core of your profession, it is rotten to the very centre. Now what induced you I address myself to all that profess truth here present to make a profession? What was the secret motive that brought you out of the world? Was self interest, filthy lucre, honour, praise, admiration. the root and bottom of your religion? Depend upon it, if it was so, it is rotten to the very centre. Unless sovereign grace prevent, that which began wrong will end wrong; that which is based in hypocrisy will end in despair; that which began in deceit will end in an

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overwhelming curse.

3. In saying “what wait I for?”—he was not waiting to see which way the tide turned; he was not waiting to observe from which quarter the wind blew; but he was for starting at all hazards, without waiting for the shifting and veering of man’s applause. In other words, he was not a time-server. But how many such characters there are in the church of God, whose religion is but one continual timeserving! They never think of the honour of God; they have no single eye to His glory; they have no inward craving after His approbation—no holy fear of His great name—no desire to be right before Him; but are ever watching and waiting, crying and bowing, and looking to the creature, and the creature only. Thus, all their religion is one wretched makeshift: and like a waterman, they are watching which way the tide turns before they venture their bark upon the river of profession.

4. He was not waiting for his old nature to undergo a radical change; he was not expecting to become more holy, righteous, and pious in himself; he was not waiting to be sanctified perfectly, so as to be free from the very being of sin.

Now we will turn and look at the other side of the picture, and see what he was waiting for. “Now, Lord.” He appeals to the Most High; he lays his conscience, with all its intricate movements, before the footstool of a heart searching Jehovah. “Now, Lord, what wait I for? Thou knowest.” I will shew, if God enable me.

1. He was waiting for the testimony and approbation of God in his own conscience. Now a man can never wait for the testimony and approbation of God in his own soul till he is delivered from waiting for testimony and approbation of the creature. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.” Mt 6:24 We cannot be veering and shifting betwixt God and man—we shall be either waiting for the favour and testimony of man, or waiting for the favour and testimony of God. But David could appeal to the Lord and what he was waiting for, was the gracious

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testimony and inward witness of the favour and approbation of God Himself. Now, can you say so, in solemn moments of waiting at God’s footstool? Is there a looking up, and waiting for, a panting after the inward testimony of God in your soul?—a turning your eyes away from the creature, and looking wholly and solely to God Himself? Is there a thirsting after the testimony of God, after His manifested favour, the witness of His Spirit, the smiles of His love, the sheddings abroad of that blessing which maketh rich? If so, you can say, “Lord, what wait I for?” It is for Thy smile, Thine approbation, the dropping in of Thy grace, mercy, and truth into my conscience.

2. He was waiting for a manifestation and revelation of a precious Jesus. Now the Lord the Spirit will bring all our religion, sooner or later, to the centre in the Son of God. He will gather up all our scattered feelings, and concentrate all the spiritual desires, affections, thoughts, and sensations of our soul in Immanuel, “God with us.” When the soul is thus guided and led, and brought to centre in Jesus all its hopes, all its expectations, all its desires, all the hidden emotions of the divine life; when all the varied feelings of the heart are brought to flow unto, and centre in the great High Priest over the house of God—then the soul can say before God, “Now, Lord, what wait I for?” The appearing of the Son of man, the revelation of a precious Christ, the manifestation of His dying love, the sprinkling of His atoning blood, the shedding abroad of His ineffable loveliness and beauty.

Now, we cannot come here, unless we have seen something of the beauty of the Son of God. We must have had in our own consciences, through the teachings of the Spirit, a discovery of the glorious Person, and perfect loveliness of Immanuel; we must have seen him by the eye of faith, as the only Mediator between God and man, felt our hearts fluttering within us through the solemn sensation produced by the sight, our conscience melted down at His blessed footstool, and every tender affection of our soul flowing unto Him. Till we are brought here, our eyes are looking ev-

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erywhere but to the right quarter;—to our own religion, our own piety, our own evidences; to what we have done, or what we hope to do for the Lord: we are staring and gazing a thousand different ways. But when the Lord gives living faith, brings a precious Jesus near, and shows His glory and beauty, this draws up our spiritual affections, and gathers up all our gracious feelings into His own blessed bosom, Thenceforth all our religion centres in Him, and we can say, “What wait I for?”—the manifestation of Jesus, the appearing of the Son of God, the kisses of His blessed lips, the smiles of His countenance, and the coming over all the mountains of unbelief of this most precious Immanuel.

3. “What wait I for?” The teachings of God the Spirit. When we are thoroughly emptied of ourselves—when our knowledge is shown to be ignorance, our wisdom folly, our righteousness filthy rags, and our strength weakness, then we begin to long after the teachings of the blessed Spirit. We must be purged and tried before we can value and receive the treasures of grace. When we are well exercised and tried in our souls, then we begin to long after the teachings of the Holy Spirit, that He would shed abroad the love of God in our soul, visit and guide us, overshadow us with His holy presence, and drop into our hearts His secret unction. Before we are brought here, we know not the personality of the Holy Ghost. We have no evidence in our conscience that He is God; we cannot worship and adore Him as the Third Person in the blessed Godhead. But when we are brought to this spot, that we know nothing without His teaching, feel nothing without His giving, and are nothing without His making—this makes us pant and sigh after His teachings and leadings; and we are brought to wait in the posture of holy adoration and still quietness for the dew and unction of the Spirit to fall upon our conscience.

4. “What wait I for?” To know Thy will, and do it. We have no desire by nature to know the will of God; or if we know it, we have no desire to do it. For that will is contrary to ours. That will is spiritual—ours is carnal; that will is holy, ours is unholy; that will is

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pure, but ours is averse to all good. Therefore, by nature we cannot desire to know, and do the will of God. But when He makes Jesus dear and precious to us—lifts our hearts up to Himself—then we desire to know the will of God; and not merely to know that will, but do it when known. Now could we be brought in singleness of eye to know God’s will, and do it, it would relieve us from a thousand perplexities. What is the cause of many of our perplexities? Nature bids us one thing, conscience another: the law of God in our mind points one way, and the law of sin in our members points another. It is this conflict within, the warring of the two principles one against the other, so that we cannot walk in the path of obedience, which so perplexes the soul. But when we are brought to this point. “Lord, let me know Thy will; and let me do Thy will. at whatever price, at whatever cost; however it may pain my flesh, let me know it. and do it”—whenever we are brought there, though it makes the cross itself more heavy than before, it relieves us of much exercise and perplexity, because it makes the path plain before us.

Now, David could say, on all these points. “What wait I for?... Dost Thou not know, Lord, and I wait for them?” This implies tenderness of conscience, simplicity of object, godly tear and ardent desire after God’s honour and glory. So that no man can utter these words, sincerely and simply. from the bottom of his heart, in whose soul the Lord has not begun, and is not carrying on. His own gracious operations.

II.—But he adds another word. “My hope is in Thee.” There is a connection between these two clauses. He had appealed to God—“What wait I for?... Am I a timeserver, a hypocrite, a double-minded man, a perverse rebel? Thou knowest. Lord, there is in me another mind another spirit, another nature, which cleaves to, and loves Thee.” “What wait I for?” I wait on Thee because my hope is in Thee.

What is it to be able to say, “my hope is in thee?” To feel that in the Lord rests all the hope of our troubled minds; that in Him

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is deposited all our treasure “for where a man’s treasure is, there will his heart be also”; that He is our rock, whereon we venture for eternity, in the face of sin, death, and hell. “My hope is in thee.” Not in myself—fickle and feeble; not in my own righteousness—defiled and polluted; not in my own strength, which is utter weakness; not in my own resolutions, which are to be broken; not in the creature, wayward and wavering. No: it is in Thee, Lord.

Before we can be brought to this point—to hope in God—we must know something of His Person and character. Observe, it does not say, “I hope on God,” but “in God.” It is one thing to hope on God—another thing to hope in God. When we hope on God, we hope on His attributes, on His perfections, on His invitations, on His promises. But this is not the Person of Jehovah. This is not a looking into His very heart and bosom. This is not the repose of the soul in the Triune God, as personally revealed to it. The on is external—the in is internal. The on is when the soul is at a distance—the in, when it comes to the very centre of the bosom of Jehovah. So that it is not the same thing to have our hope on God, as in God. We cannot have our hope in God till we have entered the sanctuary within the veil, till we have looked into the sympathizing bosom of Jesus, till all the emotions and desires of our heart have pierced beyond transitory things, and mounted beyond the dark cloud that hovers over earth up to the very bosom of the Three-One God, to anchor there, as our hope for eternity. Now, when we can say, “My hope is in thee,” in Jehovah-Jesus, in His sympathizing bosom, in His atoning blood, in His finished work, in His justifying righteousness; for I have a vital union to Him, as the head of the church, “God over all, blessed for ever;” when we can say, “My hope is thus in Him, centering in His very bosom;” then comes, “What wait I for?”

Whilst our hope is on Him, not “in” Him, we may be waiting for many things. We have not been fully separated from the world; we have not come to the slaughtering stroke that cuts to pieces all our own righteousness; we have not had the grafting knife ful-

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ly passed through the scion to separate it from the old stock. But when we can say, “My hope is in Thee; all my soul’s hopes, all my soul’s affections, all my soul’s desires, are in the precious Lamb of God;”—then we can say, “What wait I for?”... “Is not my all there? Does not my hope centre there? Is He not the winner of my affections, the Lord of my heart, the God of my soul, and the guide of my feet? Is He not my Creator, Preserver, Saviour and Mediator?... What wait I for?” Shall I go to the creature, when there is the Creator? look to man. When there is God? go to a worm of earth, when there is Jehovah, the Rock of Ages? “What wait I for?... Why. I wait for Thee because my hope is in Thee, and because I expect to receive everything out of Thee.”

III.—Is it not strange that all this should be consistent with a deep personal knowledge of sin?—“Deliver me from all my transgressions?” What a strange expression! Here is a man whose affections and desires are of a spiritual nature, and all whose hopes and expectations spring from, and centre in the Three-one God. Why, should you not expect this man to have no sin at all? no inward transgressions, no external backslidings, no slips nor falls? Should you not expect him to be perfectly holy and pure? Yet the same Spirit that uttered, “what wait I for? my hope is in thee,” breathed forth this petition and cry of a brokenhearted sinner, “Deliver me from all my transgressions.” It is not, then, our holiness, nor our purity, nor our piety which bring us near to the Lord; but our felt sinnership, our guilt, our filth, our condemnation, and our shame. And when the blood of Jesus is sweetly applied, it brings the soul through all these things, and above all these things, into His bosom. And yet to be a transgressor still! We will look at the words a little more closely, if God enable.

“Deliver me from all my transgressions.” What! “all my transgressions?” Yes, “all my transgressions.” You see David was but a sinner still. What is transgression? It is stepping beyond the narrow line—disobeying the word of God, the will of God, the mind of God, the dictates of the Spirit in a tender conscience, and the

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workings of godly fear in the soul. But how is this? How can a man be in this posture, “Now Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee;” and yet be feeling the workings of base transgression in his heart? It is a mystery, and always will be a mystery, except to the exercised family of God. This is the source of the mystery—that they carry within their bosom a defiled and polluted nature; a nature utterly incurable—a nature so thoroughly saturated with evil, as absolutely to be irremediable in this life.

Now, David felt the workings of these transgressions. He knew what it was to have a lustful eye, a backsliding heart, and filthy imagination, a roving, roaming, and carnal mind. perpetually transgressing God’s holy will and word. He knew what it was to be entangled in the snares that Satan spread for his feet, to be caught in the besetments of a wicked heart, and be ever stumbling through the corruptions of his nature. He knew what it was to be a sorrowful captive, a poor broken-hearted soul, exercised with a daily, and sometimes an hourly conflict. And how came he to know this? It was waiting upon the Lord, whereby he received light to see it—it was waiting upon the Lord, whereby he received life to feel it. It was hoping in the Lord, having his anchor there, that made him feel more the tossings to and fro of the sea of iniquity within. But sin was his burden. It was not his joy—it was not his glory. He could not feel comfortable, nor happy as a transgressor. It was the trouble of his heart, and the very grief of his soul that he was one. And I believe a man is dead in sin who feels otherwise.

I have no idea of a hardened transgressor among the children of God, or of a seared conscience in the living family. I know by painful experience, that stripes follow sin; and if we transgress God’s holy word, we shall be visited for it. Then this cry, “Deliver me from all my transgressions” and this delivers us from hypocrisy follows. We can no longer walk with the clean-handed and the clean-hearted. We can no longer boast of our own uprightness and consistency. We fall down as poor, guilty sinners, we smite

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upon our thigh, and we remember the sins of our youth. We dare scarcely at times look up to heaven, but say, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

In crying to the Lord to deliver him from all his transgressions, there were three things specially connected with sin, from which David desired to be delivered.

1. One is, the guilt of sin. Now, wherever there is transgression in a child of God, there must be guilt. I do not care what he has passed through—what his experience is—however the atoning blood and pardoning love of the Saviour may have been felt—guilt will be as sure to follow sin, as the shadow follows the sun. Now, when a soul feels it has transgressed against a holy and pure God, it will desire and cry earnestly to be delivered from the guilt of its transgression. Nothing can really do this for the soul, but that balmy blood, the blood of the Lamb of God. Which “cleanseth from all sin.” This can, and does deliver the people of God from the guilt of sin.

2. There is also, the filth, shame, and confusion that sin produces in the conscience. The conscience becomes defiled through sin, and filth and shame cover the heart. Now, in crying to be delivered from all our transgressions, we desire to be delivered from the filth and shame, from their pollutions and defilement. Do you not feel how sin pollutes, how sin indulged hardens and defiles the conscience, the heart, and the imagination? So that, when you would go into the sanctuary of God, and have heavenly and spiritual feelings, some lust that you have indulged, some idol that you have set up in the chambers of imagery, comes with a polluting flood into your holiest moments, defiles your conscience, and makes you feel “a beast before God”—“yea, more brutish than any man”—“a worm and no man.” Now, when you feel this, we want to be delivered from the filth of sin, as well as the guilt of it. How is this done? By having a divine plunge into the fountain which was once opened for sin and uncleanness; so as to feel the filth and shame of sin for ever done away.

3. There is besides the dominion of sin. How hard sin strives

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for the mastery in a man! Few persons, comparatively speaking, know the power of sin. They give way to it, and then they do not feel it; or their corruptions are not stirred up, and their souls are not exercised. With some, one lust governs, and keeps out the rest. If pride fill the throne of the affections, it shuts out covetousness; and if covetousness rule, it keeps out pride. So that, being under the power of one sin, the door is shut against the rest; and they think they are free from sin, because they have not the conflict with it that others of God's people are exercised with. But he who watches the movements of his heart, he who is tried by the conflict, he who is perpetually assaulted by "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life"—he knows what it is for sin to be perpetually seeking to gain the mastery over him. And O, what struggles, sighs, and groans does the poor child of God pour out into the bosom of his heavenly Father, that he may not fall a victim to the power of sin.

Now all these things—the guilt of sin, the filth of sin, and the power of sin—did David cry to the Lord to deliver him from. And I believe it will find a responsive echo in every God-taught breast. We cannot know the guilt of sin without crying to be cleansed from it; we cannot experience the power of sin without crying to be washed from it; and we cannot experience the power of sin without crying to be delivered from it.

IV.—There was one thing more in David's breast; there was a feeling besides that lay deep in that holy man's bosom: "Make me not the reproach of the foolish." Who are these foolish? I believe them to be persons in a profession of religion, utterly destitute of the feeling power of it in the heart—the five foolish virgins, who had lamps, but no oil. These foolish ones know nothing of the workings of sin and corruption in the heart of a child of God: they know nothing of the powerful temptations that Satan is continually seeking to ensnare them by; still less do they know anything of the agonising struggles in a tender conscience that they may not be entangled in the snares of the wicked one. These foolish

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ones are very consistent, upright, virtuous, and amiable, viewed as moral characters. There is much in them exceedingly admirable to nature; and yet they are foolish; for they have not the grace of God in them which makes them wise unto salvation. They do not know the treachery of their heart, the temptations of Satan, nor the inward struggles of a gracious principle against the corruption of depraved nature. But being so consistent, so upright, so virtuous, so moral, so amiable, and so honourable, they know no pity for the slipping and halting.

Now what David feared very much was this—lest by his slips and falls, lest by the transgression of his lips, the transgression of his hands, or the transgression of his life, he should be made "the reproach of the foolish." These foolish ones, unexercised and un-plagued, who know nothing of the inward workings of sin, and the strugglings of a living soul against it, he knew would point the finger of scorn against every poor, Satan-tempted, sin-plunged transgressor.

But why did he utter this cry? It was because he felt a conflict in his soul. So powerful were his temptations, so subtle were the snares that Satan was spreading for his feet—and so weak his flesh to stand against the temptations, that he felt if God Himself did not hold him up by His own almighty arm fall he should, fall he must, and thus become "a reproach to the foolish." Well; but should we not expect something better from David than this? Why, was he not a holy man, a heavenly-minded man, led up from time to time into sweet communion with his God? What! this good, gracious, holy, and heavenly-minded saint talk in this way? It is a mystery, and ever will be a mystery, that the same man who could solemnly appeal to God that he waited only for His smiles and the testimonies of His approbation—that all his hopes centred in Him, and all his spiritual affections flowed unto and rested in Him—that this same man was so tempted in his soul, so tried in his mind, so plagued by the unceasing conflict betwixt nature and grace, that he should cry as a poor broken-hearted sinner at the footstool of

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mercy, "Deliver me from all my transgressions."

Is it not a sweet encouragement to a poor, sin-burdened wretch, that this holy man was thus exercised? Suppose you had the bright part only of David's character—his holiness, his spirituality, his heavenly-mindedness, and his love to God; and had not the darker shades—his corruptions, temptations, conflicts, and perplexities. Suppose the Holy Ghost had revealed only one portion of David's experience, his blessings and manifestations, and neglected to record the cries and groans of his troubled soul; would God's poor, tried, and tempted family have gone to the Psalms as to a full breast of consolation? But the Lord the Spirit has mercifully unfolded both parts of David's experience; the bright lights, and the dark shades—the workings of grace, and the workings of nature—the deep sinkings, and the sweet deliverances; turning him out to our view, just as he was—not exalting the man, but magnifying the grace of God in him. We can read in the Psalms his experience, and feel the same workings in our own bosom. For this purpose they were revealed, that they might be a standing consolation, a breast of ever-flowing milk, to the poor and needy, hungering and thirsting after righteousness; that the Lord's exercised family might thus have a sweet testimony raised up in their hearts, that they are treading in the footsteps of the flock, and that their spot is the spot of God's children.

Let us endeavour to gather up these fragments. I have endeavoured to trace out their connection—to show you how David came into this solemn frame, and then how he breathed out his soul before the Lord. Can you and I find any echo here? Do look at it—it will bear close inspection. If you are a child of God, you will not mind a cross-examination. You will lay your whole soul at times bare before a heart-searching God, and say, "Search me, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me." Can we then walk step by step with this holy man of God?—"Now, Lord, what wait I for?" Do we know what it is to wait upon the Lord, to plead and wrestle with Him at His footstool, that He would appear for us? Can we

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lay down our feelings side by side with the feelings of David? Then the same Spirit that prompted the one prompts the other. Can we go a step further—"My hope is in thee." It is a great word to use: we may say it unadvisedly—we may say it delusively—we may say it hypocritically. Can we say it honestly? That is the question. What manifestations, what testimonies, what discoveries have we had? What goes out, and what comings in? What cries, and what answers? What tears and what wipings away of tears from our eyes? What afflictions, and what consolations? We must know some of these things in order to be able to say, "My hope is in thee."

Let us go a step further. Are we unplugged, unexercised professors, that have never loathed ourselves for the guilt of sin, and never felt its filth and power? Or if we be these unburdened, untried professors, we cannot say with a feeling heart and conscience, "Deliver me from all my transgressions;"—"more in number than the hairs of my head"—transgressions in heart, lip, and life; transgressions morning, noon, and night; proud transgressions; covetous transgressions; hypocritical transgressions; transgressions of every kind, every colour, every shade, and every hue. But when we come as penitents to the footstool of mercy, we can say, "Deliver me from all my transgressions." Have we ever feared, cried, and groaned within us, lest we should be made a reproach of the foolish? lest our sins should break forth? lest our lusts should desolate our soul? lest our temptations should so overpower us as to cast us altogether down? Have we ever feared and quaked within us lest the foolish should point the finger of scorn at our falls and backslidings? Why if we can come in here, surely, surely we may use the words. "Make me not the reproach of the foolish."

Thus our personal experience will coincide with that of the Psalmist. We shall have testimony that the same Spirit is teaching us who taught him. We shall travel on side by side, and view our experience in his experience; for "as in water, face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." Thus we shall bless and praise God that ever He led David into these paths and gives us some tes-

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timony that the same Spirit that guided him is guiding us, and will bring us eventually to the same place where David now is; when God will wipe away tears from off all faces, and give us to see, face to face, the glory of the Lamb.

98 The Faith and Cry of the Destitute

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Behalf of the Aged Pilgrims Friend Society, on Thursday Evening,

July 24, 1845

"But mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord; in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute."

Psa. 141:8

There are times and seasons when the language of praise is most seasonable and suitable for a living soul. There are times also when the harp is hung upon the willows, and "the organ," as Job speaks, "is changed into the voice of them that weep;" and then confession, bewailing, and lamentation are suitable and seasonable to the soul. And there are times when the Lord pours out a Spirit of grace and supplications into the heart; and then praying, begging, wrestling, and leading with the Lord are most suitable to the soul. We have no command over ourselves as to what shall be our spiritual state; we cannot put ourselves into a praising, lamenting, or praying frame. For these matters we are absolutely dependant upon "God the Lord," who worketh in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, and bringeth forth that which is according to his own good pleasure. But we may lay this down as a rule generally in consistence with the experience of God's people, that the times of praise with them are very few in proportion to the times of prayer; and that could we sit by their side, when the harp is strung and when the harp is unstrung, we should find that the seasons of prayer and lamentation far exceed in number the seasons of praise and thanksgiving. And thus we find, that the Psalms, which are a manual of Christian experience, bear a similar proportion. If you were to look over the Psalms, and compare

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the number of those which are psalms of praise with those which are psalms of lamentation or prayer, you would find that the former bear a very small proportion compared with the latter.

The words of the text are not the words of praise; they are the words of prayer; and, being the words of prayer, they are often more suitable and more seasonable to the hearts of God's people than if they were the words of praise. For there are many times and seasons when we can use the words of prayer, and find a sweetness and suitability in them, when the accents of praise would falter upon our stammering lips.

I.—The first petition, though it does not altogether assume the language of prayer, is this, "Mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord." We will view this as the experience of a child of God. We will not consider it so much David's particular state and case here; but we will endeavour to view it in a more general light, as applicable to the experience of every living soul.

Now observe, first, the character pointed out by the words, "Mine eyes." For who alone has "eyes?" Is it not the living soul; one taught of God the Spirit; one in whose heart the Holy Ghost has begun and is carrying on a gracious work? In fact, before the Lord the Spirit begins this gracious work, we have no "eyes;" we are altogether shut up in nature's blindness, and the very light that is in us, as the Lord said, is but darkness. None, then, but a living soul can use such words as these with real spiritual feeling: "Mine eyes are unto thee."

But observe, in the second place, the condition of the soul here pointed out. This condition is one of soul poverty, soul exercise, soul distress. So that it is necessary not only to be a living soul, but it is also necessary to be placed by the Spirit in a certain condition, before we can know anything of the experience set forth in the words before us.

But having taken a glimpse of the character and condition implied in the text, let us now look at what is more specially contained in the words themselves: "Mine eyes are unto thee, O God

the Lord.”

1. By “eyes,” we may understand three different things as taking place in the soul’s experience. First, it may signify the eyes of the understanding; as the Apostle says, “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.” (Eph. 1:18.) Before divine life enters into the heart and conscience, there is no spiritual light in the understanding. We require therefore a special illumination of the understanding in order to see the things of God; and more especially to see the Person of the Son of God. For, you will observe, our text refers altogether to “God the Lord.” Before, then, our eyes can be unto “God the Lord,” we must have the eyes of our understanding enlightened to see who this Lord God is. Now, I believe in my heart and conscience that every living soul of God’s family is brought to know, believe in, to worship, and to love a Three-One God. There are no—there can be no Arians, or Socinians, in the Lord’s living family. The Lord the Spirit leads all his quickened ones into a personal experimental knowledge of, and faith in a Three-One God, by unfolding to their understanding, and opening up to their heart and conscience the sacred mystery of three glorious Persons in one undivided Godhead. For instance; when the Psalmist says, “Mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord,” his eyes were unto God the Father, desiring to experience a measure of the spirit of adoption in his soul, enabling him to cry, “Abba Father;” unto God the Son, as the treasure-house of all spiritual blessings; and unto God the Spirit, as the only teacher and revealer of salvation to the soul.

Thus the eyes of the understanding are not merely enlightened to see the Person of God the Father, but they are enlightened also to see the Person of God the Son. They are enlightened, for instance, to see the Godhead of Jesus; and what a sweet glory is cast into the soul, when the eyes of the understanding see the Godhead shining forth in the Person of Immanuel! And what an infinite preciousness, unspeakable value, and glorious dignity this

stamps upon every word and action of a suffering Jesus, when we see the Godhead shining forth through them all! When the eyes of our understanding are also enlightened to see the manhood as united to the Godhead; when we view this mysterious, secret, and indissoluble union; when we trace the human nature of the Lord of life and glory having a distinct existence from, and yet intimately united unto, his glorious and eternal Godhead;—when the eyes of the understanding are thus enlightened to see the union of the infinite Godhead and the finite manhood in one glorious Person, and to view him not only as God, and not only as man, but to view him as the God-Man exalted far above all principality and power, a risen Mediator, a glorious High Priest, an ever-living and ever-loving Advocate, Mediator, Friend, and Intercessor,—what glory and beauty then shine forth in this Immanuel!

But not only are the eyes of the understanding enlightened to see the Person of the God-Man, “Immanuel, God with us;” but they are also enlightened to see the distinct personality of God the Holy Ghost; and not merely brought to see it as revealed in the Scriptures, but to see it in that peculiar indescribable way whereby a living soul only can see it.

2. And this leads me to shew, that not only are there eyes of the enlightened understanding, but that there are also eyes of faith; for we read, “By faith he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” Wherever there is spiritual understanding, there must be spiritual faith. The graces of the Spirit are never separated; they are all in blessed and holy union one with another: yet they may be distinct in the matter of personal experience. Thus, sometimes we may see things by the eyes of our spiritual understanding; and yet find faith too weak to embrace that which is thus seen. Nay, when we are in this state, we may even fear lest the portion of Balaam seem to be ours, that we “shall see him, but not nigh.” He had his eye upon, but never had faith in the glorious Person of the Son of God. But the Lord gives to his people not merely spiritual eyes of the understanding, but also gives them the eyes of living faith, “the substance

of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." And when these new eyes, the eyes of faith, are given, then indeed we see. There is a sweet and solemn looking up of the heart unto the Lord; there is a going forth of faith upon his glorious perfections; there is a gracious internal act of the soul, whereby the person of the God-Man is looked unto, believed in, hoped upon, and cleaved to with purpose of heart. And wherever the soul has had, not merely the eyes of the understanding enlightened, but also has had the eyes, the believing eyes of living faith communicated to it, to lay hold of the Person, blood, righteousness, work, and love of Immanuel, that soul is passed from death unto life, and saved with an everlasting salvation.

3. But there are not only the eyes of the spiritual understanding, and the eyes of living faith; there are also eyes of loving affection. Therefore the Bridegroom says to the Bride, "Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck:" and then, turning to her, he says, "Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me." The eyes of the Bride gazed upon the Bridegroom, and cast upon him a languishing look of love. It is so naturally. If there be a beloved child; if there be an endeared wife or husband; if there be a cherished friend, do not the eyes look upon them with tenderness and affection? Can we ever look too much? can we ever look too long? And as the eye rests upon the beloved object, do we not drink in deep draughts of still more tender affection? So spiritually. Wherever the eyes of the understanding are spiritually enlightened, and wherever the eyes of faith look up unto the Lord, there also will be the eyes of affection. And these eyes of affection look up unto the Lord with sensations of the tenderest love; they look up unto him not merely as casting all our hopes of salvation upon him, not merely with admiration of his glorious Person, viewing his surprising majesty and beauty; but also with tender affection and devoted love, flowing forth out of the heart unto him who is "altogether lovely."

If ever I knew what it was to have the eyes of my understand-

ing enlightened, the eyes of my faith opened, and the eyes of my affection looking up to the Lord of life and glory, it was during an illness I had last Autumn. There on my bed I knew what it was, I believe, in the actings of living faith and living affection to be looking up unto "God the Lord." And sweet and blessed indeed was the sight of "Immanuel, God with us," in his beauty, loveliness, and glory. It indeed softened my heart; and I knew a measure of what the Scriptures speak of in those words, "To be spiritually-minded is life and peace." Therefore in describing these things, I speak of what, I hope, the Lord has shewn me, and wrought with divine power in my heart; and from time to time I do know what it is to be able to say, "Mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord." For I am sure there is no other Object in earth or heaven that we can look to with any hope, or with any confidence; nor is there an object worthy of our heart's affection or trust but "God the Lord." God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, Israel's Three-One God in covenant love and covenant ties, is worthy of, and will claim all the faith, all the hope, all the trust, all the admiration, and all the affection of every believing, hoping, loving heart. And when these blessed realities are brought with divine power into the soul, we are enabled to say, "Mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord," and to no other.

II.—But this leads me to what we read in the next clause, "In thee is my trust." Now before we can be brought to trust in the Lord, depend upon it, we must have been cut off and cut down from all creature confidence. I am well persuaded in my soul, that as long as we can look to the creature we shall look to the creature; as long as we can hang upon man we shall hang upon man; and therefore it is needful for "God the Lord" to cut us up and cut us off from resting upon the creature in any shape and in any form, in order that our trust may be simple, childlike, and implicit, so as to be wholly and solely fixed upon him.

But what are the ideas connected with the expression trust? "My trust is in thee." Before we can trust a person, must we not

know that person! "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee." Must I not, then, have some spiritual and experimental knowledge of God—of this Object that is so trustworthy, before I can trust in him? How can I trust in him whom I do not know? of whose character I am altogether ignorant? I must have some experimental knowledge of God in my soul before I can say, in the language of truth, faith, uprightness, and simplicity, "In thee is my trust." Knowledge, then, experimental knowledge, is the very ground of trust. An experimental knowledge of the true character of God as a covenant God, full of mercy, full of faithfulness, full of lovingkindness and truth; an experimental knowledge of the grace and glory of God the Father; of the Person and work of God the Son, through the teachings and operations of God the Holy Ghost, must be ever the foundation of gospel trust.

Besides that, there is another idea connected with the word "trust," and that is confidence. I may know a person, and believe that he is trustworthy; and yet not have had any such personal experience of his trustworthiness as to confide in him. But when, in addition to my knowledge of him, he has done that for me which has given me a confidence in him, then my trust arises, not from a bare knowledge of his character, but it also springs from a knowledge of what he has done for me. So that all true spiritual trust is composed of these two elements—a knowledge of God, and a confidence in God on account of what he has done for the soul. Now, in order that our trust may be in "God the Lord," we must see him worthy of it. Trust and confidence in God comprehends the Three Persons of the Godhead. When David said, "My eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord," it was to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, Israel's Three-one Jehovah, that his eyes looked. So, when he says, "In thee is my trust," it is, in the same manner, Jehovah the Father, Jehovah the Son, and Jehovah the Spirit, in whom his heart reposed all its childlike confidence. He trusts in the Father, because he has made a "covenant ordered in all things and sure;" because he has chosen him in Christ be-

fore the foundation of the world; because he has shewn forth his mercy in the face, Person, work, love, and blood of his dear Son. He trusts in God the Son, because he sees in him everything trustworthy; he views him as having died for his sins; beholds him as having brought in an everlasting righteousness; sees every action and every suffering of the blessed Immanuel stamped with infinite dignity and glory; and feels he can commit his soul into his hands, for he beholds a cursing and condemning law completely fulfilled, the justice and purity of God's character amply satisfied, Satan cast down, dethroned and destroyed, death abolished, and life and immortality brought to light by the gospel. He sees also that he has at the right hand of God the Father an ever-living and ever-glorious Head and Mediator, to plead his cause for him; and to keep him by faith through the power of God unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. And thus he sees in the Person of God the Son every thing on which he can repose with the most implicit confidence. And so, with respect to trusting in God the Spirit, who has borne with his manners in the wilderness, whom he has often grieved, but yet who has from time to time brought him back when he had backslidden after idols, melted his soul into penitence and sorrow, smitten the rock that the waters might gush out when his heart felt like an adamant, and led him, with weeping and supplications, to the feet of the Saviour, the exalted and glorified God-Man in his heart's affection—having had this experience of his love and power, he can trust in the Holy Ghost to carry on the work that he has begun till he brings it to full and final perfection.

Thus, when the believer is enabled to say, "My trust is in thee," all his hope, all his confidence, and all his expectations are founded upon the Three-One God, in his distinct personalities, and yet unity of essence. But, as I before observed, before we can come to this spot, "My trust is in thee," we must be thoroughly weaned from the creature; we must be cut off from an arm of flesh; our own righteousness must be dashed to a thousand shivers before our eyes; our wisdom must have become utter foolishness; our

strength must have become thorough weakness; we must have felt the misery of our previous idolatries; we must have mourned over our perpetual and unceasing backslidings; and we must have seen in the Lord everything to draw forth the affections and desires of our soul.

Thus also before there can be trust in the Lord, there must be secret divine communications from him. So that if there be trust in the Lord, there will be not only a going forth of the soul to him, but there will be a coming down of that very Lord into the soul, enabling it to trust in him. There will be also trials, and promises in those trials; there will be temptations, and deliverances out of those temptations; there will be afflictions, and consolations proportioned to those afflictions; there will be exercises, and relief in those exercises; there will be miseries, and mercies suitable to those miseries. And these things being wrought in the heart, and brought into the conscience by a divine power, there will be strength to trust in the Three-One God, such as the Lord communicates only to those who truly and earnestly seek his face.

But will not this trust be tried? Every thing worthy of trust is tried. The very musket that the soldier carries into the battle is sent to the proof-house before it is thought fit to go to war with; the sword or sabre he wears to fight his country's battles are tested and proved before they are committed to his hand. And will not your trust, if it be spiritual trust, if it be a spiritual weapon to fight your soul's battles, have to be tried too? Is it not "the trial of your faith," and not faith itself, which is "much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire?" Does not James tell his brethren to "count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trial of their faith worketh patience?" &c. So that wherever there is trust in God, that faith will be tried. If we trust God in providence, there will be things to try that trust; if we trust him in grace, there will be temptations, besetments, perplexities, daily trying that trust, whether it be genuine. If our trust be weak, it will have weak trials to encounter; if it be strong,

it will have strong trials to encounter. The back is suited to the burden; and the burden is suited to the back. The trial is proportioned to the faith; and the faith is proportioned to the trial. It is a great point then to come to, to say, "My trust is in thee;" for it is to say, "Thou hast weaned me from the creature; thou hast reduced me to thorough poverty and destitution of spirit; thou hast separated me from creature wisdom and creature strength; I have none other to look to but thee; thou art my only refuge, my only harbour, the only haven of my tempest-tossed soul." So that to be able to look to the Lord solely, and say feelingly, "My trust is in thee," is one of the strongest expressions a child of God can make use of.

III.—He adds another supplication, "Leave not my soul destitute." His soul then knew what it was to be destitute; he had known the misery of beggary and soul poverty. It was not with him as natural poverty is with the rich, a matter of speculation, a mere matter of theory; but a matter of personal and painful experience. He knew what it was to be destitute; and feeling the misery and wretchedness of being thus destitute, when he was favoured with his eyes being unto the Lord, he was enabled to say, with tenderness and implicit submission, "My trust is in thee." He was looking to the Lord, then, to obtain from him that which his soul was most specially bent upon, that upon which his heart was most intently fixed: "Leave not my soul destitute."

Now there are two seasons chiefly, or rather, two stages of experience when this prayer becomes suitable. In early days, before the Lord has much blessed the soul with manifestations of his kindness and favour, the eyes of the understanding are often enlightened to see what mercy, pardon, and the grace of God are; and though the soul is not yet fully cut off from the creature, the arm of self-righteousness broken, nor the idol of fleshly wisdom dethroned; yet the mercies, the visits, the enjoyments that the Lord favours his people with, are not powerfully brought into the heart. But this experience leads the soul to know what it is to be feelingly destitute. There is this conviction wrought in the heart, "If I have

not the pardon of sin manifestly communicated, I must die in my sins; if I have not the love of God shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Ghost, I have no testimony that the Lord loves me personally; if he do not answer my prayer; if he do not apply his word; if he do not bring home his promises; if he do not bless me with the sweet manifestations of his everlasting favour, I am undone," "I know," says the needy soul, "I cannot procure these things myself; yet I know that I must perish without them." Now one in this state of experience knows what destitution is, and can therefore say, "Lord, leave not my soul destitute." It is in the margin, "Make not my soul bare;" "Strip me not of every hope; leave me not completely naked; abandon me not to nature's beggary and misery; let me not go down into the pit with all my sins upon my head; leave not my soul destitute of pardon and peace."

One prayer, then, is of this nature. But there is another of a more matured kind. When the Lord has in some measure blessed the soul, and given it a knowledge, not merely of what grace is in the word, but what grace is in the heart; when not merely his favour is seen in the Scriptures, but has shone as a matter of personal experience into the conscience;—when this is not in present feeling, the soul is obliged to cry, "Leave me not destitute." The soul in this state is like one who has been what is called 'well to do in the world,' and then been stripped of all; who has known the comforts of opulence and then been reduced to the extreme of poverty. This is a far worse state than to have been born and bred poor. The nobleman reduced to bankruptcy, the wealthy banker compelled to beg for a livelihood, must needs feel the sharp pangs of poverty far more keenly and acutely than he who was born in a workhouse, and cradled in the depth of natural indigence. So spiritually. If the soul has tasted that the Lord is gracious; if it has felt anything of his kindness and mercy; if it has enjoyed his favour like dew upon the grass, must it not feel more keenly the deprivation of these things than if it had never personally experienced them? So that, when the Lord withholds his presence, does not drop in his

favour, nor shed abroad his testimonies within, then the cry will go forth, "Leave not my soul destitute."

Now you may depend upon it that every living soul is brought to this conclusion that he is utterly destitute, except so far as God the Spirit has done something for him, or as God the Spirit is doing something in him. For I am convinced in my own heart, that the Lord brings all his people to this spot, to know that they have nothing spiritually but what he gives them, feel nothing but what he works in them, and are nothing but what he makes them. The Lord has enlightened the eyes of their understanding to see what his grace, mercy, and favour are; he has taught them what his manifestations are, and shown them that his visitations, and his visitations alone, preserve their spirit. It is not their piety, resolutions of amendment, nor profession of religion that can make up for heavenly manifestations of divine favour. No; these things condemn them often more than sin; for they make them appear more like varnished hypocrites. But being in a measure honest and sincere, they cannot bear to think that they should be hypocrites, have a name to live while dead, and thus perish with a lie in their right hand. Thus they know what the Psalmist says, "Leave not my soul destitute." The cry and breathing of his soul was, that the Lord would bless him with some manifestations of his goodness; that he would cause his favour to rest upon him like the dew upon the branch; that he would shed abroad his everlasting love in his soul, and fill him with joy unspeakable and full of glory; that he would come down into his heart in his precious, blessed, and manifestive mercy, and make him like a hind let loose, or like a watered garden, prepared unto every good word and work. When he has not this, when the Lord withdraws himself, when there is no answer to prayer, when there is no special teaching and power of the Lord, when all is dark within and gloomy without, when his soul sinks thus into the depths of creature wretchedness and poverty, then he cries, "Leave not my soul destitute."

Now, there are many things that a living soul is panting after,

the deprivation of which makes it feel destitute. One is, the fear of God. When we see (as we do see sometimes) what snares are spread for our feet—when we know, as we painfully know, daily know, the workings of our dreadfully depraved and corrupt nature, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life—when we feel this infernal trinity all struggling for the mastery, and fighting against a Three-One God—do we not want (I at times deeply do) to feel the fear of the Lord at work in our souls, as “a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death?” When we see our weakness, when we know our frailty, and that we are walking in the midst of gins and snares; when our wicked heart is going out after every imagination of evil; when nothing seems to be too base for us to do, or too vile for us to desire, will there not be at such times a cry to the Lord, as there was with one of old, that he would keep us from evil, that it may not grieve us, and so our heart might be made tender in the fear of the Lord?

Again, when we feel full of unbelief, unable to muster a single grain of faith, or are exercised, harassed, and perplexed by the vilest temptations to infidelity, do we not then want, as the Lord raises up the desire in the heart, to be blessed with a living faith? and when we have not this, do we not often feel destitute? And do not our hopes sometimes sink very low? Are not our evidences often beclouded? Do not the testimonies of the Lord sink out of sight? Are not past feelings and favours covered with a thick cloud, so that we can scarcely think the Lord will visit our soul in mercy? Do not these feelings make us cry, “Leave not my soul destitute?” And does not sin often lie on the conscience? Do not secret backslidings bring guilt? And do not our inward adulteries and idolatries receive stripes, inward stripes, as their punishment? Does not the feeling of guilt make us long after manifested pardon and the sprinkling of atoning blood to heal the guilty conscience, and purge it from filth and dead works? And when this is withheld, does it not bring us to say, “Leave not my soul destitute?” Are we not also frequently in our feelings without life or love to

God's people? without any holy affections, any heavenly-mindedness, any spirituality of soul? Will not this too lead us sometimes to say, “Leave not my soul destitute?” And do we not value sometimes the favour of God more than ten thousand worlds? the testimony of the Spirit more than thousands of gold and silver? and the sweet witness within that we are the children of God more than anything the world can offer? When our witnesses seem to be against us; when the leprosy rises up in our forehead, as in the forehead of Uzah, and in the face of Miriam, do we not anxiously desire that the Lord would shed abroad his love in our hearts and tell us, with his own peace-speaking lips, that he is our God and Father? And do we not often want to be fruitful in every good word and work, and lament our barren lips and useless lives; lament that we have so little conformity to the crucified Lord, so little separation from the world that lieth in wickedness, so little contrition and meekness of heart, do so little for the Lord, and live so much for ourselves, and so little for his glory? Does not our heart at times desire more conformity to Christ's image? and to walk more simply, more believingly in his blessed footsteps? And when we cannot do these things, but rather do the contrary, will not this be the secret breathing of our soul, “Leave me not destitute?”

But the very cry is a pledge that the Lord will not leave the soul destitute. Strange though it be to us; it is the light that shows darkness; it is life that makes us feel deadness; nay, more, it is fertility and fruitfulness that make us feel barrenness; it is riches that makes us feel poverty; it is God's teaching and presence that make us feel destitution. Look at the dead professor, and hardened presumptuous wretch, with a lie in his right hand. Is he ever crying and groaning to the Lord in the secret corners of the house, on his bed by night, or during his occupation by day, that the Lord would look upon him and bless him, give him a sweet testimony, shed abroad his love in his heart, and lift upon him the light of his countenance? With all his profession, he is unfruitful in every good word and work; like the barren fig tree, he only cumberes the

ground; he is but a sapless branch, which the sharp pruning-knife of the husbandman will soon cut away. This very mourning over our barrenness; this very feeling of our inability to do good, is a proof of the life of God in the soul, an evidence of the work of grace in the heart. "Leave not my soul destitute." This is something genuine; this is heart work; these are the footsteps of the flock; these are the leadings and teachings of God the Spirit in the hearts of the redeemed. These things are saving; these things will lead the soul to eternal glory. And he that knows any of these things by personal experience will one day see the glory of the Lord face to face. What do we then know of these things? Can we lay our experience side by side with this experience of the Psalmist, and say, "Mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord; in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute." Wherever that prayer is, it will bring an answer; and wherever that answer is, there will be matter for everlasting praise. Blessed are the souls that know these things from genuine heartfelt experience. They will shine forth as stars for ever and ever; and when the Lord of life and glory comes a second time without sin unto salvation, then shall they also appear with him in glory.

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I had forgotten till a late period of the day that I had to plead the cause of the Aged Pilgrims' Friend Society this evening. The text broke in upon my mind this morning as I was reading the Scriptures; it seemed suitable for this evening, though it was not taken by me with any view to the cause I am to plead for; and yet I could not but afterwards be struck with the connection between them (a connection not sought by me) and the case before us this evening.

It has struck my mind, then, that many (may we not say most?) of these Aged Pilgrims, whose cause I am attempting to advocate, are saying, "Mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord." If they are, as we have reason to hope, partakers of grace; and if they are (as we know they are) bereft of those things which the world makes

its god, can they not say, "Mine eyes are unto thee?" If some of these aged saints knew that I was pleading their cause to-night, and if they could look out of their cellars, and garrets, and lonely abodes, and look upon this large congregation, would not their hearts be going out to the Lord that he would open the hearts and hands of his people to contribute to their wants? And if the Lord has brought them down in providence, has he not made them say, "My trust is in thee?" May we not add one little word to the text, (I shall not incur John's condemnation if I do), "leave not my body and soul destitute?" We can do something for the body; we can do nothing for the soul—that we must leave to the Lord. But you and I have to do now with the body. Is it not a mercy to be the Lord's almoners? Look at the mercies you enjoy—the comfortable homes—the food spread upon your table—the many comforts, shall I say luxuries? that some of you can readily procure. Are you not connected with these Pilgrims by a secret bond? If they are, as we have reason to believe—if they are, with you, among the family of God, is there not a mystical union between you and them, though they may lodge in a garret or cellar, and you may live in a house; they may lay on a hard flock bed, and you may sleep on a soft and downy couch? But if the spirit of the Lord is at work in their hearts and in your heart, there are the same spiritual feelings in your souls. You may say, lying on your soft downy couch, "Mine eyes are unto thee;" and they may say, with more feeling than you and I perhaps, from their dark cellars and hard mattress, "Mine eyes are unto thee."

I feel glad to plead for this cause at Zoar. It gave me pleasure to find the managers gave ready permission to have a sermon on their behalf here. It gladdens my heart to see the large congregation—not to hear a poor worm like me—but in the hope that the Lord may in some measure work upon your hearts and open your hands to contribute to their wants. I feel great interest in the Society; I have four pilgrims on their books for whom I have a real sympathy. But I will not attempt to work upon your feelings—I must leave it

wholly and solely to the Lord. I shall therefore conclude by reading a paper which the secretary has put into my hands.

89 The Labourer's Rest

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

July 27, 1845

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Matthew 11:28

There are two features especially worthy of notice in the invitations which are scattered up and down the Scriptures of truth: one is, their limitation; the other, their largeness. By their limitation, I mean, that they are confined to God's quickened family; that they do not extend themselves into, what I might almost call, infinite space; but are circumscribed within a circle, and that descriptive of the characters of those in whose hearts the Spirit of God is at work. The other feature worthy of notice is, the largeness of these invitations as far as is compatible with their limitation.

I will endeavour to explain my meaning more fully. In the invitations the Spirit of God traces a circle; and that circle does not extend its boundaries beyond the quickened family of the living Jehovah. But within that circle there is a largeness, so as to comprehend every one of God's own people that are embraced within it. These two apparently contradictory features are reconcilable thus. God knew what was in the hearts of His people; He knew that they would require every possible encouragement that He could give them; and yet He would not stretch the encouragement beyond those for whom it was intended. He would not lavish his gracious invitations upon an ungodly and rebellious world; and yet in these very invitations, He would use language which, though within the bounds of due circumscription, should fully reach unto and embrace every quickened soul. Let us look, for instance, at the invitation contained in Isa 55:1, and see if we cannot trace out these two

features—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters."

"That thirsteth"—there is the limitation; the utmost bound of the circle is not extended beyond those who are spiritually athirst for the living God. And yet, within that circle, how large, how wide, how comprehensive is the invitation! "Ho, every one that thirsteth." How widely do the arms of the invitation extend themselves, to draw into and fold within their embrace all, without exception, in whose bosom the Blessed Spirit has raised up those spiritual desires after the waters of life which are expressed by the figure of "thirst!"

Again; look at the invitation which dropped from the Lord's own lips, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" Joh 7:37. The Lord Himself limited His own gracious invitation to those who thirsted after Him; but within that limit, how He enlarged it to suit the case of every one who spiritually thirsted to be wholly His! "If any man"—not some, not few, not many; but "if any man"—whether many or few, whatever be their state or condition if this spiritual feature be but found in them, "let them come unto Me and drink."

So again, in the invitation, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" Isa 45:22, we still see these two prominent features. "The ends of the earth," spiritually understood, refer to God's poor, tried family, who often feel themselves to be at the remotest distance from the Lord. But all these are freely invited. "All the ends of the earth;" all that feel themselves in that remote spot, all who know themselves to be spiritually far from a holy God, and mourn over their distance and separation, are freely and fully invited to look unto the Lord for salvation.

The same two features we also find in the text. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The invitation does not spread itself beyond the circle of those "who labour and are heavy laden." It does not extend itself so wide as to take in those who have no burden nor sorrow in their hearts. It is not lavished upon the ungodly and rebellious; and yet within that

circle, how freely and graciously does the Lord invite all in whose hearts this fruit of divine teaching is. "Come unto me," He says, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden." So that while the limitation excludes the dead in sin and unregeneracy, the enlargement takes in all the quickened and the exercised; and thus while the circumscription of the circle prevents its being abused to foster self-righteousness and presumption, the wideness of the circle, by embracing all that are spiritually, burdened and sorrowful, shuts out hopelessness and despair.

Having observed these two noticeable features in this and every scripture invitation, we may go on, with God's blessing, to enlarge upon the text. We may remark four things connected with and flowing out of it:

I.—The character of the Speaker.

II.—The character of the persons spoken to.

III.—The invitation itself.

IV.—The promise connected with the invitation.

These several features may the Lord enable me so to open up, and may He so accompany the word with power, that it may be made a blessing to some of the poor and needy of His living family.

I.—We will look, first, then, with God's blessing, at the character of the Speaker. All the force, all the value of the invitation depends upon that. We cannot raise up our expectations too high, we cannot fix our eyes too intently upon the Person of Him who uttered this gracious invitation. For is it not the Lord of life and glory? Is it not the Mediator between God and man? Is it not "Immanuel, God with us," from whose lips, those lips into which grace was poured, that these words dropped? To neglect this—to overlook the character of the Speaker—is to take away the force of the whole.

Now, when such an invitation as this drops from the lips of Him, "who spake as never man spake," the words go forth full of sweetness and grace—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are

heavy laden, and I will give you rest." We want two features in the character of the Speaker made manifest to our conscience, to encourage us to receive the invitation: first, we must know whether He that speaks it has power to perform what He says; and secondly, whether He who has the power has also the will. It is necessary that both these things should meet in the Speaker of such an invitation as this. If He lacked power, He would speak in vain; for He would promise what He could not perform; if He lacked will, He might speak, but we should not be able to rest upon the invitation, as doubting whether His heart moved in concert with His lips. But do we not see the highest power and deepest will uniting together in the Person of the Speaker here? Look at Him in his complex Person. Is He not "God over all blessed for ever?" Is He not "the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth?" Is He not equal to the Father as the Second Person in the glorious Godhead? Can He then want power? He, "for whom all things were made"—He, "by whom all things were created"—He, "by whom all things consist" He, for whose glory all things were made that are made—He cannot want power. But does He want will? Do we not read of "the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush?" And how did He shew forth that will? Can we ever think too much of—can we ever look too much at His coming out of the bosom of the Father? O look at the everlasting love of God in giving up His only-begotten Son! Look at the everlasting love of the Son in condescending to stoop so low! What infinite love! What boundless compassion! What depths of mercy and grace must have dwelt in His eternal bosom to bring Him down into this lower world, there to become "a worm, and no man"—to "take upon him the form of a servant"—to be "made in the likeness of men"—to "take the flesh and blood of the children"—and to debase Himself so low that He might raise us up so high! Can He then want will?

But when we look at His complex Person, His Godhead and manhood in one glorious Immanuel, do we not see all power and will there shining forth? The power of Godhead, and the will of

Godhead; and that power, and that will, manifested in the assumption of manhood. So that when we look upon the Lord of life and glory, "Immanuel, God with us," the infinite manifestation of eternal power, and the infinite manifestation of eternal love, can we want a stronger demonstration than this, that He has all power and all will, not only to promise, but also to perform? What more then can we want in the character of the Speaker to enforce this invitation upon the conscience?

II—But we pass on to consider the character also of the persons spoken to. Who and what are they? They are described in two words—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." The Lord here has selected, so to speak, two features which are to be found in the heart and conscience of all His ransomed and quickened family

1. that they labour—and

2. that they are heavy laden. And all that are so heavy laden, the Lord freely invites: yea, more, He Himself draws them near to His own blessed bosom.

Let us look at these two features separately:

1. What is it to labour? To labour is to have a load to carry, to have a task, a work to perform. Now, the Lord's people, when the spirituality of the law is made known in their conscience—when the purity and holiness of God's character are manifested in their souls, and their heart is made tender in His fear, are immediately set to work. They are compelled by their inward feelings, and by the weight of eternal realities upon their conscience, to labour to work out their own salvation, and establish such a righteousness, as they think will be pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God. But they always, sooner or later, find and it is God's purpose to make them find that this labour is labour in vain; that it is the toil of the Ethiopian to change his skin, and the leopard his spots; that the iniquity of our nature, the depravity of our heart is so desperate and so incurable, that there is no such thing as working out a righteousness which God can accept.

The Lord sees that many of His dear children are toiling and struggling to do something pleasing in His sight. And, whatever disappointments they continually meet—whatever rents are made in the web which they are weaving to clothe themselves with; however short they find the bed, and however narrow the garment—yet many go on foolishly endeavouring to please God by the works of the law, instead of trampling under foot their own righteousness, and looking wholly and solely to the obedience and sufferings of Jesus. To such He says, "Come unto me." Your labour is in vain; you can never work out a righteousness pleasing to God; for to be a righteousness acceptable to Him, it must be perfect: there must be no flaw in it; it must be completely without a spot, a speck, or a stain. Can you produce this? Have you ever produced one thought perfectly pure?—one action thoroughly holy?—one desire with which sin and self have not in some way intermingled? Were you ever fully conformed to God's holy will and word for one minute in your life? Then how can you produce a righteousness which God can be pleased with?

Now, we must learn for ourselves, by painful experience, that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and thus cast them away with self-loathing and abhorrence from us; yea, feel as Job did, "Though I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me" Job 9:30,31. Yes, we must know and feel the word of God, manifesting His holiness and our unholiness, till we are glad to cast off our own righteousness just as we should be glad to cast off our besmeared clothes if we fell into a dirty ditch.

2. But there is another branch of spiritual labour—a labouring under temptation. The Lord's people are a tempted people. They do not indeed all sink into the same depths of temptation; they are not all equally plagued and harassed with the workings of an evil nature, an ungodly world, and an ever-watchful and implacable enemy. But the quickened family, I am well convinced, sooner or later, must be exercised with sharp and powerful temptations. A

desperately wicked heart will not lie idle or asleep in their bosom; sin will work with greater or less power; the world will allure or alarm; Satan will entice or harass. And when these temptations come, labour must attend them.

Now the ungodly have temptations; but they never resist them. There is no fear of God in their heart, whereby the keenness of temptation is felt; no holy principle in their bosom to struggle against it. They comply with temptation; and complying with it, the temptation is not felt to be temptation. The current glides along so quietly and unresistedly that its depth, force, and rapidity are wholly unnoticed. But the Lord's quickened family have a spiritual nature communicated, what the apostle Peter calls "a divine nature" 2Pe 1:4 lodged in their bosom: a holy principle, which feels and hates sin, and desires and loves holiness.

It is, then, the internal opposition of this new, divine, and spiritual nature to all sin, that makes the quickened family of God feel the keen edge of temptation. The deeper, therefore, that the fear of God is in the heart, the more sensibly alive we are to His perfect holiness, and the more powerfully that the Spirit of God acts upon that new nature, the more keenly and acutely do we feel temptation.

But let us look at some of these temptations more in detail:

1. Some of the Lord's people labour under temptations to suicide. This temptation may indeed, in many cases, be connected with a diseased body; but it more usually springs from the suggestions of Satan, who will often ply the mind with such fiery darts as these—'You had better know the worst of it at once; there is no hope for you; you will be a vagabond upon earth; the very brand of Cain is set upon you; you are a reprobate, and God will hurl you down some day to the depths of woe; the longer therefore you live, the greater will be the number of your sins, and the hotter your damnation.' Many of God's family have had to labour, at one time or other of their spiritual life, under this most distressing temptation.

2. Others of the Lord's family labour under temptations to infidelity. They can scarcely believe at times that the Scriptures are the word of God. Doubts, questionings, suspicions, objections keep working and fermenting in their minds as they read or hear the word, or seek to meditate and pray. There is often, what I may call, 'a bass accompaniment' of these infidel thoughts sounding in their hearts—a jarring string of the vilest suggestions, which mingles its harsh and discordant notes with every spiritual movement of the soul. The Trinity, the Deity of Christ, the efficacy of His finished work, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, Christ's second coming; in a word, the most sacred truths of Scripture, and Scripture itself, are all alternately questioned and assailed by the infidelity of our fallen nature. These harassing temptations are perpetually troubling some of the Lord's exercised family.

3. Others of the living in Jerusalem are perpetually tempted to commit some sin. A lustful eye is perpetually entangling some; and they tremble lest they should fall headlong into adultery, or say or do something which shall distress their own souls, and bring reproach on the cause of God. A covetous spirit besets others, perpetually seeking to get possession of their heart, and bury them in carnality and wordliness. The pride of their hearts is often assaulting others, hurrying them into words and actions utterly unbecoming the gospel. An impetuous hasty temper is the besetment of a fourth, and a tongue that cannot be tamed or ruled.

Now these temptations are not occasional visitants; they are not chance callers, who knock at our doors once a month, or once a year. In many of the Lord's family they are perpetual: by perpetual, I mean, more or less frequently recurring temptations. It is this which harasses them, wears out their strength, makes this world a vale of tears to them—that temptation is so perpetually at work, and that they find they have a nature so headlong prone to comply and fall in with the temptation: that they find little but weakness where they hoped to find strength: and that, instead of resisting and fighting against these temptations, and in the fear and strength

of the Lord overcoming them, they feel little else but a feeble wavering heart which is perpetually giving way: and that thus they are only kept from time to time by the skin of their teeth.

4. Others, again, of the Lord's people labour under doubts and fears, questionings and suspicions, whether the work of grace was ever really begun upon their heart: whether what they have felt for they cannot deny that they have felt something was not a spirit of delusion—whether their convictions were not merely convictions of natural conscience, and whether their joys were anything else but the joys of the hypocrite—whether, in a word, delusion and hypocrisy have not been the root and core of their religion; and whether they shall not perish in hypocrisy, or die in despair. Many of the Lord's family labour for years under these doubts and fears as to the reality of the work of grace upon their hearts. For they cannot trifle with these things; they cannot trifle with eternity; nor trifle with a heart-searching God: nor trifle with their immortal souls: nor trifle with death, hell, and judgment. They feel these realities too solemn and important to be trifled with; standing as they do upon the brink of eternity, and only a hand-breadth betwixt them and death. For want of bright and clear manifestations, many, if not the majority of the quickened family of God, are exercised whether what they have known and felt was the work of the Spirit upon their souls, or whether it was merely the offspring of nature, hypocrisy, and presumption.

5. Others of the Lord's people labour under almost perpetual assaults of Satan. This enemy of the Lord and of His people, casts his blasphemous insinuations into their souls, directing his suggestions against the holiest and most sacred things, and filling their carnal minds with the filthiest and most abominable imaginations.

Now these various temptations and all the family of God more or less experience them, though all do not sink to the same depth constitute labour. But the word is rendered in some of the old translations, and I believe it is nearer to the original, "weary."

"Come unto me, all ye that are weary." We shall not wander, therefore, far from the meaning of the Spirit in the text, if we look at that word also. For the effect of labour is to weary. We cannot labour under the law without weariness; we cannot labour under temptation without being wearied of the conflict; we cannot labour under distressing doubts and fears without being weary of them; nor can we labour under Satan's assaults without being faint and weary in our minds. In fact, the end of all spiritual labour is to weary. The Lord's purpose in laying burdens upon us is to weary us out. We cannot learn our religion in any other way. We cannot learn it from the Bible, nor from the experience of others. It must be a personal work, wrought in the heart of each; and we must be brought, all of us, if ever we are to find rest in Christ, to be absolutely wearied out of sin and self, and to have no righteousness, goodness, or holiness of our own.

The effect, then, of all spiritual labour is to bring us to this point—to be weary of the world, for we feel it, for the most part, to be a vale of tears: to be weary of self, for it is our greatest plague; weary of professors, for we cannot see in them the grace of God, which alone we prize and value; weary of the profane, for their ungodly conversation only hurts our minds; weary of the saints, for they are sometimes too carnal for us, and sometimes too spiritual; weary of our bodies, for they are often full of sickness and pain, and always clogs to our soul; and weary of life, though often afraid to die, for we see the emptiness of those things which to most people make life so agreeable.

By this painful experience we come to this point—to be worn out and wearied; and there we must come, before we can rest entirely on Christ. As long as we can rest in the world, we shall rest in it; as long as the things of time and sense can gratify us, we shall be gratified in them; as long as we can find anything pleasing in self, we shall be pleased with it; as long as anything visible and tangible can satisfy us, we shall be satisfied with them. But when we get weary of all things visible, tangible, and sensible—weary of

ourselves, and of all things here below—then we want to rest upon Christ, and Christ alone.

But the Lord has added another word, “heavy laden.” Mark you, He does not merely say, “laden.” A man may carry an ounce upon his back, and that may be called a load; and he may be said to be laden. But such a load spiritually would no more be a burden for the Lord to remove, than a cross worked into a Popish vestment is the cross which the Lord bids His disciples take up and carry after him. In order therefore to bar out all such pretensions, the word is “heavy laden.” As though the Lord would not have to do with light professors; as though He would not hold out His hand to save any but the drowning; as though He would not cast a single look of condescension upon any who had not a heavy load upon their back; as though He would neglect all who could carry their own burdens; and confine Himself wholly and solely to those who needed His out-stretched help. And why should He do otherwise? Did He come to save those who can save themselves?—to cleanse those who can cleanse themselves?—to deliver those who can free themselves? Did the Lord of life and glory come forth from the bosom of the Father—did the Eternal Son of God assume flesh, to save self-saviours, to help self-helpers, and cleanse self-cleansers? Surely, surely, we cannot think that the Son of God came down upon such a mission as that. No; it was “to seek and to save that which was lost.” The text, therefore, expressly guards against any hypocritical pretensions; for in it the Lord says, “Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden.”

But how heavy laden?

1. Some are heavy laden with the burden of guilt. Indeed, whenever sin is charged upon the conscience, it must produce guilt. I have no opinion of any professor, however high, however low, whatever be his standing in the church, who has never felt guilt upon his conscience. I am sure he never can have known pardon—he never can have felt Jesus precious—he never can have believed in His name, nor cleaved to His blood and righteousness

as all his salvation.

But what produces guilt upon the conscience? The work of the Spirit in the soul, revealing the spirituality of the law, and the holiness of God's character; and thus causing the guilt of sin to cut and penetrate into the conscience through the folds and veils of an unbelieving heart. But when I say, that every quickened vessel of mercy must feel guilt—guilt before God—guilt enough to bow his head down with shame, and to make him put his mouth in the dust—guilt to cut to pieces all his own righteousness—guilt to force him out of every refuge of lies, and to beat out of his grasp every false hope—when I say that every child of God must feel guilt sufficient to produce this, I am not going to lay down God has not, and why should I attempt it? how deep that guilt must be, or how long that guilt must last. If it has not driven the soul out of every refuge of lies, if it has not beaten false hopes completely out of its hands, if it has not forced it to flee to Jesus as its only refuge, it has not been yet deep enough, it has not yet lasted sufficiently long; it must strike a deeper root downward to make the naked embrace the rock for want of a shelter. When it has done that, it has done its work. There is no salvation in guilt; it prepares the soul for salvation, but there is no salvation in it.

2. Again. There is also a being heavily laden with a daily conflict. Guilt is not perpetually felt; there is a relief for it; for when the blood of sprinkling is applied, guilt is removed. But conflict between a body of sin and death and the holy, pure, and divine nature of which God's people are made partakers, lasts during the whole of our mortal span upon earth: lasts did I say? it increases in continuance. Our early battles were but skirmishes: it was but the fight infantry meeting the first attacks of the cavalry. But when we have been long in the field then the battle becomes indeed in right good earnest: for “every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood.” This internal warfare is more or less experienced by all God's family. But what a burden it is to have such a daily conflict with a body of sin and death! It is the greatest bur-

den that I have on earth. We all have our trials, heavy trials: but of all the burdens that I am acquainted with, the daily conflict with the body of sin and death, the workings of my corrupt heart, my fallen and depraved nature perpetually lusting to evil, entangling my eye, catching my affections, ensnaring my soul, dragging me, or drawing me into everything that is foul and filthy, base and vile, not externally, through mercy, but internally, forms the heaviest burden I have to carry. I do not know that I have for months felt this burden, this heavy conflict, more severely than since I have been in this metropolis. I do not know that I have spoken a hundred sentences beyond actual necessity to an ungodly person: and the Lord has kept my feet from all outward sin and open evil: yet the conflict I daily and sometimes hourly feel with my wretched heart has been my trouble and grief continually. Now when we are so laden with a body of sin and death, when we feel such vile sins perpetually struggling for the mastery, and such a depraved heart pouring forth its polluted streams, and I am sure the Fleet ditch emptying itself into the Thames at Blackfriars never poured forth such a polluted stream as the fountain of iniquity in your depraved heart and mine,—I say, when we feel this common sewer of our depraved nature pouring forth this polluted stream, must it not make us grieve and groan if we have known anything of the life and fear of God in our souls? Yes, daily make a living soul grieve and groan, draw at times scalding tears from his eye, and force convulsive sobs from his burdened bosom to feel that he is such a monster of depravity and iniquity: that though God keeps his feet so that he does not fall outwardly and manifestly, yet there is such a tide of iniquity flowing in his heart, polluting his conscience continually.

The Lord speaks to such, “Come unto me.” What a sweet invitation! What gracious words! “I, that am mighty to save:” I, Jehovah Jesus, the Lord of life and glory: the once crucified, but now risen Immanuel, invite all such, “Come unto me.”

But whom does He thus address? The virtuous, the moral, the

upright? those who have cleansed their own hearts and hands, and in their own strength and righteousness live good lives? He does not deign these a look. These are whited sepulchres, fair without, but within full of dead men's bones and uncleanness. These are “scribes and pharisees, hypocrites,” who lay heavy burdens upon others, and never touch one of them with their little finger. The Lord does not speak to such. He will not spare them one look of compassion. But He fixes His penetrating gaze, His sympathising eye upon, and opens the tenderness and compassion of His loving bosom unto those who labour and are heavy laden; to His poor, suffering, sorrowing, groaning, and mourning family; to those who have no one else to look to; those who are burdened in their consciences, troubled in their minds, and distressed in their souls. He says to such, “Come unto me.” This leads me to the third branch of my discourse.

III.—“The invitation.” How authoritatively, and yet how graciously, does the Lord speak! Have you never observed this in the word? How differently the Lord speaks from the prophets of old! When the prophets spake, it was with a “Thus saith the Lord.” But when the Lord of life and glory spake, it was, “I.” He stood on earth not as a prophet, to interpret the word of God, as the spiritual instrument, or as the vessel of clay through which God addresses men. No; he spake not so: but He spake, clothed in all the majesty of Godhead. Jehovah spake when He spake; for He is God over all; God and man in one glorious Person. And what does He say? What is the gracious invitation that dropped from His lips? O that we might hear them spoken with power to our hearts: “Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

And what is coming? How frequently the Lord speaks thus in the word! He says, “All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.” “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” How

frequently does the word occur! But what is its meaning? Is there not in coming some movement? When I come to a place, is it not perfectly distinct from standing where I am? In coming, there is a movement of my body—is there not? So spiritually for we are to interpret these spiritual figures by their natural meaning there is, in coming to Jesus, a movement of the soul; so that if there be no movement toward Him, there is no coming. But as “labour” is spiritual, and “heavy laden” is spiritual, so the “coming” is spiritual. It is not then a coming of the body. The body may come, and the heart be left behind. It is not the humble tone, the prostration of the body, the bending of the knee, or the upturned eye;—all these forms may and do exist, where the soul is dead in sin.

But coming is a movement Godward of that divine nature which God himself has implanted in the soul. It therefore implies faith. “He that cometh to God must believe that He is.” We cannot come to Jesus except we believe in His name, and we cannot believe in His name except special and spiritual faith is in our hearts; for “faith is the gift of God,” a grace and fruit of the Spirit. Before, then, we can come, there must be faith communicated through the special operation of the Spirit upon our conscience.

Now, wherever there is this special faith given whereby we see Jesus, what a precious sight! believe in Jesus, what precious faith! and move toward Jesus, what a blessed movement! then there will be a coming to Him. But we come in two different forms. I will not say there are two ways of coming; there is only one way; yet in our feelings they are often distinct. I will explain my meaning.

Sometimes we come as driven: sometimes we come as drawn. Sometimes the north wind blows us from behind; sometimes the south wind allures us from before. Guilt, fear, wrath, death, hell, eternity—this storm upon our back will often drive us; for we have no refuge but Jesus where we can hide our guilty heads. For where else can I hide? In the law? That curses. In self? That is treacherous. In the world? That is under the curse of God. My own righteousness? That is filthy rags. My own strength? All is

weakness. My own resolutions of amendment? They will all issue in my falling more foully than before. Then, when the north wind of guilt, wrath, and terror beat upon the soul; and at the same time, the Holy Spirit, by His internal operations, holds up to the eyes of the understanding, and illuminates the mind to see who this precious refuge, this shelter, this harbour is, then the soul flies unto Jesus; as one said of old

Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee.

We find this traced out in Isa 28:16,17, “Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place.” Now, when the hail sweeps away the refuge of lies; and the waters of guilt and fear overflow the hiding-place; and the soul sees the stone that God has laid in Zion for a foundation, a tried stone, a chief corner-stone, elect, precious, it flees to this Rock for shelter, hides in this Rock of Ages, and takes shelter in his Person, blood, and righteousness. This is coming.

But there is another coming, and that not of a different nature; for the Spirit works in one and the same way; yet His operations are different; and that is drawing. Have you never felt drawn? What said one? “Draw me” not drive me, “and I will run after thee!” “I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” Jer 31:3 There is the putting in of the hand by the hole of the door, and a moving of the bowels towards the Lord of life and glory. There is a sweet attractive power put forth in the heart. We see His beauty; “we behold His glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” We see in Jesus all the Majesty of the Godhead, and all the tenderness of manhood, and see them both combined in one glorious Person. We see the hands that made heaven and earth nailed to the bloody tree. We

see the divine nature united to the human; and the infinite nature shining forth in the finite. And we see beauty, glory, and blessedness in this divine Immanuel. We hear Him speak; we catch the sound of His invitation falling on our heart; some dew and savour drop into the soul, and this melts, stirs, and breaks—this softens, moves, and draws—and this blessedly leads the soul to look to, and take refuge in a glorious Immanuel. This is coming. There is a sweetness in this. This is not being driven by necessity, but drawn by love. This is not being compelled through the hardness of the case, and through wrath, guilt, and fear beating upon our unsheltered head. But it is the sweet putting forth of the power of the Lord, drawing up our heart's affections unto Himself. The children of God feel both at different times and at different seasons. They need both. They are sometimes in situations where drawing would not do: and they are sometimes in situations where driving will not do. When they are carnal, worldly-minded, wrapped up in self, and going after idols, they want a driving north wind. But a driving north wind continued too long would make them rebellious, stir up the enmity of their hearts, and almost plunge them into despair. Therefore they want the drawings of divine love, the sweet attractive power of the beauty of the Lord to overcome rebellion, put down unbelief, smite the demon of infidelity in them, and lead them to the footstool of the Lord of life and glory to lay hold of His strength, and embrace Him in the arms of faith and affection. When this is done, that is fulfilled—"Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." There is a willingness then to be saved by Jesus. There is no self-righteousness then clamouring for its share of work and wages; no rebellion boiling within; no infidelity nor unbelief striving for the mastery; but the world drops its charms, self-righteousness is turned into self-loathing, and the soul is willing to be saved in the Lord's own way by superabounding grace, and the love and blood of the Lamb.

Is not this a sweet coming? But how many times do we thus come in our lives? Some persons would make us believe that we

come to Christ once as poor guilty sinners, and when we have come once, and got a blessing, there is no more such coming again. Delusion is stamped upon all such doctrine. I venture to say this, that if a man say he has only come to Christ as a poor needy sinner once in his life, and has lived many years to make a profession after, and never came again, he never came spiritually at all; he has never known the attractive power of the Holy Ghost in his conscience; his hope is delusive, and he has nothing but a lie in his right hand. Is guilt felt but once?—pardon received but once?—then may coming be but once, and receiving but once.

Is not religion that is worth the name, a daily work? Is it not begun, carried on, and crowned by the Lord of life and glory Himself? Is it by coming once that we are made "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light?" What! Is all the beauty of Jesus exhausted at one view? Are there not in Him treasures of mercy? Are there not in us treasures of wickedness? Are there not in Him boundless depths of compassion? Are there not in us unfathomable depths of iniquity? Do we not daily sin, hourly provoke God? Do we not daily need mercy and compassion? Are we not daily transgressors against infinite patience? And do we not daily want that patience to be manifested? As long as we live in the body, there will be at times would to God there were more times of it! a coming unto this blessed Jesus. There will be a prostration of the spirit before Him; there will be a yielding up of a broken heart to His service; there will be a clasping of Him in the arms of love and affection; there will be a pouring out of the soul at His footstool. And every temptation that does not produce this, and every burden that does not effect this, and every conviction and sorrow that does not thus bring to His feet, is of as little value as the howling wind over a heath. There is no spiritual effect produced by our experience of trial, temptation, and sorrow, if it do not bring us to the only spot where rest and peace are to be found.

But this leads me, as time is waning, to the last branch of the subject.

IV.—The promise—"I will give you rest." What does rest imply? To my mind it implies several things.

1. To rest is to lean upon something. Is it not? So spiritually. We want to lean upon something. The Lord Himself has given us this figure. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" The figure of "a rock" on which the church is built—"the foundation" which God has laid in Zion—points to the same idea, that of leaning or dependence. Now when the soul comes to lean upon Jesus, and depend wholly and solely on Him, it enters into the sweetness of the invitation. Have we not leant upon a thousand things? And what have they proved? Broken reeds that have run into our hands, and pierced us. Our own strength and resolutions, the world and the church, sinners and saints, friends and enemies, have they not all proved, more or less, broken reeds? The more we have leant upon them, like a man leaning upon a sword, the more have they pierced our souls. The Lord Himself has to wean us from the world, from friends, from enemies, from self, in order to bring us to lean upon Himself; and every prop He will remove, sooner or later, that we may lean wholly and solely upon His Person, love, blood, and righteousness.

2. But there is another idea in the word "rest,"—termination. When we are walking, running, or in any way moving, we are still going onwards; we have not got to the termination of our journey. But when we come to the termination of that we have been doing, we rest. So spiritually. As long as we are engaged in setting up our own righteousness, in labouring under the law, there is no termination of our labours. But when we come to the glorious Person of the Son of God—when we hang upon His atoning blood, dying love, and glorious righteousness, and feel them sweet, precious, and suitable, then there is rest. "We which have believed, do enter into rest," says the apostle. His legal labours are all terminated. His hopes and expectations flow unto, and centre in Jesus—there they end, there they terminate; such a termination as a river finds in the boundless ocean.

3. But there is another idea still connected with "rest," relief. When we rest, we find relief to our weary limbs. So spiritually. When the soul comes to Jesus, He gives it rest and relief from its burdens; as well as deliverance from anxiety, and cessation from the labour that distresses and distracts it. He promises to give this—"Come unto me, and I"—Who else can do it? None, either in heaven or earth—"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." How? By communicating to the soul out of His infinite fulness, by sprinkling upon the conscience His atoning blood, by shedding abroad in the heart His dying love, and enabling the soul to believe on His name, and cling to His Person.

In this there is rest—nothing else will do it—nothing else will give it. Other remedies will leave us at last under the wrath of God. But he that comes to and leans upon Jesus, His finished work, His dying love, will have rest here and heaven hereafter. Are not our poor minds often restless, often anxious, and pensive, because of a thousand doubts, perplexities, painful trials, and grievous afflictions—do they not all make your spirit weary and restless within you? There never can be anything but restlessness while we move round this circle of sin and self. But when by precious faith we come out of our own righteousness, our own strength, our own wisdom, our own worthiness; come to, believe in, hang upon, and cleave unto the Person, blood, and work of the only-begotten Son of God, so as to feel a measure of His preciousness in our hearts—then there is rest. This is solid, this is abiding, this is not delusive; this will never leave the soul deceived with false hopes. No, it will end in eternal bliss and glory—in the open vision of eternal love—in seeing Him face to face whom the soul has known, looked to, believed in, and loved upon earth.

90 The Feet of the Saints Kept

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

July 31, 1845

"He will keep the feet of his saints."

1 Samuel 2:9

The person that uttered these words knew their meaning spiritually and experimentally—the only way whereby divine truth can be known. I need scarcely observe, that they were uttered by that deeply taught and highly favoured child of God, Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel. There is scarcely any saint whose experience is recorded in the Scriptures that I have felt more communion with than this afflicted handmaid of the Lord; for she was led in a peculiar path of trial and temptation; and had to mourn over her natural, as I have had to mourn over my spiritual barrenness. She knew too the only place to which she could go for the removal of this barrenness—the throne of grace, where she could pour out her heart before the Lord. And she knew too by personal experience, what it was for “the poor to be taken out of the dust, and the needy to be lifted out of the dunghill, to be made to sit with princes, and to inherit the throne of glory.”

Speaking then by divine inspiration, she utters a promise in the text. This promise, like all other promises dropped from the mouth of Jehovah, is absolute and unconditional; and yet, though absolute and unconditional, is limited—that is, to the children of God. But you will observe, the limitation is not so pointed, nor so particular as in some other promises. For instance; it is not confined to the “poor and needy;” it is not limited to the “hungry and thirsty.” In a word, it is not restricted to the various marked and definite characters among the family of God; but it unfolds in its ample bosom, and embraces in its widely opened arms all the living family. It is not, then, a promise limited to any definite experience; but it is one absolute and irrespective of all conditions; and yet manifestly embraces the whole of God’s elect people. “He will keep the feet of his saints.”

With God’s blessing, then, I shall endeavour this evening to unfold the mind of the Holy Ghost in the text by describing first,

who the “saints” are, for whom the promise is intended; and secondly, how the Lord fulfils his promise, that “He will keep their feet.”

I.—With respect to the sanctification of God’s people, each Person of the Trinity has a distinct share in that mighty work. The family of God are sanctified by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. And with respect to this sanctification by the Three Persons of the Triune Jehovah, is the remnant according to the election of grace called in the word of God “saints.”

1: First then, they are sanctified by God the Father; that is, they are consecrated, or set apart, which is the original meaning of the word “sanctified.” They were set apart in the original decree of election; as Jude speaks, “To them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.” Here, you will observe, sanctification by God the Father precedes preservation in Christ, and calling by the Holy Ghost. In this sense we are to understand the words which God spake to the prophet Jeremiah (1:5): “Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and ordained thee a prophet to the nations.” Now this is the root and spring of all sanctification. If God the Father has not sanctified us by his own electing choice in Christ Jesus from all eternity, not all the profession in the world can ever make us saints before him.

2. But God the Son has also a part and a share in the sanctification of his own dear people. They were sanctified in him before all worlds, as having a vital union with him. He is their holy covenant head, in whom all the members being united by an eternal union are sanctified; as the apostle speaks, “If the first-fruits be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches.” (Rom. 11:16.) If Christ the root be holy, the branches that spring out of the root are holy. If Christ, the first-fruits, is holy, then the whole lump also is holy, being sanctified by the first-fruits. Therefore, the Apostle speaking of Christ, says, “Who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.”

(1 Cor. 1:30.)

Again. The Lord Jesus Christ sanctified them also, in time, by his own blood; as we read “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.” (Heb. 8:12.) He shed his blood for them; he laid down his life on their behalf; and by the pouring out of that sacred stream from his holy body, he washed away their sins; that sanctified and cleansed they might stand holy before God; “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” (Heb. 10:14.)

3. But God the Spirit also has a share in the sanctification of the people of God. And until they receive the teachings of the Holy Ghost and his secret operations in their heart and conscience, they are not vitally sanctified. They are sanctified originally in the purpose of God; they are sanctified actually by the work of Christ; but they are not sanctified vitally and experimentally, till they are brought under the teachings and leadings of God the Spirit. When that gracious Teacher visits their souls with his divine operations; when he begins a work of grace on their hearts; when he begets them anew unto spiritual life, and implants a holy principle, radically and thoroughly holy, in their hearts, then by the implantation and possession of this new, holy, and divine principle, this “new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,” they become living saints.

Now, no sooner do they become saints by the operation of God the Spirit in their hearts, and by his secret indwelling in their souls, than they have conflict. All the Lord’s people who are so, not merely by election and redemption, but also by the calling of the Holy Ghost, are a tried people. All the Lord’s saints are, more or less, a tempted and a suffering people; for they are chosen in the furnace of affliction; they are “the third part” whom the Lord brings “through the fire.”

II.—Now this may cast a light upon the words of the text, that “God will keep the feet of his saints.” We see that God’s people are a tried, tempted and afflicted people; and therefore that they need to

be “kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.”

But you will observe, that the text speaks of the Lord keeping “the feet of his saints.” There is something spiritual and experimental intended here. It is by our feet that we have a standing; it is by our feet that we are enabled to walk and move forward. When the Holy Ghost, then, in the text, declares, that “God will keep the feet of his saints,” he seems to have reference, first to their standing, and secondly, to their walking.

Now in both these points will Satan, the great enemy of their souls, direct all his arts and arms against the saints. And so weak and helpless are they, that it is only so far as the Lord puts forth his power, that the feet of the saints are kept.

i. The saints, as I have observed, have a standing in Christ, a standing before all worlds, a standing out of which and from which they never can be driven. And we may believe that the Spirit has some reference to this eternal standing in Christ, when he says, that God will keep the feet of his saints.

Have you ever observed how the Lord dealt with Satan in the case of Job? He gave him two separate permissions; one was, to touch Job’s goods, his family, and his all; but upon Job himself he was not to lay his hand. Now as long as that restriction was laid down, Satan, however he afflicted Job in his property and his family, could not afflict him either in body or soul. This was a hedge set round about Job; a defence of God, through which Satan could not pierce. But this was not enough. It was not enough to hinder Satan from shewing his hellish malice; it was not enough to try Job; and it was not enough to prove a standing example to all ages what man is when tempted, and what the grace of God is to keep him under temptation. So God moved the hurdle, so to speak, a little more inward. He took down the outward hedge that kept Satan from touching the person of Job; he thus narrowed the space, and put the fence in a little nearer. But there was still a limitation to “save his life;” he might do what he would to his body, but he was not to touch the life of his soul. Thus God kept the feet of his

servant Job. Had this restriction not been laid upon Satan; had he not been tethered by this chain, he would have soon hurled Job into despair; and let the life blood not only out of his body, but the life-blood also out of his soul. But God kept Job's feet. Satan could not touch his standing in Christ; he might tempt, try, and distress him, and drive him to his wits' end: but he could not touch his eternal standing. What a mercy it is, then, that all the temptations of Satan, all the snares he spreads for their feet, and all the violent assaults that the people of God are exercised with, cannot drive them from their standing in Christ! They were given to Christ by the original act of God the Father, and are preserved in him; so that Satan cannot drive them from their standing in his Person, blood and righteousness.

ii. But there is another meaning of the word. It is by our feet that we walk in the ways of the Lord. Every movement of the soul; the whole progress from grace to glory; every step in the love and fear of the Lord, is taken by the spiritual feet of our souls. So that when the text declares, and the promise spreads its ample arms, that "He will keep the feet of his saints," it has reference not merely to their standing in Christ, but also to their walking in this vale of tears, their feet being upheld by Omnipotent power in this waste howling wilderness. Now, as long as a man's feet are kept, his whole person is kept. He may totter, he may stagger; he may turn to the right hand or to the left; but as long as his feet are kept upon the firm ground, he falls not. But if his feet are tripped up, he falls instantly. So that when the promise runs, "He will keep the feet of his saints," it has reference to their being kept altogether. For if their feet are tripped up, or slide, or give way, instantly must they measure their length upon the ground.

1. Now Satan is always endeavouring, in some way or other, to trip up the children of God. Sometimes, for instance, he endeavours to trip up their feet by the inward power of sin in their carnal heart. O, how Satan can work, when permitted, upon our depraved nature! What powerful lusts he can kindle into a flame!

What vile imaginations he can raise up in our carnal minds! What sins he can stir up in our polluted heart! So that, if left to ourselves, we must utterly fall a prey to them.

There is one thing which I have felt, which seems in some measure to be a mystery. It is the co-existence of two things in my heart, which seem contradictory. One is this, to feel myself every day worse and worse. There was a time when I thought I should be holier and holier: but now every day I seem viler and viler; nay, I feel the workings of sin more sensibly manifesting themselves, so as to be kept from actual evil only by the skin of my teeth. And yet what seems surprising, co-existing with all this fountain of abominable evil, I find my conscience more tender in the things of God than it was when I was not so tempted by the besetments of the enemy. When I was advancing, as I thought, in the path of holiness, I could do many things which I cannot do now. It puzzles me, to feel so distinctly the working of sins I was once not tempted to; and yet the workings of a conscience in some measure made more tender than before. That sin should become more strong, as the conscience, in some points, becomes more tender, is to me a mystery.

But when we feel the workings of sin in our carnal mind, endeavouring perpetually to entangle our steps, it makes us cry and groan to the Lord that he would keep our feet; and, through mercy, he does more or less keep them, though how he keeps them, we will endeavour to shew as we proceed onward.

2. Another way by which Satan seeks to trip up our feet, is by drawing us aside into presumption and vain-confidence. I believe many of God's people are here unknowingly. They have never been sifted down to the very bottom of their religion; their hearts have never been laid naked and open before the eyes of him with whom they have to do. They have the life and fear of God in their heart; but they want soul exercise. For want of being put into the fire, for want of a deeper work of grace upon their hearts, they often mistake what they have for what they have not, and what they have not for what they have. In other words; they are often wrapped

up in a measure of presumption and vain-confidence, which they mistake for faith, and think their confidence proceeds from the operations of the Spirit, when, for the most part, it is little else but a delusion of the Wicked One. Now if Satan can trip up our heels by getting us into presumption and vain-confidence, he has carried a great point. Presumption and vain-confidence eat out the very life of God in the soul, stop the mouth of prayer in the heart, entice us into a thousand snares of the devil, take us off our watch, and leave us to wander into paths that we should not otherwise think of walking in. Had the fear of God been more powerfully on the alert, we should not sink into the lap of ease; but through thinking we have faith that we have not, we are drawn away and entangled in the snares of Satan before we are aware. The Lord, therefore, keeps the feet of his saints by exercising them, and leading them into a deeper knowledge of the filthiness and depravity of their fallen nature; or by suffering Satan sometimes to fall upon them, and shake their religion to its very centre; or by letting down piercing convictions into their consciences; or by sending a whole army of doubts and fears that put to the rout all their vain-confidence and presumption; or by showing to them the fearful train of difficulties that lie in their road. By these and various other means he strips them of their vain-confidence.

3. Though Satan can trip up the feet with vain-confidence, yet he can also trip them up with despair. Some of the Lord's people are more entangled with vain-confidence, while others of them are more entangled with despondency. The one is a precipice, and the other a ditch, which have destroyed thousands. The Lord's people often seem staggering between the two like a drunken man. You have seen a drunken man: he cannot keep an even path, staggering sometimes to one side of the road, and sometimes to the other. So it is with the Lord's people; as the prophet says, "they stagger, but not with strong drink." They stagger sometimes to the height of vain-confidence, and sometimes to the quagmire of despair. One hardly knows which takes us most out of the road, which

leads us most away from the Lord of life and glory. The spirit of vain-confidence eats up the life of God in the soul; the spirit of despair drowns the life of God in the soul. The spirit of presumption shuts up the mouth of prayer; the spirit of despair also shuts up the mouth of prayer. They are two extremes; but each of these extremes is such as tends much to stop the crying and groaning soul from pouring out its desires before the Lord. But Satan will not more succeed in driving the saints into despair than he will succeed in drawing them into vain-confidence. The Lord knows exactly how to time his remedies; he knows how to suit his healing medicines to the state and case of the patient. Thus, is he lifted up with vain-confidence? God sends the arrow of conviction into his conscience. Does he see him well-nigh swallowed up in despair? He lets down a word of consolation into his soul, giving him some reviving testimony, or sweet smile. Thus, he lifts up the soul from despair by a smile of his countenance, as he brings it down from vain-confidence by the arrows of conviction. Satan does not care which evil we fall into. He has toppled down thousands from the lofty heights of vain-confidence, and has swallowed up thousands in the deep quagmire of despair.

But the Lord will "keep the feet of his saints." They shall never utterly fall down this dangerous precipice, never be wholly swallowed up in this awful quagmire. They may stumble on the brink, and stagger on the very edge; but the Lord will lay his arms underneath them, so as to keep them from being altogether swallowed therein. Have you not found it so? When you have been reclining on the lap of ease, has there not been an arrow of conviction that has roused you from your sleep? When you have feared you should fall headlong into despair, has there not been some gentle word, some precious testimony, some sweet promise applied, whereby you have been kept from falling into that gloomy whirlpool?

iii. But again. The feet may not only be tripped up, but they may also be beguiled. If our feet are tripped up, we fall altogether. But, without being tripped up, we may wander from the right road;

therefore we are warned (Prov. 4:26, 27), “Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil.” We hear what the Lord says of the strange woman, that “her paths incline to the dead.” Therefore he solemnly warns us, (Prov. 7:25,) “Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths.”

The promise, then, that the Lord will “keep the feet of his saints,” not merely implies that he will keep their feet from being tripped up, so that they shall not fall utterly, but that he will also keep them from declining from the right path.

1. For instance; there are paths of delusion; and these paths of delusion apparently run side by side with the strait and narrow path that leads to eternal life. One of the things I most dread is to be left to a spirit of delusion; for I see how Satan can impose upon a man’s mind, if not preserved. As an angel of light, he can come under such subtle forms, can cast such mists of error over the eye, can so insinuate his lies into the mind, and so dress out delusion, making it appear to come from God himself, that, next to falling into sin, I dread falling into a spirit of delusion. Satan knows exactly the persons he has to deal with. Our natural constitutions vary; our minds are cast in different moulds; and our education and habits materially differ. But Satan, who is intimately acquainted with the state of our minds and constitution, and what is congenial to our disposition, like a skilful angler, who has a fly and a hook for every fish, knows exactly how to suit his temptation to our natural state and case. Some he sees superstitious, easily drawn aside, soon elated, readily entangled by craft and subtlety; and upon these he will come as a spirit of delusion, puffing up their minds with pride, deceiving them with some novelty, and imposing his own lies and errors upon them as though they were the solid teachings of God the Spirit.

But the Lord will “keep the feet of his saints.” There is in the living soul a divine principle, which tastes heavenly food, savours heavenly fragrance, hears heavenly sounds, sees heavenly objects,

and feels heavenly sensations. The spirit of delusion is always alien from, and opposed to, these spiritual senses of the soul. When the spirit of delusion, then, comes to the child of God, there is that in his bosom which secretly rejects it. “The voice is of the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” It does not come into his soul as from the Lord; there is no breath of the sanctuary in it, no divine influence communicated by it, no holy affections drawn upwards, no meltings of heart, no softening of spirit, nor any of those divine realities which living souls experience. But it puffs up the mind, sears the conscience, hardens the heart, inflates and lifts up the soul with vain imaginations, takes away the Cross of Christ, and sets up an idol. This delusion, then, coming into the heart of a child of God, meets an antagonist there, that has eyes to see the feet of this witch; that has ears to hear she does not speak in gospel language; that has a nose to smell her ill-savour; that has hands which when they touch her do not feel the same sensations as when they touch the Lord of life and glory. And thus, when the spirit of delusion comes before a child of God, there is that secret indescribable feeling in his soul which rejects it, and is not overcome nor entangled by it. How many have I seen, in my day, entangled in some delusion or other that has come over the religious world! What blasts of delusion were continually blowing when Irvingism first came abroad; and how many thousands were entangled in that delusion! Let the devil come with any spirit of delusion, he is sure to catch some—but not the living soul. For he has that internal principle, that spiritual understanding, that heavenly light in his judgment, that peculiar discernment in his conscience, that divine apprehension within, which, as if instinctively, detects delusion. It does not produce in his soul those divine sensations which the Spirit of the Lord does; therefore he rejects it as the spirit of delusion. I admit that he may be entangled for a time; but sooner or later he will be brought out; for the Lord “keeps the feet of his saints.”

2. But there is also a turning into the path of error. There are many “bye paths,” that, as Bunyan says, “butt down upon the strait

and narrow way.” If the path of truth runs to the right, the path of error runs to the left. Satan, who is continually sowing tares in the Church, perpetually flying about upon the wings of novelty, introduces errors just as he sees opportunity; and raises up cunning and crafty, though apparently religious men, for the purpose of propagating them abroad. There is a principle in the natural heart which embraces error, and there is a principle in the spiritual mind which rejects error. I have never yet heard of any error abroad, however awful, that I have not felt something in my heart to cleave to it; and I have never heard any truth spoken of, that I have not felt another principle in my heart to cleave to it. I feel distinctly the workings of the two principles. When error comes before me—the vilest error—I feel a cursed principle in my heart, that closes in with it, and forms a fleshly union with it. But then, I feel, through mercy, another spirit, which hates it, rejects it, and dares not embrace it, through the workings of a conscience made tender in God’s fear. You and I have in our hearts a principle of unbelief, which would drink down every lie of the devil, and reject every truth of God. We have a principle of infidelity that doubts every revealed truth, and yet can believe every one of Satan’s lies. But if God the Spirit has quickened your soul into spiritual life, you have another principle—the principle of living faith which loves truth, clings to it, receives it into the heart, and approves of it in the conscience. Thus there is a constant conflict betwixt these two things—the principle of unbelief, which believes nothing but the devil’s lies; and the principle of faith, which receives, loves, and cleaves to the truth of God.

But, besides this, there is a reasoning principle in our mind, which falls in with the subtle insinuations of Satan and Satan’s agents. A man may reason, till he reasons himself out of every truth, and reasons himself into every error. He may reason about the Bible, till he believes the Bible to be a fiction. He may reason about the being of God, till he believes there is no God. He may reason about the deity of Jesus, and the personality of the

Holy Ghost, the existence of the Trinity, and every revealed truth, till he reasons himself into thorough infidelity. Thus, we have not only a depraved principle that cleaves to error, but we have a reasoning mind, that would reason itself out of truth into error. And this awful adversary of the faith of God’s elect is always at work in our minds, to bring us into Satan’s snares. But yet, through mercy, there is another principle—an understanding heart, a believing spirit, a feeling soul, a tender conscience, in the breast of a child of God, which rejects error, because error always comes to it distinct from the truth of God. Error hardens—truth softens. Error sears—truth melts. Error blinds—truth enlightens. Error deadens—truth quickens and revives. Error lifts up—truth lays low. Error leads the heart from God—truth leads the heart up to God. Now as in our right mind we know what softening is, and what hardening is—what being led to the Lord is, and what being led from the Lord is—as we can trace in our souls the working of these two distinct things (as in our right mind we love to do), we turn away from error, because it leads us from God, and we cleave to truth, because it leads us to God. And thus the Lord keeps the feet of his saints. Error shall not entangle them. They may go on the very borders of it; they may, for a while, drink into a measure of the very spirit of it. But there is that in all error, Unitarian, Arian, Arminian, Pre-existential, or Antinomian, which never finds a lodging in the tender conscience, never finds a resting-place in the renewed heart. But there is in truth something so vital, so sweet, that so drops into the heart, and (if I may use the expression) feels itself so at home in the soul, that the child of God cleaves to it at any price, any cost. The Lord keeps the feet of his saints. They shall never become Ariens, Antinomians, Socinians, or Arminians. They shall know the truth, and the truth shall make them free.

2. But they may not only decline into error; they may also turn aside into idolatry. What says the Spirit by the Apostle John? “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” Some of the Lord’s people are not tempted by a spirit of delusion—others of the Lord’s chil-

dren are not tempted by a spirit of error. But how many who are exempt from these bye-paths, are not exempt from declining into idolatry! And O, what a burden idolatry is to a child of God! To feel there is that in his heart which at times he loves more than God himself—that there is that in his bosom which he nurses, hugs, and embraces, though it has stung him a thousand times as a viper! What a base wretch man is! what a depraved creature, nursing in his bosom these filthy idols! We wonder at the depravity of the heathen. We see their hideous idols, and wonder that a reasonable man can bow down to such disgusting images. But do we not find a parallel in our own hearts? Did Hindoo or Otaheit-an ever sculpture an idol so hideous as that which we embosom and enshrine in our breasts? Theirs is, after all, but a hideous log of wood or stone; but our filthy desires, our corrupt imaginations, our bosom idols, are ten thousand times more hideous in the sight of God. But the Lord will keep the feet of his saints. They may have their idols; he will keep them from being altogether entangled. He will sometimes convince them of the sin of idolatry, by laying the guilt of it upon the conscience. He will sometimes, when they hug the idol very closely, take it out of their bosom; and at others make that idol to be their torment, and turn that from which they seek lively gratification into a source of pain and misery. And thus, in one way or another, he will keep the feet of his saints from declining into the path of idolatry.

3. But there is also the path of fleshly ease. Do we love trials? Are we fond of being exercised, plagued, and tempted? Why, we know what a coward flesh we have—how glad we are to slip our neck out of the collar of sorrow and suffering—how unwilling we are to walk in the strait and thorny path before us—how fond we are of a little ease, though it be but, as Job says, “to swallow down our spittle!” We are very glad to get into this smooth path, this laying down of our arms, this settling of ourselves in our arm-chair, this resting upon past experiences, this slinking out of the battle, this going into the rear with the baggage. We are very liable to get

into this path of carnal ease; so the Lord keeps us out of it by afflictions, temptations, and trials. But the church of God, in this age and generation, is much in a path of fleshly ease; almost, like the church of Laodicea, neither cold nor hot; like the people of Laish, dwelling carelessly; like Ephraim, “a cake not turned; grey hairs are upon him, and he knoweth it not.” But the Lord will not allow us to take our ease. We may try to make our nest comfortable, but there will always be a thorn at the bottom of it. We may attempt to settle down upon our lees, but there will be a shaking of the vessel. We may try to slink out of the engagement and creep into the rear; but there will be the “thunder of the captains, and the shouting” even there. We may try to rest our heads upon the baggage-waggon, but even there we shall hear the roar of the artillery. The Lord will visit his people with some severe and cutting affliction, some sharp rod, some heavy stripe, when they have turned out of the right track into the path of fleshly ease, and thus bring them back.

iv. The promise is absolute—“The Lord will keep the feet of his saints.” But how, for the most part, does the Lord keep them, instrumentally?

1. The grand instrument whereby the Lord keeps them is, by implanting his fear in their hearts. It is the new covenant promise, “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.) The Lord puts his fear into the hearts of his people; and this becomes in them “a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death.” This is their bosom companion all the journey through. This is that holy principle in their breast, whereby instrumentally their feet are kept. Would they stray into sin? The fear of God in their bosom checks. Would they rush into vain-confidence? The fear of the Lord in their bosom forbids. Would they fall into despair? The fear of the Lord in their bosom upholds them. Would they become inward idolaters? Would they fall into the entanglements of Satan? Would they get into the path of fleshly ease? The fear of the Lord,

as a fountain of life, gushing up in their souls, and watering their hearts with its blessed streams—this fear of the Lord, which is their “treasure,” preserves them from the ways of the destroyer, and thus keeps their feet in the paths of the gospel.

2. But the Lord also uses his word. “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth,” was the prayer of the dying Lord. By opening up his word to their hearts—by causing his precepts to drop with power into their consciences—by applying his truth to their souls, sometimes cutting, sometimes consoling, but always penetrating—he keeps their feet. Would they break every hedge? The word of the Lord forbids it. Thus he keeps the feet of his saints through his truth, by opening up that truth in their consciences, and applying it with power and savour to their hearts.

3. He keeps them too, every now and then, by intimations from above—by dropping in the dew of his grace—by secret meltings of heart—by softening the spirit—by raising up this question, “How can I do this thing, and sin against God?”—by raising up tender emotions and loving sensations towards himself. As Ephraim, “after he was instructed, smote upon his thigh,” so the Lord’s people, when he looks upon them, smite upon their breasts. By these secret intimations, their feet are kept in the ways of the Lord. Have you never felt it so? When you have been tempted to do something that your carnal heart loved, and to which Satan was urging you with all his might, has there not been some intimation, some word, some check from God? When an impetuous word was bursting forth, when anger rose in your bosom, was there not a secret restraint, that kept down the rising wrath? When the lust of the eye entangled you, and you would fain walk in the paths of the dead, was there not some feeling Godward, some check, some admonition, some opening up of the Scripture, some touch of God’s finger upon your conscience, some secret emotion in your soul, that kept you from the ways of destruction? And when delusion came before you, did no word from God drop, to open it up, and show you it was a delusion? If error crossed your path, and

your carnal mind embraced it did no word come into your heart, to show you how contrary it was to the revealed word of God? And when the world spread out its snares, and allured you to its arms, was there not some secret admonition, something from the Lord’s own mouth, that kept you from being entangled in the snare, and walking in the path of the dead?

4. And sometimes the Lord keeps us by his providence. There is a snare spread for us—he will send us in a path where the snare is not spread. Satan lays his snares, as poachers do in what is called “the run” of the hare. The spring is set just in the hole of the hedge through which the poor animal runs. So Satan, that cunning poacher, lays his snare just in our very “run.” But the Lord determines otherwise. We have perhaps fixed to go down this street; had we gone, we should have fallen into a snare. An impulse comes to take another turn; by obeying that impulse, we are kept from falling into that trap. Could the Lord’s people see how he has kept them from falling into snares, by his wonderful interpositions, how it would raise their admiration of his wisdom!

The promise is absolute—“He will keep the feet of his saints.” What tenderness there is in it! The Lord sees his poor scattered pilgrims travelling through a vale of tears, journeying through a waste howling wilderness, a path beset with gins, traps, and snares in every direction. How can they escape? Why, the Lord keeps their feet, carries them through every rough place, as a tender parent carries a little child; when about to fall, graciously lays the everlasting arms underneath them, and when tottering and stumbling, and their feet ready to slip, mercifully upholds them from falling altogether. Thus the Lord keeps the feet of his saints. But do you think that he has not different ways for different feet. The God of creation has not made two flowers, nor two leaves upon a tree alike; and will he cause all his people to walk in precisely the same path? No; we have each our path, each our besetment, each our trials, each peculiar traps and snares laid for our feet. And the wisdom of the all-wise and only-wise God is shown, by his eyes being

in every place, marking the footsteps of every pilgrim, suiting his remedies to meet their individual case and necessity, appearing for them when nobody else could do them any good; watching so tenderly over them, as though the eyes of his affection were bent on one individual and carefully noting the goings of each, as though all the powers of the Godhead were concentrated on that one person to keep him from harm. What a mercy it is there is such a promise in the Bible! “He will keep the feet of his saints,” that they shall not be utterly tripped up, utterly cast down, utterly wander away from God and godliness. He will keep their feet in this vale of tears, amidst all the springs, traps, and snares laid for them, in the narrow path that leads to life, and bring them eventually to see his glory, and be with him for ever, where all tears shall be wiped away from off all faces.

91 Divine Arithmetic

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

August 3, 1845

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations: knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

James 1:2, 3, 4

This Epistle was written to “the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad.” These were not the Jewish tribes; for after that nation had rejected the Lord of life and glory, God the Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost to raise up a spiritual church consisting of believers in the name of God's only-begotten Son. The twelve Jewish tribes ceased to have a standing as the people of God; and the Christian church was then established, and succeeded in their room and place.

These twelve tribes scattered abroad, (so called because they succeeded into the room and place of rejected Israel,) are the same people as those to whom the Apostle Peter writes, “the strang-

ers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:1, 2.) The occasion of these elect strangers being spread abroad through these various countries, we find in the Acts of the Apostles, where they are said to have been scattered through the persecution that came upon the church after the death of Stephen. (Acts 8:18, 19.)

These twelve spiritual tribes thus scattered in various places of the world, at the time that James and Peter wrote their Epistles, were undergoing severe persecutions and trials; and the storm had come upon them so unlooked for and so unexpectedly that their heads were almost bowed to the ground before it.

This is the general effect of persecution. When the cloud first breaks upon our head, it comes so unexpectedly, that it often bows us down before it. We are not prepared either for outward persecution or inward temptation, when the Lord first touches our hearts. We need therefore to be supported under persecution, and comforted under temptation, before we can be brought to “endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.”

James, then, writes to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, enduring a great fight of afflictions outwardly, and a severe conflict with temptations inwardly; and he bids them not be discouraged by these trials that had come upon them. He sets before them a sum in spiritual arithmetic—one not taught in schools or colleges, but one of a divine nature, made known to the soul by the teachings of God the Spirit. He says, “My brethren, count it”—here is a problem for you to solve, a rule-of-three sum to calculate—“count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

In taking up these words this morning, I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour to look at them in two points of view, in order that I may be enabled as the Lord may direct, more clearly to unfold the

meaning of the Spirit therein.

I.—The nature of these temptations.

II.—Their fruits and effects on the soul.

I.—The text speaks, you will observe, of “divers temptations.” These words do not altogether convey the full force of the original. By “divers,” we are not only to understand different, in point of quality, but we are to understand also numerous, in point of quantity; many and different. And by the word “temptations,” we are to comprehend not merely seductions to sin, powerful assaults of the enemy, and all that is usually implied by the expression “temptations;” but we are also to understand by it “trials.” So that would we give the full force of the two words, we must use this kind of circumlocution—many and different trials and temptations.

But James speaks also of believers falling into them, in which there is something of an experimental nature implied. The idea conveys the impression of a person walking for a given time upon a smooth road, and then on a sudden coming into a rough one; or of a person travelling along a firm path, and suddenly finding himself sinking in a quagmire; or of one who has hitherto been advancing along a flowery meadow, and unexpectedly falling into a pit where he is torn by briars and thorns.

But the word “fall,” implies not merely the suddenness of the change, but the helplessness also of the creature to extricate itself from these spots of danger and difficulty.

Is not this, then, a singular circumstance, that the Apostle James, writing by divine inspiration, bids his suffering brethren “count it all joy,” esteem it as a pleasure, value it as a blessing, and estimate it as the richest of mercies, that they should fall into quagmires, that their feet should be sore and weary with walking on rough and rugged stones, and that the flesh should be torn from their skin by sharp briars? This is, as I before hinted, an arithmetic not taught in the schools, but one to be made known by nothing short of divine teaching in the heart and conscience of

the Lord’s family.

But James has respect to the effect produced thereby. He is not looking upon trials simply as trials, nor temptations merely as temptations; he is estimating the fruit to be produced by them. To use an illustration. A person ignorant of agriculture, if he were to see the sower scattering large quantities of seed upon the ground, would think it a great waste of the precious corn; but he that understands the nature of ploughing, sowing, and reaping, would know that this seed thrown into the ground is consigned there with a view to harvest. So spiritually. The trials, temptations, exercises, and sorrows that God’s people have to pass through, are the precious seed, which springs up in the appointed time, and bears a bountiful crop. So that, just in the same way as we count it gain instead of loss when the farmer scatters his grain into the furrow, by comparing it with the crop that is to spring therefrom, so are we to view the troubles and trials which God’s people endure, not as so much loss, but as real and positive gain; for out of this apparent loss, as in the case of the seed, will the bountiful crop of eternal glory come. As the Apostle declares, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” (2 Cor. 4:17.)

The word “temptation” has two significations; first, that which we more particularly understand by temptation; and secondly, that which is conveyed by the term trial.

There are several points of difference between temptations and trials. For instance: all temptations are trials; but all trials are not temptations. Temptations spring from Satan, our own hearts, and a world dead in wickedness. Trials spring from God; for “the Lord trieth the righteous.” Temptations are connected with and act upon our carnal nature. But trials are connected with and act upon our spiritual nature; because they try faith, hope, love, and all the other graces and fruits of the Spirit. Temptations are more or less connected with sin; but trials are not necessarily so connected. There is therefore a broad line of distinction between temptations and

trials.

Now all the Lord's family have to pass through each of these. They all have a sinful nature, and therefore must know temptations as springing out of that sinful nature. And as all the people of God have a spiritual nature, so they must be conversant with trials; for these are adapted to, and spring from the very existence of that spiritual nature. So that every one who is possessed of a carnal and a spiritual nature, in other words, every quickened child of God must know temptations and trials in his own personal experience. For the same reason, every child of God will from time to time be discouraged and cast down by these temptations and trials; and yet he will one day or other, when he reaps the spiritual profit, (for he cannot do it at the time), "count it all joy" that he has fallen into these "divers temptations."

Let us endeavour, then, with God's blessing, to trace out a few of these temptations and trials.

i. And, first, let us look at some of those temptations that peculiarly beset God's living family.

1. What is the world to a child of God but one great scene of temptation? But is the world anything but man, fallen man, in the aggregate? Is it not the actings of sinful hands, the desires of sinful hearts, and the words of sinful lips? In a word, is not the world entirely made up of evils that you and I feel daily and hourly working in our corrupt nature? Just, then, as in our new nature we have spiritual communion with invisible things above, and with divine realities revealed in the word of truth; so, in our carnal hearts, we have a sensual, earthly communion with the world and all that is in it. And just in the same way as our spiritual nature loves, delights, and centres in heavenly things, so does our carnal nature love, delight, and centre in earthly things; for it never can rise above them. As long as we live in the body, our carnal nature will have sensual and earthly unions with the basest things; and there is nothing too vile or abominable for our carnal nature not to have close, sensual, earthly communion with. This, then, being

the case, and there being a new principle in the child of God opposed to the evil of sin, separated from it by the power of the Spirit, bent upon eternal realities, and possessing a measure of the mind of Christ, it is through the opposition of this new principle, the temptation is felt to be temptation.

The men of this world have temptations. Satan tempts them; but they are not felt by them as his temptations. He tempted Judas and Peter; but how different the temptation in the case of Judas and that of Peter! In the case of Judas, there was no spiritual discernment of the temptation, no resisting principle, no inward conflict: his covetous heart fell in with it, was caught with the hook, and ruined by the snare. Peter was overcome in spite of his godly fear and a heart made honest by the grace of God, in spite of his love to Jesus and his faith and hope in him. He was not caught by a bait as Judas, but suddenly overwhelmed and carried away by violence, in spite of and in opposition to his better principle.

When Satan tempts the men of this world, they fall in immediately with his temptations; they are carried away by them, drowned in their lusts, and, if grace prevent not, end eventually in destruction or despair. The same temptations assault the child of God; but they are felt by him to be temptations: he has in him a nature utterly opposed and averse to them; he has eyes that see, a conscience that feels, and a life that groans under them: and yet, to his shame and sorrow, he often finds himself entangled therewith.

2. Some of the Lord's people are sadly tempted with infidelity. I had to struggle under this temptation for many years before ever I knew that a child of God was tempted by it. I never heard it described from the pulpit; and the first place I ever saw it touched upon was in Bunyan's "Grace Abounding."

Many of the Lord's people, I believe, are painfully harassed with a reasoning mind producing every sort of carnal argument to tempt them to disbelieve the revelation which God has given in his word. This, where the heart is altogether infidel, is not felt to be a temptation; the carnal mind embraces it, and denies God with

daring front; it espouses the cause of infidelity with open arms, and hates and abhors the truth. But with the child of God it is one of the most acute temptations, one of the most fiery trials he ever can pass through; for it saps the very ground of his hopes, and brings him to this point, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" It fills his heart with distressing sensations; for he has in him a believing principle which is grieved by these vile suggestions. He not only finds this world a barren wilderness; but a cloud of darkness rests upon the next. He knows himself to be a sinner; yet when infidelity comes in, tempting him to disbelieve the deity of Christ and the work of the Spirit, it leaves his soul without a refuge. There the workings of infidelity must be a distressing temptation to every one who is made alive in his soul.

3. Others of the Lord's family are tempted to blaspheme and swear. I do not know that I have sworn an oath for these twenty years, certainly not since the Lord touched my heart; but I have had many times the working of it within, though, through mercy, it never has escaped my lips. What a temptation this is to a child of God! But was not Job tempted by it, when his wife, who should have strengthened and encouraged him, proved his tempter, and said, "Curse God, and die?" Was not Peter tempted with this, when he broke out into oaths and curses, and denied the Lord of life and glory? Was not Jeremiah more than tempted by it? It is true, he did not curse his God; he was saved from that, through mercy; he was kept from passing beyond that bound but he cursed the day of his birth and the man who slew him not from the womb. (Jer. 20:14-17.)

4. Others of the Lord's people are tempted to commit the unpardonable sin. Some persons say, 'the unpardonable sin cannot be committed now.' But I want to know this. Is not Jesus "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever?" Is not the Spirit, the Third Person in the glorious Godhead, unchanging and unchangeable? Has his power ceased in the hearts of God's people? Then, if men could sin against the Holy Ghost in the days of the Apostles; if men's

hearts are still the same, and if the power of the Spirit upon God's people is the same now as then—why should not men now commit the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, as well as then? I believe it is committed by many. But none of God's people can commit it: there is a blessed hedge set round about them; they may sin deeply and foully, and fall into the basest transgressions: but they can never break the bounds so as to commit the unpardonable sin: they can never trample upon the blood of Christ, blaspheme the Holy Ghost, or count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing. Satan may work in their mind all sorts of abominable things, and fill their hearts with all kinds of obscenity (those who are acquainted with these things best know to what daring lengths the accuser of the brethren can go); but he never has, and never will to the end of time plunge an elect vessel of mercy into the unpardonable sin. God himself will keep him, so that he never shall break through the bounds. But there are seasons when he will be sadly tempted by Satan to think that he has committed it; and in a fit of despair his carnal mind may even sometimes wish to do it, that he may know the worst of it. But God the Spirit will keep him; the heavenly Pilot will preserve his bark from making shipwreck upon this fearful rock.

5. But there are temptations to sin also. Some temptations are of a horrible kind; suicide is among them; for it is a sin to which every principle of our souls is utterly averse. But other temptations are of a seductive kind. There are temptations that drive, and temptations that draw; there are temptations that hurry on with fearful violence, and temptations that allure the soul by the cords of sensual lust. It is difficult to say which are the more dangerous. If there be a precipice, it matters little, whether we are driven down it, or fall from it unawares. If we fall, we fall, whether it be by violence or seduction.

Many, then, of the temptations which God's people are exposed to, seduce, allure, and draw them into things that are dishonourable to God, and grievously wound their own conscience. "The lust

of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life;" the various seductions and allurements to sin, known only to those who painfully experience them, are continually endeavouring to draw away the child of God from the strait and narrow path. So that he often escapes by the very skin of his teeth; and merely by the mercy of God holding him up. If he walks on, it is in such a perilous path that none but the everlasting arms could hold up his soul from disgracing the cause with which he is connected, and distressing his conscience throughout the whole of his life.

ii. But we pass on to consider what is intended by the word "trials." I have before observed, that trials and temptations are distinct. God is not the author of temptations; he cannot do evil, nor tempt any man to commit it. That holy being Jehovah, can never, if I may use the expression, soil his fingers by touching evil. We therefore read, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." (James 1:13, 14.) 'But is it not said,' some might reply, (Gen. 22:1), 'that "it came to pass that after these things God did tempt Abraham?"' I answer, the word "tempt" there does not imply that God seduced Abraham into evil. It is a mistranslation, and means simply that God tried Abraham; that is, by putting him into the furnace, he exercised his faith, and proved whether he was obedient to him in all things. And therefore Paul says, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." (Heb. 11:17.)

Trials, then, are of various kinds; but their object and end is one and the same; it is to try the graces and fruit of God the Spirit in the soul, and more especially the grace of faith. All the afflictions that God's people pass through are trials for their faith, whether they are afflicted in body, in circumstances, in mind, or in that way which each knows most painfully for himself. But what is the effect of the affliction? When it comes upon you, is it not to try your faith, and prove whether it is genuine? When your faith

is put into the furnace, does it not separate the dross which is so mingled with it? Do not trials reduce faith into its true compass, and winnow away the chaff from the grain? Do they not bring faith to hang more closely upon the Author and Finisher of it? We may think we have great and strong faith when we have no trials, and all things are going well and smooth with us; but let painful trials come, sharp afflictions in providence, severe persecutions, bitter convictions, an arrow from God's quiver, or something that tries our faith to the centre and cuts our flesh to the very quick—does not our faith then at once seem to sink into so small a compass as scarcely to be visible? Yet at the very time our faith shall be all the stronger, for it will hang more upon, and flee more unto its blessed and bountiful Giver and rely more simply upon a Three-one God.

Now every one of God's children must meet with trials; some are without, and some within; but each has a burden peculiar to himself, which he oftentimes thinks to be heavier than any others. It is with us in grace, as it is sometimes in nature; when one part of our body is afflicted, we think it to be the very worst place to bear the pain, and that we could endure it better in some other part. So spiritually: our trials come to us in the tenderest part, and are generally considered severer trials than any other which God's people go through. Each feels his own burden and trial, and suffers under his own sorrow; and being ignorant of the trials of another, each believer is tempted to think his trials are beyond most others sharp and painful. But let us consider.

II.—Their fruits and effects. James describes these as following one another: first, that they try faith; secondly, the trial of faith works patience; thirdly, that patience has her perfect work; fourthly, that when patience has had her perfect work, we become perfect and entire, wanting nothing. These fruits and effects I shall endeavour now to trace out.

I have already observed that James bade his suffering brethren "count it all joy" when they fell into these divers temptations and trials: for he was looking at the end, and viewing the crops, the rich

harvest, to be produced thereby.

1. It is for the trial of faith. If we have a grain of spiritual faith, that faith must be tried as with fire; as saith the Apostle Peter, "Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:7.) It has been said, with great truth, "Untried faith is no faith." We can never therefore fully and satisfactorily know that we have faith till faith has had a trial, and has come triumphantly out of it.

But what is the first effect of trial? In many cases the first effect is to stun. It does not produce in our souls a seemingly favourable effect; it overwhelms and overpowers. When temptations to infidelity and blasphemy have come upon you, to deny or curse God, or temptations to sin and the seductive pleasures of the flesh, or some sharp family or bodily affliction, has not the first effect of it been to stun, stupify, and overwhelm your soul? I know, through painful experience, that it has been so with me. We are thrown down by the blow, and there we lie upon the ground stunned, like a man who has had a knock-down blow, not knowing where we are. But after a time the soul rises again, and is revived out of its state, like the man who has had the knock-down blow, and begins to lift up his head.

There is then a revival of the soul. But with this revival there is sometimes rebellion. Rebellion does not always work at the first; the stunning blow strikes down rebellion, as well as apparently the life of God within. But when the soul revives rebellion will work; peevishness, fretfulness, hard thoughts of God, complainings that we are thus dealt with, angry askings why these trials have come upon us; or what can be the profit of these afflictions. All this while rebellion works most painfully in the carnal mind; and of all the trials that God's people have to endure, rebelliousness is one of the most distressing. What! a creature of the earth to rebel against the

all-wise Jehovah! that glorious Being, who could turn us to destruction as easily as we trample upon a beetle, and with one frown send us to hell! that a puny wretch, like man, should dare to lift up his arm against the Almighty! that ever his mind should rise up in awful waves of rebellion against such a holy, wise, and gracious God! This is a trial that puts faith into the furnace, touches it to the very quick, and proves whether or not it is the genuine faith of God's elect. Where real faith is not in the heart, this trial will drive a man from the paths of God, into the world, or into despair, or into drunkenness and open sin, and sometimes into suicide.

But where there is true faith, the living faith of God's elect there is a secret cord that will keep the soul in the paths of God. However fluctuating, weak, and wavering, or however tossed to and fro, and apparently driven from its centre, yet there is that secret band which links the soul to the throne of the Most High, never suffering it to go beyond a certain point; and this keeps it secretly and mysteriously, yet powerfully, from breaking through the bounds. All this is necessary and indispensable; there is no alternative; for faith must be tried.

There are writers and preachers that will admit there are such things as trials and temptations, and will even allow that many of God's people pass through them; but then they seem to set forth a path that may be travelled without them; such as "being drawn by love," and going to heaven safely and smoothly, without being assaulted by Satan, tempted by the world, entangled by fleshly lusts, or being put into the furnace of affliction. But all God's living people know it to be a truth, that wherever there is faith in the heart, however weak and small that faith may be, it must be tried. It is "the trial of faith," not faith itself, which is "more precious than of gold that perisheth."

2. Now this "trial of faith," which every child of God must pass through, produces a certain effect, set forth in the text. "The trying of your faith worketh patience." And patience can be produced in no other way. Men cannot gather patience out of the word of God,

as they gather a plum from a tree; they cannot pluck patience out of the Scripture as we may walk by a hedge-bank, and pluck a violet out of the hedge. No: patience is a grace of the Spirit, a fruit of the Holy Ghost; it must be produced inwardly, and communicated and worked in our heart by a divine hand.

But, what is patience? It implies two things: first, endurance; and secondly, submission.

i. It implies, first, endurance, according to those words, “Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (2 Tim. 2:3.) Endurance is necessary to gain the victory. Do we not read, “He that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved.” (Matt. 24:13.) If a man runs a race, we know he must have endurance in order to arrive at the goal. In the same way we must learn endurance; and this can only be learnt by passing through afflictions and trials. Does the soldier learn warfare merely by being drilled upon the parade, and going through the appointed exercises? This may do for the yeomanry or militia, but it will not do for active service. A man must be engaged in the battle, face the enemy, hear the roaring of the artillery, see the flashings of the sabres, and often suffer grievous and painful wounds in his body; and then, after many campaigns, he learns to be a soldier. So spiritually. Am I to sit in my arm-chair, read the word of God, ponder over David’s, Paul’s, and Peter’s experience, see the trials they endured, and learn the theory of spiritual warfare thereby? It may do to make a hypocrite, with a varnished face and a smooth tongue; but it will not do to make a “good soldier,” enduring hardness as one of those whom the Lord is leading to victory. These learn endurance by trials, afflictions, temptations, and sufferings, and by more or less of the daily conflict. As the back is strengthened by carrying burdens; and the sinews and muscles of the arms enlarged by exercise; so the soul learns to endure hardness by having weights to carry, struggles to endure, and battles to fight.

ii. But again. The word “patience” implies submission. What is the grand point that God is bringing his people to? Do we not read

that God has predestinated the elect “to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren?” (Rom. 8:29.) Are they not said to “have the mind of Christ?” (1 Cor. 2:16.) And do we not read, that “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps?” (1 Pet. 2:21.) But what was the most prominent point in the life of Christ? Was it not to do the will of the Father? Did he not say, “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me?” (John 6:38.) When enduring his dolorous sufferings in the gloomy garden of Gethsemane, to which earth never has and never can witness a parallel—when the agony of his soul pressed the bloody sweat through the pores of his skin—and he was being “made perfect through sufferings,” was not this the height of his obedience, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done?” (Luke 22:42.) Now if we are to wear the image, and have the mind of Christ, we must learn submission to the Father’s will as he did. But how can we learn submission, if we have nothing to submit to? What is the use of my talking of having the grace of submission to God’s will, if that will never thwart mine? if that will be never unsearchable by my intellect, and as much beyond mine as heaven is beyond earth? If that will never cross mine in any particular, what can I know about submission? I may talk about it, think I understand it, and flourish a few words respecting it; but as to the internal grace of submission, I cannot know it, except I have trials, and God works it in my soul. I will tell you when we are able to submit.

We need to see three things prior to submission. First, we must see the hand of God in the trial, and that it is brought upon us by the Lord himself. We cannot see this at first. When bodily or family afflictions, cutting trials or sharp temptations come upon us, what is their keenest edge? We cannot see that they come from God. The Lord brings the trial; but he hides the hand that brings it; the cloud appears in the sky, but we see not the face of God behind it. But after we have endured the trial, we are brought to see that the Lord sent it. This was Job’s trial. If Job could have seen that God sent the

trial, he could have borne it: but the Lord had hidden himself. Job went backward and forward, but he could not behold him. But the moment God appeared to speak through the cloud, Job saw the hand of the Lord; he laid his hand upon his mouth, and said, "Behold, I am vile!" He fell into his right spot; submission was brought in his soul. But when there was nothing but the cloud, and no divine hand seen, he was full of rebellion and peevishness; he could not feel submission, for he could not see the hand of God in it. Thus to see the hand of God in a trial is the first step to submission.

A second thing necessary to produce submission, is, to believe that we are interested in those words, "All things work together for good to them that love God." (Rom. 8:28.) We cannot see this at first. I have at times been fully persuaded that no good could come out of an affliction exercising me. It has been so contradictory to flesh and blood, that I have thought the time could never come when I should see the hand of God in it, or feel any good springing out of it. But when God enables us to believe (for he alone can) that a blessed crop will one day spring up out of it for our benefit and his glory, then we are brought to feel submission.

But we need also a third thing to produce submission, and that is, to be fully persuaded that the trial or temptation was absolutely indispensable; not merely to believe that God sent it, and that good will come out of it; but to be brought to this point, to be satisfied that good could come in no other way; that the heavy trial, the severe temptation, or the cutting affliction was really necessary, to come from the very quarter it did, to be laid upon the shoulders at the time it was, and to be brought into the heart in the precise way in which it came. When we can see and believe these three things, then we feel true submission.

3. But there is not only the work of patience, but also the perfect work of patience. There is a difference between the work of patience, and the perfect work of patience. The work of patience is to submit; but till patience endures without murmuring and submits without repining it has not had its perfect work. The trial must go

on, and the sufferings be endured, in order that patience may be fully ripened. When murmuring is fully silenced, infidelity thoroughly subdued; peevishness and fretfulness ceased, rebelliousness taken flight, the soul softened at the footstool of divine mercy, and melted into a flood of genuine contrition and godly sorrow—when thus viewing the hand of God, we submit to his righteous will in all things, patience has its perfect work. It is now perfected, and brought to full maturity; it is not then merely the blossom, nor the unripe fruit, but the matured crop of patience, manifested in its implicit submission to the divine will.

4. But the Apostle adds another fruit and effect of patience—"That ye may be perfect and entire wanting nothing." There are three fruits then produced by the perfect work of patience; 1. perfection; 2. entirety; and 3. wanting nothing.

1. Perfection. How can we understand these words? Is there such a thing as creature perfection? Certainly not. We must not interpret one part of God's word to militate against another, nor explain its meaning so as to clash with the experience of the Lord's family. The inspired word can never contradict the teachings of the Spirit in the heart.

By "perfection," we may understand two things, first, the soul's complete standing in Christ; its perfect acceptance in the Person, blood, and righteousness of the Son of God. But we never see that we cannot become perfect by our own strength, wisdom, and righteousness, till patience has had its perfect work: we may have the doctrine in our head, and understand the theory of it; but the experience of it we cannot have till patience has had its perfect work. But when this is accomplished, the soul is brought to submission, and it becomes manifestly clothed in the obedience of Jesus. Whilst we are fretting, murmuring, and rebelling against the Lord's dispensations in providence or grace, what faith is there in the Son of God? what testimonies or intimations of mercy are there from the Lord? or what fruits and effects are there of his grace? But when we are brought to lie still, then patience has its perfect work, and the

soul shines forth manifestly clothed in the Person and work of the Redeemer.

But by perfection, in the Scriptural sense of the word, we may also understand maturity and ripeness in the divine life—what the Apostle calls being “of full age,” (Heb. 5:14, literally, “perfect.”) This maturity and ripeness in the divine life is always produced by trials and temptations, and God’s working through them the grace of patience, and bringing forth its perfect work in the soul.

2. But there is another word added, “entire.” This means ‘having every part complete;’ literally, ‘possessing the whole of everything allotted to us.’ And this respects not the standing of the soul in Christ, but the work of the Spirit upon the heart. The new man of the soul is proportionate in all its parts; every member and grace of the Spirit grows together. There is no enlarged head and withered heart; no strong arm and feeble limb; no dwarf, giant, nor deformed cripple among the family of God. The new man of grace is perfect in all its parts and in all its proportions. And when the new man of grace grows thus altogether, the believer is “entire,” every part having its full proportion. You may have observed many persons in the religious world, professing to have faith, strong faith, almost to remove mountains, who have no humility, simplicity, brokenness, nor contrition; no tenderness of conscience, godly fear, deadness to the world, nor separation from the things of time and sense; an enormous faith, but a most scanty proportion of its fruits. Is not this a delusion? and is not hypocrisy stamped upon the very profession of it?

The Lord, then, in order to give every member and grace of the Spirit its due proportion, brings trials, temptations, and exercises; and this discipline causes every branch of the new man to grow together in perfect harmony. As faith grows, hope enlarges, love increases, humility deepens, patience strengthens, consistency brightens, the life is changed, and the soul becomes more truly conformed to the image of Jesus. Trials, temptations, and exercises produce this, by winnowing away, purging out, and sep-

arating what is carnal, gross, and sensual. So that by cutting off and cutting out that which is earthly and carnal, they leave the new man of grace to grow forth in all his blessed proportions. Am I afflicted? it strengthens my faith. Is my faith strengthened? my hope is increased. Is my hope increased? my love is drawn forth. Again. Is my hope strengthened? prayerfulness, panting after the Lord’s presence, and desires after the blessed revelation of himself increase in proportion. Do these things increase? They produce more patience. Does patience increase? It produces more consistency. So, just as one grace flourishes in the soul, there is a beautiful growth in all. Faith is not like a sucker that grows from the tree, drawing away all its sap, which must be plucked up in order to preserve the parent stock; it is rather the stem, from which all the branches grow in beautiful proportion. The faith of the Christian is not the twining ivy that lives upon, and eventually strangles the parent stem; but a divine root, from which all grows in just proportion, in beautiful and blessed harmony. A believer thus becomes entire: “one grace is not starved that another may fatten; one grace is not weakened that another may be strengthened. But faith being strengthened, patience has its perfect work, and the believer becomes entire; not that he becomes more perfect in Christ, but because he has every fruit and grace of the Spirit growing in exact proportion and harmony.

3. “Wanting nothing.” Before he was afflicted, he went astray; but now he keeps God’s word. Before the trial of faith, he was spreading all abroad; but after it came, it shut him up in a narrow compass. Before, he little knew whether the anchor of hope would bear a hard strain. Before, he was not certain whether his love was genuine, or whether he had true patience. There were many fruits of faith unripe, many graces of the Spirit in imperfect exercise, many members of the new man apparently feeble. But when trials came, the Lord through them produced patience, and eventually brought forth its perfect work.

Thus the soul becomes not merely actually, but also manifes-

tively entire: it lacks nothing. Every grace and every fruit of the Spirit is brought forth in blessed harmony and beautiful proportion; not a single limb or feature of the new man is defective in the soul. Jesus himself is in the heart. Do we not see it so? Those who are most tried, have they not most of the likeness of Christ in them? Where am I to look for humility, prayerfulness, love to God's people, simplicity, uprightness, the image of Christ? In an unexercised, hardened professor with the doctrines of grace upon his lips, and as dead to all vital godliness as Satan himself? I may see a distorted likeness: I may see a charnel-house white-washed over, full of dead men's bones and uncleanness; I may see a clean outside cup and platter; but I shall look in vain beneath the varnished face for the beautiful image of Christ in his soul. To see that, I must go to the perplexed, exercised, suffering children of God walking in the path of affliction, put into the furnace of suffering, and at times well-nigh drowned in the waters of sorrow. There you will see the mind and image of Christ; there you will see those who are "perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

Now, do you think you have had the sum worked out? We have had a problem to handle and bring out the solution. There were these figures—"divers temptations;" and the sum to be brought out was, "all joy." Take the mass of troubles, multiply the figures as much as you please, you will still find the sum total to be "joy." Well it might puzzle the acutest schoolmaster to bring out this. But when we see what the Spirit does in the heart of God's people, what sweet arithmetic does "the wonderful Numberer" (Dan. 8:13, marg.) bring forth! This we may not now see; but when God the Spirit shall calculate the sum for us, then we shall see and feel too, that divers temptations, many afflictions, and grievous sorrows are to be counted all joy, if they work in us the mind of Christ, conform us to the image of Jesus, and "make us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." If this be the sum, and this the solution, then the most afflicted people, the most deeply tempted, and the most painfully tried, have reason to bless God the most. Above,

there are no degrees of joy or glory; but as regards this time-state we may surely say, if small afflictions bring out but a small sum total of joy, very great afflictions will bring out a great sum total of joy. If a row of three figures is to bring out only a row of three figures of joy, then a row of ten figures of temptation and trouble will bring out—ten figures shall I say?—a hundred of spiritual joy below, and a thousand figures of joy in glory above untold and untellable. The Apostle says, "count it all joy." He was a master of divine arithmetic. Nor was his brother Paul below him in the noble art of spiritual calculation; for he counted the sufferings of this present life not worthy to be compared with the glory that should be revealed in him; and casting up the figures for the Lord's people as well as himself, says to them (2 Cor. 1:7), "Our hope of you is stedfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation."

92 Miracles Not Ceased

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

August 3, 1845

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

Matthew 11:6

A question has been raised, whether in sending this message to the Lord Jesus, John the Baptist wished to satisfy his own mind, or the minds of his disciples. Some have thought that John the Baptist could never have entertained any suspicion in his mind whether Jesus was the Messiah. And thus to vindicate John's honour, they have supposed it was the unbelief of his disciples that John wishes to remove. I do not profess to have a decided opinion upon the matter; but I cannot see why John, considering the circumstances

in which he was placed, might not have had suspicions working in his bosom. Was he not a man like ourselves? Did he not carry in his bosom the same unbelieving and infidel heart that we are possessed of? And considering his circumstances, that he was shut up in prison, that the Lord did not appear to release him, might not a suspicion of this nature have crossed his breast—'Am I the Forerunner of the Messiah, and will he not come to release me out of this dungeon?' I do not see that it impairs the character of John to allow he had these suspicions, these doubtful thoughts in his mind, knowing what unbelieving hearts we all possess.

But, whether it was to satisfy the mind of John, or whether it was to satisfy the minds of John's disciples, the answer of the Lord was, "Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see." It appears from a parallel passage (Luke 7:21), that the Lord wrought several miracles before their eyes: "In that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight." Thus, he could appeal to their own senses, and say, "Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see." Does he doubt my mission? Does any suspicion cross his bosom whether I am the Son of God? Tell him what ye have seen, what ye have heard, that these things may support his wavering faith, that they may strengthen his faltering feet. Tell him the miracles which you have seen performed by my hands, "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them;" and then, as an intimation adapted to the wavering faith of John the Baptist, or of his disciples, he adds, "and blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me."

The miracles of our Lord were not merely testimonies of his mission from God, not merely manifest evidences of his almighty power, not merely temporal blessings to the objects of those miracles; but they had also a spiritual bearing; they were typical and figurative of spiritual blessings communicated from the same gra-

acious hands. And in this way I shall this evening, with God's blessing, consider the words. I shall not speak of the miracles here spoken of as miracles wrought upon the body, but as miracles wrought upon the soul.

Miracles wrought on the body have, for the most part, ceased. The Lord of life and glory is now at the right hand of the Father in majesty and power, and has ceased, as once upon earth, to drive away sickness by a word or a touch: but he puts forth that power in men's souls that he once put forth in men's bodies. So that though miracles are changed as to their character, yet miracles have not ceased as to their existence. We behold indeed no natural miracles now; we see no blind Bartimeus restored to sight; we view no dead Lazarus come out of the tomb. But wherever a work of grace is begun and carried on in the soul, there are blind eyes opened, there are the lame made to walk, there are the deaf made to hear, there the leper is cleansed, the dead raised up, and to the poor the gospel is preached.

I shall therefore, with God's blessing, take up the words as they lie before me in this spiritual sense, endeavouring to trace out one by one the character first; and then, the miracle wrought upon that character.

I.—"The blind receive their sight." This is by the putting forth of the power of God in their souls. For in what state and condition are we by nature? Are we not blind to our state as sinners before God? blind to the spirituality and condemning power of the law? blind to the majesty, greatness, holiness, and purity of God above? blind to the beauty and preciousness of Immanuel? blind to the personality and operations of God the Spirit? And is not this blindness a feature that universally prevails? Are we not, in a spiritual sense, born blind? Do we not grow up in that blindness? And can any natural power remove it? Can any light in the judgment, can any doctrines received in the mind, can any profession of religion, can anything that nature has done or can do, remove that blindness? It may be increased, and it is increased, when darkness is put for

light, and light is put for darkness; but it cannot be removed by any power of man in himself, or for others. It is the special work, the grand prerogative of the only-begotten Son of God, to remove this blindness by communicating spiritual eyesight. And this is done in a moment. We may not indeed be able to trace out the very moment that quickening grace visited our souls, though we shall, for the most part, be acquainted with the period within certain limits. But it was done in a moment of time; there was an instant, though we may not be enabled to recollect it, when divine light was brought into our dark minds, and the blind received sight.

But how do the blind know that they have received sight? The way of the operation of the Spirit of God is hidden from us. This is the Lord's own testimony, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8) "As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all" (Eccl. 11:5). The way, therefore, of the Spirit's operation is to us unknown. But we begin to know that we see, by having objects presented to our mind, and by having an internal perception of those objects. Our natural eye sees everything but itself. A child when it begins, what is called, 'to take notice,' that is, to observe and understand objects, does not reason, perhaps lives and dies without ever reasoning, as to the process whereby it sees. But when objects are presented to the eye, there is a perception of those objects, and a feeling connected with them. So it is spiritually. A child of God cannot understand how, or why it is, but he knows that "whereas he was blind, now he sees:" that there is in his soul an inward perception: and that this inward perception is attended with certain sensations, to which sensations he was a stranger in times past.

1. For instance. He sees that there is a God above, the holy, invisible, and eternal Jehovah, who looks into the secret chambers of his soul, whose penetrating eye searches through every veil, and

pierces into the depths of that heart that is hidden from all eyes but that of a heart-searching God. This is what a man never sees by nature; this is the special work and act of faith; for by faith we endure, "as seeing him who is invisible."

2. But again. Whenever the blind receive sight, they see the purity and spirituality of God's character. Before the blind receive sight, they think that God is such a one as themselves; they have no idea of, no internal acquaintance with, the infinite purity, holiness, and spirituality of Jehovah. They therefore never bow down before him; there is no trembling of heart at his great name, no bringing down of proud imaginations at his footstool, no inward shrinking into self before the loftiness of the Most High, no perception of his glory, no yielding up of the heart in subjection, no adoration nor admiration of his eternal Majesty. But wherever spiritual eye-sight is given, and the purity and holiness of Jehovah are made known to the heart, there will be, as we find all through the scripture, self-abasement. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job. 42:5, 6) "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts" (Isai. 6:5). The purity, holiness, and spirituality of God's character, produced in the saints of old this prostration of soul before him.

The Lord God Almighty reveals in the soul these perfections to drive it from a broken covenant: he makes known his purity, spirituality, and holiness to bring guilt upon the soul, drive it out of every lying refuge, and beat out of its grasp every hope but that which he himself implants. I cannot define—who can?—how much we shall know of God's purity, how much our hearts shall be broken within us by a sense of his majesty, what sensations of inward reverence, what feelings of guilt, fear and condemnation shall be produced by his holy law. But I am sure of this—if they do not beat us out of every false refuge, if they do not strip us of every natural hope, if they do not remove from under our souls every creature

prop, they have not done their work yet. And why God displays his terrible majesty, why he sets our secret sins before our eyes, why he lays them with weight and power upon our conscience, and why he searches the very bottom of our hearts—why is all this preparation, but to bring us near the Son of his love, to draw us to the bosom of the Lord of life and glory, and make him dear and precious to our souls?

3. In due time, therefore, the blind receive sight to see the Person, blood, righteousness, glory, and beauty of Immanuel. “But we see Jesus.” Did your eyes ever see him? Do look into conscience—did your eyes ever see Jesus? I do not mean your natural, your bodily eyes; but the eye of faith, the eye of the soul. I will tell you what you have felt, if you ever saw Jesus. Your heart was softened and melted, your affections drawn heavenward, your soul penetrated with thankfulness and praise, your conscience sprinkled with atoning blood, your mind lifted up above all earthly things to dwell and centre in the bosom of the blessed Immanuel. Do you think, then, you have seen Jesus by the eye of faith? Then you have seen the perfection of beauty, the consummation of pure loveliness; you have seen the image of the invisible God; you have seen all the perfections and glorious character of the Godhead shining forth in him that was nailed to Calvary’s tree. I am sure such a sight as that must melt the most obdurate heart, and draw tears from the most flinty eyes; such a sight by faith of the beauty and glory of the only-begotten Son of God must kindle the warmest, holiest stream of tender affection. It might not have lasted long. These feelings are often very transitory. The world, sin, temptation, and unbelief soon work: infidelity soon assails all: the things of time and sense soon draw aside: but whilst it lasted, such, in a greater or less degree, were the sensations produced. Now, if you have ever seen Jesus by the eye of faith, and ever had a tender affection going out toward him, you will see him in glory. But you will never see him in glory, if you have not seen him in grace; you will never see him eye to eye in the open vision of eternal bliss, unless you have

seen him now upon earth by the faith of God’s elect in your heart.

But we must not tarry over this portion; we must go on to consider the other parts of the text.

II.—”The lame walk.” By the word “lame” here we are to understand, not one who is generally understood by the expression, that is, one who has, in a measure, the use of his limbs; for if so, it would not be applicable. The lame often do walk, though feebly. The word “lame” rather means a cripple—one unable to move his limbs—unable, however feebly, to use any motion whatever of the body. Now, does not this set forth the state and condition of Adam’s fallen progeny? and of the elect as springing from the loins of this sinful parent? Has not Adam’s fall crippled every faculty of our soul? Has it not blinded our eyes? Has it not withered our arms? Has it not maimed our legs? Has it not dried up our hearts? Has it not affected our memory, our understanding, and our imagination? In a word, has it not so crippled every faculty of our souls, that they are altogether dead Godward?

Now, when the Spirit begins a work of grace upon the heart, God’s people are made sensible that they are in a crippled state. Not merely lame, for that might imply that they could shamble a little forward, that they could get hold of a crutch or a strong staff, and by that means manage to walk in the strait and narrow road; but that they are more than lame, that they have lost more than the use of one limb, that they are crippled, paralytic, bedridden, unable to lift up a leg or a finger. And this is what exercises and tries many of God’s people. We know the fall in theory better than we do in practice. We know the fall in our head better than we know it in our heart. We say that man is dead in sin, that his faculties are all crippled, that he is utterly helpless in the things of God. This is our creed. But when we come to carry this out, we are exercised, perplexed, troubled, often distressed, because our creed is so true. We believe with our judgment perfectly, that we are altogether crippled; but when we begin to feel how unable we are to move forward, and how thoroughly we are what we say we

are: when the light in our judgments descends into our heart to become life there, how it shackles the mind! Crippled in prayer, so as to be unable to pour forth the heart; crippled in reading, so as scarcely to understand, or feel a single portion of scripture: crippled in hearing, crippled in speaking, crippled in thinking, crippled in acting; all blighted, all withered, all torpid, all unable to move forward. When a feeling of our helplessness thus lies upon our conscience, how deep it cuts! But the promise is—and there is a sweet fulfilment of it sometimes—that “the lame walk.” How? In their own strength? No; not in their own strength. In the strength of the Lord. We read, “they shall walk up and down in the name of the Lord;” that is, in the strength of the Lord. “My strength,” said Christ to Paul, “is made perfect in weakness.” “From me,” says the Lord to his church, “is thy strength found.”

Sometimes, then, the Lord enables the soul to walk on in his paths. The crippled state is for a time removed. Prayer is sweet—the word of God is precious—the heart is enlarged—the soul is enabled to move cheerfully on in God’s ways (“I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart;”)—religion and the things of God are no longer a burden—the heart and conscience, the memory and feelings are no longer paralysed and crippled; but sweet life is poured into the soul—the vigorous sap that flows out of the stem penetrates and reaches to the remotest twig in the branch. And as the mighty sap penetrates through every branch, and as the life-blood from the Head pervades every limb of the body, there is power to walk cheerfully in the Lord’s ordinances, to walk in sweet communion with a Three-one God; to walk in light, life, and liberty, in the enjoyment of gospel means, and in the shinings of God’s uplifted countenance. When this is fulfilled, when we leave our bed where we have lain, perhaps, bedridden for months; when the limbs are supernaturally strengthened, and we move cheerfully forward; when the Lord himself lays the everlasting arms underneath;—then, like the cripple at the beautiful gate of the temple when his ankle-bones received

strength, there is a leaping, praising, and blessing the Lord. Have you not felt this? You are not always crippled and lame, if you are child of God. It may be your experience, say, nine times out of ten: but the tenth time, is there not some feeling in your heart, some life in your soul, some sweet enlargement, some heavenly love, some divine sensations? This is walking: and wherever this is felt in the heart, there is a fulfilment of the miracle, that “the lame walk.”

III.—But we go on to another case—a more desperate case than any that we have already handled. We have looked at the blind, and O how pitiful their state seems to be! We have viewed the crippled, and how helpless their condition appears! But what do you think of a man, not merely blind, not merely lame, but also leprous?—“from the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it: but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores?” Leprosy was a natural disease, but it was also figurative of something spiritual. The leprosy of the body was a significant type of the leprosy of the soul. If you remember, there were no means to be used in the Old Testament to cure leprosy. God himself reserved its cure in his own hands. But when the leper was cured, there were certain ceremonies to be performed, as we find in the fourteenth chapter of Leviticus. The leprosy, however, was a figurative disease—figurative of the deep-seated disease of the soul. Now, I believe in my conscience, that every child of God will, sooner or later, feel himself to be a leper. He will have the upper lip covered, he will dwell alone, and will cry, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ He will feel himself, sooner or later, to be a leprous wretch. He will feel the sores of sin, not merely externally, but internally. He will have the ‘quick, raw flesh,’ and every symptom in his soul corresponding to the symptoms of the leprosy in the body.

The Lord of life and glory, when he was upon earth, shewed forth his almighty power in cleansing lepers. We read of several instances. We read of one who came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” And we read of his cleansing ten lepers at once, though one only, and he a Samaritan,

returned to give him thanks. Now, this was typical and figurative of the cleansing power of the Lord of life and glory in the soul. Am I a leper spiritually? I can no more cure myself of my leprosy, than the leper could naturally. Was leprosy a disorder that kept spreading, deepening, and increasing, till, unless God cured it, it brought its victim to a premature death? So spiritually. If I live and die with the leprosy of sin uncleansed, where God is, I cannot come. The leper must be cleansed—cleansed, not merely by the shedding of atoning blood upon the cross, which is the actual cleansing of him from filth and guilt in the sight of God: but he must be cleansed also by the application of that atoning blood to his soul, by having his heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and thus enjoying a testimony of the everlasting favour of God.

Now, when a man is convinced in his soul that he is a leper, to whom can he go for cleansing, but to the Lord of life and glory? We may try a thousand remedies: they will all prove insufficient: but “the blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanseth from all sin,” has never proved—no, not in one case—insufficient. Do not some of you think, sometimes, your wound incurable—your heart so hard, that it seems nothing can soften it—the disease of sin in you so desperate, that it seems at times to you utterly impossible you can be anything else but a sinner? Now, the deeper we sink into a spiritual knowledge of our leprosy before God, the more do we seek after, the more do we cleave unto, the more do we value, and in due time, the more do we prize that balmy blood which cleanseth from all sin. What else can take out the stains from so deeply-dyed a soul? What else can present it pure before the eyes of infinite Purity? What else can pluck a sinner out of the depths of the fall, and make him whiter than an angel of light before the throne of the Most High? The blood of the Lamb of God revealed in the heart, applied to the soul, and sprinkled upon the conscience, takes out the deepest stain of guilt. Whatever our sin has been (except the unpardonable one, which cannot be committed by a child of God), however deeply ingrained our iniquity is—if it be of the most awful

nature, the blackest dye—the blood of Jesus, applied to our soul, will take it all away, and purge the conscience from guilt, filth, and dead works to serve the living God.

IV.—“The deaf hear.” Who are the deaf? Are they not spiritually and figuratively those who, in a state of nature, have no ears to hear the voice of God, and live? Yes: by nature we are all deaf—deaf to warnings, deaf to condemnations, deaf to threatenings, deaf to precepts, deaf to promises, like the deaf adder, that stoppeth her ears, and will not hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. Who can describe the deafness of man by nature to every warning, every threatening, every portion of God’s word? It is indeed an awful part of the fall. But when the Lord the Spirit begins a work of grace upon the heart, he circumcises the ear. He thus opens it to receive instruction. He gives a new faculty to the soul, whereby the truth of God is received as from the mouth of God. Has not this been the case with some of you? When you heard the law, in times past, its threatenings rolled over your heads, like the thunder, without making any impression; when you heard of the love, blood, and sufferings of Jesus, there was no softening, melting, humbling of your soul. Were you not deaf, utterly deaf? Had you any one divine sensation in your soul? any one tender feeling? any breaking down of spirit? Not one.

But when God the Spirit mercifully removes this deafness to all the truth of God—then the deaf begin to hear. This is one of the first marks of life in the soul. They hear the threatenings of God’s law, and every threatening reverberates in thunders in their hearts. They hear, and they believe what they hear, that he will bring the wicked to judgment; that there is appointed a day to judge the world; and that those who live and die in their sins will be swallowed up in an awful gulf of misery. When the Lord the Spirit opens their ears, they hear the voice of the Son of God; for he says, “My sheep hear my voice;” and again, “The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.” They hear the “still, small voice” whispering

in their souls. They hear the feeblest intimation of his mercy and grace. They hear what he says in his precepts, and obey. They hear what he says in his promises, and hope. They hear what he says in his invitations, and believe. They hear the voice of the Lord, which “shaketh the wilderness; the Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests; and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory.” This voice of majesty and mercy sounds through every chamber of the heart, and penetrates with almighty power, still and gentle though it is, into the most secret recesses of the conscience.

In hearing the word, have you not sometimes heard things that broke your heart all to pieces? Have you not sometimes had your sins turned up to view, and cutting convictions produced? Have you not sometimes had your evidences brightened, your hope encouraged, your affections drawn out, your path cleared up, and your souls graciously comforted and strengthened? If so, a miracle has been wrought in your heart. The Son of God, sitting at the right hand of the Father, has as much, by divine power, opened your ears spiritually (or you could not hear), as ever, in the days of his flesh, he opened the ears of the deaf naturally. O what a mercy it is to have the hearing ear, and the believing heart! Not setting ourselves against the majesty of the Most High: not rushing on the thick bosses of his buckler—but to be broken down and humbled; to kiss the Son lest he be angry, to touch the hem of his garment, and to hear, or to long to hear him speaking in soft whispers to the heart, “Fear not; thou art mine.”

V.—“The dead are raised up.” The “dead” are those who by nature are dead in sin. These dead are raised up when life from God visits their souls. They are raised up to faith in Jesus—raised up to hope in his name—raised up to a sense of his dying love to their souls—raised up from doubt and fear—raised up from the depths of despondency, to look unto him and be saved. What a mercy it is that the Lord of life and glory still puts forth the same power in the

hearts of his people, that he once put forth in their bodies, and that he raises them up from their state of death and deadness! Do we not often feel so dead, as though we had not a particle of the grace of God? So dead, that it seems scarcely possible to have a sensation of spiritual life again? So dead, that we almost fear whether the power of God was ever felt in our hearts? Now, the Lord raises up life and feeling in our souls, by putting forth the same power that called Lazarus out of the tomb. And every lifting up of the heart towards him—every panting desire to know him, and the power of his resurrection—every breathing of tender affection—every sigh, cry, and groan—yea, every feeling, however short, however transient, Godward—is a proof that the Lord of life and glory is still putting forth his power in the hearts of his people.

Now, just in proportion as we know and deeply feel our state by nature, shall we experience and value these spiritual miracles. In the days of the Lord’s flesh, who valued him? and who wanted miracles to be shewed forth? Was it not the characters whom he shewed to the disciples of John? the blind, the lame, the leper, the deaf, and the dead? And the more inveterate and the more irremediable these cases were, the more the power and the glory of Jesus were shewn in bringing them out of this forlorn state, and giving them health and cure. Is it not so spiritually? If I am not by nature totally blind—if I am not by nature thoroughly crippled—if I am not a leper to the very core—if I am not completely deaf—if I am not altogether dead—I cannot know, I cannot value when known, the power of the Lord in removing these diseases. But if I am deeply sensible of my lost and ruined condition, and know that I am by nature a complication of maladies—that every disease meets in me—that I am not only blind, but also lame—and not only lame, but also a leper—and not only a leper, but also deaf—and not only deaf, but also by nature dead: then I learn to put an inestimable value upon every breath of life, every teaching of the Holy Ghost, every mark of God’s favour, and every testimony that I am one of his.

VI.—But the Lord adds another word, which throws a sweet light upon the whole—”The poor have the gospel preached to them.” Why should the Lord mention this among his miracles? Was there any putting forth of miraculous power in this? Was there anything resembling, anything analogous to, giving sight to the blind, strength to the lame, cure to the leprous, hearing to the deaf, and life to the dead? There was, considering the circumstances of the times. The poor, in those days, as is too much the case in our own, were generally despised. We see what the spirit of the Pharisees was, in what they said to the blind man—”Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.” The poor were looked upon more as brutes than men. The rich, the noble, the educated—these were admired; but the poor were looked upon as the common herd whom any oppressor might trample under foot.

But when the Lord of life and glory appeared upon earth, he came as a poor man. God was determined to stain the pride of human greatness: he therefore sends his only-begotten Son into the world, to be born in a stable, and cradled in a manger: to be the son of poor parents, and to work with his hands for his daily bread. Therefore they said, “Is not this the carpenter’s son?... How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” The very parentage of Jesus, though it was from David himself, was obscured by the low condition in which he was born. When he came into the world, poor men were his companions. He chose poor fishermen to be his disciples, and he associated for the most part with the poor. It was therefore a miracle that these poor people naturally should have the gospel preached to them. And being so contrary to every practice then known, it stood on the same footing, as a proof of his heavenly mission, as his raising up the dead, giving eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, feet to the lame, and cleansing the lepers.

But there is a deeper meaning than that; there is a spiritual interpretation connected with the words. The “poor,” understood

spiritually, are the “poor in spirit,” the broken in heart, the contrite, the lowly, the troubled, the emptied, and the exercised, who are nothing, and have nothing in themselves spiritually good.

Now to these the gospel is preached. It is their very poverty which makes the gospel received by them, and makes the gospel precious to them. As the blind needed eye-sight, and received eye-sight—as the lame and crippled needed power to walk, and received power to walk—as the leper needed cleansing, and received cleansing—as the deaf needed hearing, and received hearing—as the dead needed raising up, and were raised up: so the spiritual poverty of the poor in spirit prepared them for, and made them receive the gospel.

And what is the gospel? Is not the gospel a proclamation of pure mercy, of superabounding grace? Does it not declare the loving-kindness of God in sending his only-begotten Son to bleed and die, and, by his obedience, blood, and merit, to bring in a salvation without money and without price? Is not this the gospel? Not clogged by conditions, nor crippled by anything that the creature has to perform; but flowing freely forth as the air in the skies? The poor to whom the gospel is preached, value it; it is suitable to them; it is sweet and precious when the heart is brought down. But if I stand up in religious pride, if I rest upon my own righteousness, if I am not stripped of everything in the creature, what is the gospel to me? I have no heart to receive it; there is no place in my soul for a gospel without money and without price. But when I sink into the depth of creature poverty, when I am nothing and have nothing but a mass of sin and guilt—then the blessed gospel, pardoning my sins, covering my naked soul, shedding abroad the love of God, guiding me into everything good, and leading me up into enjoyment with a Three-one God, becomes prized. When such a pure, such a blessed gospel comes into my heart and conscience, has not my previous poverty of spirit prepared me for it? Has not my previous beggary and necessity made a way for it, made it suitable to me, and when it comes, makes it precious to me? We must, then,

sink into poverty of spirit, that painful place, in order to feel the preciousness, and drink into the sweetness and blessedness of the gospel of the grace of God.

We often know the theory of the gospel before we know the experience of the gospel. We often receive the doctrines of grace into our judgment before we receive the grace of the doctrines into our soul. We therefore need to be brought down, humbled, exercised, stripped of every prop, that the gospel may be to us the gospel—more than a sound, more than a name, more than a theory, more than a doctrine, more than a system, more than a creed—that it may be soul sensation, soul enjoyment, soul blessing, and soul salvation. When the Lord the Spirit preaches the gospel, “without money and without price,” to the poor in spirit, the humbled, stripped, and exercised—it is a gospel of glad tidings indeed to the sinner’s broken heart.

VII.—And then the Lord closes his message to John, by pronouncing a blessing upon a certain character, “Blessed is he who-soever shall no! be offended in me.” What is the meaning of the word “offended?” It signifies stumbled. This is the meaning of the word in the New Testament.

Now there are many things in Jesus that stumble us by nature. Have you not been stumbled by his Godhead? Has not your reason been shaken to the very centre, and has not every sort of infidel suspicion crept over your mind concerning it? This was stumbling. Do not the precepts of the Lord of life and glory stumble most men? are they not too high for them to cross, and a stumbling-block in their path that they cannot get over? Is not Jesus generally a stumbling-block to the sons of men? When God laid the stone in Zion, was it not for two purposes—to be for his people a foundation, and to be for his enemies a stone of offence and a stumbling-block? All then, but God’s people are offended in Jesus. They stumble upon that stumbling-stone. His precepts are too rigid—his yoke too heavy—his cross too burdensome. His precious gospel is distasteful to the carnal mind; therefore all natural men

are offended, and stumbled. They like not the pure gospel. The unconditional gospel is not lowered sufficiently to their carnal heart. But the Lord’s people are, by divine teaching, brought through these difficulties. They may be stumbled, and that painfully, at times, at the infinite Godhead of Jesus. They may be stumbled to know how his blood can cleanse from sin; a thousand difficulties may perplex their mind: but they will not stumble so as to fall. They may totter and stagger, but not stumble so as to fall entirely.

Now, do look at the blessing that the Lord has pronounced—”Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.” (Matt. 6:6.) What is the feeling of your heart toward Jesus? What is the solemn desire of your soul? that he would come and make your heart his abode? that he would visit your soul with the light of his countenance? that he would sprinkle his blood upon your conscience? that he would make himself very near, very dear, and very precious? Do you count one word from his lips worth a thousand worlds? a smile of his countenance worth thousands of gold and silver? Then you are blessed. You are not stumbling upon the dark mountains of error. You are not stumbling at the perfections of the Son of God. You are not offended at a free gospel, an unconditional salvation. No; the Lord in mercy has slaughtered your prejudices, subdued your enmity, and brought you to receive the gospel as a little child.

‘Well,’ but some may say, ‘I believe all this; but then, I have doubts and fears whether the Lord has begun his work in me, whether I am one of his family. I cannot enjoy the power of truth as I would wish.’ But, does not the Lord say, “Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me?” You are not offended and stumbled at Jesus. No: your very lamentation is, that you cannot enjoy him, cannot feel him precious, cannot love him, cannot delight in him, cannot have sweet smiles from his countenance, cannot have a blessed revelation of his love in your heart. Now, if you were offended by a pure gospel; if you turned your back upon wisdom’s ways: if you preferred the indulgence of some vile lust to obedience

to the Lord of life and glory: if you were fighting against sovereign grace, and against the Person, work, and blood of the Lamb, you would be under the curse. But if there be in your heart, in spite of doubts and fears, in spite of suspicions and apprehensions, an earnest desire to know the Lord of life, and to breathe out all your soul into his bosom; if this be the reigning feeling within—that none but Christ revealed in your heart can do you good, and you would sooner have a precious Jesus in your soul than thousands of gold and silver:—you are blessed, for you are not offended in Christ. You may be offended at many things in yourself, but he is to you, at times, the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely. And he that is not offended in him, but is enabled to receive him as the Christ of God, to look to him, to believe in him, and at times to feel him precious—he comes under the blessing which “maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it”.

93 Spiritual Delight, and Confiding Trust

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

August 7, 1845

“Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.”

Psalm 37:4, 5, 6

To search and to know the heart of man is God’s special prerogative. He claims it as such; for, when speaking of man’s heart, he says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” he adds, “I, the Lord, search the heart; I try the reins.” (Jer. 17:9, 10.) We find the Psalmist using similar language, “O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me: thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off; thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways: for there is not a word in my

tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.” (Psa. 139:1-4.)

The deepest traces of this knowledge which God has of the heart of man are to be found scattered up and down the Scriptures of truth. The 37th Psalm, [I believe the author meant the 73rd Psalm] for instance, contains the deepest knowledge of the heart of man; and not merely the most intimate acquaintance with all its secret movements, but also with the remedy which God himself has provided to meet the malady. It is a grand spiritual armoury out of which heavenly weapons to fight against the peculiar besetments of God’s people are to be brought to the end of time. It is a repository of healing medicines to be applied from time to time to the rankling wounds that these peculiar besetments continually make in the conscience. One of these peculiar besetments is the fretting and envying that there is in a gracious man’s heart against the prosperity of the ungodly. Asaph deeply felt this; nay, so deeply that his feet had well-nigh slipped altogether through the force of the temptation. Job felt this, as we read in the 21st chapter, when he was so stumbled at the prosperity of the wicked. And all God’s people, one in a greater and another in a less degree, feel from time to time the workings of this spirit of envying and fretful murmuring, when things go against them, and in favour of those whom they know to be ungodly.

The Lord in this Psalm meets this case, and provides remedies for it; and these remedies he not merely provides for his people in the letter of truth, but he also, in his own time and way, graciously applies them to their soul.

You will observe, that in the text there is a very close and intimate connection betwixt the precept and the promise. The Lord lays down two precepts, and he connects with them two promises. And it will be my endeavour and aim this evening, if God give me power and ability, to show not only what the precept and the promise are, but also the spiritual and experimental connection between them. So that, if we are enabled (and God alone can enable us) to perform the precept, we are sure of having the promise

fulfilled in our heart's experience.

The text consists, therefore, as I have just observed, of two distinct branches. There is a precept in each, and a promise in each, and these two are intimately connected.

I.—The first precept runs thus, "Delight thyself in the Lord;" and the promise connected with that precept is, "And he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

There is a close and intimate connection betwixt the humbling teachings of God in the heart, and our delighting ourselves in him. What was the frame and mind, and what was the peculiar besetment that God the Spirit met in this Psalm? It was the envy and fretfulness which often work in a good man's bosom against the prosperity of the wicked. In other words, the character pointed out in this Psalm was one walking in a path of peculiar trial, temptation, and perplexity; and one of his peculiar trials, perplexities, and temptations was, that all things went contrary to him, whilst all things went on favourably with the ungodly. Now I do not say that this was absolutely necessary to make him delight in the Lord. But I say this, that we cannot delight ourselves in the Lord till we have ceased to delight in other things; and therefore we need to be led in a path of trial, temptation, perplexity, conflict, and sometimes to experience great distress of soul on account of sin laid upon our conscience, in order to be brought to fulfil this precept spiritually.

The precept is not laid down here as though man were able in his own strength and wisdom to take it up and obey it. There is a preparatory teaching of the blessed Spirit before a man can enjoy in his own soul a living experience of the precept. And the very way whereby God brings him to perform it is, by first leading him into those paths of trial, perplexity, and sorrow which stir up the enmity, peevishness, and fretfulness of his rebellious heart. For instance

1. By nature we delight in the world. It is our element, our home, and what our carnal hearts are intimately blended with. We need to be divorced from this carnal union; we need to have the world

embittered to us. Now the very means that God employs to embitter the world to us are cutting and grievous dispensations as unexpected reverses in fortune, afflictions of body, of family, or of soul. But these very means that the Lord employs to divorce our carnal union from the world, act upon the peevishness and fretfulness of our depraved nature. So that we think we are being very hard dealt with in being compelled to walk in this trying path, whilst the ungodly are prospering. And yet by these cutting dispensations we are eventually brought to delight ourselves in him, who will give us the desires of our heart.

2. Again. We cleave close to a covenant of works. Our naturally religious heart is continually aiming to do something whereby we think we can gain the favour of God. Now when every exertion to set up our righteousness is completely baffled, when our resolutions are proved to be weak as water, when all our endeavour to do something that we think God can accept prove entirely baseless, and the corruption of our heart becomes more and more manifest in every attempt to carry out what we think will please God—this stirs up the self-pity, the murmuring, the peevishness, and the rebelliousness of our nature.

3. Again. We delight in sin. It is the very element of our nature; and even after the Lord has called us by his grace and quickened us by his Spirit, there is the same love to sin in the carnal heart as there was before. We delight in it; we would wallow in it, take our full enjoyment of it, and swim in it as a whale swims in the waters of the sea. But the Lord will never suffer us to do the evils that we would; he prevents us from walking in these things, by laying the guilt of them upon the conscience, by producing cutting convictions in our soul, by making us at times loathe ourselves in dust and ashes on account of our own sinfulness and folly, by making us feel ashamed of ourselves, and covering us with confusion of face because our carnal heart so delights in wickedness.

4. We by nature are prone to idolatry. Self is the grand object of all our sensual and carnal worship. Our own exaltation, our

own amusement, our own pleasure, and our own gratification, or something whereby self may be flattered, admired, adored, and delighted, is the grand end and aim of man's natural worship.

From all these things, then, which are intrinsically evil, which a pure and holy God must hate with perfect abhorrence, we must be weaned and effectually divorced. This we cannot learn from reading the Scriptures, or by hearing the experience of others. We may have the theory correct; but the experience of it must be wrought by God's own hand in our conscience. But all the time we are doing homage and worship to self; all the time we are loving the world; all the time we delight in sin; all the time we are setting up idols in the secret chambers of imagery, there is no delighting ourselves in the Lord. There cannot be. We cannot delight ourselves in the Lord till we are purged of creature love, till the idolatry of our hearts is not merely manifested, but hated and abhorred, till by cutting temptations, sharp exercises, painful perplexities, and various sorrows we are brought to this state—to be sick of sin, sick of self, and sick of the world. Until we are brought to loathe ourselves, we are not brought to that spot where none but God himself can comfort, please, or make the soul really happy.

How long you shall be walking in this painful path, how heavy your trials, or what their duration shall be, how deep you may have to sink, or how cutting your afflictions may be in body or soul, God has not defined, and we cannot. But they must work till they have produced this result—weaned, divorced, and completely separated us from all that we naturally love, all that we idolatrously cleave unto, and all that we adulterously roam after. If they have not done this, they must go on till they produce that effect. The burden must be laid upon the back, affliction must try the mind, perplexities must encumber the feet, until we are brought to this point,—that none but the Lord himself, with a taste of his dying love, can comfort our hearts, or give us that inward peace and joy which our soul is taught to crave after.

See, then, the connection betwixt the workings of fretfulness,

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 rebelliousness, and peevishness in the heart of the saint, and the precept, "Delight thyself in the Lord." 'What?' it may be said, 'here is a man full of peevishness, rebellion, enmity, and fretfulness, and God tells him to "delight himself in the Lord."' He fain would do it, but cannot. This is the state and case of many of the Lord's people; they have enough religion to make them miserable, but not enough to make them happy; enough grace to make the world distasteful, but not enough to make the Lord of life and glory precious; enough religion to keep them from falling into sin, but not enough to break down the hankering idolatry of the carnal heart.

The Lord, then, who sees all their trials, raises up in their hearts the power to perform the precept—to delight themselves in the Lord. But how does the Lord do this? We are completely powerless, thoroughly unable to delight ourselves in the Lord. It is as impossible for a fallen sinner to delight himself in the perfections of Jehovah, as it is for him to create a new sun, and plant it in the sky. It ever is, and ever must be, a special act of grace, and of the operation of God the Spirit in the heart and conscience of the elect sinner. But there is a time and season when the Lord does enable his dear family to fulfil this precept, "Delight thyself in the Lord."

How then does he bring about the fulfilment of this precept? By manifesting himself, with more or less clearness and power to their souls. There are in the Lord of life and glory infinite treasures of loveliness and beauty; and when these are manifested to the soul, then delight in these glorious perfections instantaneously springs up in the heart. Sometimes the Lord is pleased to enlighten the eyes of our understanding, and then we have a view of his matchless perfection, beauty, and loveliness by the eye of living faith. We see an indescribable glory in his eternal Godhead; we see an indescribable loveliness in his pure and spotless humanity; and we see an indescribable beauty in the union of the Godhead and the manhood in one glorious Immanuel. I have seen, I believe, with the eye of faith, that "perfection of beauty," which the tongue of man can never express, the beauty, loveliness, grace, and glory of

the Lord Jesus Christ. When there is any discovery of his beauty and glory to the eyes of the understanding, and any reception of it by living faith in the heart, it is utterly beyond the tongue of men or angels to describe. But when we have a view by faith of the matchless perfection, glory, beauty, and loveliness of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is then, and then only we are enabled to delight ourselves in him. There is in the soul a solemn delight in the beauty of the Lord of life and glory; there is a going forth of the tender affections of the heart unto him as the “altogether lovely;” and there is a flowing forth of the secret desires of the soul towards him as he sits enthroned in glory, power, and majesty at the right hand of the Father. Now if ever we have seen this, we have fulfilled the precept, “Delight thyself in the Lord.” But this delight is not in thy religion, not in thy own acts, no, nor in thy own experience either, but “in the Lord”—thy thoughts, thy desires, thy meditations, thine affections, all fixed in, all fixed upon, the Lord of life and glory.

Now, when we are enabled to delight ourselves thus in the Lord, it is sometimes in the way of meditation. There is a sweet meditation of the soul upon his glorious attributes. Every divine character that shines forth in the Person of Immanuel is received by faith; and no sooner does faith receive it, than hope in the soul anchors in it, and love in the heart flows out towards it. Sometimes in reading the Scriptures, they are opened up to us with sweetness and savour. We see and feel an indescribable beauty in those passages which speak of the Lord of life and glory. Faith is kindled; the soul believes, simply and with a child-like spirit, what it reads; and the affections flow forth to that which is so sweetly and solemnly made known. Sometimes, in secret prayer, there is a drawing near to the Lord—a delighting ourselves in him as altogether beautiful, and altogether glorious and lovely. And sometimes, without any special means, before the heart is aware it is made like the chariots of Amminadib, caught up in believing admiration and adoration of the Lord of life and glory. Now, when this is felt in the soul, it is a fulfilment of the promises—”Thine eyes shall see the King in his

beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off” (Isa. 33:1)—”In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel.” (Isa. 4:2.) Then the soul can enter, in some measure, into the language of the Bride, when she said, “My Beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest amongst ten thousand: yea, he is altogether lovely.”

II.—But I pass on to consider the connection of the promise with the precept. You will observe, the Lord has given a precept—”Delight thyself in the Lord;” and he has closely connected a promise with it—”And he shall give thee the desires of thy heart.” Now, if we are enabled (and only God can enable us) to delight ourselves in the Lord with child-like simplicity and affection, the Lord, for his own name’s sake, for his own mercy’s sake, will fulfil the promise so closely connected with the precept. And not only so. They are not merely connected by the solemn declaration of Jehovah, but also by a link in time. I will explain my meaning. If we are enabled to delight ourselves in the Lord, he gives us then and there the desires of our heart. The precept and the promise are so closely allied, there is such an intimate connection between the two, that they are linked together in time in enjoyment at seasons, as closely as they are linked together in the word of truth. When we are enabled to delight ourselves in the Lord, the desire of the heart flows out instantaneously unto him in whom we are enabled to delight. There are times, many times (O how numerous are they?), when we have no delight in the Lord—when we can scarcely recall any delight we have ever experienced—when our heart is a desolate wilderness, where nothing grows but thorns and briars; and when we have no desires after him. But when we are enabled to delight ourselves in the Lord, immediately desires spring up. The very same Spirit that raises up the power and gives the feeling to delight ourselves in the Lord, enables us, at the same moment, and by the same operation, to feel desires—nay more, to give those desires utterance, to pour them forth, to spread them out, to lay them, with all humility and

simplicity, at the divine footstool. And what are these desires? Let us endeavour to mention a few of them.

1. One is, to embrace in our arms that blessed Lord in whom we are, at the time, delighting. We see him sitting in heaven above, in glory and beauty; and our desire is, to stretch forth our arms, and bring him down into our heart, and that he would come with divine savour and power into our soul. We want something more than to delight ourselves in him—we want to enjoy him. It is not sufficient to see his beauty at a distance. It is not sufficient to have the affections of the heart drawn out towards that beauty. That does not satisfy us—nothing satisfies us but a personal enjoyment of that beauty, made manifest and shed abroad in the heart. But when we are enabled to delight ourselves in the Lord, there is the desire going forth that the Lord would reveal himself with power, come down with glorious majesty, and sweetly form himself in our heart the “hope of glory.” This, you see, is the desire of the heart; and the Lord gives the desire when he enables us to perform the precept. To be brought near to that blessed bosom out of which all grace flows, and in which all affection and love centre, is the desire of the heart when we are enabled to delight ourselves in the Lord; not to be at a distance, but to be brought near; and the nearer we are brought, the nearer we desire to be brought. If I may use an illustration, it is something like the movement of the earth towards the sun. Philosophers tell us, that were the earth to advance towards the sun, it would move every moment, more and more rapidly towards it, till at last it would be altogether swallowed up, and lose its own existence in it. So spiritually. When the Sun of Righteousness attracts a soul near to himself, the more near it is drawn, the nearer it desires to be drawn; so that nothing can really satisfy and satiate it, except to be absorbed and swallowed up in his boundless grace and glory.

2. Another desire of our heart is, to be conformed to his image. When we delight ourselves in the Lord, and are then enabled to tell him the desires of our heart, one is—that he would stamp upon

us his own image, and conform us to his own likeness. We see his meekness, gentleness, tenderness, and compassion. We see him “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.” We see in him all perfection—everything holy, pure, and blessed. Now, we cannot delight ourselves in the Lord, unless there be some sympathy and union between us and him. Can impurity delight in purity? Can sin delight in holiness? Can the carnal love that which is spiritual? Impossible. But when we are under the sensations I have traced out (and I hope I know something of them, or I could not speak of them as I do), then there is that softness of heart, that spirituality, that heavenly-mindedness, that tenderness of conscience, that holy affection, graciously wrought out and produced in the soul, whereby we desire to have the mind, likeness, and image of Christ stamped upon us. And if the Lord would but indulge us with it, we would wish never to sin again, never think anything again dishonouring to God, never speak anything that grieves the Spirit, never do anything that the Lord eternally hates.

3. Another desire of our heart is, to be separated and weaned from the things of time and sense, to have the world put under our feet, and the body of sin and death subdued; that we may not live under the power of any sin, but trample it under our feet.

4. Another desire is, to receive the blood of sprinkling with full power upon our conscience; to feel its sweet efficacy, purging away all sin and guilt; to have it so applied by the Holy Ghost, so spiritually received, known and felt, that fear, dread, and darkness may all take flight from the soul, and hide themselves in their dens as the unclean birds were driven away from Abraham’s sacrifice.

5. Another desire of the heart is, to shelter under his glorious righteousness. When we delight ourselves in the Lord we behold his righteousness; but to behold his righteousness with solemn delight, is not the same thing as feeling the sweet enjoyment of that glorious righteousness received into the soul. There is a delighting in it as a garment; but this is a different thing from having the

garment put upon and imputed to us, suited and perfect in all its parts. But when the soul delights itself in the Lord's spotless righteousness, its desire goes after this righteousness, to be altogether wrapped and clothed in it, to feel the sweetness and know the efficacy of it, that it may stand up before God whiter and brighter than the angels of light.

But many, nay, innumerable are the desires which the soul feels, when it is enabled to delight itself in the Lord. Each has his peculiar trials which then he can lay before the throne; each has his peculiar griefs which then he can unbosom himself of; each has one request which then lies with greater power upon his heart than another. And when he delights himself in the Lord, he is enabled to tell the Lord that desire. There are times when we have desires in our hearts, but we cannot utter them; sometimes unbelief works in us; sometimes self-pity, sullenness and murmuring; sometimes despondency and rebellion; sometimes a cold, torpid spirit that freezes up every faculty of the soul. We may too have desires fluttering in our heart, and working at the bottom of our bosom; but there they are fluttering to and fro, without any power to raise themselves up from the heart in which they lie. But when we are enabled to delight ourselves in the Lord, they come trooping forth. This however may not be once a year, or very rarely in a man's life. These are not every day banquets, every week or month's enjoyments; no, they are for the most part very rare things,—so rare that when they are past we look back at them as sweet reminiscences. But it is at these times if we have desires, that we are enabled to lay them before the throne of mercy.

Now if we have ever been enabled, in the depths of the soul, in the movements of the heart towards God, when stretched upon our bed, sitting by our fireside, occupied in the affairs of life, or in any of those solemn moments, when no eye or ear saw or heard us but the eye or ear of the Almighty—if ever we have been enabled to delight ourselves in him, and to have the goings forth of sweet affection towards him who is infinitely, ineffably, and incon-

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ceivably glorious—if ever our delights have centred in him who is altogether lovely and only desirable, then God will give us every desire of our heart. At these moments he says, inwardly, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it;" "Make thy request large; make it in heaven above, or in the depth beneath." And the Lord is pleased, so to speak, that his dear people should open their mouth wide at such times, telling every thought, and uttering at his footstool every secret desire.

III.—But we pass on to consider the other precept contained in the text, and the promise connected with it. I see a great beauty, glory, and sweetness in the linking together of these two precepts and these two promises. I will explain how.—There may be here some of God's people (perhaps many) who cannot altogether realize what it is to delight themselves in the Lord. They want to do so more than they have been yet enabled. They have had glances, glimpses, testimonies, hopes, tokens; but as to a season of solemn delight in the Lord, they cannot say clearly and positively, that such has been their experience. Well, does the Lord cut off such? Does the Lord do with them as many a haughty professor does now-a-days, trample them under foot as nothing? take his weak sheep and trembling lambs, and throw them over the hurdles? God deals not so with his little ones. The sympathizing bosom of Jesus is as distinct from the conduct of such professors, as heaven is from hell. He knows his people's state and case. He sees the secret movements of their hearts. He knows all their times of despondency, fear and apprehension. And therefore he gives them a precept, and connects with that precept a promise as suitable as the other. "Commit thy way unto the Lord." Some here may say, 'O that I could delight myself in the Lord! but my heart is hard, my path intricate, my mind perplexed and burdened, and my soul dark; I feel my helplessness; I know I cannot delight myself in the Lord; but it is my grief and burden that I cannot do so.' Now are you to be cut off for that? No: does it not say, "Commit thy way unto the Lord." What is 'thy way?' Why, it is thy perplexed way, thy entangled way, thy

desponding way, thy doubting and exercised way, every feeling thou hast in thy soul because thou canst not delight thyself in the Lord—this is ‘thy way.’ ‘But,’ say some of you, ‘if I could see my interest clear; if I could feel the blood of sprinkling applied, enjoy the sweet assurance that I am saved, and taste the love of Christ that passeth knowledge, how happy I should be!’ The anxiety and sorrow you feel because you cannot realize these sweet sensations in your heart, are your ‘way;’ that is the path in which you are walking. And it is this which tries you so. It is your perplexed way, your intricate way, your entangled way, that is the grief and trouble of your heart.

Now, the text says, “Commit thy way unto the Lord.” But God must as much work in us the power to commit our way unto him, as he must work in us the ability to delight ourselves in him. They are both acts of faith. The minor act of faith, to “commit our way unto the Lord,” is as much an act of living faith, as the greater act of faith, to “delight ourselves in the Lord.” It requires the same power that made heaven and earth to enable a living soul to commit his way unto the Lord. But there are times and seasons when the Lord enables the soul to fulfil the precept, to commit its way unto him.

But what is the idea contained in the word “commit?” It is to take one’s burden, and lay it humbly at the Lord’s feet; to bring our case, and put it in the Lord’s hand; in whatsoever state, whatsoever trial, whatsoever experience, to take it, and lay it at the Lord’s feet—this is to commit our way unto the Lord. But before we can do this, we must be divorced and weaned from looking to the creature. How prone we are to do this, to measure our experience by that of others, to trust to the good opinion of men or of a minister, to try to gain the approbation of a church—something or other distinct from God’s approbation in the soul, something or other distinct from the witness of the Spirit in the heart! Now, the reason, the main reason, why the Lord exercises his people so with perplexities and trials, shuts them up, makes the way dark

before them, is to take them off the creature, and bring them to this spot—”none but the Lord himself can save my soul, pardon my sins, relieve my distress, and give me that which alone can satisfy me I am his.” Whenever this is wrought in the soul (and it is for the most part wrought there by a series of cutting disappointments), it is enabled to commit its way to the Lord, to lay its case at his footstool. This is an act and exercise of living faith. How many of the Lord’s people there are who have a way in which they are walking, and this way they think altogether peculiar: that no saint has ever walked in the path before them! Theirs, they complain, is such a strange, such a strait, such a difficult, such an entangled road, that they cannot think any child of God ever travelled in it.

Now, whatever be the way, the precept runs—”Commit thy way unto the Lord.” Art thou dark? Commit thy darkness. Art thou unbelieving? Commit thy unbelief. Art thou tempted? Commit thy temptation. Art thou exercised? Commit thy exercises. Art thou perplexed and embarrassed as to what course to take? Commit thy perplexity and embarrassment to the Lord, in the actings of simple faith, in the pouring out of spiritual desire, in the goings forth of hope and love from the heart Godward.

But some may say, ‘Why, you are setting before us an impossibility.’ It is so: but God works these impossibilities. What is impossible to man, is possible to God, for “with God all things are possible.” Nay, I will tell you another thing—if you have never committed your way unto the Lord, you are no Christian; you are nothing but a dressed-out professor; you have never had the teachings of the Spirit in your conscience, nor the actings and exercises of living faith in your soul. You may have the doctrines correctly—you may have a sound system, creed, and theory—but you have never felt the operation of God the Spirit upon your conscience, if you have never committed your way to the Lord. I know the difficulty, as well as you do, of committing one’s way to the Lord—the workings of unbelief, the temptations of Satan, the harassings of the enemy of our soul; the infidelity and scepticism, the doubting and fearing

of a perplexed mind. But I know also what it is to commit that way. We must know both sides. We must not take the infirmities, the sins, the unbelief of God's children, and because we have that which all men have, conclude we have the other. We must know both sides of the question. We must know the impossibility, and we must know the possibility. We must know the difficulty, and we must know the ease. We must know the want of power, and we must know the communication of power. We must know what it is to cry under our burden, and we must know what it is to lay that burden at the Lord's feet. And this committing of our way unto the Lord is as solemn an exercise of living faith in the soul (though not so clear, not so sweet, not so satisfying), as much an act and operation of God the Spirit, as delighting ourselves in the Lord.

IV.—But the text adds—"Trust also in him," which is a further expansion, a more complete development of what it is to commit our way unto the Lord. There is this difference betwixt the two—trusting is a further act of faith. I will illustrate my meaning by a comparison. Say you have a sum of money in hand; and this, for various reasons, you do not wish to keep in your house. You have a friend, a trustworthy friend: you go to him, and say, 'Will you take charge of this little sum of money I have?' Now, putting into his hands this sum, is committing your money unto him. It is committing to his charge and keeping what is dear and precious to you. After you have left the money, perhaps, a certain fear comes over you—'suppose he should spend the money; suppose he should not give it back when I want it; suppose he should employ it for his own purposes; what becomes of me? what becomes of my engagements?' But if after you have committed the money to your friend, you feel implicit confidence that when you ask for the money it will be returned, then you trust in him. You first believe, then you commit, then you trust. If you did not believe your friend was trustworthy, you would not commit it to him. After you have committed it to him, a doubt may rise in your mind as to whether he is really trustworthy; but when your confidence

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in him is so well-grounded, that you are sure he will return the money when wanted, then you can trust in him that when you go for it he will return it fully and fairly into your hands. Look at it spiritually. Our 'way' is that most dear to us. Nothing can be so dear to a man as the way by which the Lord leads him. His experience is all in all. If that be right, all is right—if that be wrong, all is wrong. If he part with that, he parts with all he holds dear. When then he believes, by the actings of living faith in the soul, that the Lord Jesus is revealed that he should commit his way to him; that as God, he has almighty power—as man, a tender, sympathizing bosom—as God-Man, he is "over all, God blessed for ever;" when in the actings of this faith, he commits his way to the Lord, he puts his soul into his hands, puts all his difficulties, perplexities, exercises into his hands, into his very heart. But there may rise doubts, fears, suspicions—'Will the Lord hear me? will he appear for use? Is he all that I believe him to be?' Infidelity will work—doubt, suspicion, and fears may arise, 'Is the Lord what I believe him to be? am I what I believed myself to be?' But when we are enabled to feel that he will keep what we have committed unto him, and that he is able and willing to keep us who have committed it, then we are enabled to trust as well as to commit.

V.—Now follows the promise—"And he shall bring it to pass; and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day." "He shall bring it to pass." What? The thing that lies deepest in thy heart—"thy way." Does not thy way lie deepest in thy soul—the path that God has led you by, the path that God is now leading you; your path of temptation, trial, and perplexity; your past or present experience; the case and condition in which you now are? You may be troubled in your soul, doubting in your mind, fearing in your heart, distressed in your feelings; you may sink down to the lowest point that a child of God can sink to; yet that way, in which you are so deeply sunk, if the Lord enable you from time to time to commit it to the Lord, and trust in him, he will bring to pass above what your heart desires. Look at

the movements of your heart Godward; look at your embarrassments, temptations, and exercises; look at that which rolls backwards and forwards in your mind, and which is tossed to and fro on the waves of your anxious bosom—what lies nearest, dearest, and deepest,—let honest conscience speak. That, whatever it be, the Lord tells you, and sometimes enables you to commit to him, to put it into his hands, to trust it to him. Now whatever it be, so committed and so trusted, the Lord has declared in his unerring word of truth, he “will bring it to pass; “he will fulfil it when his time has arrived. Does darkness envelop it? do mountains of difficulty stand up in the way of its fulfilment? Never mind; God will bring it to pass in the face of all, over mountains and through difficulties, in spite of, and in the midst of, all surrounding obstacles. He “will bring it to pass,”—that which lies deepest in your heart, nearest your affections, and that which you are enabled in the actings of living faith sometimes to commit into the hands of the Lord God Almighty.

But, in order to clear up the point, God the Spirit has added, by the pen of the Psalmist, this explanation, “And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.” The word “righteousness” in the Scripture has more than one signification. I will not take up the time, as it is wearing away, by explaining the different senses; but merely observe two. One is, ‘the righteousness of God,’ which is imputed unto and put upon all them that believe; the other is, uprightness, sincerity, and honesty of heart in the child of God, as a part of his new nature. Now both these different kinds of righteousness will God bring forth as the light. I have been endeavouring to show that the precept, “Commit thy way unto the Lord,” is a precept adapted to the exercised, tried, tempted, and distressed. Now do you want your righteousness to be brought forth as the light, that you may see Christ’s righteousness, and that you may see your interest in it, as clear, plain, and palpable as the light of day? And if you have committed your way unto the Lord, your doubting and fearing way, he will

one day give a clear discovery of this righteousness to your heart. What the everlasting God has said, that he will fulfil, “He will bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.” It shall spangle before your eyes, glisten in your heart, and shall be manifest in your soul’s happy experience as the light of day when it arises to gladden the earth.

But there is another sense—the uprightness, sincerity, and integrity of a man’s heart Godward. There is much of this spoken of in the Old Testament Scriptures; the sincerity and uprightness of a man’s heart. It is a cutting feeling to us, (and yet we must have the experience of it), to have our motives misunderstood, and the things that we do and the things that we say from pure motives (and so far as they spring from the new man of grace they are pure) put down to base ones. Few things are more mortifying or more trying to me, than to have my words and actions attributed to the worst of purposes, such as, that they are said and done merely to exalt and glorify myself, when it is the very furthest from my thoughts. Now we shall all have to lie under this imputation, that pride may be mortified. We would glory in our pure motives, in our integrity, did our professing brethren, did the real brethren admire them. We should glory in man, and rob God of the glory. Therefore he permits that your motives, thoughts, and actions should all be misrepresented, and put down to base motives. But the time will come when the Lord will bring forth your righteousness (so far as you have acted in any point from pure and simple motives) as the light. It shall shine in the eyes of men. It shall be as bright to those that have spiritual discernment as the light of the sun, which shines forth clearly in its own intrinsic glory. Now, this may be your lot. You have acted from motives really, in the sight of a heart-searching God, simple and pure. You are now lying under misrepresentation. It is no use your trying to remove it—your attempts to remove it will only make it worse. But the Lord will one day bring forth your righteousness, the integrity of your motives, the sincerity of your actions, as the light, so that men shall be forced to acknowledge

that you were honest and upright in intention.

“And thy judgment as the noon-day.” The word ‘judgment’ here means case—the case to be decided by the judge, the point in hand that perplexes a man’s soul, the grand trial at issue. Every man has a case, a cause—something to be decided; a cause that he looks to God to give him an issue upon. Now, if you are enabled to commit your way to the Lord, and trust in him, he will surely fulfil these promises. He will bring forth your imputed righteousness as the light to gladden your soul with its beaming rays. He will bring forth your integrity and uprightness to shine and glisten before the eyes of your believing brethren. He will also bring your judgment—the case in hand, the trial at issue, the point that lies most upon your heart, the thing that presses most deeply upon your conscience—he will bring this judgment forth as the noon-day. You shall see Satan defeated, sin pardoned, your enemies baffled, your case brought out to the light as clear as ever you have seen the noon-day sun walking in his brightness, and casting forth his beams of glory and splendour to enlighten the world.

94 Divine Enlargement And Spiritual Obedience

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

August 10, 1845

“I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.”

Psalm 119:32

I was endeavouring to show on Thursday evening a connection between the precept and the promise; and I observed that, whenever the precept and the promise are linked together, if we are enabled to perform the precept, God is sure to fulfil the promise. But there is a connection of another kind between them—that namely betwixt the precept itself, and the power to perform it. The word of God is full of precepts, but we are totally unable to perform them. We can no more, without divine operation, perform the precept,

(that is, with a single eye to the glory of God, from heavenly motives, and in a way acceptable to the Lord), than we can, without special power from on high, believe on the name of the only begotten Son of God. We need a peculiar power to be put forth in our hearts, a special work of God the Spirit upon the conscience, in order to fulfil in the slightest degree the least of God’s precepts spiritually. The way in which we perform the precept, when we do perform it at all, is set forth in the words of the text, “I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.”

In taking up the subject this morning, I shall endeavour to unfold it according to the two clauses of the text; but in so doing I shall invert their order; and, with God’s blessing, I shall endeavour, first, to trace out the mind and meaning of the Spirit in the words, “When thou shalt enlarge thy heart;” and, secondly, “I will run the way of thy commandments.”

I.—Before we come to examine the subject closely, it will be desirable to give a little explanation of two points—What is intended by the Holy Ghost by the expression “heart;” and, as things are best seen by their contrast, to explain what it is to have a contracted heart, in order that by the contrast we may understand the better what it is to have an enlarged heart.

1. By the word “heart” in the Scriptures, the Holy Ghost means more than one thing. Sometimes, for instance, He means by it that corrupt, depraved principle, which we derive from Adam. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” (Jer. 17:9) God saw “that every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil, continually.” (Gen. 6:5) “A heart,” Solomon says, “that deviseth wicked imaginations.” (Prov. 6:18) In all these passages, the expression, “heart,” means that corrupt nature which we derive from a fallen progenitor. There is another signification which the Holy Ghost has attached to the word, which I may define in one short sentence, “the feelings of the soul Godward.” It is, therefore, sometimes taken for the understanding. Thus we read, that God gave Solomon “largeness of heart, as the sand upon the

sea shore.” Here it means wisdom and understanding. Sometimes it means affections, the tender affections of the soul, as in numerous passages where David speaks of his heart “inditing a good matter,” “panting after the Lord; ___ rejoicing in his salvation,” or else sorrowing, mourning, or cast down. And sometimes, it signifies conscience, as where God said of Josiah, “Because thine heart was tender.” (2 Kings 22:19.)

2. This heart, then, or new nature, is susceptible sometimes of contraction, and sometimes, as divinely wrought upon, of expansion. The heart of a child of God, viewed spiritually, is a tender exotic; it is not a hard, rough, native plant, that stands every storm, which no frost nips and no drought burns. It is a foreign plant; for it comes down from heaven, the abode of eternal purity, and dwells in a man’s bosom, with all the tenderness of a plant from a warm country. Now these tender feelings Godward are susceptible of contraction. They resemble a hot-house plant. Open the windows, expose it to the chilling blasts of this cold, inclement, northern clime, it shrinks, the tender buds refuse to expand, and the whole plant droops and dies. But let the windows be closed; let the bright sun pour his warm rays through the glass roof upon it, and the same plant, which so contracted, shrivelled, and withered away under the blast, opens its tender bosom and sends forth its sweet fragrance. So with the new-born soul. There is that which shuts it up, and that which opens it; that which makes it shrink sensitively into so small a compass as scarcely to be seen, and that which draws it forth and causes it to send abroad its heavenly odours.

We will look then, with God’s blessing, at some of those things that contract, straiten, and shut up the heart, before we look at the causes and nature of what expands and enlarges it. The new heart of grace is exceedingly tender. And therefore there are many things that will cause this tender heart to shut up and contract itself.

i. One is guilt. Whenever guilt lies upon a man’s conscience, it shuts him up altogether in his feelings Godward; it narrows, it contracts his heart. There is no room in his soul for divine enjoy-

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ments; there are no divine consolations shed abroad, no inshinings of divine light, no incomings of heavenly love.

ii. Another is unbelief. O what a narrowing, contracting, and shutting-up power is there when unbelief works powerfully in a man’s carnal mind! How the tender plant of faith shrinks into a small compass before its chilling blasts! How unable then are we to receive the truth in the love of it—unable to act upon the perfections of the Lord of life and glory—unable to come forth into the light of His countenance, unable to enjoy any one testimony of His manifested favour; unable to realise a single mark, or testimony of the grace of God being in the heart!

iii. Darkness of mind is another thing that contracts and shuts up a man’s heart Godward. Many flowers, when night comes on, hide themselves as it were from it; their petals gather up and close over the bosom which, during the day, expanded itself to the warm rays of the sun, defending it from the cold dews and chilling breaths of the night. So spiritually. How darkness of soul (and all the Lord’s people are brought to mourn and sigh under felt darkness) contracts the heart! How it closes up every gracious feeling! How it checks every going forth of the soul in the actings of faith, hope, and love! What a veil it spreads over the hidden man of the heart! So that there is nothing good or gracious apparently in exercise.

iv. Deadness, coldness, torpidity of feeling Godward, that wretched state in which many of God’s people are so continually,—how this shuts up, contracts, and narrows the heart Godward! How unable a man is in this dead, cold, torpid state, to enlarge his own soul! Does he attempt to pray? He has no power to pour forth a single desire. Does he attempt to read? He can scarcely get through half-a-dozen verses without wandering. Does he come to hear? There is scarcely anything that even his outward ear receives. He is unable to fix his thoughts and affections, unable to realize the presence, love, and power of God in his soul. Does he attempt to converse? He has scarcely a word to say, shut up in his feelings toward the family of God, shut up in his feelings toward the Lord

Himself.

We must know by painful experience what it is to have these narrow, contracted, shut-up hearts, that we may by the contrast know what it is to have an enlarged, expanded heart. We cannot know the one except by knowing the other. It is this miserable feeling of contraction, which makes us know the difference betwixt these painful sensations and of an enlarged, expanded heart.

II.—This leads me to enter more fully into what it is to have an enlarged heart. What is the meaning of the word enlarged? The idea is this—the making of an opening, so as to give a wide space. Thus, the Lord promised to the children of Israel that He would “enlarge their border;” that is. He would give them more ample room; that they should not be confined to a narrow space in which their population should exceed its limits; but that He would so extend their boundary as to give them ample width for their increasing numbers! Thus the word conveys the idea of an expansion, a removal of all that is narrowed up and contracted, by giving a wider coast. a more ample border.

Now none but the Lord Himself can enlarge the heart of His people, can give them spiritually what Jabez prayed for “O that thou wouldest enlarge my coast!” (1 Chron. 4:10.) None but the Lord can expand their hearts Godward, and remove that narrowedness and contractedness in divine things which is the plague and burden of a God-fearing soul.

Having seen what is meant by an enlarged heart, let us look at the way whereby God is pleased to enlarge it.

1. It is by the special operation of God the Spirit upon the soul that there is ever felt any enlargement of heart Godward. For instance; when he applies any portion of His word with power, that enlarges the heart; “the entrance of thy word giveth light.” The very nature of divine light is to expand the heart into which it comes. As darkness shuts up, so light opens; as darkness freezes, so the word of God sealed with power melts. “He sendeth out his word, and melteth them.” (Ps. 147:18.) Truth revealed to the soul

has a liberating power. “Ye shall know the truth; and the truth shall make you free.”

2. A sensible realization of the Lord’s presence enlarges the heart. When the Lord is absent, when He hides His lovely face, when He does not draw near to visit and bless, the heart contracts. There is no going out to Him, no coming down of, sweet communications from Him; the heart is shut up in itself, contracted in its own narrow compass. But when the Lord is pleased to favour the soul with His own gracious presence, and bring Himself near to the heart, His felt presence opens, enlarges, and expands the soul, so as to receive Him in all His love and grace. To use a figure I have before alluded to, the heart is often like a flower beaten down by the rain, prostrated by the wind, surcharged with moisture, overpowered by the dews of the night, unable to lift itself up, dropping downwards, with all its petals contracted. But let the sky clear up, let the beams and rays of the glorious orb of day shine forth, the flower, whose petals before were closed, expand themselves to receive the warmth of the mid-day sun. So it is with the God-fearing soul. When the dew of night rests upon it, when darkness covers, when the cold blast beats, when the rain drifts upon it, there is no unfolding, no enlarging. But when the Sun of Righteousness breaks forth, the drooping heart then expands all its bosom to the warm rays, and lifts its bending head, which before had been sunk down by the cold mists.

3. The unction, savour, and power of the Holy Spirit, whenever felt in the soul, produce an enlargement of heart. The absence of the dew of the Holy Ghost leaves the heart shut up in its own darkness. But when dew, savour, and power rest upon the soul, they immediately by their secret, penetrating, unctuous influences expand and enlarge the heart; they soften its rigidity; they melt down its harshness. Whereas before it was narrowed and contracted, so as not to open itself to any one divine feeling; no sooner does the softening dew and melting unction of the Holy Ghost touch a man’s heart than it enlarges, opens, melts and expands itself before

the Lord.

I have hinted that the word “heart” in Scripture has more than one signification. Sometimes it means understanding, sometimes conscience, and sometimes the affections. Now whenever the heart is enlarged by the internal operations of God the Spirit, it is enlarged in these senses.

i. The understanding is enlightened; we read, “Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures.” (Luke 24:45.) And we find David pleading earnestly, “Give me understanding and I shall live.” (Ps. 119:144.) It is a great blessing to have an understanding heart; not to be tossed to and fro with every wind of error; not to be caught with every delusion of Satan; but to have a sound mind, established in the truth as it is in Jesus. But when the Lord is pleased to enlarge the heart, He opens the understanding; He gives an insight into the Scriptures of truth; He shews us the mind of Christ; He brings a sweet light into our soul, whereby we read the Scriptures with the same light and in the same spirit by which they were inspired. Thus we enter into the meaning of passages we never knew before; we understand mysteries, which before we were unacquainted with; we feel our minds to open, expand, and receive the truth as it is in Jesus in greater simplicity and godly sincerity.

ii. But there is also an enlarging of the conscience. If our heart is contracted, our conscience is not sensitive nor tender. Have you not observed, that when your mind was contracted, your affections toward God cold and dead, that your conscience was not sensitive, that sin was not that burden to you as at other times—that you could play with it, walk upon the borders of it, venture upon forbidden ground, dally with evil, did not feel this and that thing to be inconsistent with the will and word of God, which you felt to be so at other times? Now when your heart has been enlarged, when your soul has felt the power and operations of the Spirit, your conscience becomes more sensitive—as it is said in Isaiah of the human nature of Christ—“of quick understanding in

the fear of the Lord.” Sin is more seen to be sin; evil is described in things where we did not see it before; the “exceeding sinfulness of sin” is more deeply felt; the worldliness and carnality of others that did not when we were cold and dead much affect us, now that we are under the inshinings of God the Spirit, become irksome and burdensome. Thus, as the understanding is enlightened to see, the conscience is made more sensitive: as we get a deeper insight into the Person, work, and blood of Jesus, the conscience takes a wider range, and is made more alive and more tender than it was before.

iii. Besides this, there is an enlargement of the affections. Our affections will waver in the same way as our understanding and our conscience. When our understanding is dark, and our conscience is hard, then our affections are cold; but when the Lord is pleased by the entrance of His word to give light in our understanding, and to make the conscience more tender and sensitive, then there is an enlargement also of the affections.

Have you not felt at times as though you had not a single grain of love towards the Lord of life and glory? Has not your heart often been as an adamant, which neither judgment nor mercy, threatening nor love could move? And have you not been, when in that state, unable to love God’s truth or His people—yea, rather felt your heart filled with the most fearful hardness, and enmity towards them? But when the Lord is pleased to enlarge the heart, these affections, which before had been shut up, expand, breathe themselves forth, and flow out and flow into the Lord of life and glory. There is a clasping Him in the arms of tender affection, and a desire to live and die in His embrace.

4. When God enlarges the heart He enlarges every grace and fruit of the Spirit.

i. For instance. There is faith. Faith in the soul sometimes sinks down to the very lowest ebb; there seems at times to be scarcely one grain of it left. We have not a single spark of faith in living exercise. The hand which should take hold of Christ’s strength is as if paralysed; there is no putting it forth to receive strength out of His

gracious fulness. But when God the Spirit, by His secret power and unction enlarges the heart. He enlarges faith: as the Apostle says. "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly." (2 Thess. 1:3.)

This is an enlargement of faith; and just in proportion to the enlargement of faith, do we take in the object of faith. When our faith is very weak, it is like the hand of a little child. Its tiny fingers can only grasp little objects, and can scarcely hold them when grasped. So when faith is small it is unable to take hold of great things; and if it take them, it is unable to hold them. But when the hand of the child is increased to the brawny fingers of a man, then the same hand, which before was unable to grasp little substances is now enabled to lay hold of great burdens. So with faith in the heart; it is in some as the hand of the child, it is in others as the hand of the adult. The hand in the one case is weak, in the other strong. But the hand of the child differs only in size and strength from the hand of the man. When then the Lord enlarges the heart, He enlarges the fingers of the hand; as we read of Joseph, "His bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." (Gen. 49:24.) So when the Lord enlarges the heart, He enlarges the sinews and muscles of living faith, and presenting Christ before it, enables it firmly to embrace His Person and work, His atoning blood, His justifying righteousness, all that He is and has for God's poor needy family.

ii. So also, when God enlarges the heart, He enlarges hope.

Anchors, you know, are made different sizes. You may walk in the Queen's dockyard, and there you may see anchors for a boat, and anchors for a three-decker. Yet all anchors are made in the same way, and are designed for the same purpose; and the little anchor that holds the boat is as useful and as much an anchor as that which holds the three-decker, so spiritually. There is hope in the heart of the babe. But the hope in the heart of a babe is but as the anchor of a boat; yet it holds that babe as firmly as the anchor holds the boat to which it is moored. But as the Lord increases hope, He

increases the size of the anchor; and as the vessel and its anchor always bear a proportion to each other, so when He enlarges the size of the anchor He increases the size of the ship. Nay more, as He increases the size of the ship, He increases its burden: for these two are proportionate. He increases a man's trials, perplexities, difficulties, and sorrows. And thus, ship, anchor, and burden are all enlarged together.

Thus, when He enlarges the heart He enlarges a man's hope. It takes a more vigorous hold within the veil; it enters more deeply into the presence of God; it takes a firmer grasp of covenant engagements, electing love, the immutability of God's purposes, and the unchangeable nature of the great eternal I AM. Have you not felt at times your hope sweetly enlarged, so that it almost attained to the "full assurance of hope?" Scarcely a cloud remained between you and God; and you believed you should ride triumphantly into the haven of bliss and peace? and having these blessed sensations in your heart, you could part with life itself at that moment to fall into the embrace of your God. Now this was a sweet enlargement of your hope.

iii. In the same way when the Lord enlarges the heart, He enlarges its love towards Himself and His people. How cold are our hearts too often toward the Lord! and, as a sure and necessary consequence, how cold towards the brethren! Sometimes we seem even to dislike their company; and if we see them coming down one street, we would gladly take another turning in order to avoid them. How averse too from the Lord's ways! How cold in prayer, cold in reading, cold in hearing, and cold in doing anything to the glory of God! How backward, how opposed to every thing holy, heavenly, and spiritual! But when God in mercy enlarges the heart, He also enlarges the affections to love the Lord, to love His word, to love His people, to love all that savours of the precious name of Jesus.

iv. There is also an enlargement of the mouth. "My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies, because I rejoice in thy salvation." (1

Sam. 2:1.) It is out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. "The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips." (Prov. 16:23.) When your heart is contracted, when your soul is shut up, when your affections are chilled, there is no enlargement of the mouth, especially if you have any tenderness of conscience. Hypocrites and dead professors can talk about religion at all times. "But a prating fool shall fall" whereas the Lord's people are often shut up. and have not a word to say upon divine things. If there be no sweet enlargement of the heart, there is no enlargement of the mouth; and when there is no life nor feeling in the soul enabling it to speak of the things of God, to speak of them at all is but a burden to them. But when the Lord enlarges the heart, then there is an enlargement of the mouth. The lips speak freely, simply, with savour, dew, and unction, of the things that God has done and is doing in the soul.

v. There is also an enlargement of the steps, as David says. "Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip." (Ps. 18:36.) This is a strengthening of the feet, so that they are enabled to take longer steps. Sometimes from weariness we stumble, can scarcely drag one limb before another, get so faint and tired that we seem unable to move one step further in the ways of God. But when the Lord enlarges and strengthens a man's feet and steps, He enables him to move more actively forward, and to run more eagerly in the way of His commandments.

III.—This leads me to the second part of the text, the connection of the precept with the power given to perform it: "I will run the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart." David was no legalist: he was no Arminian perfectionist; he was not drawing upon the strength and wisdom of the creature, but he was looking up to the Lord to work a certain work upon his soul. When that certain work was wrought upon him, then, and not till then, would he, or could he perform the precept. How often have you seen the precept handled in the way of which the Lord speaks as done by the scribes and Pharisees of old! "For they bind heavy

burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." (Matt. 23:4.) Nothing is more easy than to take a bundle of precepts into the pulpit, and tie them round the necks of the Lord's people like an iron collar. But how many of them does the minister perform out of it? Every child and servant of God taught by the Spirit knows that he cannot perform one precept except as the Lord enlarges his heart. This deep sense of our helplessness does not foster sloth, nor lead to licentiousness; for guilt and condemnation are felt from the non-performance of the precepts; and our desire and prayer, when we are in our right mind, are, that the Lord would enlarge our heart, for we love to run the way of His commandments.

What are these commandments? And how do we run in the way of them? I will endeavour to show you.

The Lord in His word has given several commandments; and these commandments we perform when the Lord enlarges our heart. For instance.

1. The Lord commands us to believe in the name of His dear Son, as the Apostle John writes, "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 3:23.) But we cannot believe in the name of Jesus, any more than we can make a world, until God enables. Believe in Jesus! receive Him by precious faith into my heart! feel the efficacy of His atoning blood in my conscience! bathe my blissful soul in the sweet enjoyment of His dying love! I do this? Before I can, of myself, do this, I must be able to say, "Let there be light, and there shall be light." But when the Lord by His grace and Spirit enlarges the heart; when He drops His dew, unction, and savour into the soul; when He draws near to it, and makes it draw near to Him; when this blessed Sun of Righteousness shines forth through the dark cloud, and warms the cold dark soul, then it can no more not believe in Him than before it could believe in Him. We can no more refuse to believe when faith comes into the heart, than we can believe before faith

does come. When God enlarges the heart, and draws forth the affections, then we run in the way of this commandment. We do not believe as a duty; we do not believe as a precept; nor do we believe even as a privilege. But we believe as a blessing. We believe as we see an object with our eyes. We open our eyes, and we cannot but see. So when faith opens its eyes, it sees Jesus; nay, it cannot but see Him.

2. Another commandment is, to repent. “God commandeth all men everywhere to repent.” What! repent! Have the heart broken with contrition! feel godly sorrow! experience the flowings forth of grief towards a crucified Lord! Can I do this? It is utterly beyond my reach. I may shed crocodile tears. I may work myself up into fleshly excitement; I may fall upon my knees, lacerate my back, refuse to eat my meat, and lie upon the ground. But to feel a broken heart, melted down into compunction and godly sorrow—the man that feels what an adamant he carries in his bosom knows well that it is the pure grace of God alone that can give him repentance. I believe the Lord brings all his people to that spot of which Mr. Hart speaks—when the question was not whether he would repent, but whether God would give him repentance; no longer whether I will do this for the Lord, but whether the Lord in mercy and grace will do this for me. The great I sinks then into absolute insignificance; and the creature is brought down to its true spot—abasement and helplessness. But when the Lord enlarges the heart, with this enlargement is there not the grace of penitence? Is there not the tearful eye, the convulsive sob, the inward grief of soul? Is there not real gospel repentance and sorrow felt in a broken and tender heart? I am sure there is this.

3. God commands us “to love one another.” “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.” (John 13:34) Can I of myself feel this love? I may pretend to do so; I may do as one of old did, who came to his brother with a very fraternal salutation, “Art thou in health, my brother?” and then smote him under the fifth rib with a sword. I may say, ‘Brother this,’ and ‘Sister that’—

’how I love you!’—’what affection I feel for you!’ I might, if God did not keep me honest, play this part of a varnished hypocrite. But I cannot feel, nor create this true love, without a special work of the Spirit on my soul. But when He enlarges the heart, and melts the soul at his footstool, He gives love to Himself: and with that love, He gives love to His people, pure affection: not a feigned, but real desire for their spiritual welfare; not a few canting phrases, but a true feeling of brotherhood; not a mere expression of ‘brother’ on the lip, but brotherly affection in the heart.

When He enlarges the heart, we do not want to go amongst our brethren to say, ‘Brother,’ or ‘Sister;’ we feel them in our very soul; when we are alone with God there is a tender affection flowing forth out to them of our heart, an embracing of them in our soul. Nay more, we can forgive our enemies when the Lord enlarges our heart. If we can see them in the right spot, where we would see them, we can forgive them, though they have been most unkind to, and cruelly treated us. I have felt, that when the Lord is pleased to enlarge the heart, anger, enmity, prejudice, bitterness, malevolence—those unclean birds all take flight, and simplicity, tenderness, humility and love all live in the soul.

4. The Lord commands us to deny ourselves, take up the cross, put off the old man, and walk as becometh the gospel. Can we do this? We cannot. We may affect a popish austerity; we may put on a hypocritical visage; we may look all sanctity and holiness; we may cleanse the outside of the cup and platter, and put an extra coat of whitewash on the sepulchre. But as to that inward crucifixion, that inward deadness to the world, that inward putting off of the old man and putting on of the new, which the word of truth speaks of, we cannot attain to, except God the Spirit work in us both the will and the power. But when God enlarges the heart, then there is no burden in God’s ways; His precepts are not grievous; it is a pleasure to walk in them; and there is a sweet gratification in obeying them.

“I will run the way of thy commandments.” Not lag, nor loiter, not turn aside, not faint, not falter. “I will run” eagerly, actively, as a

lover runs to his beloved bride—"I will run" cheerfully the way of thy commandments, when thou hast enlarged my heart.

5. So with the ordinances, the ordinances of the Lord's house—baptism and the Lord's supper. These are not grievous; they are not burdensome, when the Lord enlarges the heart. When we are narrowed up, shut up, contracted, these ordinances of the Lord's house are burdensome to us. We hate the very sight of the table spread with the emblems; we have the most horrible feelings of rebellion against the ordinance of baptism; yea, we feel every infernal sensation that Satan can stir up in our minds. But when the Lord enlarges our heart, there is no burden then; whatever be the precept, whatever be the ordinances, we can run in that way with cheerfulness, freedom and liberty.

6. So with respect to every precept of the gospel, whatever it be, we can run in the way of God's commandments when He enlarges our heart. There is no running in any other way. All other service is legality; all other obedience is but the froth and spawn of free-will, nothing but the mere natural obedience of the creature, not the spiritual obedience of the child of God. But let us look at this. Is it our happiness, is it our pleasure when we cannot run the way of God's commands? Do we lay the inability upon God, or pack it upon the old man? and say, It does not matter, I cannot obey them: but when God gives me the power, I shall. This is the very essence of antinomianism, the very spawn of licentiousness, the worst abuse of gospel grace.

The Christian is in one of these two spots for the most part; sometimes shut up, contracted, cold, dead, torpid. But this is his grief and misery. In this state of feeling, he cannot run the way of God's commandments. But is he pleased with being a loiterer? No: it is his grief and trouble that he cannot run in the way of God's commandments. This evidences the work of God the Spirit upon him; he would do it, but he cannot—"the good that he would, he does not." But it is the will being on the side of God which proves the reality of grace; it is the heart and conscience being enlisted on

the side of the Lord that proves God is at work on his soul.

On the other hand, the children of God are sometimes in this state. Their hearts are enlarged, their souls strengthened, and their feet are enabled to run the race that is set before them. This is their joy, their happiness, and their delight.

Now can you trace out these two things in your conscience? What is the use of my standing here to speak these things? Is it merely to amuse you? Is there not something deeper wanted than that? You have a soul to be saved or damned; you are a child of God or not; the grace of God is in your heart, or it is not; you are on the broad road to hell, or on the narrow road to heaven. Have you no concern about it? What! stand upon the brink of eternity, and have no anxiety respecting it! If you are a child of God, you will have this deep concern at times in your bosom.

Can you trace out in your soul the distinct existence of the two things I have endeavoured to handle? Do you know what it is to be shut up, cold, dead, and stupid? Is this your grief and burden? You say, it is. It is a good thing if you can say so with an honest heart. Look at the converse. Did you ever know what it was to have an enlarged heart? Did mercy, grace, peace, blood, and salvation ever cast out these grievous enemies of your soul? If so, it enlarged your coasts, it strengthened your borders. Did you ever experience what is said of the church, that she shall "fear" (rather flutter, or palpitate) "and be enlarged?"

Did your soul ever experience the unutterable sensations of divine enlargement? When this came into your heart, did it produce sensible expansion Godward, enlargement of understanding, conscience, and affections; so that you walked at liberty, and had sweet testimonies that God was your God? And how do you feel as to the precepts of God's word? Are they sometimes burdensome? Are they sometimes pleasant and delightful? They will be burdensome when we are shut up; and they will be delightful when we are enlarged. When shut up, nothing so difficult; when enlarged, nothing so easy. When shut up, nothing so painful; when enlarged,

nothing so pleasing. When shut up, afraid to look at them; when enlarged, able to enter into their length, breadth, and meaning. When shut up, seeing no beauty in them, and only viewing them as a task-master; when enlarged, contemplating them as the will and word of a kind parent, and desiring to obey them, because God has so graciously and plainly revealed them. Thus, by these distinct ebbings and flowings, these distinct sensations in your conscience—by tracing out the work of the Spirit therein, we may at times come to some decision whether God the Spirit has begun and is carrying on the work of grace in our conscience, or whether we are dead in an empty profession.

The Lord clear up the difficulty (where it is felt to be a difficulty) in the hearts of His trembling ones. The Lord decide the doubtful case; and shew them, that their spot is the spot of God's children—that they are walking in the footsteps of the flock—that their God is with them, and will be with them, to lead them in a right way, and to bring them to “a city of habitation.”

95 The Refuge Of The Oppressed

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

August 10, 1845

“The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed: a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, has not forsaken them that seek thee.”

Psalm 9:9, 10

I found upon the vestry table this morning a letter requesting me to preach from a certain text, “Jesus wept.” The writer of that letter must know very little of the perplexities and exercises that I and every minister of truth have with respect to the texts that we preach from. I cannot take a text, and speak from it in the mere exercise of my judgment. Before I can take a text, and preach from it, I must have three things. First, I must see a vein of experience in it; in other words, I must have light upon it: secondly, I

must find a measure of sweetness and savour in it; I must know something personally of the experience contained in it, and feel a measure of dew and unction to rest upon it; in other words, I must have life from it: and thirdly, I must find in it sufficient matter to form a tolerably full and connected discourse. I cannot run here, there, and everywhere all through the scriptures, nor deal in vague, loose generalities: but as far as the Lord gives me wisdom, strength, and ability, my path is to unfold the mind of the Spirit in such portions of the scripture as are commended with some savour to my conscience. In making these remarks, I wish not to condemn other gracious men who are led differently. Each has his own path and his own work: and God will bless each according to that line in which he leads him.

I have been much exercised and perplexed as to what text I should preach from. I think I have turned the Bible over this afternoon from beginning to end, without finding any one text in which I could see and feel these three things. At last, my eyes, in turning over the Psalms, fell upon these words. But it remains to be proved whether God directed my eyes there; for if he directed my eyes there, and brought a measure of their sweetness and savour into my soul, the effects and fruits will be seen and felt in your consciences.

The text consists of four clauses. May the Lord enable me, in taking up these clauses, so to unfold them, that the dew, power, and savour of the Holy Ghost may rest upon, and seal them with a divine unction to our hearts.

I.—“The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed.” By “the Lord,” in the text, we are to understand Jehovah in his Trinity of Persons, and Unity of Essence: Jehovah the Father, Jehovah the Son, and Jehovah the Holy Spirit, Israel's Three-one God. Now God, in his Unity of Essence, and Trinity of Persons, is a refuge to God's poor, oppressed family.

How he is. I shall endeavour under my third head more particularly to unfold: but previously, it will be desirable to enter a little

into the meaning of the word “refuge.”

1. The leading idea contained in the word “refuge” is that of shelter. For instance, we read in the scripture of “the cities of refuge.” These were certain cities, three on one side of Jordan and three on the other, which God appointed for the manslayer to flee unto, that the avenger of blood might not smite him with the sword. When the manslayer had fled into these cities of refuge, he found in them shelter, protection and safety.

2. Again, Strong holds, fortified cities, and lofty rocks are set forth in scripture as places of refuge. David says, “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer., my high tower, and my refuge” 2Sa 22:2,3 . “The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats” Ps 104:18. All these expressions imply, that when a person escapes to a fortified city, a lofty tower, or a high rock, there he finds shelter.

3. Again. A harbour of refuge is an expression in common use, that is. a natural or artificial haven along a rocky or dangerous coast, into which a ship tossed by the storm, or in danger of being cast upon the rocks, may run, and find safety.

Thus, the leading idea in the word “refuge” is shelter and safety: a place where one that has the guilt of blood upon his conscience, or one who is attacked by an enemy, or one who is tossed upon the stormy main, may find a secure shelter.

The Lord Jehovah in his Trinity of Persons, is this refuge for his people? He is their city, he is their rock, he is their harbour: unto him they flee in their distress, and find eternal safety.

But before we can find the Lord to be a refuge and a shelter for our souls, we must, by the work of the Holy Ghost upon our conscience, be brought into that spot to which the Lord as a refuge is adapted. The cities of refuge were nothing except to the man who had shed blood: the strong hold and fortified city are nothing except to one who is pursued by an enemy: the harbour of refuge is nothing to a vessel sailing before the wind, on a smooth sea. Danger, attack, alarm, violence, peril—these things make a refuge

suitable and desirable.

Carry this idea into spiritual things, as the text unfolds it. “The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed.” Does not the Holy Ghost here point out the persons who need refuge?

Who are these “oppressed”? They are the Lord’s tried family, his quickened, exercised, and often perplexed people. These are oppressed in various ways. But it is their oppression which makes Jehovah sought after as a refuge for their souls.

There is a great deal of natural oppression in this country. What strides it is making! This country presents at this moment a fearful spectacle—the rich getting richer, and the poor getting poorer; avarice sweeping into its lap the labours of the poor, increasing thereby its ill-gotten substance: and many of those who toil by their hands reduced to extremity and well-nigh starvation. These things I should not allude to, were not many of God’s people suffering participants. The poor child of God suffers under the iron hand and iron heel of oppression just as much as his fellow men. But there is this difference between them. The oppressed men of the world know no Jehovah as a refuge to flee unto: but the Lord’s oppressed family flee for refuge unto that invisible God whom the world knows nothing of. They have a God of providence on whom to fix their eye: and the Lord, who counts the very hairs of their head, and who knows they stand in need of supplies for their temporal necessities, at times opens his hand. They have not fled to him for refuge in vain: for they thus see more clearly his bounty in providence relieving them from their oppression.

But there is another sense of the word, a higher and deeper signification, that is, oppressed spiritually. All the Lord’s people are not oppressed naturally: but all the Lord’s people are, in their measure, oppressed spiritually. For instance,

1. There is the heavy burden of sin. The guilt of sin lies weighty and powerful upon many a tender conscience. This is an oppression which often bows the family of God down to the earth with sorrow, fills them with fearful pangs of apprehension as to what

will be their future portion, lays and keeps them low, and often makes them sigh and groan under the heavy burden upon their shoulders. But it is this very oppression, in the hands of the Spirit, which leads them to make the Lord their refuge. We need heavy weights and burdens to bring us to a point in our souls. We are often trifling with the things of God, getting a few doctrines in our judgment without knowing their power and blessedness in our soul's experience. And so some go on for years hovering around the truth, without coming into the feeling power of it, satisfied with a sound creed, without having the sweetness and savour of divine realities made manifest in their conscience. Now, when the Lord has purposes of mercy and love to manifest—when he is determined that a man should know him to be the only refuge, he lays burdens upon his back, he brings guilt into his conscience, he sets his secret sins before his eyes, he makes him feel that of sinners he is chief. Wherever this is laid by the Spirit upon a man's conscience, it will bring him, sooner or later, to the Lord as his refuge. 'What can I do?' says the poor burdened soul; what help can I find from the creature? What salvation can I find in myself, a poor guilty wretch, weighed down with the oppression of sin?' This will make him seek after the Lord as his refuge, for he has none other to flee unto.

2. But he is oppressed also by Satan, that enemy of his soul's peace. And O, what an oppressor is this! I have been speaking of earthly oppressors. I have been endeavouring to shoot an arrow at those exactors who grind the face of the poor. But what are those outward oppressors to the inward oppressor? What is the iron hand of creature oppression to the iron hand of Satan when he is let loose upon a man's soul? How many of God's people have to groan and sigh bitterly on account of the oppression of this cruel exactor, harassing, teasing, assailing, tempting, perplexing, and confusing them in some way or other: drawing them into sin, or driving them into despondency. The Lord came, it was an especial part of his mission, to heal those that were oppressed by the devil.

Satan is the oppressor of the whole human race: but he is the oppressor particularly of God's family. But when we are oppressed in this way, if the Lord be our teacher, it will drive us off the creature, out of a name to live, out of fleshy religion and natural wisdom, and bring us to the Lord himself, as the refuge of our souls.

3. The daily conflict that God's people have to pass through, produced by the body of sin and death under which they "groan being burdened," and by the sinfulness of a depraved nature, grievously oppresses all the living family of God. But this very oppression is overruled for their good—this very body of sin and death, which is the heavy burden of their souls, is made to work for their spiritual profit: it leads them to the Lord to support them under it, who graciously brings them through, and enables them to overcome in this battle.

Now the Lord is "a refuge for the oppressed." Every oppressed soul, sooner or later, finds him to be such. But in order to find the Lord to be our refuge, we must be cut off from every false refuge; as the prophet declares, "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place" Isa 28:17. As long as we can hide our heads in a lie, we shall hide them there; as long as we can escape into a creature refuge, into that hole shall we slink. The hail therefore of God's wrath needs to be felt in the soul to sweep away the lying refuges; the waters of judgment must come into, and overflow the hiding-place, and bring us out of it, lest they drown us in it; and then, and not till then, shall we know by heart experience that the Lord God Almighty is a refuge for the oppressed.

II.—But the second clause of the text opens up still further when Jehovah is a refuge—a refuge in times of trouble. Do you not see how the scriptures always put together the malady and the remedy? How they unfold the promises as suitable to certain states and cases of soul? and how all the perfections of God are adapted to his people only so far as they are brought into peculiar circumstances? This vein runs through all the scripture. So here the Lord

is declared to be a refuge. But when? “In times of trouble.” We do not want him to be a refuge when there is no trouble. Shall I use the expression without irreverence? we can then do without him. We can love the world, can amuse ourselves with the things of time and sense, can let our heads go astray after the perishing, transitory vanities of a day: we can set up an idol in our heart: we can bow down before a golden god: we can have our affections wholly fixed on those naturally dear to us: we can get up in the morning, pass through the day, and lie down at night very well without God. But when times of trouble come, when afflictions lie heavily upon us, when we are brought into those scenes of tribulation through which we must pass to arrive at the heavenly Canaan. then we want something more than flesh and blood: then we want something more than the perishing creature can unfold; then we want something more than this vain world can amuse us with. We then want God; we want the everlasting arms to be underneath our souls; we want to feel support; we want manifestations and consolations; we want something from the Lord’s own lips dropped with the Lord’s own power into our hearts.

1. These “times of trouble” are sometimes times of temporal trouble. If you live long enough, you will have about as much temporal trouble as you can well stand under; you will have as many waves and billows of temporal sorrow as will sometimes seem about to drown you. But what a mercy it is, when the waves and billows of temporal sorrow beat upon the head, like the surf upon the rocks, to have a God to go to! not to be looking here and there, driven perhaps to a mad-house, to strong drink, to the halter, razor, or pond. But to have a God to go to! an ever-living, ever-loving Jesus, who opens wide his arms, unfolds the treasures of his sympathizing bosom, and says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Now these “times of trouble” which the Lord’s people have to pass through, make them to know that there is a God above. And this is a grand distinguishing feature of a child of God that his very

worldly troubles are, so to speak, the wave that carries his bark farther on to the kingdom of God. When worldly troubles come upon a natural man, they are the ebbing wave that carries him away from God to dash him upon the rocks. But when temporal troubles come upon a child of God, they are the flowing wave that takes him into the peaceful haven of Jehovah’s bosom.

2. But there are spiritual troubles. And what are all our temporal troubles put together to our spiritual troubles? They are but a drop in a bucket: they are but the dust in the balance. Soul trouble outweighs and ever will outweigh natural trouble. But soul trouble will drive a man to the Lord, if anything will. When we are in soul trouble, we want such a God as he has revealed himself to be in the scriptures—a God of infinite power, infinite mercy, infinite faithfulness, infinite forgiveness, and infinite love.

These times of soul trouble make God’s people know that the Lord is their refuge. If I am in soul trouble—if my heart is surcharged with guilt—if my conscience is lacerated with the pangs of inward compunction, can the creature give me relief? can friends dry the briny tear? can they still the convulsive sigh? can they calm the troubled breast? can they pour oil and wine into the bleeding conscience? They are utterly powerless in the matter. They may increase our troubles, and they often, like Job’s friends, do so; but they cannot alleviate it. Only one hand can ease the trouble—the same hand that laid it on; only one hand can heal the wound—the same that mercifully inflicted it.

Now, in these times of soul trouble, if ever we have felt it and we must know for ourselves whether we ever have, we shall make the Lord our refuge. There is no other to go to. We may try every arm but his, we may look every way but the right, and we may lean upon every staff but the true. But, sooner or later, we shall be brought to this spot—that none but the Lord God Almighty, who made heaven and earth, who brought our souls and bodies into being, who has kept and preserved us to the present hour, who is about our bed, and about our path, and spieth out all our ways, and

who has sent his dear Son to be a propitiation for sin—that none but this eternal Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, who made and upholds heaven and earth, can speak peace, pardon, and consolation to our hearts.

But you will observe, that the text speaks of “times of trouble.” It does, not define and it is a great mercy it has not defined what these times are, how many, or how long: nor does it define what that trouble shall be. Whatever trouble comes upon a child of God, is a “time of trouble:” and however long it may last, or however short it may endure, it is still a “time of trouble.” And in these times of trouble, the Lord will be his refuge. But how sweet it is in these times of trouble to have a God to go to: to feel that there are everlasting arms to lean upon, that there is a gracious ear into which we may pour our complaints, that there is a heart, a sympathizing heart, in the bosom of the Lord of life and glory, that feels for us; to know that there is a hand to relieve, and to experience, at times, relief from that Almighty and gracious hand!

III.—“And they, that know thy name will put their trust in thee.” There is a knowing of God’s name. By the “name of God” are to be understood the revealed perfections of the Almighty—all that he has revealed concerning himself in the scriptures of truth. Every attribute, every perfection, everything that God has said of himself, is summed up in the “name of God.” But especially does the “name of God” signify the Son of his love, who is “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person;” as he said to Moses, “Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him;” that is, all my revealed perfections, all my glorious character, all my divine attributes are in him; for “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” Now, there is a knowing this name of God; that is, there is such a thing as an experimental acquaintance in the soul with the perfections of God as revealed in the scriptures.

His name is therefore known when the perfections of God are revealed in the heart and conscience by the power of the Spirit. And this is by virtue of living faith in the soul. By faith we see God. By faith we know God. When we receive into our hearts the truth as it is in Jesus, and when we believe by living faith what God has said of himself in the word, then we know the name of God: and every manifestation of God’s mercy, every token of God’s favour, and every shining in of God’s perfections, is a discovery in our hearts, a raising up in our souls of the knowledge of God’s name.

Now, till we know God’s name, we cannot, we shall not, put our trust in him. But if we know his name, if we have received into our hearts the perfections of God, and have a personal experience of them—then the necessary and infallible consequence will be, that we shall put our trust in him. Let us take a review of some of these perfections of God, which when made known enable the soul to put its trust in him.

1. For instance. There is God’s eternal faithfulness—the covenant faithfulness of a covenant God. Now, if we have received into our hearts this perfection of the Almighty—if we have any personal, experimental knowledge of it, from having found God faithful to his word in our soul’s experience—by knowing that name, or that part of God’s name, we put our trust in him, as in a faithful, promise-making, and promise-keeping Jehovah. But wherever the Lord makes his faithfulness known to his people, he will try that knowledge. Our faith is to be put into the furnace, and our knowledge of God is to be tried as with fire. We may believe his faithfulness: but that is not enough. Our belief in his faithfulness must be tried before it can be known, or proved to be genuine. The Lord therefore hides himself, veils his face with a dark cloud, does not shine forth into our souls as we would fain have him, brings upon us a train of perplexing circumstances, and appears, instead of doing the thing we desire him to do, to do the thing exactly contrary. But if we know his name, if we know him to be a faithful God, in spite of all appearances—then we shall put our trust

in that faithfulness, because that faithfulness has been proved in times past, and has been received into the heart as a part of God's eternal character.

2. His lovingkindness and tender mercy are another part of the name of God. He has shown this in the gift of his only-begotten Son. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" 1Jo 3:16. Now, if we have tasted a measure, though it be but a small measure, of the lovingkindness and tender mercy of God: if ever his favour has dropped into our souls, like the dew upon a branch: if ever this secret of the Lord has been upon our tabernacle,—we know that part of the name of the Lord, and if we know it, we put our trust in it. We feel it to be trustworthy, to be a support for the soul that knows that the lovingkindness and tender mercy of God are from everlasting to everlasting.

3. Another part of his name is, his infinite and unspeakable wisdom. Can he err? Has he ever erred? In all the multiplicity and variety of circumstances that have distressed the children of God, has the Lord ever taken a wrong step? Though he has baffled nature, though he has disconcerted reason, though he has turned our plans upside down, though perhaps he has done the thing that we most feared, and thwarted every natural purpose and inclination of our heart—can we say that he has erred? that he has made a mistake? that he has acted unwisely? that he has not done that which is for our spiritual good? Murmuring, rebellious, unbelieving heart, hold thy peace! Shall man, foolish man, a worm of the earth, a creature of a day, lift up his puny voice and say, that God can make a mistake? Your path is very dark, very intricate, very perplexed: you cannot see the hand of God in the trial that is now resting upon you; you cannot believe that it will work together for your good. I admit it. I have felt it. I have known it.

But the time will come, when this dark path in which you are now walking, shall be seen full of radiancy and light, when you will prove the truth of those words—"He brought the blind by a way that they knew not." When we know God to be infinitely wise,

that he cannot err, that all his dealings must be stamped with his own eternal wisdom, we are silenced, we hold our peace, we have nothing to say, we are where Aaron was. When Nadab and Abihu were smitten by the Lord, Aaron knew that God could not err; he "held his peace" Le 10:3. This is our right spot. If we know anything of the folly of the creature—if we know anything of the wisdom of God—this is our spot. When our dear Nadabs and Abihus are smitten before our face, our spot is to hold our peace, to put our mouth in the dust; for God is still accomplishing his object, in the face, and in spite of nature, sense, and reason.

"They that know thy name." They who have these perfections revealed in their hearts, who have something more than a name to live, who have something deeper than a sound creed, that know God's name by a manifestation of that blessed and glorious name to their conscience, they, and they only, will put their trust in God. These are great words. Put your trust in God! Have you ever seen him? Is he not invisible, dwelling in the light, which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see? What! put our trust in an invisible Being, one whom we have never seen? Surely, there must be something more than nature here. Yes, there is something more than nature here. What says the scripture of one of the ancient worthies? "He endured, as seeing him who is invisible." He saw him that was invisible: he felt the presence, he knew the power, he beheld by the eye of living faith, the invisible Jehovah.

We must have precisely, in our measure, the same experience in our hearts, before we can put our trust in God. The faith of most professors shall I say, nine out of ten? is nothing but an empty trust, nothing but a name, an idea, an opinion, a speculation. It is not a heartfelt reality, known in the depths of their conscience before the eyes of a living God. 'But,' say they, 'they put their trust in God.' Yes, so they do—in a God of their own framing, by a trust of their own devising. But to put their trust in an invisible God, just as though he was present for their eyes to look upon and their hands

to touch; to rest on him the salvation of their immortal souls; to put all their concerns into his hands, and carry that on for a series of years,—thus to put their trust in the invisible God, something more than flesh and blood—something more than nature, sense, and reason—something more than creature wisdom and creature prudence—something more than an enlightened judgment, is needful here.

On this wide sea all will be wrecked, except the vessels of mercy that God is bringing to their destined haven. But he that in the quiet depths of conscience, and in the actings and exercise of that faith of which God alone is the giver, puts his trust in the name of the Lord God, and gives up himself, with all that he is and has, in the solemn moments when God weighs up the secrets of his heart and puts the thoughts of his soul into his balance—he that can solemnly, deliberately, feelingly, experimentally, and believably thus put his trust in an invisible God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—does so because he knows the name of that God in whom he trusts.

Here is the turning point. Here is the grand line betwixt life and death: on the one side, a dead professor: on the other side, a living soul. Notional confidence, feigning to be true faith—that will one day be consumed by the blaze of God's nostrils, as flax before the fire: it will never endure the appearance of the Son of God. But the weakest spark of living faith in the soul, the humblest confidence of a child of God, will never be disappointed. That faith will be crowned in the day of the Lord's appearing. It will issue in honour, bliss, and glory.

IV.—"For thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." There is a word here that sweetly closes the subject—"them that seek thee." There are some perhaps here who say, "These things are too high for me: I cannot attain unto them.. 'I have searched my heart,' say some of you; 'I don't know whether I have passed through all that oppression you have been speaking of.' 'I have cast a hasty glance over what I have felt to be my experience,' say

others, 'and I cannot speak positively of times of deep soul trouble. You have been explaining to us what it is to know the name of God, and to put our trust in the invisible Jehovah. When I search my heart, and trace out the feelings of my soul, chilling apprehensions arise, whether I am really a partaker of that grace you have been describing.' Now, shall I cut you off? Does the word of God rather cut you off? Look at it. It puts in a word for you—"Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee."

"Them that seek thee." Now, this takes in the poor, the halt, the lame, the crippled—the little ones of God's family, who cannot mount up into great heights of experience, and have not sunk into great depths of soul trouble. It does not leave out any of God's family, for not a hoof of Israel is to be left behind.

There is, then, a seeking of God. But before we can seek God, we must have two things wrought by divine power in our souls. First, we must have a desire to find something; and then, we must know something of that God from whom we are seeking that which we desire to find. If I lose anything, I seek for it. I am merely playing, merely trifling, I am at a child's game, to be looking and searching into every corner, if I have lost nothing, and want to find nothing. So that, if there be not lodged in the depths of our heart, a solemn spiritual desire to find Jesus as the salvation of our soul, as our hope, our portion, our treasure, our all, our seeking is a dream: it is only child's play: it is mocking God: it is trifling with our own soul: it is only playing the part of a varnished hypocrite.

Is this, then, wrought with divine power in your conscience—that you want to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection—that you long to feel his atoning blood sprinkled upon your conscience—that you pant to taste his dying love shed abroad in your heart—that you desire to know the fellowship of his sufferings, and be led by the Holy Ghost into solemn union with a broken-hearted Lord? Do you want to know whether your name is in the book of life? Whether the Holy Ghost has really begun a work of grace upon your conscience? Whether you are truly in the narrow, nar-

row way that leads to eternal life? Does this ever fill your soul with trembling anxiety, so as to lie nearer to your heart than any worldly care, or any earthly thing?

Then, if this be the case, you are seeking that you may find something; and you know what you want. You want power, you want mercy, you want the blessing that maketh rich, you want the testimony of God and the sweet consolations of the Holy Ghost in your soul. If you want not this, all your profession is a lie. But if you want this, you have also been taught by the Holy Spirit where to get it. You have been brought off the creature, been emptied of your own righteousness, weakened as to your own strength, had your evil heart laid bare, felt the burden of sin in a guilty conscience, and known real anxiety, and, at times, distress of mind. You have seen the way of salvation through the Son of God. You believe though it may not bring peace into your heart that he is “the way, the truth, and the life:” and you believe that none but he, in his sweet manifestations, can do your helpless soul good.

Now, this leads you—if you know these things by divine teaching—this leads you to seek. How do you seek? You pray, you sigh, you cry, you groan, you search the scriptures, you hear the word. Your poor heart, sometimes, is panting after the Lord as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks. You are crying for a sweet discovery of Jesus’ blood to your conscience. Sometimes you are doubting, sometimes fearing: sometimes hoping, sometimes desponding: sometimes lifted up, sometimes cast down: sometimes feeling that you are a child of God, sometimes almost believing that you are a child of the wicked one. And yet on you go. You cannot rest satisfied, as thousands are, with a name to live, with a form of godliness, with the outside of religion. Something vital, something inward, something experimental, something saving, revealed by the Holy Spirit in your heart and conscience, you know to be the sum and substance of vital godliness: and if you have not this, you feel you have nothing. You cannot take up with anything short of this. You cannot rest upon outside consistency. You cannot believe by your

own strength. You cannot store your head with a system of sound doctrines, and rest in a scriptural creed. If you have not Jesus in your heart and in your arms, you have nothing, you feel you have nothing.

And this often tries your mind. You cannot get a sweet view of Jesus, cannot feel him coming into your heart in soft love and power. He will not speak. He will not whisper peace. He will not tell you that you are his. He will not bind up your wounds. He will not discover himself in the manifestations of his mercy. This tries you. It is a good thing it does. For this whets your appetite for divine things. This makes you hunger and thirst after righteousness. This makes you weary, and therefore to want rest. This makes you troubled, and therefore to need consolation. This makes you perplexed, and therefore to crave a divine solution to your difficulties. This makes you empty, and therefore you long to be divinely filled.

Now, it says for your comfort who seek the Lord—who really pour out your very soul before him—who seek him on your bed—who seek him in the different hours of the day—who seek him with an honest heart—who really hunger and thirst after him for what he is in himself—this is spoken for your consolation, “Thou, Lord”—David solemnly appeals to God himself—“Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.” “They often fear that thou hast forsaken them. They often doubt and tremble in their minds whether thou wilt ever appear. But thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them.’ Do you often find it so? Is there not sometimes a little encouragement? Do you not sometimes under the word hear your experience traced out? Is there no little enlargement sometimes in prayer? Is there no sweet text, that sometimes comes into your bosom, and makes your very soul feast, as it were, with honey and the honey-comb? Is there no sweet sensation raised up in your heart, whereby you believe that really God is at work upon your soul?

Now, the Lord never forsakes his people. He says, “I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” O these secret waterings of God upon the soul!

O these secret leadings of the blessed Spirit in the heart! How he revives the soul when dead! How he opens it when shut up! How he enlarges it when contracted! How he draws it with the cords of love! How, from time to time, he lays the everlasting arms underneath the fainting, tottering spirit! He “has not forsaken them that seek him.” There may be long seasons of darkness. We may pray, and get no answer. We may cry, and the Lord give no token. We may fear that he never will hear us; yet it will be found in the end, that the Lord has not forsaken them that seek him. No, not for one moment; some appearance on our behalf, though we cannot clearly see it: some support, though we may not sensibly feel it; some check in the conscience, though we may not be fully conscious of it; some secret guidings of the feet, though we may not be able plainly to discern them.

“Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.” No. He never will forsake them, for his promise runs thus, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” The Lord never forsakes the work of his hands. He will never give up his little ones into the hands of Satan that he may destroy their souls. He will not forsake them that seek his face, and call upon his name.

Can you find, you that desire to fear God—and there is no use my speaking to any one else, for they have no ear to hear, nor heart to feel—can you feel anything of this experience in your heart and conscience?

Let me just recapitulate a few of the things I have endeavoured to unfold this evening, that they may be warm in our memory, and sealed upon our conscience, if God please.

Were you ever oppressed, or had a real burden of sin? Were you ever harassed by the devil? ever plagued by a body of sin and death? Did you ever grieve and groan on account of the sin that dwelleth in you? If you have, I will pass on to another enquiry. Did this lead you to God as your refuge? There is the turning point. A man may have convictions, fears, and troubles, and they may only harden his heart the more—drive him from God, instead of draw-

ing him to God. But what has been the case with your soul? Has it brought you to God as your refuge? so that, in solemn moments, you have fallen down before God, and said, “Thou art my refuge, and my hope in the land of the living!” If ever this experience has taken place in your soul, you are a child of God. The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed. But he never opens his arms, and never bows down his ear, except to his own poor and needy family.

You have known—have you?—“times of trouble.” I do not mean natural trouble though you will have your full portion of that, but soul trouble. Can you recall when? Do you remember how it came on? How long did it last? How weighty did it prove? Above all, what was the effect? Did it bring you to God as a refuge? Did it drive you out of a refuge of lies, a name to live, a form of godliness, an outside profession? We must look at the result. Trouble does not prove you a Christian, but your making God to be your refuge in times of trouble proves it. Cain had trouble—Saul had trouble—Ahab had trouble—Judas had trouble—and it never drove them to God. But the trouble of God’s people leads them to God, for they have no other rest, no other refuge. Have you not found it so? It is a mercy for you, if you have. Have you any testimony that you know God’s name? Have his glorious perfections ever been opened up in your heart? Have you ever received the love of the truth, and seen the glory of God shining forth in the face of his dear Son? And has it produced this effect in your conscience—that you have put your trust, cast your hope, anchored your soul in these glorious perfections? If so, you are a child of God: none but living souls know these inward dealings.

One word more before we close. If you cannot come in here, can you come in with this—that you seek God? that there is a cry in your soul after him, a desire in your heart to find him gracious, a breathing out of your spirit into his ears and into his bosom? This is almost the lowest evidence of a living soul: and God has mercifully given that evidence to encourage the hearts of his fainting family. Then you are a child of God. If this seeking of your heart is

really a spiritual breathing of your soul into his bosom, God will not forsake you; he will not leave undone the work he is carrying on; he will not suffer sin, the world, the devil, and self to get the mastery; he never has forsaken, he never will forsake, those that seek him sincerely.

Surely, if we are children of God, we can find our character under one of these heads. Here it is traced out by the finger of God the Spirit; surely, if the Lord is our teacher, we can find some of these characters in our hearts. O what a mercy to have the feeblest spark of grace in our souls! Some men think that I am some reckless—what shall I say?—some reckless hacker and hewer, who does not care how he cuts down men, women, and children. God forbid I should lay the weight of my little finger upon the soul that the Lord has touched, though it be but the birth of yesterday.

This is my desire and aim—however far I may fall short of it—to trace out every mark of divine life in the soul, and to cut down and pull to pieces every empty profession that wears but the appearance of it. I would, if God gave me wisdom, strength, and ability, encourage the feeblest breath of divine life in the soul, the faintest mark of the finger of God upon the conscience. But as to encouraging an empty profession, as to bolstering up vain confidence, as to deceiving those who would gladly deceive themselves—God in his mercy, as long as I occupy a pulpit, keep me from doing the devil's work! On the one hand, may he enable me he alone can to take forth the precious from the vile, and thus be as God's mouth, and as a Barnabas to comfort God's children; and on the other hand, may he enable me to cut down and hew to pieces everything that does not bear the stamp, lineaments, and features of the work of God upon it.

And I know—I speak not of myself—I am a poor instrument in the hands of the Lord—I know such a ministry God will always bless, if he indeed has sent forth a man with it in his heart and mouth. Such a ministry he will bless, and no other. He will not bless a mere doctrinal ministry; neither will he bless a mere

practical ministry: he will not bless anything but an experimental ministry: men equipped, commissioned, and sent forth by his own glorious power to trace out the work of God the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of his people, and distinguish spiritual life from professional death: and thus become instruments in the hand of God to build up the church in its most holy faith.

Some of you I may not see again, perhaps the greater portion of you; for though if God will I speak again on Thursday evening, yet many of you may not hear me, at least this year, again. Therefore I would leave this with you, and may God in mercy seal it upon your conscience—What do you know of the things of God in your soul? If you know the least of God's teachings, you are as safe as if you knew the most; but if you know nothing whatever of the teachings of God in your soul, may God in mercy lead you to reflect on what the awful consequence will be of living and dying with a name to live, and with nothing but a lie in your right hand.

96 Divine Husbandry

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

August 14, 1845

“Thou visiteth 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.”

Psalm 45:9, 10, 11

The text contains a very sweet description of the way in which God fertilizes the earth, and causes it to produce food for the use of man. But I should fall very far short of the mind of the blessed Spirit here, if I limited the meaning of the words merely to the natural productions of the earth, and to the way in which God causes those productions to spring forth. There is doubtless an experi-

mental meaning in the words, a vein of spiritual truth couched beneath the figure. I always have been, and always hope to be, an enemy to what I may call “a false spiritualization” of God’s word; for as there is a true spiritualization, there is also a false one. But if we observe three rules of interpretation, I think that a false spiritualization will not easily be put on any text. First, the spiritual interpretation must be strictly based upon, and closely coincide with, the literal one. Secondly, the interpretation must be in every point agreeable to the analogy of faith, and consistent with the teachings of the Spirit in the hearts of God’s children. Thirdly, there must be a savour, more or less, connected with, and flowing forth from it into the heart of the preacher, and thence into the heart also of the hearer. I hope, in endeavouring to explain the mind and meaning of the Spirit here, I may not fail in any one of these three rules; in other words, that my interpretation may be true, may be consistent, and may be experimental. The Lord only, I know, can give the blessing.

In speaking upon these words, I shall make no formal divisions; but viewing the text as an experimental description of the work of God upon the soul, I shall take the points as they lie before me, beginning with the first process, and going on to the consummation. But we must bear in mind that the Holy Spirit, in speaking here of the work of grace upon the hearts of God’s children, follows out that mode of cultivation which is adopted in, and is suitable to, Eastern countries. We must discard from our minds the system of agriculture in this country, and keep before us the mode pursued in the East, in order to see the analogy between the process described in the text, and the work of grace upon the hearts of God’s people.

I.—The first point to which I would call your attention is, the subject of the operations, set forth in the text under the word earth—“Thou visitest the earth.” The earth naturally is but the mere soil in which all its productions grow; and in itself is utterly unable to produce anything suitable for the food of man, except it

undergo special operation. The dull, brutish earth can never without cultivation produce out of its bosom food for the use of man. So it is with respect to man’s heart by nature; it is as incapable of producing anything gracious, heavenly, spiritual, and acceptable to God, as the natural earth is unable spontaneously to bring forth those fruits and crops which are for man’s sustenance.

The earth is in more than one Scripture set forth as typical of the soul of man. For instance: “Ye are God’s husbandry;” that is, your soul stands in the same relation to God the spiritual husbandman, as the earth stands in relation to the natural cultivator. Again: “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord.” Has the earth ears to hear? Does God address himself to the natural soil? No; he speaks to the inhabitants of the earth—to man, whose body he formed out of the dust of the ground. So that we have Scriptural warrant to interpret the word “earth” as typical of the soul of man.

1. But what is the first word in the text, introducing the whole process, so to speak, of divine agriculture? “Thou visitest the earth.” The earth, man’s soul by nature, lies waste and void, overrun with briars, thorns, and thistles, and naturally incapable of striking forth spiritual culture. “Thou visitest the earth;” ‘thou lookest upon it in its desert state; thou beholdest it utterly devoid of life; thou seest what it is naturally, incapable of producing anything spiritually good.’

2. But God does not merely visit the earth with his eye, so as to mark it out for future culture, but he also visits it by the communication of his precious grace. He visits the soul by regenerating it through the operation of the Holy Ghost; by making it a partaker of a new and heavenly nature. And the first touch of the divine finger upon the conscience, the first entrance of spiritual light, the first communication of heavenly life, is summed up in the expression, “Thou visitest.” What a gracious expression it is! Here is the earth, utterly unable to raise up in itself anything acceptable to God. But in mercy he visits it, looks down from the height of his

sanctuary upon the elect soul, dead in sin; and in his own mercy and grace, unasked for (for the Lord is unsought when the earth bears nothing but that which is fit for the fire), he visits the soul with the light and life of the Spirit.

II.—But the text goes on to say, “Thou visitest the earth, and watered 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.” that is to say, everything fit. The first grand process in the East, indispensable to all cultivation, is to irrigate the soil. In this moist climate, the chief feature is humidity; but in those burning climes, the chief feature is dryness. We, in our humid climate, are obliged to drain the land to make it bear fruitful crops; but in those hot countries, they are obliged to irrigate it and cause streams to pass over it, in order to make it fit for the plough. It is so hard, so dry, so burnt up with drought, that unless it is irrigated and watered the plough cannot pierce the soil. Thus we see the necessary process pointed out by the Spirit of God here by watering it. “Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it.” Before, then, it is ploughed up, before the seed is committed to the bed, it is irrigated and watered. But how? It is explained in the text. “Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water.” This “river of God” is the river of mercy and grace that flows out of the bosom of a Three-one Jehovah. It is the same river which Ezekiel saw in his vision, that came from the temple, flowing by the altar, and entering into the salt sea to heal the waters, and make them sweet. It is added, “And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh.” (Ezek. 47:9.) It is the same river of which the Psalmist elsewhere speaks, “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High.” (46:4.) It is the same river that John saw in vision, and which he describes: “And he shewed me

a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” (Rev. 22:1.)

This “river,” then, “full of water,” is the eternal flowing forth of mercy, grace, truth, and love out of the bosom of a Three-one God. And this mighty river irrigates and waters every soul that God visits. I do not mean to say that the first communications of grace to the soul are manifestations of pardoning mercy; but the very first watering and enriching of the soul by the river that is full of water, flows out of the hidden mercy and grace that lie stored up in the bosom of God for his elect family. Until the soil of the human heart is moistened and softened by the flowings-in of the flood-tide of grace; until some measure of this overflowing and ever-flowing fountain of mercy gushes out of the Redeemer’s heart into the sinner’s conscience, there is no breaking down of his soul before God, no preparing and fitting it to receive the truth in the love of it, no seed-bed in which the word of truth may germinate. Therefore, after the Lord has visited it, then comes the watering and irrigation by this “river that maketh glad the city of God,” so as to prepare it for the reception of the word of life; as we read, “Thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it.”

But previous to preparing and sowing it with corn, after it is irrigated, there must be the ploughing: the irrigating is to prepare it for the plough. In its dry, hard state, the plough could not pass through. There must be a softening of the heart, a breaking down of prejudices, a humbling of the soul, a melting of the spirit, proceeding from the divine watering, so as to soak into the depth of a man’s soul, before the divine plough can rightly enter into his conscience and plough it up, so that the seed may find a bed in which to germinate. Do we not find it so? Is not the law often preached in all its curses, without reaching the sinner’s heart? But when the sinner’s heart has been visited by God’s grace, and when it has been humbled, broken down, and prepared, then the plough is put in to break up the soil, and to draw a furrow in which the seed may find a bed, and germinate. It is thus the heart becomes fit and prepared

for the word of life. The object of the ploughing, as we shall see when we get further into the text, is to make a ridge, and a furrow; as it says lower down, "Thou settlest the furrows thereof." Now, if there is no plough passed through the conscience, there can be no ridge, and no furrow. A furrow implies a ridge; and a ridge implies a furrow. A ridge and a furrow are both produced by the plough passing through the conscience. This breaking up of a man's heart, this bringing to light the worms and maggots and black soil that lie underneath, this tearing up of whole crops of weeds, this driving of the plough through all the briars and thistles that cover the human heart, prepare the soil for the seed which God has provided for it.

This "corn," or seed, is the word of life. The Lord himself, in the parable of the sower, explained that the seed sown was the word of God; sown instrumentally by the undersowers, and made effectual unto salvation by God the Spirit.

This seed, then, is truth, received into the heart; the truth concerning the Person of Jesus, as the God-Man Mediator, "God over all, blessed for ever;" the truth as respects his atoning blood, as shed to put away sin; the truth as regards his glorious righteousness, which is "unto all and upon all them that believe;" the truth as it respects the internal operations of God the Spirit upon the hearts of God's family. It therefore comprehends all that in Scripture is called, "the truth as it is in Jesus." And to have it sown in the heart is called "a receiving of the love of the truth, that we may be saved;" (2 Thess. 2:10); and a receiving Christ especially, who is "the way, the truth, and the life." (Col. 2:6; John 14:6.)

Now, until God in mercy has visited the heart; until he has irrigated it with this "river of the water of life," which greatly enriches it by communicating its fertilizing properties; and until it has been ploughed up and broken, and the ridge and furrow traced for a seed-bed for the corn, there can be no reception of the truth in love. In the parable of the sower, the seed was cast forth, and fell upon different sorts of soil; but it only found a seed-bed in the

good and honest heart. Some fell by the way-side, and the fowls of the air devoured it up. Some fell on stony ground, where there was no depth of earth, for the plough had not passed through it. Some fell among thorns, where the stream had not passed to soften and irrigate it, and so make a seed-bed. The good and honest heart, made so by God's grace, alone had a seed-bed for the corn to germinate in and grow.

Any other reception of truth than this will never profit the soul. If we have never had God's grace visiting the soul, never had any communication of life and light out of the fulness of Jesus; in other words, if this river has never shed its sacred streams over our souls, and if the plough of conviction has not passed into our conscience, so as to turn up our deep corruptions to view, and prepare the heart for the reception of the word, whatever be our knowledge, whatever our profession, whatever our consistency, we have not yet received the love of the truth. And here lies all the difference betwixt a honest-hearted child of God, taught of the Spirit, and a conscience-seared professor. They receive the same doctrine; but the one receives it into a honest and good heart, made such by the grace of God; and the other receives it into his natural understanding, without any divine life or power in the conscience.

III.—But after the seed has been safely committed to the furrow, there is another process pointed out in the text: "Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; thou settest the furrows thereof." Irrigation takes place on two occasions. The earth is first irrigated to make it soft to receive the plough; the plough is then passed through it to make the furrow; and after the seed has been committed to the soil, then there is another watering, "to settle the furrows thereof;" and "to water the ridges abundantly;" a second irrigation, after the seed has been committed to the furrows, to make it germinate and grow.

This is carried out experimentally in the hearts of God's people. When we first receive the love of the truth, it is through the blessed Spirit putting that truth into our heart. But is there not a further

pouring out of his gracious influences and divine operations, so as to water the ridges and settle the furrows of the heart, in order to cover the seed, and make it moist and tender to germinate? Unless this tide of the same pure river flows over the ridges and furrows, the seed is not properly buried, nor is it in a fit state to germinate downward, and bring forth fruit upward. When we first receive the love of the truth, we receive it in power. "Our gospel," says the Apostle, "came not unto you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.) But do we not need the same Spirit again and again to water that truth which has been implanted, and settle the furrows of the soul; so that it becomes settled down into an enjoyment of, and a firm adherence to, the truth as it is in Jesus?

IV.—But we pass on to what takes place after the second irrigation, "Thou makest it soft with showers." We have had two irrigations; we have had two copious waterings; we have seen how, by the river of God, the soil has been fully saturated. But in those burning climes the effect would soon pass away; the Lord therefore not merely speaks of the water of the river, but he speaks also of the showers from on high. The bottles of heaven have to do their work, as well as the river of God.

Thus after the Lord's people have received the love of the truth, and after they have received a clear testimony in their conscience, they may never perhaps all their lives long have such sweet enjoyment; they may never again have the river pouring into their hearts its copious streams; they may never be moistened and saturated in every ridge so completely and fully as when they first knew the Lord. But are they unwatered because that tide does not pour forth an equally copious stream? No; the Lord has another method of watering the soul after its receiving the love of the truth. "Thou makest it soft with showers." Every now and then communications of grace descend in still showers upon the heart, which is thus kept moist, tender, and soft by the dews and rains that fall from on high. Have not you, that know the Lord by divine teach-

ing, found this in your experience? You have come parched to hear the word; your soul has been dry, barren, and dead; but the Lord has opened the word with life and feeling to your soul. Then there was a shower. It did not come with all that overflowing sweetness which you had in days past; still there was a softness communicated, and your parched soul was refreshed, just as the dry chapped soil is refreshed by the droppings down of the rain from above.

V.—But "He also blesses the springing thereof." He not merely makes the ground soft with showers, but also blesses the springing, after the seed has been committed to the furrow. The first operation in nature is to send forth a root, and the root buries itself downward in the soil. So it is with the word of God received in the heart. It does not lie there, as a pebble in the soil; as torpid and as inert as a stone in the street. It is a living thing, just as the seed-corn in the earth is a living thing. As the seed-corn puts forth a root, so the truth received in the love of it puts forth a root in the souls of God's people; it strikes its tender yet strong fibres into the heart and conscience, and penetrates into a man's very being, so as to take firm and fast hold of his conscience and affections. And thus the springing thereof is connected with, and depends upon, the shooting of the root downwards.

But besides this, there is the springing of it upwards; the springing up of the soul toward God; the going forth of heavenly affections; the mounting up of living faith to its Author; the budding forth of hope towards its Giver; and the springing up of love and affection towards its Shedder abroad. And how sweet it is to experience something of the springing up of divine life in the soul; to feel the power of the truth we have received into our understanding, and believed on in our conscience! And though we often seem to have no religion worth the name, and to be utterly destitute of vital godliness, yet how sweet it is, now and then, to experience the springing up of divine life in the soul! If we have never experienced this springing up in the soul, what right have we to think ourselves Christians?

Have we, for instance, any springing up of godly fear? As we read, “the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death.” (Prov. 14:27.) The property of a fountain we know is to gush forth. When sin then comes before us, when temptations present themselves, when Satan is laying some snare to entangle our feet, the fear of the Lord will at times spring up in the soul. “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

There is also sometimes a springing up of faith. There is a looking unto Jesus; a viewing by the eye of faith his glorious Person, his atoning blood, and justifying righteousness; there is a casting of a longing, languishing look towards his dying love.

Sometimes there is a springing up of hope—“a good hope through grace;” that when body and soul part company, we shall be with the Lord; that we shall not perish in the waste howling wilderness; but that when death comes we shall depart to be with Jesus. How sweet it is at times to feel this springing up of hope, this blessed anchor, that enters into the very presence of God!

How sweet also, at times, to feel the springing up of love towards the Lord of life and glory, and in secret moments, when no eye sees, no ear hears, to experience the secret risings up of tender affection towards him!

There is also the secret springings up of tender affections towards God’s people. When we come into their company, and our hearts become knit together in tender sympathy, we feel a measure of love and affection, and union and communion with them spring up spontaneously in our souls.

There is a springing up likewise of reverence towards God’s great majesty; a springing up of humility, so as to fall down at his footstool; a springing up of a teachable broken spirit, to sit at Jesus’ feet, and hear his words, with the temper and feelings of a little child: a springing up of heavenly-mindedness, so as to set the affections upon Jesus at the right hand of God; a springing up of faithfulness, so as to be zealous and contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; a springing up of a single eye to

the glory of God, so that what we say or do may be said or done more or less to the honour of God. Now all this is the springing up of truth in the heart, of that seed which God has committed to the soul, and which he waters with his grace, in order that it may bear fruit to his glory.

The Lord blesses this springing. There are some perhaps of God’s people who can scarcely trace out in their hearts anything of this springing up. They have been deeply exercised and tried by sin and guilt upon their conscience; but they cannot honestly say that they have had clear communications of grace and mercy, and received the love of the truth. They hardly dare call themselves the children of God. Yet when we look at that which takes place in the secret chambers of their heart before God, we find the springings up of a living faith, hope, and love, and of every other grace of the Spirit that God himself has planted in the soul. The Lord blesses the springing thereof. If the Lord did not bless the springing, no sooner did the tender plant rise out of the soil, than it would be nipped by the cutting winds, or devoured by the caterpillar; it never could live out half its time, much less rise up to bear solid fruit. But the Lord graciously keeps alive and blesses the springing up of everything good and gracious which his own hand has planted in the heart.

What a mercy it is to be able to trace out any springing up of these blessed things within! for we know that we are utterly unable to create them in ourselves.

VI.—But it adds: “Thou crownest the year with thy goodness.” As though he would say, “Let us take the whole circle of the seasons. Let us not merely look at the spring-time, when the corn is in the blade. Let us not look merely at the summer, when the corn begins to ripen. Let us look at the autumn, at the harvest time, when the corn is gathered in. Yea, let us look at winter, when we eat the fruits of the earth.” Thus we find the Lord going round in a gracious circle. “Thou crownest the year with thy goodness.” Then if the Lord has blessed the springing thereof, he will bless its sub-

sequent stages; he will bless the ripening of the corn, as well as the first committal of it to the seed-bed; he will bless the gathering of it in, as well as the waterings, and the springings up of it; and thus will crown the whole revolving circle with a gracious harvest.

After the seed has sprung up, is there not a long series of months before it is matured? “First the blade,” as the Lord speaks, “then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.” After the Lord has watered the soul abundantly with his mercy and grace, and after he has blessed the springing thereof, we should expect that all things would go on smoothly. But we see it is not so in nature, and I am sure it is not so in grace. We read (Psa. 74:16, 17), “The day is thine, the night also is thine; thou hast prepared the light and the sun: thou hast set all the borders of the earth; thou hast made summer and winter.” Now, night in nature is as indispensable for the ripening of the fruits of the earth as day. The earth is so constituted, and the seasons are so adapted to it in their beautiful variation, that every change is indispensable for the maturation of the seed. The alternation of night and day is particularly indispensable to its growth. So spiritually. After the Lord has committed the seed of truth to the soul, and after he has blessed the springing thereof, is that all? Is there not something more to be done? Does it now bring forth fruit? Is there not some further process necessary? Surely. In order that there may be maturity, there must be an alternation of seasons.

1. For instance, there must be night. How painful it is for the living soul, after he has enjoyed some of the beams of day, to have to pass through a dreary night! But I believe all the Lord’s people know more or less what it is to walk in darkness. They do not feel in their souls those sweet in-shinings that they long to experience. They have not those gracious breakings in of the Sun of righteousness that their hearts earnestly long after. They have “to walk in darkness, and have no light.” In this state, we often call in question all that the Lord has done for our souls. We actually cannot believe that the Lord has done what we in time past believed he had done. The work of grace is so obscured, the evidences so becloud-

ed, the mind so perplexed and confused, that however clear our experience may have been at the time, now that darkness covers the soul, we feel unable to form a right judgment even upon our own experience. But this night is necessary for the strength of the soul. Were it all day, the plant would spring up rapidly, and grow so flaccid, so luxuriant, and so tender, that it would break down by its own luxuriousness. There is a certain stage in which it needs to be strengthened; and this strength is given in the night season, by withdrawing those influences of the sun which would draw it up too luxuriantly. So spiritually. We need to be strengthened. Did not the Apostle learn this lesson? How did he learn it? Was it by basking in the beams of the Sun of righteousness? Was it by enjoying sweet manifestations of the Lord of life and glory? Was it by having all his evidences brightened and made conspicuous? Not so; but by having a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. He thus learnt his weakness, and when he learnt his weakness, he also learnt the strength of Christ made perfect in his weakness; so that he could glory in his infirmities, not as infirmities, but because the glory of Christ rested upon his soul in his infirmities. So these spiritual night seasons, though all things seem then to be against us, yet strengthen the soul. We begin in the night season to look out for the work of God more conspicuously. We begin to feel more clearly the difference between the teaching of God and the teaching of man. We come to this point, that in these dark seasons God alone can give us light, and in these cold dead seasons God alone can give us life. Now, this is real strength—real strength, because we learn it in our weakness, and learn by that where our real strength lies. The work of grace upon the heart must be tried. If it be a feeble work, it must be tried feebly; if it be a strong work, it must be tried strongly. But whatever the depth of the work of grace upon the heart, it must have trials in order to prove it genuine. These night seasons, then, prove whether the work upon our heart be genuine or not. We can travel on very comfortably by day; but when night comes, and we are unable to see our way, we must lean

upon our heavenly Conductor, or most assuredly go astray. While we can see our evidences, we can go cheerily forward; but when darkness covers them, we begin to look out for help, and want the everlasting arms spread forth for our support, lest we fall into pitfalls and quagmires. Thus we learn the secret of our strength in these night seasons.

2. Again. In all climates there are cold days to be endured, as well as hot days. We, in our folly, sometimes think we could manage the seasons better than the Lord. Sometimes we would not have these wet days, and at other times these dry days, or these cold nights. We think, in the vanity of our hearts, that we could arrange these things better than God. But when harvest is gathered in, and the crops laid up in the barn, then we see how much more wisely God has ordered these matters than we could have done. The very cold has an effect upon the goodness of the fruit. If the Lord “crowns the year with his goodness,” then every chilly night, every stormy day, must have a ripening effect upon the corn, just as much as the warm beams of the glorious sun. Do we not often painfully feel the coldness of our heart Godward? Have we not often mourned and sighed on account of the hardness, barrenness, and leanness of our heart in spiritual things? And can we think this is really for our good? But “all things work together for good;” and therefore these cold, dry, barren seasons must be among the things that work together for our good. What good, then, do I get by passing through these cold, dead, insipid seasons? I get emptied of fleshly religion. If I did not know by painful experience the coldness and deadness of my heart Godward, I should make an idol of self, be filled with false zeal, think I could do something in my own unassisted strength, talk and act as an unemptied, unhumiliated pharisee, and wear a fancied crown of creature holiness. But when I feel as cold towards God as though I had not one spark of grace, as dead in my feelings as though the light and life of God had never come into my conscience, as utterly unable to move my soul Godward as the earth in the frost of December is unable

to clothe itself with the verdure of July, then I learn this great lesson—to distinguish between the teachings of God in the heart, and the mere zeal and activity of nature. Is not this real strength? Is not this necessary for maturing and ripening the fruits and graces of the Spirit in the heart? By enduring these nipping blasts, I learn whence “all my fruit is found,” all my strength proceeds, all my faith flows. Yes: by passing through these cold seasons, I learn to prize the feeblest ray of warmth, as well as to be thankful for the smallest mark of favour. I learn, too, that if I have heavenly affections and spiritual desires, God is their author and giver. I learn also, having no righteousness of my own, to receive with a thankful heart communications of grace and mercy out of the fulness of Jesus: and I learn that they are free and sovereign, because they are undeserved, and because I am utterly unable to raise them up in my own soul.

3. But there are storms also, as well as cold nights and wintry days. We see the storm sometimes beats down the tender blade; but we do not see that at the same time it washes off the vermin that drink up the juices and would eat out the heart of the young corn. The thunderstorm and the hail all do their part in killing those things that would prevent the maturation of the crop. So spiritually. If I am a Christian, I have to pass through storms, to have fierce trials from the devil and persecutions from the world—many hard blows from sinners, and many much more cutting blows from saints; I have to endure the unkindness of enemies, and what is more painful, the unkindness of friends. I am not to be a coddled up child, whom its mother takes such tender care of as to keep it ever by the fire-side corner, if I am to be a hardy, vigorous man. I must go forth into the storm—I must endure the winter’s piercing cold, and the summer’s burning heat—I must endure till the vicissitudes of seasons, if I am to bear them uninjured. So spiritually. Am I to be matured in the Christian life? Then all luxuriant growth must be checked. It is like a youth shooting up rapidly, while a fatal disease is about to cut him down in the bloom

of life, and hurry him to an early grave. A really hardy and vigorous growth will deepen and widen, as well as heighten the plant. Then we must pass through these storms that are necessary for the due maturation of the fruits of the Spirit. The stormy seasons that we may have to endure will do our souls good, because they come from the Lord, and execute certain purposes. Say, for instance, I am leaning too much upon the arm of a friend. Well, a storm shall come, and separate me from that friend. Does that do me harm? Not if it bring me to lean more upon the arm of Jesus, and make me follow more closely after him. The storm, in passing over my head, has then done me no harm, but real good. It may perhaps have beaten down my religion, and obscured my evidences. There may even be the flashing lightning of God's anger, and the lowering clouds of vengeance, and heavy showers of hailstones. But if these storms wash away and beat down those lusts that creep round my soul, and would insinuate themselves so closely as to eat out the heart of vital godliness, I have reason to thank God for the storm that beats off these vermin. I have reason to be thankful even for the pelting hail and cutting rain, though it lacerate the feelings, as the hail wounds the plant, if it kill those caterpillars which would otherwise eat into the kidney of the wheat, and destroy the very heart of the crop.

4. And then, when the corn has been ripened by this succession of day and night, this circle of the seasons, comes the last stroke of all, the gathering into the heavenly garner. How the Lord's people shrink from this stroke! The Lord Jesus has taken away the sting and destroyed the power of death; and yet how often the fear of death brings God's children into bondage? But can the corn be harvested in any other way than by cutting it from the stalk? Or can our souls be taken to the bosom of God by any other way than cutting us from the earth? That stroke, when it comes, may be less cutting, perhaps, than we now think. But how cutting in prospect it is as to the families whom we leave behind, the relations whose tears we see in anticipation, the widow or husband for whom we

feel more tenderly than for ourselves! Yet that last cutting stroke is indispensably necessary to gather the soul into the heavenly garner.

“Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths drop fatness.” All thy paths in providence, and all thy paths in grace, though they often be in the deep waters; yet thy paths all drop fatness into the soul, making it rich and fruitful, so as to bring forth fruit to the honour and glory of God.

Now, the real children of God may not be able always to trace out the spot in which they are, but they will be, if under divine teaching, in some one spot marked out in the text. There are some, then, whom the Lord has but just “visited,” whose hearts he is making tender, whose consciences he is dealing with and working upon, giving them an ear to hear the truth, bringing them out of self, knitting them to the people of God, and teaching them to enquire the way to Zion with their faces thitherward. They have many things to contend with—right eyes to pluck out, right arms to cut off; many thorns and briars still growing in their hearts; many worldly lusts entangling their feet; doubts and fears working in their mind, or infidelity perpetually striving within. Yet with all this, they set their faces Zionward; however cast down, they are not cast away; however falling, yet rising up again, with tears and cries asking the Lord to be merciful.

There are others perhaps who have had “waterings.” They have felt the incomings of the divine tide. When hearing the word, when reading the Scriptures, when alone upon their knees, or when thinking upon divine things, they have felt a tide of indescribable sweetness, bearing all before it; tears have gushed from their eyes, and their hearts have been melted and dissolved. They cannot tell how it came, or whence it came; yet it has melted them down, and brought them completely out of the world and from dead professors.

Then, perhaps, there are others in this congregation passing through another part of the process, having the corruptions of

their hearts turned up to view, and the secret lusts that sometimes get the better of them. There are, perhaps, others who are full of love to the truth, who are looking to Jesus, and to whom his name is as ointment poured forth. They have desires springing up and pantings after the knowledge of him and the power of his resurrection—secret breathings forth of ardent affection, and flowings forth of living faith. These have received the love of the truth, and from time to time feel the springings up of faith and hope in the Lord of life and glory, of love towards his name, mingled with reverence, humility and, godly fear.

There may be others passing through dark seasons, in which there is no light; through cutting blasts, nipping nights, and cold days, that shake their faith to its very centre.

Yet the Lord crowns the year with goodness after all! And when he puts in the sickle, and gathers his saints into the garner above, each will bless the Lord with joyful voice, each will give the Lord the glory, that he has crowned the year with goodness; that super-abounding grace has reigned through righteousness; that matchless love has triumphed over all; that in all his dealings, however painful, in all they have had to pass through, however seemingly adverse, yet goodness and mercy have followed them all their days, and they shall dwell in the house of God for ever. Happy is the soul that can find any of his experience in these words! The least is as safe as the greatest; the feeblest as secure, in the purpose of God, as the strongest. “Happy are the people that are in such a case! yea, happy the people whose God is the Lord.”

97 The Anchor within the Veil

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning,

August 17, 1845

“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and

which entereth into that within the veil: whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Hebrews 6:18, 19, 20

The Apostle, in this chapter, has been describing the miserable end of apostates from the truth. But lest the things he had declared concerning these apostates might discourage and cast down the hearts of those true disciples to whom he was writing, being tender in the faith, he adds, “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.” And this leads him to shew what these “better things” were, and the nature of those “things that accompany salvation.”

He therefore immediately mentions (verse 10-12) their “work and labour of love,” and bids them “shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that they be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

This leads him to shew the nature of those promises, and the character of the heirs of them. “When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.” He then shews that Abraham, like all his children, inherited this promise through faith and patience. “And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.”

He then proceeds to point out the foundation upon which these promises stand—that they rest upon the immutable oath of God. “For men verily swear by the greater; and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife: wherein God willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath.”

And this brings us to the words of our text: “That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor

of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

There is something so ample in the text that I feel this morning like a weak man attempting to grasp in his arms a burden beyond his strength. In fact, there is sufficient substance in these words to occupy at least a dozen sermons, if God gave a man experience and ability to bring out all contained in them. I can therefore, only attempt to skim over the surface of the things that are contained in the text. I cannot plunge into the depth that coucheth beneath.

Let us therefore endeavour (as the words seem to lie with some degree of sweetness and power upon my heart) to bring out a few of the prominent truths contained in the text. I shall therefore, with God’s blessing, attempt

I.—To shew the character of the persons here spoken of.

II.—The nature of the refuge to which they flee.

III.—The firm foundation on which that refuge stands.

I.—We will look, first, then, at the persons spoken of in the text. Their character we may sum up under two leading features; one is, that they are “the heirs of promise;” the other, that “they have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them in the gospel.”

1. Their first character is, that they are “the heirs of promise;” that is, they are God’s children, who are inheritors of the promises made in the gospel. And it is through faith and patience on their part that they come into the personal enjoyment of them. They are heirs not through anything in themselves; they are heirs because they are sons. “If sons then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” Their sonship gives them heirship. But before they can enter into the inheritance, before they can be put into possession of the things laid up for them, they must have two distinct graces of the Spirit wrought in their heart; they must have faith to believe, and patience to wait for the things that their faith lays hold of. Faith is necessary in order to give the promise a place in

their hearts; and patience is needful (for “he that believeth shall not make haste;”) that they may not precipitately run forward, but may wait, endure, and suffer to the end, till they come into the actual enjoyment of those promises which were brought into their heart by the power of God.

2. But, besides this character, that they are “heirs of promise,” the Holy Ghost has stamped a second upon them: “they have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them.” This implies that they have been beaten out of false refuges. We know that man by nature makes lies his refuge. Nothing is too treacherous, nothing too delusive for you and me not to shelter in. The world is a shelter for some; their own righteousness for others; a delusive hope for a third; the good opinion of men for a fourth; mere rites and ceremonies for a fifth. We know that man’s lying, treacherous heart will hide itself anywhere but in the hope set before us in the gospel. Therefore, the Lord’s people, who carry in their bosom the same treacherous heart with all their fellow-men, need to be beaten out of all these lying refuges, that the hail may sweep them away, and the waters overflow them.

The expression “fled for refuge,” throws a light upon the way in which they came to lay hold of this shelter. It is an expression of alarm. They did not walk gently forward, nor carelessly saunter to the refuge, but they fled. This implies that there was that which drove, which alarmed, which beat them out of the false refuges in which they had hidden themselves. Now, we do not attempt to define how long, or how deep, convictions of sin must work in a sinner’s conscience. But we may be quite sure of this—if they have not worked so long, if they have not worked so deep, as to bring him out of all false refuges, they have not yet done their work. If these convictions, these apprehensions, these fears, these solemn thoughts have not made us flee with fear, with anxiety, with alarm to the refuge set before us, we as yet lack the character stamped upon the heirs of promise.

To flee implies a pursuer, and a pursuer of that nature that unless

we escape him, he will plunge his sword into our bosom. Such is the law with its awful curse. Such is Satan with his fiery darts; such is death with his sweeping scythe. If we do not flee from these pursuers, these avengers of blood, they will strike an arrow through our liver. So that by these pursuers, these avengers of blood, we are compelled, whether we will or not, forced, driven out of every refuge of lies, to that which is set forth in the gospel.

But the Apostle tells them what this refuge is, “the hope set before them.” Hope here signifies the Object of hope, the Lord of life and glory, “Immanuel, God with us.” He is therefore called, “The Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble.” (Jer. 14:8.) And he bears this title because in him all the expectations of Israel centre; and to him every sin-burdened soul flees that he may obtain shelter and refuge. This hope is set before us in the gospel. The word of truth reveals Jesus as the hope of the hopeless, the shelter of the shelterless, the refuge of the refugeless. And when the Lord the Spirit is pleased to enlighten our understanding—when the glorious Person, atoning blood, justifying righteousness, and finished work of the only begotten Son of God are set before our eyes, and a measure of faith is raised up in our heart to look to Jesus as the object of our soul’s desire, then we lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel.

But there are several things which must be wrought by a divine power before we can do this. We must, first, feel a sense of our danger—that is indispensable. We must, next, by a sense of our danger, be driven out of lying refuges—that is equally indispensable. We must then see what to flee to. Not to be running here; not to be turning to the right hand, not to be swerving to the left. But we must have a definite Object—know the goal to which our feet are tending; not looking back to the Sodom from which we have escaped; not hanging for help upon man, or on any thing in the creature: but with our eyes looking right on and with our eyelids straight before us, run as having a certain object in view; a goal traced out in the word of God, and held up before our soul’s eye.

And this is Jesus, whom we embrace as set forth in the Scriptures as the only begotten Son of God—“Immanuel, God with us;” as having, by his sacrifice upon the cross made a propitiation for sin, destroyed death and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and opened a way through the veil, that is, his flesh, into the presence and sanctuary of God.

When this is made known to the soul, viewed by the eyes of an enlightened understanding, and faith is raised up to receive in simplicity and godly sincerity what is revealed with power, then we no longer run hither and thither, seeking help and finding none, turning to the right hand or to the left: but we flee to a definite Object, to the goal set before us, which is Jesus, the great High Priest over the house of God.

But there is an expression, “to lay hold,” that deserves notice. There is something to be touched, tasted, felt, handled, known, and enjoyed. It is not an object merely seen at a distance—a something to be viewed merely by the eye, and not grasped by the hand. But it is set forth as a tangible object, as something laid hold of, embraced, grasped, and experimentally and definitely felt. This vital and experimental laying hold distinguishes living from dead faith; the mere natural understanding speculating about Jesus, from the enlightening of the eyes of the spiritual understanding by the Holy Ghost. Natural faith may see Christ in the Scriptures; but it cannot see him by the eyes of the soul. Nor is there a laying hold. A living soul alone has power to embrace and grasp a living Saviour. Natural faith fails here; it may think, talk, reason, and argue; but it cannot lay hold, grasp, embrace, or bring in; it cannot enjoy a living union between a living soul and a living Lord. It is a withered hand, paralyzed and dead. But living faith reaches forth into eternity, stretches beyond the vale of transitory things to lay hold, by a sensible act and appropriating touch, of the hope set before us in the gospel.

This we see signally shown in one case when the Lord was upon earth—that of the poor woman with the issue of blood. (Luke

8:43-48.) The multitude thronged round Jesus; the crowd rudely pressed upon his sacred Person. But only one trembling hand touched him; and when that timid, yet believing hand touched but the border of his garment, instantly virtue flowed forth from his sacred Person, and healed her disease. So spiritually. Professors may intrude upon the Lord, and thrust themselves into his presence; they may, as the Jews of old, throng and press his sacred Person; but it is only the peculiar touch of living faith that derives virtue out of him. So that it is not merely fleeing for refuge; nor is it merely seeking the hope set before us, but it is the laying hold of it by a living hand. It may be indeed sometimes almost with a convulsive grasp; it may be at others with a trembling hand; it may be but for a few moments that living faith touches the object of the soul's hope. The accompanying incidents of time or intensity do not affect the nature of real faith. As in the case of the diseased woman, it was not the strength, nor length of her touch which healed her, but the faith which was in it, so it is now. The distinctive character of true faith is, that it touches, embraces, lays hold of, and thus brings supplies out of Christ's glorious fulness into the poverty-stricken soul.

Now this Object of hope is set forth in the gospel. But you will observe, that the Apostle having spoken of the Object of hope transfers himself immediately to the grace of hope—"which hope," he says, "we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

II.—And this leads me to show, as I proposed, secondly, the nature of the refuge that the Lord's people flee unto. When the soul flees for refuge to the hope set before it in the gospel, whom does it see within the veil? Is it not the great High Priest after the order of Melchisedec? Was not this typified by what took place on the great day of atonement? You will remember, that none but the high priest, while the temple was standing, was allowed to enter within

the veil, and that only one day in the year. He entered in with the blood which he sprinkled upon and before the mercy-seat. And this was typical of the entering of the Lord of life and glory, after his resurrection, into the presence of the Most High.

Now, hope as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, enters within the veil where Jesus now is. And this is its distinguishing character. It pierces beyond all temporal and transitory things; and enters into things eternal and invisible, within the veil. But the high priest upon earth, when he had discharged his appointed office within the veil, came forth again to sojourn among his fellow-men; but not so with the great High Priest, his glorious and ever-living Antitype; he tarries within the veil, at the right hand of the Father, the great High Priest over the house of God—the Mediator, Intercessor, and Advocate of God's family.

When then Jesus reveals himself to the eyes of living faith, they view him in all the circumstances of his holy life, in all the circumstances of his suffering death, and in all the circumstances of his glorious resurrection and ascension. And thus hope fixes itself upon the risen, ascended, and glorified Lord, the great and glorious High Priest, who is passed within the veil.

The veil of the temple signified the separation that existed between God and man, and the hiding of heavenly things from his eyes. But when Jesus died upon the cross, the veil was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, implying that a way of access was opened into the very presence of God—that believers are no longer, like the Jewish worshippers, to tarry without; but are allowed to enter, in the actings of faith, hope, and love, into the very presence of God himself.

Thus, a good hope through grace, as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, passes through all sublunary things; it pierces through that cloud which hangs upon the eyes of men; it penetrates through the veil of unbelief that rests upon the heart; it passes through the waves and billows of infidelity, as the literal anchor through the waves of the sea, and it takes firm hold of him who

is within the veil. Its flukes anchor firmly in the great High Priest over the house of God, as the natural anchor passes through the deep waters, and buries itself firmly in the sand.

Jesus is here called “the Forerunner;” that is, he has entered heaven before any of his people; for “in all things he must have pre-eminence.” He is the firstfruits and wave-sheaf of a whole harvest of redeemed, and is gone to prepare a place for them, that where he is they may be also. He has ascended up on high, and set himself down at the right hand of the Father; and there ever lives, the great High Priest, the true Melchisedec, to present his intercession before the eyes of Jehovah. He presents not his actual blood, but the merit of that blood. He presents his righteousness; he presents his holy Person, yea, he presents himself, the great and glorious God-Man, as the church’s ever-living and loving Head.

Now the nature of true gospel hope is, to anchor in this glorious High Priest; not to rest upon anything in ourselves, not to rest upon anything in others; but to pass through all these frail and perishing things into the very presence of God himself; so as to take firm hold upon the glorious High Priest within the veil.

But this we cannot do until we have a sight by faith of the King in his beauty—until there is a discovery to the eyes of our understanding, and faith be raised up in our hearts to look unto, live upon, and embrace with all our soul’s affections this glorious Forerunner, who is entered within the veil. This looking unto him, is an act of faith; this anchoring in him is an act of hope; and this tender affection towards him is an act of love. These are the three grand graces in the soul—faith, hope, and love. And wherever there is faith to believe, there is hope to anchor, and love to flow forth in the breathings of tender affection.

This “Forerunner is made a High Priest after the order of Melchisedec.” There are two points in which the order of Melchisedec differed from the order of Aaron. 1. The Aaronic priesthood was hereditary. It passed from father to son, and therefore was always in a course of mutation and change. But the Melchisedec

priesthood is permanent, immutably fixed in Jesus. As the apostle argues, Heb. 7:23, 24, “And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death; but this Man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.” Thus, as Melchisedec was “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually;” so the priesthood no longer passes out of the hand of Jesus, as it did in the course of nature out of the hands of the Jewish high priest. It is not a temporary, nor transitory, but an eternal priesthood. The second feature of the Melchisedec, as distinguished from the Aaronic priesthood is, that it is a royal priesthood. Melchisedec was “king of Salem;” and of Jesus it was prophesied, “He shall be a Priest upon his throne.” (Zech. 6:13.)—Zion’s King as well as Zion’s Priest. Thus he not merely intercedes as the great High Priest within the veil, but he lives as a King to execute his own purposes. The hope of the soul anchors in and rests upon this royal High Priest, knowing that he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him—standing at the right hand of the Father as an Advocate for the poor and needy; and manifesting the virtue of his intercession, by sprinkling his blood upon the conscience, discovering his glorious righteousness, and shedding abroad his dying love.

Now everything that we have received out of Jesus, every testimony of interest in him, every mark of his favour, every glimpse and glance of his love, every thing that has raised up our heart heavenward, every word that has come home with softening, melting, dissolving power into our conscience—all flows from this one thing—having fled for refuge, and laid hold of the hope set before us in the gospel.

III.—But the apostle shews us, (and this is the third point which I shall endeavour this morning to speak upon) the certainty and security of this refuge that the Lord’s people flee to take hold of: “That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge

to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” The Lord gave certain promises (and these are the promises to which the apostle alludes) to Abraham. He said, “Surely, in blessing I will bless thee.” This was the leading promise, “Blessing I will bless;” that is, absolutely, unconditionally. But in giving this promise to Abraham, he gave it to all who have the faith of father Abraham. Every believing soul that walks in the steps of believing Abraham, God blesses with the same absolute, unconditional blessing that he blessed his spiritual progenitor with—those rich blessings which God has blessed his children with in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. As the apostle declares, (Gal. 3:7, 9,) “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed. So then, they which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham.” Again (ver. 14,) “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promises of the Spirit through faith.” And again, (ver. 29,) “And if ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Now these promises rests upon two things; and these two things the Apostle, declares to be “immutable,” or unchangeable. One is, the counsel of God; as we read, “to shew the immutability of his counsel;” and the other is, the oath of God.

The counsel of God is, the determinate purpose of God to bless whom he will bless, to have mercy upon whom he will have mercy, and to save whom he will save. This is his eternal, immutable, unchangeable counsel. The Three-One God fixed his love upon definite objects; the purpose of his love being to bless them and bring them to the eternal enjoyment of himself, in spite of all opposition from without and within. This counsel stands firm as the throne of Jehovah; an irreversible counsel, that though man may change, the elements melt with fervent heat, the world pass away, and the heavens be rolled up as a scroll, yet the eternal purpose of a cove-

nant Jehovah never can pass away. Upon this counsel and purpose of God his promises stand; they flow out of this counsel; they run parallel with this counsel; they stand upon the same foundation with this counsel; and were given in the mind of God ere the world itself had any being, and when the “everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure,” was made between the Eternal Three.

We have the transcript of this counsel in the written word. Every promise in that word flowed from his eternal counsel; and his eternal counsel was the basis of every promise. So that when we read the promises, we read the counsel from which those promises flow, and on which those promises stand. When then we read “the promises,” we may be as sure that every promise will be fulfilled, as we are certain that the eternal counsel itself will be fulfilled. The eternal counsel is the source, the promises are the streams; the eternal counsel is the foundation, the promises are the superstructure. The superstructure will last as long as the foundation stands, and the streams will flow as long as the source remains.

But God has confirmed his immutable purpose with an oath. He adopts here the custom of men, knowing how weak, how feeble, how frail man’s faith is. It was not sufficient to give a simple promise, to make a covenant, and bestow promises resting upon that covenant—he would do more, he would confirm it with an oath, as we find in Genesis 22:16, “By myself have I sworn.” The margin of the text instead of “confirmed” reads, “he interposed himself;” that is, put himself by an oath, as between the promise and its fulfilment. And this he did, in infinite condescension, that Abraham’s faith might be stronger as resting not merely upon the word of God, but upon the oath of God. Now, a man’s word we trust to, if he be an honourable man; but if we have, not that man’s word only, but the additional security and sanction of his oath, it creates double confidence. So it is with the Lord. His word is enough; but he has, in condescension to human infirmity, knowing the weakness of his people’s faith, not only given his word, but also his oath: “Surely by myself have I sworn.”

Every heir of promise has an interest in this counsel of God; and every heir of promise is interested in this oath of God. I may—you may—doubt, fear, and question in our own minds what right we have to the promise of God. We read them in the word; we see them to be unspeakably precious; we behold them spangling the Scriptures of truth as the stars spangle the sky; we view them loaded with blessings. But this thought arises, ‘Am I interested in them? I see them full of blessings; but what testimony have I that they belong to me?’ Now, this is the mark—”that have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel.” This is the mark of the heirs of promise: this is the stamp that God has put upon them, “that they have fled for refuge;” not that they have been extremely religious, not that they have been remarkably consistent, not that they have done this or that, or mean to do this and that, for the Lord. But this is the divine stamp put upon them—that they have “fled for refuge.” In other words, that they have had such a work of grace upon their hearts—such convictions of sin—such guilt, such soul trouble, as has beaten them out of lying refuges: and that, being beaten out of these lying refuges, they have looked to find some shelter from the storm which they know will one day burst upon a guilty world. Having heard the roar of the thunder upon the horizon, and seen the flashes of lightning in the sky, and felt the drops of falling rain upon the earth, while the world saw nothing but a bright sky, they fled for refuge to the Saviour that God himself has set before them in the gospel—to the Lord of life and glory revealed in the Scriptures of truth—to the Son of God, as having appeared in the flesh. They have fled by faith to his atoning blood for the pardon of their sins—to his righteousness as their only justification—to his sacred Person as their Advocate and Intercessor at the right hand of the Father—to the promises of the gospel as the breasts of consolation to which they desire for ever to cling, and milk out their sweetness and blessedness. This is their character.

Now, every soul that has experienced these things, that has

been taken out of refuges of lies, and fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before him in the gospel, and not merely fled to, but also by an act of living faith has laid hold of Jesus, has felt a measure of his love and blood, tasted his grace, and been ravished by his beauty—every such soul, however doubting and fearing, however dark and distressed, however cast down with the difficulties of the way, is “an heir of promise;” and being an heir of promise, he rests upon the counsel and the oath of God. In a word, every such soul that has “fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before him in the gospel,” has the counsel of God upon his side. He is one of those on whose behalf the eternal covenant was made. His title to it is—he has “fled for refuge;” and the counsel of God, the secret counsel, and the manifested counsel is, to save that man, whoever he be, however black his sins, however vile his heart, however contradictory the path he is walking in may seem to flesh and blood, however rough and rugged his way, however assailed from without and within. That man who has fled for refuge by an act of living faith to lay hold of the hope set before him—it is the counsel of God that he shall be saved. Nay more, lest that should not be enough, God has interposed himself, has confirmed it by a solemn oath that he will save such; not merely said it, but sworn it. That they may have additional security, he has condescended to swear by himself, that surely he will bless, surely he will save such souls.

Now the Apostle holds this out as strong consolation. He says, “By two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.” No: it is utterly impossible for God to lie. The earth may be dissolved, and all creation reduced to chaos before God could lie. He would cease to be God if the faintest breath of a change, or the shadow of a turn should pass over the glorious Godhead. But it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore this holds out strong consolation for those that have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them.

“Strong consolation” implies comfort applied to the soul; and that in proportion to the strength of its faith, in proportion to the

depth of its trials. Who needs strong consolation? Is it not those who have nothing which this world can comfort them with? Those who have fled for refuge? fled out of the world, and therefore they do not expect any consolation in the world? They have fled out of sin, and do not expect consolation from sin. They have fled out of self-righteousness, and do not expect consolation from self-righteousness. They have fled out of those refuges of lies. They may cast at times, through the wickedness and weakness of the heart, a hankering look for other shelters; but they never turn back. These need strong consolation. They need something that can bear up their minds, something that can support them, something that can enable them to endure to the end.

And what is the ground of this strong consolation? This is the ground, that God has eternally determined and sworn by himself—that he will save and bless those that have “fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel.” This is the foundation of their consolation, this is the ground of their hope, that God has made such and such promises, and confirmed such and such promises by his solemn oath—that those who flee for refuge, and lay hold upon this hope, have an interest in and title to them, and have a manifest assurance of being “heirs of promise.”

See how the Lord puts “strong consolation” on the surest ground. He does not say, ‘Look at your lives—how pious, how holy, how religious they are!’ nor does he even point at the depth of your experience; nor does he condescend to notice anything whatsoever of the creature. But this is the foundation on which he places it—his own counsel, his own oath.

Now, did you ever in your life feel spiritual consolation? If ever you did, it was by laying hold of the hope set before you in the gospel. There was no consolation ever got by looking at fallen self. If ever there was any true consolation, any hope raised up in the heart, any solid comfort, it came out of the actings of living faith embracing the blood and righteousness of Christ, tasting a measure of his preciousness, seeing his glory and beauty, and feeling

the heart in some measure dissolved into nothingness at his footstool. Not looking at ourselves; but receiving as empty sinners out of his fulness: not trusting to ourselves, or our own attainments; but going to Jesus, and receiving something into our hearts out of him. Nothing but this can give us consolation; and the more this is felt, the more this will give us “strong consolation.”

But, you will observe, that the Apostle speaks of this act of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ as an anchor; and he says, this anchor is “sure and stedfast, and entereth into that within the veil.” In other words, that this hope acts the same part towards the soul as the anchor literally and naturally acts to the ship. Now, can we always see the ground on which the anchor rests? Is not the bottom covered by the dark, deep waves? And the deeper the anchor sinks, is not the ground less seen? Is it not so spiritually? Is not this the mark and characteristic of a living soul—“to endure as seeing him who is invisible?” Is there not, must there not be, a laying hold of invisible realities in the soul? And is not this laying hold of, and is not this anchoring in invisible realities, a grand mark of faith? If I can see with my eyes, I do not want to see with my heart. If I can believe in my judgment, I do not want to believe in my conscience. If I can touch by the hand of nature, I do not want to touch by the hand of faith. These all fail, and come short. The child of God, I am well convinced, will be opposed at every step he takes. But he has fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before him; and he believes, hopes, and anchors in an invisible Jesus.

Unbelief is always looking for something visible. Reason always questions ‘how this thing can be consistent with that?’ And thus all the reasonings and argumentations of our fallen nature will be bringing up strong artillery against living faith. But the Apostle says, “Hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” (Rom. 8:24.) If we could see Jesus as plainly with our bodily eye as we can see the texts of Scripture in which he is spoken of, there would be no need of the special act of God the Spirit upon our heart to give us faith. If we could reason upon truth

and receive it into our souls, as we reason upon and receive matters of science and human learning, there would be no need of the special operations of God the Spirit. Therefore, just in proportion as our hope enters within the veil, and anchors in this glorious Immanuel, will be the opposition made to it by nature, sense, and reason. And nature, sense, and reason, with the unbelief and infidelity of our hearts, will sometimes work so powerfully, that the anchor seems almost giving way. Nay, we scarcely at times seem to have any anchor at all. The ship is so beaten about by the waves, that there appears no firm hold of, no real anchoring in, the Person, blood, and work of Jesus. And yet it holds. The ship is not beaten from her anchorage; it does not fall upon the rocks, is not cast away and lost. Still, by some invisible cable it holds, in spite of nature, sense, and reason. Therefore, the Apostle says, it is “sure and stedfast.” It is firm and stayed; it may be out of sight, and seem giving way; the waves and billows may rise so high as even to hide the cable from our eyes; and as the cable dips beneath the waves, it may seem sunk and lost; and yet all the while there is a secret, firm, invisible hold. Have not a thousand temptations blown across us to drift us from Jesus? I am sure they have blown upon my soul. Have they not blown across yours? Have not a thousand waves of unbelief almost tossed us upon the rocks? Have we not sometimes been tempted by lust, and sometimes been driven almost by despair, to give up our anchorage? Have we not sometimes doubted and feared whether our hope was not all a delusion, and whether we ever really by an act of living faith cast anchor within the veil? Yet it will not, it does not altogether give way. There is still some coming unto the Lord, still some going up of tender affection, some actings of faith in his blood and righteousness, some pantings of heart after him, some love to him, some embracings of him as our only hope and help. Then it has not failed yet; nay, the more it is tried, does it not prove the anchor to be all the stronger? Does it not prove the anchorage to be all the firmer? What can fail? Can the anchorage fail? That cannot fail—it is the Person of Jesus. Can

the anchor itself fail? That cannot fail—it is the work of the Spirit to create it in the soul. Can the cable fail—the mysterious connection there is in the heart between the soul and Jesus—can that break? No: that is twined by an eternal hand—that was woven by the fingers of God himself—that cannot, cannot break. Then what can fail? Shall the ship fail? If it be a ransomed soul—if the Lord of life and glory be the pilot, he knows all the shoals, and can steer it into the haven of eternal felicity. If that infallible Pilot who never yet missed the harbour has purchased her, chartered her, and is guiding her upon her homeward destination, how can the bark itself, ‘The Good Adventure,’ be ever cast away?

Then, if none of these things can fail, what strong consolation there is to those that have “fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them in the gospel!” How this noble anchorage, this safe roadstead, opens its capacious arms to receive every living child of God! Surely you must know whether this has taken place in your conscience; if once you were in a lying refuge, and then a storm came, and beat you out of it—then you must know whether there were any goings forth, any lookings, any longings, any stretchings forth, any reachings forward to lay hold of a precious Saviour. You must know if these things ever had a place in your soul—if you have had these feelings you must know whether Jesus ever had a place in your heart—whether you ever viewed him by the eyes of enlightened understanding—then you must know whether faith ever flowed towards him, hope anchored in him, and love embraced him. These things cannot take place in a man’s bosom, without his knowing he has had such things working in his soul with power. He may have many doubts, fears, and apprehensions as to the reality and genuineness of the work. His faith may be sorely tried. But he must know whether he has felt these things or not—whether these things have had a certain definite effect upon him that has brought him out of lying refuges to “lay hold of the hope set before him in the gospel.”

Now, if God the Spirit has wrought these things in your heart

in a measure, though a feeble measure, you are a heir of promise; and if you are a heir of promise, you have a title to strong consolation; for your soul rests upon the immutability of God's counsel, and the immutability of God's oath. Is it not a mercy it should be so? Suppose it was thus—that I had made myself a holy man; that I had, by a long course of penance, endeavoured to atone for my sins; that I had, by rigorous acts of obedience, worked out a measure of self-righteousness;—should I not be always at uncertainty? and would not the issue be final despair? But when it comes to this—"fleeing for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel"—when it stands thus, that this is the mark God has stamped upon the heirs of promise, and put his finger upon this experience—if you have this, you have everything. If this has been wrought in your heart by divine power, you are a child of God—your soul will be saved as sure as there is a God in heaven, a counsel of God in eternity, and an oath of God in time. If these immutable things that cannot fail are on your side; how it holds out an escape for every poor sin-convinced sinner—every one that knows the plague of his own heart—every one in whose soul the blessed Spirit has begun and is carrying on a work of grace!

The Lord enable us to see it more plainly! The Lord enable us to feel it more powerfully! The Lord enable us day by day to be manifested as heirs of promise, to be continually fleeing for refuge to lay hold of the blessed hope set before us—so that when eternity shall come, and time have passed away, and be no longer—then we shall see face to face in heaven what we have seen by the eye of faith upon earth; and enjoy in full that which in this life we have only realized by feeble and distant anticipation.

89 Blessings Imputed, And Mercies Imparted

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on Lord's Day Evening,

August 17 1845

"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made

unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

1Cor. 1:30, 31

These words, or rather a portion of them, came to my mind this morning as I was sitting in the pulpit after I had done preaching. And as I have usually found it far better that a text should come to me, than that I should go to a text, I have been induced to take them, and endeavour to speak from them this evening.

Some of my enemies, and alas, some of my professed friends, have endeavoured to make out that it was my natural ability, or my acquired learning, which enabled me to preach; though I must say that I have but slender pretensions to either. But I know, if either were the case, I should have the whole word of God, and especially this chapter and this epistle against me: and did I look to, or lean upon either, I had better have remained where I was, in Babylon, than attempt to stand up in God's name. But, through mercy, I have a witness in my conscience, which contradicts such representations.

I believe I have the same perplexities and exercises with respect to texts, and also with respect to sermons to be preached from texts, as others of my brethren in the ministry. I know what it is to be in thick darkness, and what it is to have a measure of sensible light; I know what it is to be shut up, and what it is to enjoy a degree of liberty; I know what the absence of life and feeling is, and at times what is their presence; I know (to use an expression of Brainerd's) 'what it is to work with stumps, and what it is to work with fingers.' So that, with respect to both my texts and sermons, I stand precisely on a level with my other brethren. I have often to cry to the Lord to give me texts from which to preach; and when I have got the text, to cry to the Lord to give me matter out of it. For I know by experience that all wisdom which does not come down from "the Father of lights" is folly; that all strength not divinely wrought in the soul is weakness; and that all knowledge that does

not spring from the Lord's own teaching in the conscience is the depth of ignorance. To him therefore do I desire to look that he would teach me this evening how and what to speak. And may he grant that a savour from his own most blessed Majesty may rest upon the words that may drop from my lips.

With respect to the text, we may observe in it three leading features.

I.—The eternal purpose and counsel of God with respect to his peculiar people—"Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus."

II.—The execution of that eternal purpose, in what Christ is of God made unto this peculiar people—"wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."

III.—The final purpose and grand result of God's counsel, and of its execution—"He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

I.—But it will be first desirable to point out who the people are, concerning whom the apostle makes this declaration, "Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus."

The word "ye," though it is but a monosyllable, though but two letters compose the whole of it, yet has a vast meaning connected with it. We must go to the beginning of the epistle to know who are intended by this little monosyllable. "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." These are the persons to whom the apostle addresses this epistle; these are the persons comprehended in that little monosyllable "ye"—the church of God, sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints; with all who know what it is, by prayer and supplication, to call upon the name of Jesus Christ.

The "ye" then, in the text, means quickened souls, believing characters; those who, by a work of grace upon their hearts, are sanctified, and enabled, by a spirit of grace and supplication, to call upon the name of Jesus Christ as their Lord and God.

Now, in the text, the apostle traces out what brought them into this state of saintship, "Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus." The expression refers to two distinct things: 1. The original purpose of God; and 2. The execution of that purpose. Both are "of Him."—flowing out of him, arising from him, purposed by him in eternity, and executed by him in time. "Of Him"—not of yourselves: "not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth:" not by the exertion of creature intellect, not by the instrumentality of human operation, not by anything the creature has done, not by anything the creature can do. The apostle traces up the standing of Christ's people in him to its origin—the eternal purpose and counsel of God. All that takes place in time he represents as flowing out of the eternal mind, and happening according to the original purpose and covenant plan of Jehovah.

You will observe, then, that when the apostle speaks of these Corinthian believers as being "in Christ Jesus," he intends thereby to set forth their personal standing in the Son of God under two distinct points of view:

1. As originating in eternity;

2. As taking place in time. In other words, every believer has a twofold union with Christ; one from all eternity, which we may call, an eternal, or election-union; the other in time, through the Spirit's operation in his heart, which we may call a time, or regeneration-union. Let us attempt to unfold these two kinds of union separately.

1. Every soul, then, that ever had, has now, or ever will have a standing in Christ, had this standing in Him from all eternity. Just in the same way as the vine, according to the Lord's own figure, puts forth the branches out of the stem; not a single branch comes out of the stock but what previously was in the stock: so, not a single soul comes manifestatively into spiritual existence which had not first an invisible and eternal union with the Son of God. This eternal, immanent, and invisible union with the Person of Christ, God blessed his people with before all worlds, by his eternal pur-

pose, and according to his own eternal counsel.

2. Now, out of this eternal and immanent union springs the second union that we have spoken of, which is a time union—a union in grace: a vital union betwixt a living soul and a living Head. Until the Lord quickens elect vessels of mercy they have eternal union, but they have not time union. Their eternal union never can be altered: that never can be dissolved: that accompanies them all through their unregenerate state: but their vital, spiritual, and experimental union takes place in time, through the teaching, and under the operations of the blessed Spirit.

But what a mercy it is for God's people that before they have a vital union with Christ, before they are grafted into him experimentally, they have an eternal, immanent union with him before all worlds. It is this eternal union that brings them into time existence. It is by virtue of this eternal union that they come into the world at such a time, at such a place, from such parents, under such circumstances, as God has appointed. It is by virtue of this eternal union that the circumstances of their time-state are ordained. By virtue of this eternal union they are preserved in Christ before they are called; they cannot die till God has brought about a vital union with Christ. Whatever sickness they may pass through, whatever injuries they may be exposed to, whatever perils assault them on sea or land, fall they will not, fall they cannot, till God's purposes are executed in bringing them into a vital union with the Son of his love. Thus, this eternal union watched over every circumstance of their birth, watched over their childhood, watched over their manhood, watched over them till the appointed time and spot, when "the God of all grace," according to his eternal purpose, was pleased to quicken their souls, and thus bring about an experimental union with the Lord of life and glory.

But this time union, this vital, experimental union, we may speak of also under two distinct points of view.

1. Directly that God the Spirit is pleased to quicken the soul, there commences a vital union with Christ. But this vital union

is not then known to the soul. What saith the scripture? "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." (1 Cor. 6:17) One spirit! The Spirit that rests upon the soul to quicken it into spiritual life, by that very visitation, that very indwelling, gives a vital union to Jesus. But it is not at first known, it is not brought forth into the soul's enjoyment, it is not made manifest in our personal experience. It is, to use a figure that the scriptures have adopted, like the process of grafting. Now we know that the process of grafting is this. A scion is cut off an old stock, and grafted into a new one. Before the scion can be grafted into the new stock, it must be cut off from the old: but when it is cut off from the old, and applied to the new, union does not immediately take place. The wounded scion and the wounded stock are brought into close apposition: they are joined together: and yet a time elapses before the sap flows forth out of the new stock, so as to give the scion a union to the tree. This may throw a little light upon spiritual grafting. Though the soul is cut off from the old stock, and brought into close apposition with the Lord of life and glory, yet full union is not at once nor immediately enjoyed; though the scion is cut off from the old stock, and grafted into the new, joined together never to be separated, yet a certain time is wanting that they may coalesce, that the cut stock and the cut scion may both grow together, that the sap out of the living stock may flow into the living scion.

2. When the Lord is pleased to bring the soul experimentally near to the Son of his love, and communicates a measure of that precious faith whereby Jesus is looked unto, leaned upon, believed in, trusted in, hoped in, and cleaved unto, and a taste of his love and blood is felt in the soul—that produces vital union. Then, if I may use the illustration I have before adopted, the scion and the stock are not merely in close apposition, as when first grafted; but the scion and the stock grow together—there is a coalescing between the two, a union never to be dissolved and the sap out of the stock flows out freely into the scion, so that it puts forth first its leaves of honest and tender profession, then its blossoms of faith,

hope, and love, and finally those “fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

Now the grand struggle of a living soul before he feels this vital union is to have it made manifest in his conscience. How many of the Lord’s people are in this state—cut off from the old stock, coming, as far as they are able, unto Jesus, crying to be saved by his blood and righteousness, desiring above all things to know him and the power of his resurrection; yet no divine power communicated, no inward testimony sensibly felt, no precious sap manifestatively brought into their heart, no enjoyment of the Lord of life and glory in their soul. Though there is an eye of faith to see, a hand of faith to touch, an ear of faith to hear his voice, a heart of faith to receive Jesus into its very secret chambers, yet there is not brought about a clear, manifest, experimental union with the Lord of life and glory.

But wherever this vital union is brought about, it is a union of that nature which never can be broken: “Of him are ye in Christ Jesus.” See how the Holy Ghost, by the pen of Paul, ascribes the whole to God; nothing is given to the creature to do; not the weight of a straw is laid upon the back of freewill. God does it altogether. In eternity, God ordained and gave the everlasting union; and in time, by a work of grace, he cut the scion off the old stock, brought it in close apposition to the new, bound them round together, that they may never more be separated, by the cords of faith and the cement of love; and in time brought about also that close coalescing, that vital junction between the two, which causes the sap to flow freely into their souls, and make them abundant in every good word and work.

II.—We pass on to consider what flows out of this eternal, and this time union—”Who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.” Observe again—we cannot observe it too often—how the whole is ascribed to the Lord; how completely the creature is set aside; how entirely man’s wisdom, and man’s exertions, and man’s righteousness are put into

the background; and how the Lord of grace and glory reigns triumphant. The apostle had ascribed the eternal and vital union, which the people of Christ have with their Head wholly to the purpose, and wholly to the execution of the Father; and now what Christ is to his people, he also ascribes wholly and solely to the same almighty and merciful God. “Who of God”—observe, “of God”—that is first, by the eternal purpose and secret determination of Jehovah; and secondly, by the fulfillment of his eternal counsels, in the execution of his own almighty appointment—who thus of God “is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.” The “us” here are the same persons as the “ye.” There is no distinction betwixt the two. We are ye—ye are we. The apostle sometimes addresses the church of God as distinct from himself, and he sometimes addresses the church of God as one with himself. But whether he uses we or ye the persons meant are the same—the saints of God, the elect unto eternal life.

Now, to these, and to these only, Christ Jesus is of God made “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.” The Lord knows the wants of his people. He knew in eternity what they would need in time. The fall did not take God unawares. It was not an interruption to his eternal purposes. It was not an unexpected hindrance, which God never foresaw, never provided for. God decreed it by his own permissive decree. There are active decrees, and there are permissive decrees. There are good things which God decrees, and which he himself performs: and there are evils which God decrees, that out of them good might come. But God does not put his hands to the execution of those evils. He decrees to permit them, not himself to do them; for God is not, and never can be the author of sin. We must make this distinction, or we shall impute to God that which he hates. At the same time, we must admit, that God decrees permissively, or the whole chain of events would be thrown into a mass of confusion. The distinction is beautifully set forth in what Peter said to those that crucified the Lord: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-

knowledge of God”—there is the decree—”ye have taken, and by wicked hands”—there is the agency of man—”have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23.)

The Lord, then, foresaw what his people would be, and foreseeing what his people would be—how completely ignorant, how deeply dyed in guilt, how awfully depraved, how entirely destroyed—he took care to provide a remedy beforehand. He set up, in his own eternal counsels, the God-man Mediator, that he might be, in his fullness, all that they should need in time, and enjoy in eternity. For instance:

1. He saw that they would be sunk into utter folly: that all the wisdom of man would be foolishness with God. “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” God saw that when man fell from original righteousness, he fell from all wisdom, and became a fool, mistaking good for evil and evil for good, sweet for bitter and bitter for sweet, light for darkness and darkness for light. God knew that he would stumble upon the dark mountains, far away from peace and righteousness. Therefore, knowing how folly would be bound up in the hearts of his elect children, he beforehand appointed Jesus to be their wisdom.

Now, I think, with respect to these four things which the Lord of life and glory is said to be to his people, we may view them, first, as imputed, and secondly, as imparted. Some who hold imputed righteousness, object to imputed wisdom, imputed sanctification, and imputed redemption. But why should we stand aghast, as though this would lead us into the depths of Antinomian licentiousness? If we take care to state that there is imparted wisdom, as well as imputed wisdom; imparted sanctification, as well as imputed sanctification: imparted redemption, as well as imputed redemption; if we do not by imputation destroy impartation—I do not see why we should shrink from imputed wisdom more than

from imputed righteousness. Paul says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” (Eph. 1:3.) Is not wisdom a spiritual blessing? and if this be “in heavenly places in Christ,” is it not a blessing by imputation? For what am I by nature? A fool: all my wisdom, out of Christ, is nothing but the height of foolishness, and all my knowledge nothing but the depth of ignorance. Can I then ever be considered as wise? I can, if Christ is made wisdom to me. If I have a standing in Christ, then I have a standing in all that Christ is to me. Is Christ wise? the only wise God? infinitely wise? unerringly wise? Is he Wisdom itself, Wisdom in the abstract, set forth by that title in the Pr 8 8th of Proverbs?

Then if I have a standing in him, a living union with him, I am wise in him, because his wisdom is mine. Can you find anything in the stem that is not in the branches? Penetrate the branch—does not sap ooze and flow forth? Penetrate the stem—does not sap flow forth too? Take your microscope—examine both minutely. Is not the sap in the stem and the sap in the branch identical? Is it not so with respect to Christ and his people? Have they an eternal standing in him? Have they a vital union with him? Is he wise? Then they are wise. Not indeed wise as he is, originally, eternally, intrinsically, infinitely: but wise because he of God is made unto them wisdom.

But in what sense is Christ thus made “wisdom?” Not as the second Person in the glorious Godhead, the eternal “Son of the Father, in truth and love.” As a Person in the Godhead, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the blessed Spirit, he could not be made. It is therefore by virtue of the eternal covenant whereby he became a glorious Mediator, the Bridegroom of the Bride, the Head of the church, and in due time by actual assumption of the flesh and blood of the children, Immanuel, God with us. In this way, the Lord Jesus Christ is made unto his people wisdom, and they are thus accounted wise before God, as having a covenant standing in Christ.

Now, how this sets all the Lord’s people on a level! Some of them

are educated, others uneducated: some can scarcely, perhaps, read the letters in the Bible; others have had instruction in the arts and sciences: some have had deep spiritual teachings, and the teachings of others have been more shallow. But do they not all stand on one level when we view them as wise in Christ? Are not all distinctions at once abrogated? Does not the wise man naturally come to be a fool? Does not the fool naturally come to be wise? Do not all the family of God who have a standing in Jesus, by having Christ's wisdom imputed to them, stand upon the same level—wise in Christ—because they are one in Christ?

But besides this wisdom by imputation, there is also wisdom by impartation. Without imparted wisdom, we have no manifested interest in imputed wisdom. Imparted wisdom is by the Holy Ghost making the soul wise unto salvation: and his first step in making the soul wise unto salvation is to convince it of its folly. The wisdom of the world is foolishness with God, and the wisdom of God is foolishness with the world. There must then be a complete reversal—a turning of things upside down—before we can be brought into a state to have wisdom divinely imparted. But when we are brought into that spot where, I am convinced, the Lord will bring all his people, that left to ourselves we are perfect fools: that we have no wisdom whatever to direct our feet: that we are blind, ignorant, weak, helpless, and utterly unable to find our way to the city—when by painful experience we stumble upon the dark mountains, and grope for the wall like the blind, and grope as if we had no eyes, then we value the least spark of divine wisdom communicated and dropped into our souls from those lips into which grace was poured.

We must know the value of the gem before we can really prize it. When diamonds were first discovered in Brazil, nobody knew that they were diamonds. They were handed about as pretty, shining pebbles. But directly it was known they were diamonds, they were eagerly caught hold of, and their value rose a thousandfold. So spiritually: until we are brought in our souls to prize the teach-

ings of God and the communications of divine wisdom—until we can distinguish between the pebble of man's teaching and the diamond of divine illumination—we shall neglect, we shall despise, we shall not value divine wisdom. But when we are brought to see and feel how, in every instance, we have erred when left to ourselves; what mistakes we have made; what backslidings we have been guilty of; what foolish things we have said, and what worse than foolish things we have done;—when we see folly bound up in our hearts, and stamped upon every word and action, then how we prize any portion of that wisdom which maketh wise unto salvation! and how at times we long for the droppings in of that dew and power into our souls, which shed abroad a sweet and unctuous light and lead the soul unto Jesus, to find peace in him!

2. But Jesus is also made unto us “righteousness.” Does not this imply that we are unrighteousness? For is not all that Jesus is, in exact proportion to our wants? So far as we are God's people, we find all our wants precisely met by him. Can we find a single spot into which a child of God can sink, to which some character of the Lord of life and glory is not adapted? Does he sink down as a fool before God? Does he feel such ignorance that he scarcely knows what he is, or where he is? Are the scriptures hidden from his understanding, his experience buried in darkness, and he himself in his own eyes, the worst of fools? How suitable, that Jesus, the Son of God, should be made unto him wisdom! Is he made to feel himself a polluted wretch, and brought painfully to know that all his righteousnesses are but filthy rags? that his iniquities, like the wind have taken him away? that he has not by nature one grain of that which is pleasing in the sight of God? that all his motives, all his thoughts, all his desires all his actions, all his words, bear upon them, bear in them, the deep-grained dye of guilt? Does he shrink into self-abasement at the sight? Does he loathe himself in dust and ashes? Does he feel that he is only fit to be trampled into hell as a polluted worm? When brought here, how suitable, how precious, is it to see that Jesus is made unto him righteousness!

Observe the word. It does not say, that the obedience of Jesus is made righteousness; but it says, that Jesus himself is made righteousness. It is perfectly true that the obedience of Christ to the law is the justifying righteousness of those that believe in his name; “for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,” and “by one man’s obedience many are made righteous.” But besides that, the Lord himself is their righteousness. Is not this the sure declaration of holy writ? “In him shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.” “This is the name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness.” What a sweet view does this give of Jesus! We look sometimes at Christ’s righteousness as distinct from Christ. Shall I use a figure? We look at the garment as distinct from the Maker and Wearer of the garment. We look at the righteousness so much, that we scarcely look at him who wrought out that righteousness. Now, we must not separate Jesus from his righteousness. We must not look merely at the garment, the imputed robe, and forget him that wrought it out, that puts it on, and that keeps it to this day in firm possession. But when we can see, that not only the obedience of Christ, but Christ himself—all that Jesus is—all that Jesus has, as the head of his church, as the risen Mediator, as the great High Priest over the house of God—when we can see that this God-man, Immanuel, is made unto his people righteousness, how it expands the prospect! Then we look, not merely at the robe itself, beautiful, comely, and glorious; we look farther—we look at him that made it. We do not look merely at the robe as distinct from him. We look at him who made that robe what it is—Jesus, who ever lives at the right hand of the Father to make intercession for us.

This, to my mind, is a sweet view. If I sink down into creature sinfulness, shame, and guilt, and see Jesus made of God unto me righteousness, what need I more? Has God made him so? Who can unmake him so? Has God made the Son of his love righteousness to my soul, that I may stand in him without spot, speck, or blemish? Who is to alter it? Can sin alter it? That is atoned for.

Can the devil alter it? He is chained down unto the judgment of the great day. Can the world alter it? They cannot stretch forth their finger to touch one thread of that robe, to touch one lineament of the Redeemer’s countenance. If he is made unto me righteousness, what more do I want? If I can find a shield, a shelter, and a refuge in him as my righteousness, what more can I want to preserve me from the charge of men or devils?

But there is the impartation of righteousness, as well as the imputation of it; and the impartation of it is the communication of a divine nature to the soul. Not merely the sheltering of the soul from the wrath to come by a robe cast around it, and by the interposition of the Redeemer’s glorious Person, but also the breathing of God’s image, the raising up of a new creature, and the stamping of Christ’s likeness on the heart.

3. We pass on to another thing that Christ is made to his people—that is, “sanctification.” What am I? What are you? Filthy, polluted, defiled; are we not? Do not some of us, more or less, daily feel altogether as an unclean thing? Is not every thought of our heart altogether vile? Does any holiness, any spirituality, any heavenly-mindedness, any purity, any resemblance to the divine image dwell in our hearts by nature? Not a grain, not an atom. How then can I, a polluted sinner, ever see the face of a holy God? How can I, a worm of earth, corrupted within and without by indwelling and committed sin, ever hope to see a holy God without shrinking into destruction? I cannot see him, except so far as the Lord of life and glory is made sanctification to me. Why should men start so at imputed sanctification? Why should not Christ’s holiness be imputed to his people as well as Christ’s righteousness? Why should they not stand sanctified in him, as well as justified? Why not? Is there anything in Jesus, as God-man Mediator, which he has not for his people? Has he any perfection, any attribute, any gift, any blessing, which is not for their use? Did he not sanctify himself that they might be sanctified by the truth? Is he not the holy Lamb of God, that they might be “holy, and without blame before him in love?”

What is my holiness, even such as God may be pleased to impart to me? Is it not, to say the least, scanty? Is it not, to say the least, but little in measure? But when we view the pure and spotless holiness of Jesus imputed to his people, and view them holy in him, pure in him, without spot in him, how it does away with all the wrinkles of the creature, and makes them stand holy and spotless before God.

But there is not only imputed sanctification, there is also imparted sanctification. Have I one grain of holiness in myself? Not one. Can all the men in the world, by all their united exertions, raise up a grain of spiritual holiness in their hearts? Not an atom, with all their efforts. If all the preachers in the world were to unite together for the purpose of working a grain of holiness in one man's soul, they might strive to all eternity: they could no more by their preaching create holiness, than by their preaching they could create a lump of gold. But because, by a gracious act of God the Father, Jesus is made unto his people sanctification, he imparts a measure of his own holiness to them. He works in them to will and to do of his own good pleasure; he sends the Holy Spirit, to raise up holy desires: in a word, he communicates a nature perfectly holy, which therefore loves holiness and has communion with a holy God; a heavenly, spiritual, and divine nature, which bathes in eternal things as its element, and enjoys spiritual things as sweet and precious. It may indeed be small in measure; and he that has it is often exercised and troubled because he has so little of it; yet he has enough just to know what it is. Has not your soul, though you feel to be a defiled wretch, though every iniquity is at times working in your heart, though every worm of obscenity and corruption is too often trailing its filthy slime upon your carnal mind—has it not felt, does it not sometimes feel, a measure of holiness Godward? Do you never feel a breathing forth of your soul into the bosom of a holy God? Heavenly desires—pure affections—singleness of eye—simplicity of purpose—a heart that longs to have the mind, image, and likeness of Jesus stamped upon it—this is a holiness such as the Lord of life and glory imparts out of his fullness to his

poor and needy family.

4. But lastly, he is made of God unto them “redemption.” Now, whatever Jesus is to his people, he is to them precisely according to their wants. Are they fools? He is their wisdom. Are they condemned? He is their righteousness. Are they unholy? He is their sanctification. Are they captives and prisoners, who have sold themselves under sin, and become slaves to Satan? Of God he is made unto them redemption. His redemption is imputed to them, is put to their account, is considered as theirs. When Jesus died upon the cross, he purchased a peculiar people. What he did then, and what he did there, is put to their account. The debt that he paid is crossed out of the books. The sum that he laid down is transferred to their account. Thus of God he is made unto them redemption.

But besides that, there is imparted redemption, as well as imputed redemption. What do I know of imputed redemption unless I know something of imparted redemption? But what can I know of imparted redemption, unless I have known what it is to be a captive, in bondage, in hard chains, oppressed by cruel slavery, unable to deliver myself, chained like a galley-slave to the galling oar, bound down with fetters, so that I cannot release myself? If I never have known that, how can I desire to know Jesus Christ as of God made unto me redemption? But if I catch a sight of Christ, as made unto me redemption, that communicates a gracious feeling of redemption by impartation. No sooner does the eye of faith catch what Jesus is made unto his people, than what he is to his people comes instantaneously into their heart. What he is to them, he is by imputation; and when they see what he is by imputation, then they enjoy it by impartation. Do I see redemption? Do I feel it, count it my own, and enjoy it? Then what does it do for me? Does it not break, in a measure, the chain of slavery? Does it not bring me out of captivity? Does it not, so long as it lasts, subdue my lusts, and overcome my pride? Does it not shatter the galling fetters of bondage? Does not faith in Christ as my redemption, communi-

cate a measure of that redemption to my spirit? It does. This is the connecting link between imputation and impartation.

God has made Christ all these to his people. He has set him up as their eternal Head, made him the Bridegroom of their souls, that out of his fullness they may all receive. Then, just in proportion as they learn these two lessons—what they are, and what he is—they receive him into their hearts and they see actually what he is to them in the purpose of God. Am I a fool? Do I feel it and know it? Have I had painful experience of it, so that all my creature wisdom is turned into one mass of foolishness? Do I catch by the eye of faith a view of the risen Mediator, “Immanuel, God with us,” and see what he is made of God to us? The moment my eye sees him as “wisdom,” that moment a measure of divine wisdom flows into my conscience. Am I polluted and defiled throughout? Have I no righteousness of my own? Is all my obedience imperfect? Am I unable to fulfill the requirements of God’s holy law? If once I catch by the eye of faith this glorious truth, through him who is the truth, that Jesus Christ is of God made unto me “righteousness”—the moment I see that by the eye of faith, that moment a measure of imparted righteousness flows into my heart? Am I an unholy, depraved, filthy wretch? Does corruption work in my heart? The moment I catch by the eye of faith Jesus made unto me of God “sanctification,” that moment a measure of sanctification comes into my heart, drawing up holy affections, casting out the love of the world, curbing my reigning lusts, and bringing my soul into submission at his footstool. Am I a poor captive, entangled by Satan, by the world, and my own evil heart? The moment that I catch this glorious view, that Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Father is made unto me “redemption”—if I can believe that he is made such for me, that I have a standing in him, and a union with him, so that he is my redemption—that moment a measure of deliverance comes into my soul, and redemption imputed becomes redemption imparted; the soul receives then internally what Christ has done externally. In a word, when Christ is received as “wis-

dom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,” he becomes all these in vital manifestation.

Now, do you see the steps? Just observe the connecting links. What do we learn first? We learn, first of all, what we are by nature. That is the first thing; there is no overstepping that. Then, just in proportion as we learn what we are by nature, and the Lord the Spirit unfolds the mysteries of the gospel to our understanding, and brings a sweet revelation of them into our conscience, do we see and feel what Jesus is made unto his people: and we see and feel that he has everything our souls want: that we have not a single necessity that there is not ample provision made for in the gospel—not a need unsupplied—not a malady without a remedy—not a sinking without a corresponding rising. But what is the effect of it? Why, no sooner is this seen, than a measure of it is communicated to the heart. First, I must see what I am; secondly, I must see what Christ is; thirdly, I must feel that Christ is all this to me: and when I see what I am, and see what Christ is, and then feel a measure of what Christ is for my soul, then Christ becomes to me inwardly what he is outwardly. He becomes in my heart what he is revealed in the word of truth; and this is the only way whereby we can have a vital and manifest union with him.

III.—But this leads me to the grand crowning point—“According as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” Man may glory. Yes: God has determined that man shall glory. But in what, and in whom? In himself? No; God has for ever trampled man’s glory under foot. He shall glory, but he shall never glory in self; for if he glory in himself, where God is, he never will come. God’s purpose is to stain the pride of human glory.

“He that glorieth”—yes, we may glory; we may have a song of triumph; if the Lord do but tune our hearts to sweet melody, we may speak in accents of glory and thanksgiving—“he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” Look at the words: “Glory in the Lord.” Not glory in himself, whatever he be—however deep his experience, however great his abilities, however consistent his conduct.

No creature shall ever, in the sight of God, glory in itself; but we may glory in the Lord as of God made unto us all that he has determined he shall be. what a sweet losing of one's self there is in Christ! See how he has raised up Adam's fallen progeny! See how he has given the elect a standing in Christ which they never had in their fallen progenitor! Adam could glory. Adam had natural wisdom, creature righteousness, native strength, and created innocence. He might glory in these. Just as a horse can, without sin or shame, curve his proud neck, and glory in his strength when he paweth in the valley, as Job speaks: so Adam, in his native innocence, could glory in what God had made him. But when Adam fell to the very depths of creature depravity, all his glory was for ever lost: the pride of the creature was for ever stained.

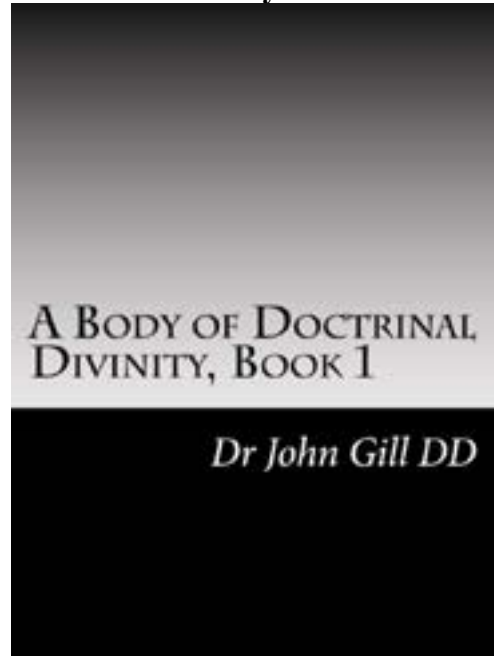
But God has determined that men may glory still: only he has changed the object of that glory, and put that glory upon, and centered that glory in his only-begotten Son. He turns the eyes of his poor needy family to look to him for salvation, and to glory in him: for "in him shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."

Sure I am, from the little I have felt (and it is but a little), there never can be any feeling so sweet as to glory in the Lord alone. Glory in my wisdom! Why, if I were to do so, there is a worm at the very bud of that glory. There is misery in the very feeling of self-esteem. Glory in anything I am! It is nothing but "vanity and vexation of spirit." But if I lose myself, trample myself under foot—cease from my own glory, strength, and wisdom—lose it all, put it all aside, despise it as nothing worth, and look unto him who "of God is made wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" to his people—I may glory then, and my glory shall be this—may it be my glory in time, and may it be my and your glory in eternity—to glory in the Lord—to glory in his wisdom, in his righteousness, in his sanctification, in his redemption—to glory in him for what he is in himself, and glory in him for what he is to his people. This is a sweet absorption of the creature into

the Lord of life and glory. This is indeed taking off the crown of human pride, and setting it upon the head of him who alone is worthy to wear it.

This is indeed a sweet loss; to lose our own wisdom and obtain divine wisdom; lose all that the flesh can boast of, and the flesh can rejoice in—and find it all again heightened, shall I say?—no, not heightened, for it is of a totally distinct nature—find it all of different and more glorious kind in the Lord Jesus, as of God made unto us "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

A Body Of Doctrinal Divinity Book 1**A System of Practical Truths**

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12 Of The Love Of God

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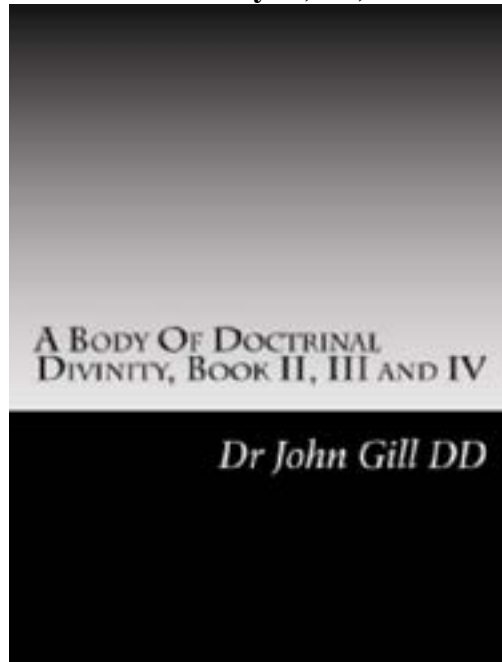
29 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of

The Father.

30 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of The Son.

31 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of The Holy Spirit.

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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 III Of The Decree Of Rejection, Of Some Angels, And Of Some Men.

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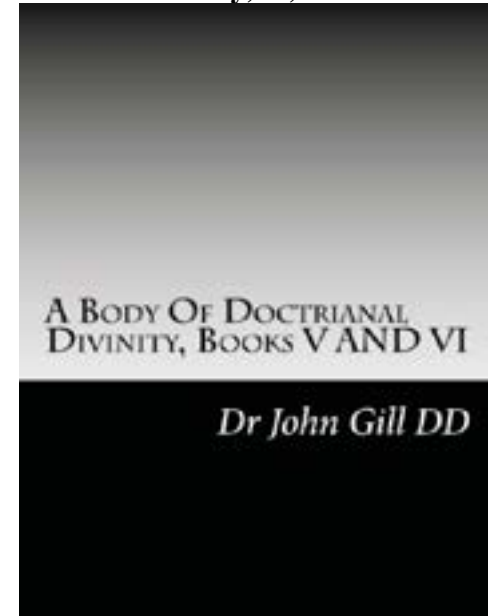
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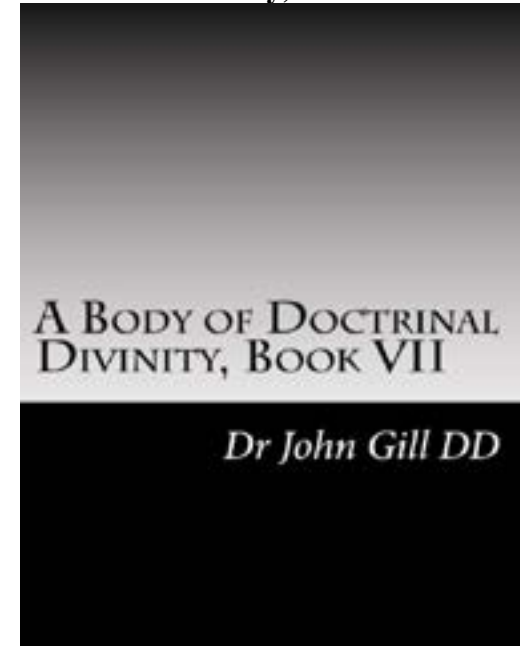
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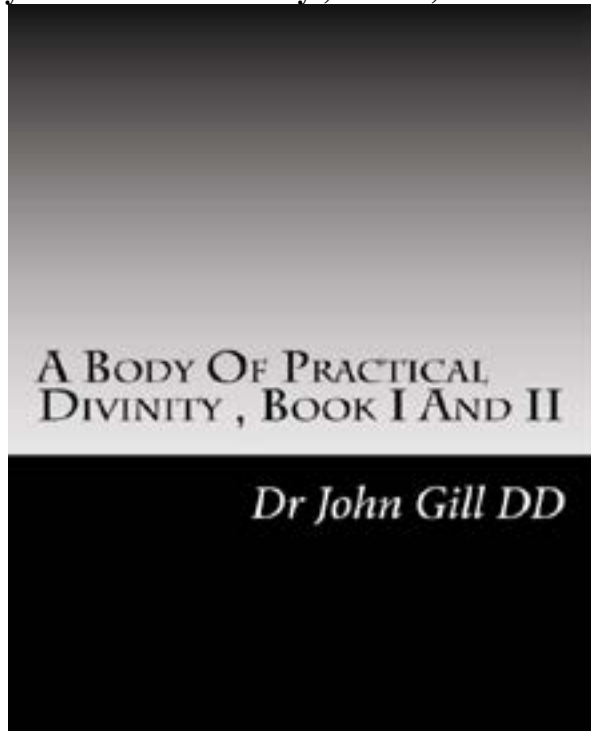
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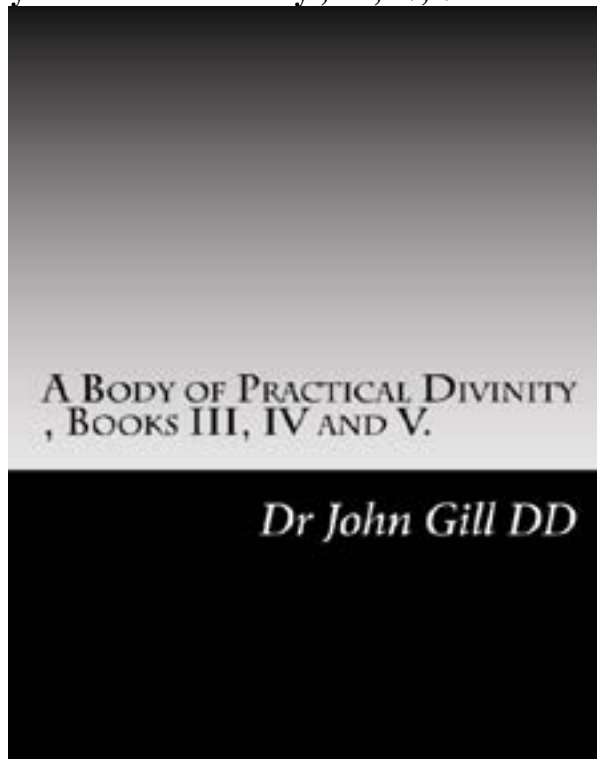
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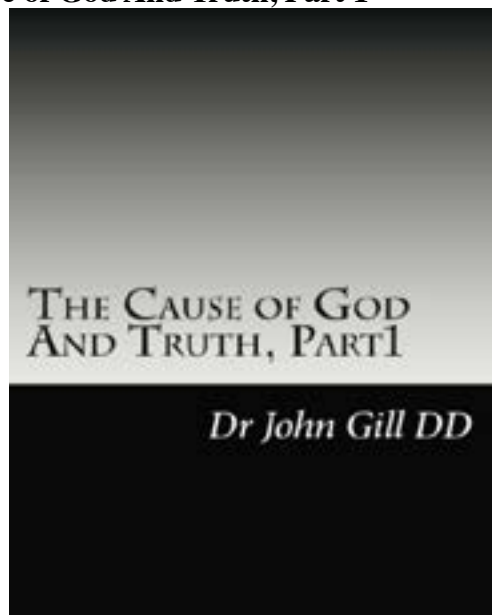
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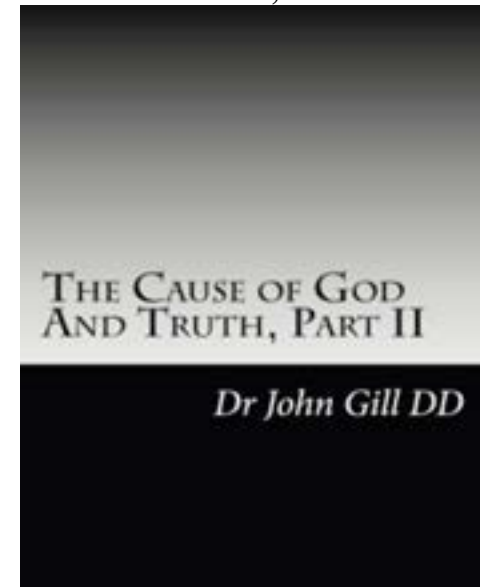
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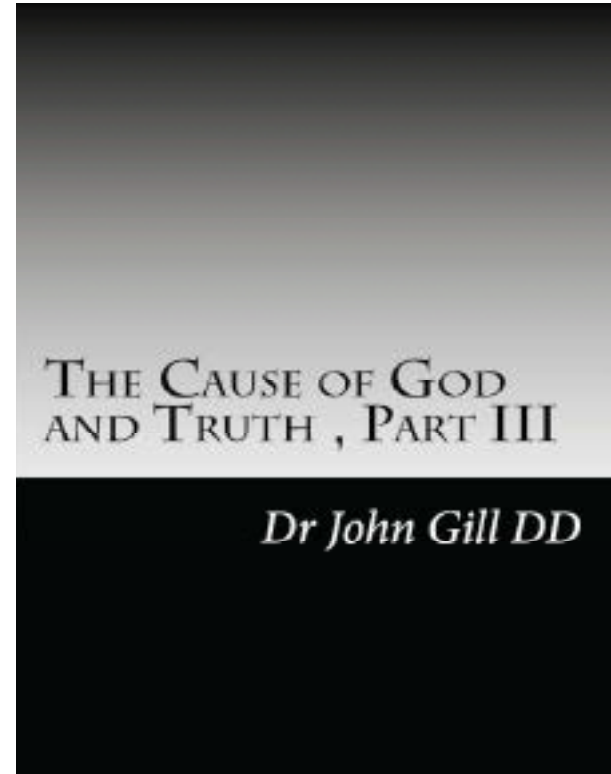
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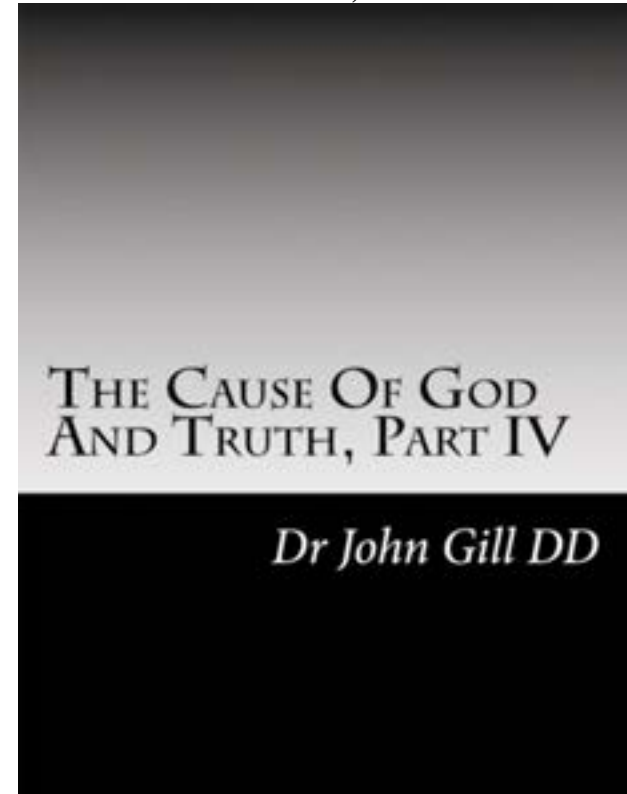
The following work was undertaken and begun about the year 1733 or 1734, at which time Dr. Whitby's Discourse on the Five Points was reprinting, judged to be a masterpiece on the subject, in the English tongue, and accounted an unanswerable one ; and it was almost in the mouth of every one, as an objection to the Calvinists, Why do not ye answer Dr. Whitby ? Induced hereby, I determined to give it another reading, and found myself inclined to answer it, and thought this was a very proper and seasonable time to engage in such a work.

In the year 1735, the First Part of this work was published, in which are considered the several passages of Scripture made use of by Dr. Whitby and others in favour of the Universal Scheme, and against the Calvinistical Scheme, in which their arguments and objections are answered, and the several passages set in a just and proper light. These, and what are contained in the following Part in favour of the Particular Scheme, are extracted from Sermons delivered in a Wednesday evening's lecture.

The Second Part was published in the year 1736, in which the several passages of Scripture in favour of special and distinguishing grace, and the arguments from them, are vindicated from the exceptions of the Arminians, and particularly from Dr. Whitby, and a reply made to answers and objections to them.

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.

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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