

J.C. Philpot

Sermons

Volume II

February 1861

Strict and Particular Baptists Minister

For 26 years

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

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

Reproduced by Bierton Particular Baptists
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 Fareham
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www.BiertonParticularBaptists.co.uk

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph Charles Philpot (1802 – 1869) was known as “The Seceder”. 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.”

178 Sin Condemned and Righteousness Fulfilled

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Feb. 3, 1861

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

179 The Sentence of Death in Ourselves

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Feb. 17, 1861

“But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.”

180 The New Covenant and the Blood of Sprinkling

61

March 31, 1861

“And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

181 The Valley of Achor for a Door of Hope

85

April 14, 1861

“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.”

182 Zion's Waymarks 109

Aug. 18, 1861

“Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.”

184 Salvation and Sanctification, in Present Grace and Future Glory 137

Nov. 10, 1861

“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

185 The Whole Armour of God 164

Dec. 22, 1861

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.”

186 The Walk In The Fields And Among The Vineyards 189

January 5, 1862

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190 The Work Of His Ministering Servants 276

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October 12, 1862

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178 Sin Condemned and Righteousness Fulfilled

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning,
Feb. 3, 1861

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

Romans 8:3, 4

What a wondrous change both of views and feelings is produced in the soul when divine light and life first enter it from above! It is indeed a revolution, a mighty revolution, for it is effected by no power short of his who says, “Behold, I create all things new.” The Scriptures, therefore, when they make mention of this mighty change, always speak of it as being effected by the power of God. Sometimes, for instance, it is spoken of as an “opening of the eyes,” and a turning of sinners “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” (Acts 26:18.) Sometimes it is spoken of as a deliverance from the power of darkness, and a translation into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13.) At other times it is compared to a birth, a new birth, as in those words of the Lord, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3.) At other times to a resurrection from the dead: “You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.” (Eph. 2:1, 4, 5.) Sometimes to a creation, as in the words, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (or, as in the margin, “a new creation;”) “old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.” (2 Cor. 5:17.) All these expressions imply a change by a power not our own.

Now one of the first fruits and effects of this heavenly change,

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this mighty revolution, is the different views and feelings that the regenerated soul entertains concerning the law of God. Before it is quickened into divine life, the law exerts no commanding power, no supreme and domineering authority over it. In word, perhaps, in name, we yield to it an unwilling allegiance; but the law as yet has not asserted its right nor spoken to us as with the voice of God. Thus the apostle speaks of himself—and we cannot find a more vivid or more experimental description of what the soul feels before and after the law has come with power than his relation of his own experience—“I was alive without the law once;” that is, not alive unto God in the best sense of the word; nor alive spiritually by regenerating grace, or by living a life of faith on the Son of God; but alive in this sense, that he had not then been killed by the sentence of the condemning law in his conscience. In this sense the soul is alive before it is dead; for never having felt the killing power of a condemning law, it is at ease in Zion, alive to a round of duties, easily satisfied with a multiplicity of forms from which it is expecting life and salvation, but utterly dead to a knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. But when God, by the operation of his word upon the heart, which is as a hammer to break the rock in pieces (Jer. 23:29), batters down the walls of Pharisaic pride and self-righteousness, then the law enters through the breach with a whole army of terrors. Before the law is made known to the conscience by the power of God, the soul is like such a city as Laish, of which we read that “the people therein dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure.” (Judges 18:7.) But when the children of Dan fell upon Laish and made a breach in the walls, then as an invading army they entered through the breach, and smote the citizens with the edge of the sword. (Judges 18:27.) So as long as the soul is alive without the law, like Laish, it is easy and quiet after the manner of the luxurious Zidonians, who engaged in trade and traffic, and having the sea for their rampart, lived without external war or internal strife. But when the word of God is applied with

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quicken power to make a breach in the walls of Pharisaism—for in this sense “the rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit,” (Prov. 18:11,)—then through this breach enters the law as an invading army; and as an army let loose upon a city, sacks, plunders, massacres, and lays waste in all directions, so does the law attack and slay a guilty conscience. Thus the apostle, speaking of his own experience, Romans 7:9, says, “when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” Sin was quiet before. But when the law came, it stirred sin up; it put new life into it; it revived sin out of its slumber in which it had been lying like a viper under a hedge in winter, or a dog sleeping at night in its kennel. The hot ray of the sun does not give the viper its poison fang; nor does the passing step of the traveller set the strong tooth in the jaw of the mastiff. So the law does not create sin, though it calls it up; is not the author of it, though it revives it. The apostle therefore says, “The motions of sin which were by the law did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death;” and again, “But sin taking occasion by the commandment wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.” (Rom. 7:5, 8.) Thus the law as reviving every secret lust and putting strength into every corruption, is armed as it were with a double power—a power to condemn the transgressor, and a power to stir up the transgression; for such is the hideous nature of sin, that “it works death in us by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.” Thus Paul says of himself, “For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin.” (Rom. 7:13, 14.) He thus felt that the law was holy, but he unholy; the law just, but he a criminal; the law good, but he vile. Taking him, then, as an exemplar of one who felt in no common measure the operation and the condemnation of the law in his conscience, we see how a poor sinner is brought in guilty before God; for the law being opposed to sin, and he being in himself nothing but a mass of sin; the law condemning every sinful thought, and he being full of sinful thoughts; the law

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condemning every vile imagination, and he prone to indulge in every vile imagination; the law condemning every foolish word, and his tongue ever dropping foolish words; the law condemning every unbecoming look, and he not able to keep his eyes from wandering after evil; the law requiring a perfect obedience, in which no allowance is made for any deviation, and he continually unable to render that obedience; the law thundering in his ears, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength,” and he not having a grain of that love; the law bidding him love his neighbour as himself, when his heart, by nature is full of enmity against that neighbour;—this ministration of death entering into his conscience, like an invading army through the breach into a besieged town, kills, condemns, and brings them in guilty before God. But, still to pursue Paul’s experience, if when he is sunk under this condemning sentence, and is without help, or hope in himself, God is pleased to reveal to his soul salvation through the blood of the Lamb, then we see that the same man who cried out, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” when he gets a view by faith of the atoning blood, justifying obedience, and finished work of the Son of God, bursts forth in a moment, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” He has found a ransom; a deliverer has come to the rescue; atoning blood is revealed to his conscience; the love of God shed abroad in his heart; and under the sweet influence of God’s grace, he can raise a joyful song of praise, that through Jesus Christ his Lord he is saved from death and hell.

Having thus laid the foundation deep and broad from his own experience, the apostle goes on to tell us in the next chapter, which is but a continuation of the preceding, the happy state of all who are interested in this great salvation. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” He could see the eternal security of those who had an interest in the Person and work and blood of the Lamb. He could see that there was no condemnation for them; that let the law utter its loudest

thunders and flash before their eyes its most forked lightnings, yet being in Christ they were secure in him; and therefore for them there was no condemnation. But lest any man might mistake the characters to whom these blessings belonged, he adds, “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;” for if a man be still walking after the flesh, he has no evidence of being in Christ Jesus. He has no testimony that he is manifestly interested in his blood and righteousness, and as such is free from condemnation; for as still walking after the flesh, he lies in all the filth and under all the condemnation of the flesh. He then goes on, in the verse preceding our text, to show how “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” meaning thereby the grace of God in the heart, the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the soul, which was to him a law, had made him free from the law of sin and death under which he had groaned. And then he proceeds, in the words which I have read, and from which I hope to speak this morning, to show how this was effected, by God “sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.”

In opening up our text, I shall, as the Lord may enable,

I.—First, show what the law cannot do, and the reason: because it is “weak through the flesh.”

II.—Secondly, what God has done by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, viz., “condemned sin in the flesh.”

III.—Thirdly, the fruit and effect of God sending his own Son, and thus condemning sin in the flesh, “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.”

IV.—And lastly, the characters in whom this righteousness is fulfilled: those “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

I.—Now does it not surprise your mind that after the description which the Holy Ghost has given of the strength of the law, the apostle should say that it was weak? How can the law be weak if it can kill, accuse, condemn, and bring the whole world in guilty before God? You must understand, then, that the law is not weak in itself: nothing can be more strong except the Gospel.

But the law is weak through the flesh. This, therefore, with God’s blessing, I shall endeavour to explain: and in so doing, shall show, first, how the law is strong, and then how the law is weak. Nor can I take a better way of illustrating this than by referring to human laws, for by looking at the law of man we may gather up some spiritual idea of the holy law of God.

i. What makes the law, as a human institution, strong?

1. The authority of the law giver. In our country, law is strong. Why so? Because no law can be passed except by the three estates of the realm met together in Parliament. To that collective authority all bow. Every class in society, with every individual from the peer to the peasant, and in fact all except the lawless outcasts, the mere waifs and strays of society, bow to the law on account of the authority whereby it is promulgated. But suppose that a number of people were to meet together, say in Edinburgh or Dublin, call themselves a Parliament and make laws: who would feel bound to obey them? It would be a treasonable act and their pretended laws could not be put in execution. But our laws, being passed in Parliament, by an authority which all recognize, are thus made strong.

2. But there is another thing needed, which is, sufficient force to carry the law into execution. The legislative power may be strong, but the executive weak. It is so in the United States, and in some measure so in Ireland. But in our country we have a whole array of judges, magistrates, and police, and these backed not only by an army of a hundred thousand men, but by the universal voice of the country to carry the law into execution. In England therefore the law is strong, but not so in other countries. Whether from weakness of the legislative or from weakness of the executive, in many countries the law is weak. In America, a man may whip his slave to death; in Ireland, may shoot at his landlord from behind a hedge, and both escape being hanged, not because each crime is not murder, but because the leniency of the jury in the one country, and the unwillingness of the people to give evidence in

the other, favour the escape of the criminal. We see then that in order to be strong, a law must have not only a trumpet voice but an iron hand. Now carry these two ideas into spiritual things, and see whether they do not both meet in the law of God. Look at its Legislator. Who gave the law? The great and glorious “I am,” the ever-living Jehovah, the Judge of heaven and earth, the Almighty Creator of all things, before whom all the hosts of heaven and all the inhabitants of the earth are less than nothing and vanity. Must not that law be strong which emanated from the great God of heaven and earth? And look at the power which that great and glorious Judge can wield. Is any one beyond his reach? Can any heart escape his piercing glance? Can any hide himself in secret places where the hand of God cannot find him? Thus whether we look at the authority of the Lawgiver, or the power that he can display in executing his commands, we see how strong the law of God is.

3. But as an additional proof of the majesty and power of God in his holy law, observe the accompanying circumstances which marked its first promulgation. Go to mount Sinai where that law was given and see how it was attended by the ministration of angels, that holy mount being surrounded by legions of bright angelic beings, every one of them swift to execute God’s commands, any one able to smite an army like that of Sennacherib with instant death. See also how it was given in lightning and thunder, in darkness and tempest; see how the very mountain quaked, the earth rocked, and so terrible was the sight that Moses himself, that man of God, said, I exceedingly fear and quake.

4. Then, again, look at the authority of the law over men generally—how it can and will accuse every man and bring him in guilty before God for positive sins, for actual transgressions. See, too, how it condemns every unclean thought and every foolish word. View how it thus seizes the whole human race, brings them before God’s tribunal, and condemns them there as guilty before a heart-searching Jehovah. Hear, too, how the law curses all who are

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disobedient to it with an everlasting curse, declaring as in tones of thunder, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” Then see how the law as its last judicial act upon earth, takes every impenitent, unbelieving sinner in death and binds him as with adamantine chains, to await the judgment of the great day.

5. Having thus seen its authority over sinners, next look at its effect upon the consciences of saints. How it slays their self-righteousness, cuts them off from all schemes of pleasing God by any obedience of the flesh, and strips them naked and bare of all creature help or hope. Thus when we look at the law under these five aspects, the authority of the Lawgiver, his power to execute its penalties, the way in which it was revealed from Mount Sinai, its dominion over sinners, and its effect upon saints, can we think it is weak? Must we not rather say, “O how strong!”

ii. Yet the apostle declares that the law was weak, and that in consequence of this weakness there was that which it could not do. What, then, could the law not do? There were two things which the law could not do, and yet unless they were done, not a single soul could be saved, and the whole human race must have perished under the wrath of God.

1. One was to save. This the law could not do. It can curse, but it cannot bless; it can send to hell, but it cannot take to heaven; it can bring bondage, wrath, guilt, fear and terror into men’s consciences, but it cannot communicate to them pardon, deliverance and peace. And why? Because it merely says, “Do this and live.” It makes no provision for disobedience; it does not breathe a syllable of mercy for a transgressor; it holds out no pardon to the sinner. If we could keep it we might be justified by it; but not being able to obey, we must fall under its condemnation as disobedient.

2. Nor can the law sanctify. There is no provision in it to communicate holiness to the soul—that holiness without which no man can see the Lord. Being a ministration of death it cannot

communicate life; not being the ministration of the Spirit, it has no power to make the soul meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. It is true that many try to make themselves holy by the law, but there being no provision in it to supply real sanctification, to bestow grace, to communicate a spiritual conformity to the image of God's dear Son, it leaves the heart still carnal; and as those "who are in the flesh cannot please God," they cannot rise into the enjoyment of his eternal presence.

iii. But the apostle says it was "weak through the flesh;" here it is that we gather up the real cause of the law being weak. It is not weak in itself, for it is armed with all the strength of God; but the flesh, that is, human nature in its fallen condition, is unable to obey it, and thus the law fails, not from any want of power in God to command, but from want of power in man to obey. Let us seek an illustration of this from human laws.

Suppose that Parliament were to pass a law that not a single drop of beer or wine, or any spirituous drink, should be sold on the Lord's day in London. It might be an excellent provision, and if I am not mistaken it is to a certain extent effected by municipal regulation in Scotland. But could that law be carried out in the metropolis? Say that an attempt were made to carry it out with a view to suppress or check intoxication, would it stop drunkenness in secret? Has it stopped it in Glasgow? would it stop it in London? The law might be good—an excellent law, if men would obey it; but you cannot make drunkards temperate by act of Parliament. Therefore the law might be good, yet it would be weak, because of the weakness of the flesh. So it is with the law of God. The law of God commands men to obey on the penalty of eternal damnation if they obey not. The law bids them love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, but they cannot do it; and therefore as it cannot part with, or lower its demands because man has lost its power to obey, it visits their disobedience with a most solemn curse. The sinner being unable to render that love, to yield that obedience, the law is weak, for as a human law

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requires obedience and punishes for disobedience, yet gives no power to obey it, so it is with the law of God. This may seem hard doctrine; but how can it be otherwise? The law cannot give life; as the Apostle says, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." (Gal. 3:21.)

Look, then, at the whole human race, and see what a state they are in. See how they are transgressors, condemned by the law; brought in guilty before God; without any salvation, without any sanctification; without strength to obey what God commands, and yet as disobedient justly amenable to God's eternal justice. O what a state! O what an end!

Now how justly God might have left all mankind to reap the fruit of their disobedience! He left the fallen angels to the consequences of their transgression; he made no provision for their recovery. No Saviour, no Redeemer, interposed between them and eternal wrath. They sinned, and were left to suffer the consequences; they transgressed, and must for ever endure the penalty. It might have been so, and that with the strictest justice, with the whole human race. There was no more call upon God to redeem man than there was to redeem the fallen angels. But he was pleased to do so. In his own sovereign grace; in his infinite compassion and boundless mercy, he was pleased to provide a way whereby sinners could be saved—a way so peculiarly his own, that whilst his justice should sustain no tarnish, his grace might shine forth with everlasting lustre.

II. This brings us to our second point, the mission of God's dear Son, that he might do what the law was unable to do; according to the words of our text: "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh."

i. God knew what man would be, and that in consequence of the fall, he could not do what his holy law required. But he could not lower the demands of his law to meet the sinner upon sinful ground; he could not lessen its claims upon the obedience

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of his creatures, because those creatures had, by their own sin, brought upon themselves an incapacity to obey. That would be to infringe his own justice, to sacrifice his own holiness. Do human laws accommodate themselves to the crimes of our criminal population? Because some men steal and others murder, must the law be softened down to accommodate thieves and to give license to murderers? Such a law, if law it could be called, would but multiply crime and break to pieces the very bonds of society. If a drunkard by habitual drunkenness render himself incapable of sobriety, is his intoxication less a sin? But though God could not lower the claims of the law, yet in order to save a guilty race, he devised a plan in his own eternal mind to save and sanctify fallen, polluted sinners, which will be the admiration of the saints of God throughout all eternity; to taste which in a measure is the only real happiness upon earth, and to enjoy which in full, will be the only true bliss in heaven. He sent his own Son. Now as I have written and spoken so much about the eternal Sonship of Christ, I shall not dwell much upon that point this morning. You know well what my views are, and I hope they have an echo in your own bosom from your having had some personal revelation of the Son of God to your own soul, for that indeed is the only way whereby he can be effectually known as the Son of the Father in truth and love. But do admire with me for a few moments the wondrous mercy and love of God in sending his own Son.

Who could be so fit to come as God's only begotten Son? Where could be found so meet a representative? When our Queen lately would send to Canada a fitting representative of herself, whom did she select for that purpose? Not the Prime Minister: he had not dignity enough. She sent her eldest son, not her son in name or office; not her son as becoming so by being sent upon that mission; but her own true and proper son, the legitimate heir of her crown and dignity. When, then, the Prince of Wales went from place to place in that important colony, he was received with honour as being the Queen's own son, with such honours as could

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have been accorded to no one else except her Majesty herself. So it is in grace. Who can be so fit a representative of the majesty, power, and glory; who can be so fit a witness of the love, mercy, and grace of God, as his own Son? It is true that we cannot comprehend the mystery how the Lord Jesus Christ can be the eternal Son of God. It is hidden from mortal eyes and from the comprehension of finite understandings, for the Lord himself declared that "no one knoweth the Son but the Father." (Matt. 11:27.) But we receive it as a most blessed truth on the authority of God's own testimony in the word; and as our eyes are enlightened by divine teaching, and our heart touched by divine power, we not only believe it, but see in it inexpressible blessedness and feel in it indescribable beauty, grace, and glory. As revealed to our soul by the power of God, we see in Jesus, as God's own Son, the very glory of God himself; for he is "the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his Person." By him God has revealed himself to the sons of men; he has come out of that light which no man can approach unto, and made himself known in the person and work of his dear Son. The apostle therefore says, "God; who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Now when we see by faith the only begotten Son of God coming forth from the bosom of his Father, we see not only Deity shining forth conspicuously in him as God the Son, but we see all the love, mercy, grace and truth of God reflected in his glorious Person, for "we behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." (John 1:14.)

ii. But God sent him "in the likeness of sinful flesh." He did not come, as he will one day come, arrayed in all his eternal glory. He did not appear in all the open majesty of the Godhead, nor in all the manifested brightness of the image of God. But he came "in the likeness of sinful flesh." Carefully observe these words, for they contain in them deep and important truth. He did not come in sinful flesh, but in the likeness of it. Our Lord's flesh was sinless

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flesh. He did not take a fallen, but an unfallen nature. Though born of a sinful woman, yet the nature he took in her womb was not polluted by her sins, either original or actual; for his pure, holy, and immortal humanity was formed in a miraculous manner, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and therefore “a holy thing,” which was united in the moment of conception to the glorious Person of the Son of God. Yet it was “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” He had a body like our own, in which dwelt a holy and immortal soul, so that his pure humanity was not a visionary phantasm, a shadowy appearance, but a true human nature in all points like ours, with the exception of sin. Thus, though in his human nature incapable of sin or sickness, he appeared amongst the sons of men as one like unto them; yet was “separate from sinners,” as having a human nature absolutely sinless. Here, then, is a heavenly mystery. There could have been no redemption of man had the Redeemer not become man; yet, unless a sinless man, he could not have been a Saviour of sinful men. This body God prepared for him. He took it thereby to fulfil God’s will, as he says of himself, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.” (Heb. 10:7.)

iii. “And for sin,” or, as it reads in the margin (and I adopt that meaning), “by a sacrifice of sin.” A sacrifice was needed, an expiation demanded, an atonement required, in order that sin might be pardoned: for “without shedding of blood is no remission.” Thus, we find in the Levitical ritual a constant offering of sacrifice; not only on such solemn and stated occasions as the day of atonement, but every morning and evening; for at these periods a lamb was duly offered. This daily sacrifice, we know, was typical of “the Lamb of God who beareth the sins of the world;” and he is, therefore, said to have been “a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev. 5:6.) Our blessed Lord offered himself “for sin;” that is, that he might put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. We therefore read, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24); and we are said by the same apostle to have “been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ,

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as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.” (1 Peter 1:19.) It was absolutely necessary either that the sinner should suffer in his own person, or in that of a substitute. Jesus became this substitute; he stood virtually in the sinner’s place, and endured in his holy body and soul the punishment due to him; for he “was numbered with the transgressors.” He thus, by the shedding of his most precious blood, opened in his sacred body a fountain for all sin and all uncleanness. (Zech. 13:1.) The cross was the place on which this sacrifice was offered; for as the blood of the slain lamb was poured out at the foot of the altar, sprinkled upon its horns, and burned in its ever enduring fire, so our blessed Lord shed his blood upon the cross. He there endured the wrath of God to the uttermost; he there put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; he there offered his holy soul and body, the whole of his pure and sacred humanity, in union with his eternal Deity, as an expiation for the sins of his people. Thus all their sin was atoned for, expiated, put away, blotted out, and will never more be imputed to them. This is the grand mystery of redeeming love and atoning blood. Here the cross shines forth in all its splendour; here God and man meet at the sacrifice of the God-Man; and here, amidst the sufferings and sorrows, the groans and tears, the blood and obedience of God’s dear Son in our nature, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

iv. Thus we see that God, by sending his own Son, did what the law could not do: he “condemned sin in the flesh.” But you will say, “Does not the law condemn sin?” It does, for it is “the ministration of condemnation,” as the apostle tells us. (2 Cor. 3:9.) But the law does not condemn sin in the same way that God condemned it when he sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and by this wondrous act of love and mercy made him a sacrifice for sin. I will show you how.

1. God condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus Christ when he laid our sins upon him, and by taking vengeance of our transgressions in the Person of his own dear Son virtually condemned, and by

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condemning put them away. We read of our most gracious Lord that “God made him sin for us who knew no sin.” (2 Cor. 5:21.) Thus he not only bore sin as our sin-bearer, but was viewed and treated by divine Justice as though he himself were all sin. He so took the sins of his people upon himself, that it was as if the whole mass of their sins met in him. Justice, therefore, viewing him as made sin for us, fell upon him as a creditor falls upon his debtor; and as God’s justice goes hand in hand with God’s wrath, for wrath is but offended justice, the whole wrath of God fell upon the head of Jesus as bearing sin. When justice therefore combined with wrath fell upon the sacred head and discharged all their contents into the bosom of Jesus, God thereby condemned sin in the flesh, for he condemned it in the flesh of Jesus Christ by their wreaking his vengeance upon it, and visiting with righteous condemnation the sins which Jesus was bearing by imputation in his body on the tree. Thus it was upon the cross that God judged sin, condemned it, passed sentence upon it, and executed it, by the sufferings and death of his only begotten Son. The sins therefore of God’s people being judged, condemned, and executed in the sufferings, blood-shedding and death of the incarnate Son of God, can no longer be visited with punishment. God having once condemned sin in the person of Jesus Christ; having accepted the sacrifice thus offered, and ever viewing him as the Surety and Representative of his people, cannot condemn sin again in their persons. It would be to punish sin twice over—to punish it first in the Representative, and then in the represented; to exact the penalty first from the Surety and then from the original debtor. Here, then, is the great blessedness of such a sacrifice, that God having once condemned sin in the person of Jesus Christ, it was expiated, atoned for, blotted out as a cloud from the sky, and will never be brought against the family of God any more. The law could not do this. It could condemn sin, but could not put it away. The law condemns sin in individuals. It says “Thou, O man, art guilty; thou, O woman, art a transgressor, and as such ye are both

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doomed to die.” But it did not and could not take the aggregate of sin, the whole mass of transgression, lay it upon the head of God’s Son, and by condemning it in his Person, remove it all away. It takes individuals one by one, curses each and all, and leaves them under the weight and personal guilt of their own transgressions, affording them no means of escape, opening to them no door of hope. But God took another way: he took all the sins of millions of redeemed sinners, laid them in all their burning mass upon the head of his dear Son, judged, condemned, and punished them, and when they were thus condemned and punished, he cast them all behind his back, and drowned them in the depths of the sea. Here then we learn the strictness of justice, the severity of the law, and the impossibility that God can “clear the guilty” in any other way than through the bloodshedding and sacrifice of his own dear Son. Thus at the foot of the cross, we see justice and mercy equally triumphant. What other place of refuge, then, is there for poor guilty sinners, who feel the weight and burden of sin? Here and here only is mercy revealed and pardon manifested, and hence will arise an eternal tribute of praise to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as all alike engaged in contriving, executing, and applying so great, so glorious, so free, and so everlasting a salvation.

2. But there is another meaning of the words which I think is well worth our consideration, for it casts a great light upon our text, throwing its beams, as it were, in two directions, upon that which precedes and upon that which follows the expression, “condemned sin in the flesh.” God was determined to show to men and angels his holy abhorrence of evil, his righteous condemnation of sin in a new, unlooked for, and yet most convincing way. To cast the sinning angels out of heaven; to banish Adam from Paradise; to destroy the old world by a flood; to burn with fire from heaven Sodom and Gomorrah—these examples of God’s displeasure against sin were not sufficient to express his condemnation of it. He would therefore take another way of making it manifest. And what was this? By sending his own Son out of his bosom in

the likeness of sinful flesh, and offering him as a sacrifice for sin upon the tree at Calvary, he would not only whilst time endures, but throughout all eternity, make it manifest how he abhorred sin, and how his righteous character must for ever condemn it. It is almost as though he would say, "The law condemns sin, but the law cannot show before men and angels its true and hideous character. It cannot sufficiently reveal any holy indignation against it, my eternal abhorrence of it, and the necessity that lies upon me to punish it. This I will now show by sending my own Son, and punishing him in the sinner's place, and thus it shall be manifested before men and angels that I will not spare it, even though I have to wreak my vengeance against it in the Person of the Son of my love." Look then at these two things, the love of God to poor guilty man in not sparing his own Son, and yet the hatred of God against sin in condemning it in the flesh of Jesus. The Apostle tells us that he and his brother Apostles were made a spectacle to angels (1. Cor. 4:9); and we read that a part of "the mystery of godliness is Jesus seen of angels." (1. Tim. 3:16.) We may well, therefore, conceive what a spectacle to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places," was the suffering Son of God upon the cross. It is almost as if God said to them by it, "If you want to see what sin really is, you cannot see it in the fall of your brother angels; you cannot see it in the myriads of human beings cursed and condemned by the law; you cannot see it even in the depths of hell. I will show you sin in blacker colours still: you shall see it in the sufferings of my dear Son; in his agonies of body and soul, and in what he as a holy, innocent Lamb endured under my wrath, when he consented to take the sinner's place." What wondrous wisdom, what depths of love, what treasures of mercy, what heights of grace were thus revealed and brought to light in the unsparing condemnation of sin, and yet in the full and free pardon of the sinner!

3. But there is a third sense, by which it is brought to bear still more closely upon the heart of the saint of God; I mean the experience of this condemnation of sin in the conscience of a

believer. The law condemns you; and you may have felt its curse and its guilt as a most awful reality. Night and day you may have felt its condemnation in your conscience, and have truly cried with anguish of spirit, "Guilty, guilty before thee, O God." But with all this anguish of spirit there was no real repentance, nor godly sorrow, nor sight of sin in its hideous blackness; for the law not being the ministration of the Spirit cannot communicate repentance unto life nor melt the heart into real contrition. But if you have ever had a view by faith of the suffering Son of God in the garden and upon the cross; if you have ever seen the wrath of God due to you falling upon the head of the God-Man; and viewed a bleeding, agonising Immanuel, then you have seen and felt in the depths of your conscience what a dreadful thing sin is. It is in this way that God condemns sin in your flesh. He condemned it on the cross in the flesh of Immanuel. In his suffering humanity was God's open display of his condemnation of sin. But when he brings a sinner to the foot of the cross and there reveals to him the Son of his love in his sufferings and death, then by this sight he condemns sin in the flesh of the believer. Then the broken-hearted child of God looks unto him whom he has pierced and mourns for him as one mourneth for his only son, and is in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. (Zech. 12:10.) Under this sight he feels what a dreadful thing sin is. "Oh," he says, "did God afflict his dear Son? Did Jesus, the darling of God, endure all these sufferings and sorrows to save my soul from the bottomless pit? O, can I ever hate sin enough? Can I ever grieve and mourn over it enough? Can my stony heart ever be dissolved into contrition enough, when by faith I see the agonies and hear the groans of the suffering, bleeding Lamb of God?" Thus, God condemns sin in the flesh in the feeling experience of his people. They hate their sins; they hate themselves; they hate that sinful, that dreadfully sinful flesh of theirs which has so often, which has so continually, betrayed them into sin; and thus they join with God in passing condemnation upon the whole of their flesh; upon

all its actings and workings; upon all its thoughts and words and deeds, and hate it as the fruitful parent of that sin which crucified Christ and torments and plagues them.

III.—But we now come to our third point, which we shall find very closely connected with the sacred subject of the sufferings and sacrifice of Christ, which I have been endeavouring to set forth,—“that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.” God was determined that his righteous law should be fulfilled; for if not, how it would seem to mock and hurl defiance at the authority of the Lawgiver! If his authority could be set at nought and disobeyed, how it would reflect disgrace even in the courts of heaven! The law required obedience, or it would have been given in vain. God, therefore, was determined that this righteousness should be fulfilled. And we shall see that according to God’s purpose it was to be fulfilled in two different ways; 1, first, for us by the obedience of Christ, and 2, secondly, in us by the work of the Spirit. Let us look at these two things in their order.

1. The law demanded two things: perfect love to God, and perfect love to man. In consequence of our crippled, ruined state by the fall, we can render neither. We cannot love God perfectly or even imperfectly, for the carnal mind is enmity against him; and we cannot love our neighbour as ourselves, for we are full of pride and selfishness. And yet this righteousness of the law must be fulfilled either by us or for us, for God’s authority must not be set at nought. It was fulfilled then for us by the blessed Jesus, who in our nature rendered to God a perfect obedience—obeying God’s law from the heart; loving him with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and loving his neighbour not only as himself, but better than himself, because he laid down his life for his neighbour, the church, to whom he was allied, not only by eternal espousal, but by taking upon him the flesh and blood of the children. In this sense, therefore, when God sent his own Son, this righteousness that we never could fulfil was fulfilled for us by the perfect obedience of the Lord Jesus.

2. But I observed that there is another meaning of the expression; for if you look closely at the language of the text, it does not say that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled “for” us but “in” us. A minister of truth once named this text to me, as creating in his mind a difficulty, and asked me whether “in” here did not mean “for.” My answer was, “Certainly not; for so to interpret it would spoil the whole meaning of the passage.” I have told you that there is a righteousness fulfilled for us; but the apostle here is not speaking so much of the fulfilment of this righteousness for us by the obedience and suffering of Christ, as of a fulfilment of it in us by the Spirit and grace of God. For God was determined not only that the law should be fulfilled outwardly and perfectly by the obedience of Christ; but inwardly and experimentally in the hearts of his people by the grace of his Spirit. How, then, is this? What is the righteousness of the law? Love to God and love to our neighbour; for “on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matt. 22:40.) Now these two commandments have to be fulfilled not only for us but in us. They were fulfilled for us by the perfect obedience of the Son of God; they are fulfilled in us when sin is condemned in our flesh, and the love of God shed abroad in the heart; for “love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Rom. 13:10.) If then you love God, and if you love your brother, you have the righteousness which the law required fulfilled, not only for you by the perfect work of Christ, but fulfilled in you by the grace of God. But there is this essential difference between the righteousness of the law required as a command, and the righteousness of the law fulfilled as a grace, that the former at its very highest point is but carnal, whilst the latter at its very lowest is spiritual. Were we legally and naturally as holy as the law required, we should still only “serve in the oldness of the letter,” but by regenerating grace we serve “in newness of spirit.” The highest obedience of Adam was but natural; the lowest obedience wrought in the heart of to child of God by grace is spiritual.

But let me show you how the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in a believer through the Spirit and grace of God.

1. First, in the fulfilment of the first great commandment—love to God. The Lord is pleased, in greater or less measure, to shed abroad his love in your heart. He brings near his righteousness, reveals Christ, gives a testimony of interest in his blood and obedience, and with this communicates love to his most precious name. Now you are fulfilling the law, because under this heavenly influence you are loving the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, mind and strength. Is not the righteousness of the law now fulfilled, not only for you, by Christ's obedience as your justifying robe, but fulfilled in you by the Spirit's inward teaching and testimony? Love is of God, for "God is love;" and it is the communication of his presence and power that kindles love to him in the believer's heart. You may have often tried to love God, but you could not. But when he is pleased to shed this love abroad in the heart, then he is loved with a pure heart fervently; and this love is the fulfilling of the law.

2. But see how in the same way there is a fulfilling of the second great commandment, love to your neighbour. This flows immediately from the former, for when the love of God is felt in the soul, it casts out selfishness, and fills the heart with love and affection to God's people, who are not only our neighbours, but our nearest neighbours, as being of the same family. John therefore gives it as a mark of divine life, "We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." This love is pure, unselfish, and spiritual. To love the Lord's people, to be willing to spend and be spent for them, because they belong to the Lord; to serve them to the utmost of our power and to do them all the good we can, because we feel a pure love for them, is a fulfilling of the righteousness of the law. This the law could not do, "in that it was weak through the flesh." But God has done it by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. Before we can obey, we want two things, motive and power. The law gives neither; the

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gospel gives both; and thus the gospel secures an obedience which the law commanded but could not produce: and grace works an inward righteousness which fulfils the law, not in the letter but in the spirit.

IV.—But let us now look at our last point, the character of the persons in whom this is fulfilled: "Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Men widely differ from each other in rank, station, abilities, and a thousand other instances; and even on the broad grounds of moral and religious conduct a vast difference may be observed between individuals; but, viewed in the light of God's word, there are really but two classes—those who walk after the flesh and those who walk after the Spirit. The apostle here and elsewhere draws a broad line of distinction between these two classes. Let us see if we can gather up this distinction. By "the flesh," we are to understand human nature in its present fallen condition. It matters not how high or how low, how gross or how refined, this flesh may be, nor what guise or form it may wear. To "walk," then, "after the flesh," is to live, speak, and act according to its movements and dictates. Now the apostle tells us that "those who are in the flesh cannot please God." He tells us also that "they that are after the flesh do mind or savour of the things of the flesh;" and also declares that "to be carnally minded," that is, to follow the will of the flesh, "is death." (Rom. 8:5, 8.) It follows from this that those who "walk after the flesh" are dead before God. They are at enmity against him by wicked works, and therefore their obedience, such as it is, cannot please him as being the unwilling servitude of a slave, the forced obedience of an enemy. But those on the other hand, "who walk after the Spirit" are alive by his quickening grace. But observe the expression: "walking after the flesh." A person may be "in the flesh," as indeed we all are, and yet not "walk after it." To walk after it implies, a setting it up as a pattern, and walking in accordance with it. But a person may be dragged after another, as we see sometimes a child is dragged unwillingly along by its mother, who

does not willingly walk with her. The child is not walking after its mother, nor hand in hand with her, nor side by side; but is compelled against its will to go a road which it hates, as to go to school when it fain would go to play. So in a sense it often is with the child of grace: he is often dragged on by the flesh. He does not go after it willingly; he does not sin wilfully, but is entangled by the strength of the flesh, dragged on contrary to his best wishes, and sometimes in spite of his earnest cries, tears, groans, and desires. He does not walk after it as in Alpine countries tourists walk through the snow after a guide, setting his feet deliberately in every step which the flesh has made before him. The saint of God, therefore, though he is in the flesh, does not walk after the flesh; for if he so walked he could not fulfil the law of love, and therefore the righteousness of the law could not be fulfilled in him. But, as enabled by grace, he does from time to time walk after the Spirit, for as the Spirit leads he follows; as the Spirit prompts, he obeys; and as the Spirit works, he performs. Nay, he is never so happy as when he can walk after the Spirit. When the Spirit reveals Jesus, he loves him with a pure heart fervently; when the Spirit applies a promise he believes it: and when he makes known the truth of God to his soul, he feeds upon and delights in it. As, then, the Spirit imprints the way before him by leading him into the footsteps of the flock, he puts his feet into those footsteps, and he is never so happy or blessed as when he can walk under the teaching, leading, and influence of this blessed Guide. As, then, under these divine influences he walks after the Spirit, he is fulfilling the righteousness required by the law, for this blessed Spirit, breathing into his heart love to God and love to man, fulfils in him this righteousness, and that not only inwardly and experimentally, but outwardly and openly before God and man, by leading him into the ways of righteousness, and making him obedient to the precepts of the gospel, and fruitful in every good word and work. Thus as he walks after the Spirit, he does the will of God from the heart. He does not walk after the flesh to gratify every foolish desire; for if he walk after the flesh, he dies in his soul

See, then, what a wondrous way God has taken to save the sinner and yet glorify himself. First he sends the law, and therein reveals his righteousness; but the law is weak. It cannot save, it cannot sanctify; it therefore leaves the whole human race under wrath and condemnation. But he will not leave all so; he will interpose; all shall not perish under his righteous wrath. As he saved Noah from the waters of the deluge; as he saved Lot from the conflagration of Sodom; so will he save those whom he has loved and chosen in his dear Son. And how does he save them? The law could not save them, for they could not keep it. What then shall he do? He sends his own Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin." Atonement is made, sin is blotted out. The law is gloriously fulfilled; and now that it may be fulfilled also in the heart of his saints, he sends forth his Spirit to reveal Christ to their souls, to take of his blood and obedience, to shed abroad his love, and by this means to fulfil in them that righteousness which they could not perform themselves, and thus make it manifest, before men and angels, that he has a people upon the earth who do obey his word, and that by walking not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

What a way of salvation does this open to a poor guilty sinner who is ready to perish! What a way of sanctification to a child of God, who would fain be holy but cannot! As received by faith, is it not enough to make the poor sinner's heart leap for joy that there is such a way of being saved, and of a saint's being sanctified?

The Lord give us grace to believe these divine mysteries more and more firmly, from a sweet experience of their blessed reality, so that we may be enabled day by day to walk after the Spirit, and, in doing so, to be ever finding it the path of life and peace.

179 The Sentence of Death in Ourselves

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning,
Feb. 17, 1861

“But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.”

2 Cor. 1:9, 10

We may admire Paul's grace, stand amazed at the depth and variety of his experience, and almost envy him the abundance of his revelations and consolations. But do we envy him his deep afflictions, his cruel persecutions, his heavy trials, his sore temptations, his unceasing sufferings for Christ's sake? When we read of his being caught up into the third heaven, and there hearing “unspeakable words which it was not lawful (or possible) for a man to utter,” we may wish to be similarly favoured; but what should we say if we had the subsequent lacerating thorn in the flesh, the pitiless, merciless messenger of Satan to buffet us? We may envy him his abundant consolations; but do we covet his stripes, his imprisonments, his tumults, his labours, his watchings, his fastings? And what should we think, say, or do, were his lot to be our own, as he himself has so vividly depicted it? “Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep: in journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” (2 Cor. 11:25, 26.) Could we endure a tenth of such afflictions as he here enumerates?

But these things must be set one against the other, for there is a proportion between them, as he declares in this chapter:—

”Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort: who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” (2 Cor. 1:3-5.) And to show us that these sufferings and these consolations, both in their nature and in their proportion, are not peculiar to apostles and ministers, he says, addressing himself to his Corinthian brethren, “And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.” If no suffering, then, no consolation; if no affliction, no enjoyment; if no trial, no support; if no temptation, no deliverance. Is not this apostolic argument? Is not this gracious reasoning? Is not this sound divinity? Yes; so sound, so scriptural, and so experimental that it can never be overthrown whilst the Church of God holds this epistle in her hands and has the substance of it in her heart.

But it would appear from the context, that over and above his usual amount of sufferings, a short time previous to the writing of this epistle, a trial of extraordinary depth and magnitude had, by God's sovereign will, befallen him, for he speaks in the verse immediately preceding our text, “We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.” (2 Cor. 1:8.) What that trouble was he has not told us. Whether it were an affliction in providence, or whether it were a trial in grace, or, what is more probable, whether it were a temptation from Satan of extraordinary magnitude and of long endurance, we are not informed; but we are told what it was as regarded its extent and magnitude, for he says he was “pressed out of measure”—as though he had no measure of comparison to determine its greatness, for he was so pressed down by it that, like a heavy load under which a person might lie, he could not tell its weight. It was beyond all his limited means, not only of natural

endurance, but even of clear and exact description. And not only so, it was “above strength,” so that had he not been supported by Almighty power, he must have been crushed under its weight. Nay even then, supported as he was by Almighty power, so pressing was it that it almost reduced him to despair, for he adds “insomuch that we despaired even of life.” He hardly knew whether he should be able to live through it, whether his mind might not give way, and whether he should escape even with the maintenance of his natural life or of his reasoning powers. He then goes on, in the words of our text, to show us from what quarter his deliverance came, and what was the effect which this trial wrought in his soul: “But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.”

Let us look at these words, if the Lord grant it, in the light of the Spirit, and may he graciously help me this morning so to open them up in harmony with the word of his truth and his teaching in the hearts of his saints, that they may be commended with divine unction, life, and power to your conscience, that being enabled according to the measure of your faith to trace out the work of God’s grace in you heart, you may gather up a comfortable hope, or be favoured with a sweet encouragement to believe that you are under the same teaching wherewith God blessed this eminent saint and servant of the Lord. But in doing so, I shall

I.—First, show you what it is to have the sentence of death in oneself. “But we have the sentence of death in ourselves.”

II.—Secondly, what is the effect of this internal sentence of death: the destruction of self-confidence, and the raising up of a trust in God: “that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.”

III.—Thirdly, the appearing of God in answer to prayer, and the putting forth of his Almighty power in vouchsafing a gracious deliverance: “Who delivered us from so great a death.”

IV.—Fourthly, the present enjoyment of that deliverance, and the future anticipation that in every time of need there will be an experience of the same: “And doth deliver in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.”

I.—There is a difference between “death” and “the sentence of death;” and there is a similar distinction between the sentence of death generally, and the sentence of death in ourselves. Let me by two simple illustrations endeavour more fully to explain my meaning, and to clear up the points of distinction which I have thus advanced.

i. All men are doomed to die. Every tolling bell, every passing funeral, the closed shutters of the house of mourning, the cemetery gleaming with its spire and white monuments in the distance, daily remind us of the mortality of man. Men may try to forget or drown the thoughts of this gloomy guest that haunts all their banquets of pleasure, but sooner or later he will strike his dart into the bosom of all that sit round the table. But though death hangs thus as a doomed sentence over the whole human race, over every one old or young within the reach of my voice, yet how few feel, how still fewer tremble at that sentence of death which they must know daily impends over them! But now look at a criminal, who, by the commission of some capital crime, say murder, has brought himself under the sentence of the statute law. As long as he was innocent of the crime, though the statute book denounces death as the penalty of murder, it reached not him. But directly he had imbrued his hands in innocent blood, that sentence which before lay in the statute book harmless as regarded him, began to lift up its angry brow and launch forth its thunder against him. Conscience brings it home to his bosom, and he who never trembled before now trembles at the sight of the officers of justice. But in spite of all his tremblings he is seized, brought before a jury of his fellow-countrymen, and found guilty of the crime laid to his charge; the judge puts on the black cap, and ratifies the verdict by pronouncing sentence of death against

him. Now that man has “the sentence of death” recorded against him. You might stand in the court and hear the trial; you might see the criminal pallid and trembling at the bar; though you could not justify his crime, you might even sympathise with him in his mental sufferings and agonies. But however keenly you might suffer partly from horror at the act and partly from seeing a fellow mortal doomed to die, how different would your feelings be from his who is anxiously watching the faces of the jury as they come in with their verdict—from his, who is eagerly scanning every look and listening to every word of the judge—from his, who is hanging as it were between life and death, and whose hope trembling in the scale sinks at the word “death” almost into despair! Here then we have in the case of a criminal condemned to die “the sentence of death:” but still, though he has the sentence of death, he may not yet have the sentence of death in himself. It is in the criminal law; it is in the verdict of the jury; it is in the mouth of the judge; but it may not have reached his inmost soul. He may hope still to escape. The Queen may show mercy; he may still receive a pardon; he may have the sentence of death commuted into penal imprisonment for life. But when all hope is taken away; when every application to the Crown for mercy is rejected, when the day of execution is fixed, and he stands under the gallows with the rope round his neck, then not only has he the sentence of death in himself, for in a few moments he will be launched into eternity.

Take another figure to illustrate the meaning of the apostle. As long as you are in vigorous health and strength you may hear of sickness and disease, and you may see your weak and aged neighbours dropping around you almost like leaves in autumn. You may hear the funeral bell, and see the melancholy procession go to the cemetery, the hearse bearing away your next-door neighbour, whom you have so often seen and perhaps conversed with. But the sight does not touch you. The funeral bell strikes no note of alarm on your mind. You are young and healthy, sound and strong, and what is death to you? Yet the sentence of death

is impending over you as it impended over your neighbour, who perhaps thought no more that he should die than you. But say that you were, in the very midst of all your health and strength, seized by some disease which is well-known to be sooner or later fatal: say that cancer or consumption laid hold of you, and that after long and careful examination by an experienced physician, your case was pronounced incurable. Then the sentence of death would be recorded against you in the mind, if not by the mouth of the physician. The first glance of his eye, the first click of his fingers, have told him that the seeds of death are in you. He might not think it prudent to tell you; but even were you informed of it from his lips you might have hope that the disease might be palliated if not thoroughly cured, and that it might not actually shorten life, though it might abridge you of much of its enjoyment. But should the disease make rapid and further progress, should all hope now be taken away, so as to be but a matter of a few weeks or days, and you inwardly felt that any moment might be your last, then not only would you have the sentence of death by the mouth of the physician and its seeds in your constitution, but the sentence of death would be in yourself.

So you see there is a distinction between these three things—death, the sentence of death, and having the sentence of death in oneself. Now take these ideas which I have thus endeavoured to illustrate into spiritual things, and see how far they agree with the work of grace upon the heart and with the experience of a living saint of God.

ii. The law is a ministration of death, as the apostle speaks, “But if the ministration of death written and engraven in stones was glorious.” (2 Cor. 3:7.) By the ministration of death is meant that the law as a minister or messenger from God brings death as message from himself. It speaks his words, which are, “The soul that sinneth it shall die;” “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” (Ezek. 18:20; Gal. 3:10.) But though the law speaks thus, and by so

speaking condemns every human being who transgresses it, yet as death in a general way impends over all, and yet men go about their usual occupations as if they never were to die, so until the law is applied to the conscience by the power of God, though it is actually hanging over men as a sentence of death, yet it is not felt by them as such. The apostle describes in his own case how men are affected toward the law before it enters as a condemning sentence into their heart. He says, "I was alive without the law once." (Rom. 7:9.) The law was hanging over him as a condemning sentence, as a minister of death, as a messenger of wrath, as a consuming fire, but he felt it not. As with a thunderstorm in the remote distance, he might hear the low mutterings of the thunder which once rolled over Sinai's fiery mount, or might see from far the play of those lightnings which scorched its top. But at present the storm was in the distance. He went about without thinking, or feeling, or fearing, or caring whether the law was his friend or enemy. In fact he rather viewed it as his friend, for he was using it as a friendly help to buildup his own righteousness. He had gone to it, but it had not come to him; he knew its letter but not its spirit; its outward commands but not its inward demands. He therefore speaks of himself as being "alive without the law," that is, without any knowledge of what it was as a ministration of condemnation and death. But in God's own appointed time and way, "the commandment came;" that is, it came with power into his conscience. He found that he could keep every one of the commandments but the tenth; for according to his apprehension and his interpretation of them, they did not extend beyond an external obedience. But the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," struck into the very depth of his conscience, for it was a prohibition from the mouth of God of the inward lusts of the heart, and that prohibition attended with an awful curse. Under this stroke sin, which before lay seemingly dead in his breast, revived like a sleeping serpent; and what was the consequence? It stung him to death, for he says, "And I died;" for the commandment which was ordained unto life he found to

be unto death! (Rom. 7:9, 10.) Sin could not brook to be thwarted or opposed: it therefore rose up in enmity against God, took advantage of the commandment to rebel against the authority of Jehovah, and its guilt in consequence falling upon his conscience made tender in the fear of God slew him. It would not have done so had there been no life in his soul; but there being light to see and life to feel the anger of God revealed in the commandment, when the law came into his conscience as a sentence from a just and holy Jehovah, the effect was to produce a sentence of death in himself. And this experience which the apostle describes as his own is what the law does and ever must do when applied to the conscience by the power of God. It kills, it slays the condemned sinner; it is a sentence of death in a man's own conscience, which only awaits the hour of death and the day of judgment to be carried into execution.

But the apostle, in the words before us, does not seem to be speaking of the work of the law in issuing the sentence of death. He had passed through that, had been delivered from it by a revelation of the Son of God to his soul, and been blessed with the love of God shed abroad in his heart, before he wrote this epistle and before he described the afflictions out of which the Lord delivered him, and in the midst of which he had so abundantly comforted him. He is not therefore speaking here particularly of the work of the law upon the conscience, but rather of those distressing trials, temptations, and exercises which in the hands of God bring the soul down, lay it low in the dust, cut it up as to any expectation in self, and slay it to any and every creature hope. "We had the sentence of death in ourselves."

iii. But let us now see the various ways in which these trials and exercises bring about the inward sentence of death. You will see from what the apostle says that it is not once or twice only that this sentence of death is recorded or felt. Thus we find him speaking of "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus;" again, "For we which live are always delivered unto

death for Jesus' sake." (2 Cor. 4:10, 11.) And thus again he says, "In deaths oft," that is, spiritual and experimental as well as natural and literal; for he could only once die literally, though in deaths oft spiritually. And again, "I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." (1 Cor. 15:31.)

Now what is life naturally and what is death naturally? Is not that life in which there is breath, energy, movement, activity? And what is death but the utter cessation of all this moving activity and vital energy? To die is to lose life, and by losing life to lose all the movements of life. Thus, when the Lord takes, as it were, out of our heart and hands everything in which we once had life, in which we lived and moved and seemed to have our earthly, natural, and enjoyed being, and condemns it by his holy word, so as to record therein, and in our conscience as an echo to his voice, a continual sentence of death against it, he delivers us over unto death. And you will observe that none but the living family of God are so delivered: "For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake" and observe also that the reason for this mysterious dispensation is to bring to light the hidden life of Jesus within, for the apostle adds, "that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." And observe also the connection which this sentence of death has with the death of Christ: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus." We must suffer with Jesus if we are to be glorified with him; must die with him if we are to live with him. (2 Tim. 2:11, 12.) His death is the exemplar, the model, and the means of our own; and as he had the sentence of death in himself upon the cross, so must we be crucified with him, that we may be conformed to his suffering, dying image. (Rom. 8:29; Gal. 2:20.) Thus not only is there a death by, under, and unto the law, so as to kill the soul to all creature hope and help, to all vain confidence, and all self-righteousness; but in the continual teachings and dealings of God upon the heart, and especially in times and by means of heavy affliction, painful trial, and powerful temptation, does the Lord by his Spirit and grace execute a sentence

of death in all those to whom he is giving to drink of Christ's cup and to be baptized with Christ's baptism.

iv. But if there be a sentence of death in oneself it will produce some sensible, experimental effect. The apostle in the same epistle in which he speaks of being crucified with Christ adds, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Gal. 6:14.) There is then a crucifixion of the flesh, which we may call a dying unto it by having the sentence in our own souls against it. Look at this in the light of your own experience.

1. What influence the world, for instance, naturally has over us and how we are sure to be entangled in it, except so far as delivered from it by the power of sovereign grace! Look at the hold that worldly business has over the mind when fully engaged in it. Look at the power which pride and covetousness have over the human heart; how easily we get entangled almost before we are aware in a worldly spirit, and are drawn aside into carnal thoughts, plans, schemes, and anticipations, and spend time and stretch forth vain and foolish desires after objects which we know can never bring with them any real peace to our conscience, or indeed any profit to our soul. The Lord, therefore, at times sees it necessary to put a check on this worldly spirit, to crucify the world unto us and to crucify us unto the world, by putting a sentence of death in it and upon it. But in order to do this he sends some heavy affliction, brings some painful trial, or allows Satan to set upon us with some severe temptation. What is the effect? An inward sentence of death against it. In the light of the Lord's teaching, as shining through the dark clouds of affliction and temptation, we begin to see what the world truly and really is—a dying world, agonising as it were in the last throes of death, and carrying upon its heaving, struggling bosom dying men and women, gasping, groaning, and falling in all directions. As with a dreary desert, or volcanic region strewed with wreck and ruin, covered with lava and ashes, no plant lives and thrives in its burnt and arid soil. Can

happiness then be gathered from it? Do the flowers of Paradise, does the tree of life, grow amidst these ashes? No. According to the primeval curse, nothing grows therein but thorns and thistles. Is not this then the effect of afflictions, trials, and temptations; that every expectation of happiness or comfort from the world is effectually cut off; and that if we attempt to gather pleasure from it, all it can do for us is to lead us into snares, cast temptations into our path, and, as the miserable issue of such courses, to bring guilt and trouble into our conscience? In this way then do we learn to find and feel the sentence of death in ourselves as pronounced by the voice of the Lord against the world, and more especially against that worldly spirit which makes the world within a greater snare and a more dangerous enemy than the world without.

2. But look at it again as regards our own righteousness. How few even of the living family of God are delivered from self-righteousness! What a Pharisaic spirit is plainly and evidently to be seen in some of the best of men! How slight and superficial a view many who fear God seem to have of the depths of the fall, of the utter ruin and thorough helplessness into which it has cast the whole human race! What a slight, slender acquaintance have many gracious people with the corruptions of their heart, and how little they seem to know and feel of their inward leprosy, their wounds and bruises and putrifying sores, and what pollution and defilement are in them to the very core! But need we wonder at this when we see them so little tried, tempted, or exercised? It is for want of these inward exercises that there are so many Pharisees in the inner court, and so few lepers outside the camp with the covering on the upper lip and the cry, "Unclean, unclean," out of their mouth. This is the reason why so many are secretly trusting to their own righteousness; for until we have the sentence of death in ourselves, to cut up, pull down, root out, and destroy our own righteousness, we shall in some way or other, and that probably hidden from ourselves, put trust in it. But when we have a discovery to our heart and conscience of the holiness of God, of the infinite

purity of his righteous character, and have a corresponding sense of our deep sinfulness and desperate depravity before him; when seeing light in his light and feeling life in his life we see and feel how holy he is and how vile we are, then a sentence of death enters the conscience against our own righteousness and we view it as a condemned thing, as doomed to die, as having no more chance of escape from the justice of God than a malefactor has of evading the law when he stands upon the gallows with the executioner behind him. We view it as a guilty, condemned criminal justly doomed to die under the wrath of God. Thus we die to it, as the wife of the criminal dies to him at the gallows' foot, and by dying to it, it effectually dies unto us; we renounce it; we see death in it, and it drops out of our arms as a corpse falls to the ground when death strikes its natural life out of it.

3. So again as regards our own strength. There was a time with us when we thought we could do something towards our own salvation; when we might repent, or believe, or pray, or praise in our own strength; when we proposed to ourselves a vast number and variety of good works, whereby we hoped in some measure to gain the favour of God, and if not by them altogether to scale the battlements of heaven, at least to secure a sense of the Lord's approbation in our own conscience. This was indeed a pleasing dream in which many have so deeply slumbered that they never waked out of it until they opened their eyes in hell. But what dispelled so pleasing a dream as this? What aroused the soul out of a sleep worse than Samson's or Jonah's? The loud and angry voice of the Lord in the conscience. And this voice spoke through heavy trials, powerful temptations, and a distressing sense of our thorough ruin in the Adam-fall. Here was the sentence of death passed and executed against this imaginary strength of ours, this thief, this robber, who would not only spoil the soul of the strength of Christ made perfect in weakness, but even rob the Lord himself of his grace and glory. So, then, how there issues as if from the mouth of God a sentence of condemnation against all creature

strength under which it passes as a condemned thing. Does not the Lord himself say, "Without me ye can do nothing;" and again, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me?" (John 15:4.) And is it not the express testimony of the Holy Ghost, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly?" (Rom. 5:6.) Is it not also the express declaration of the apostle, "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing?" (Rom. 7:18.) It is God that must work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13), for from him and from him only is our fruit found. (Hosea 14:8.) Thus we have the testimony of the word of God as well as the experience of our own hearts to prove to us that we have no strength to believe, to hope, or to love; no power even to command a good thought, no power even to raise a hearty sigh, to bid a single tear to drop from the eye, or a groan of contrition to gush out of the bosom.

Then again, as regards our own wisdom. Against this too, as against every fancied good in the creature, is the sentence of death recorded in the word and in the experience of the tried and tempted saint of God. There was a time probably with us when we thought we could easily understand the scriptures and could explain them to others; the little light which we had seemed to us much greater than it really was, and, what through pride and what through ignorance, it seemed as if we could understand all mysteries and all knowledge. There are few things young Christians are more blind to than their own ignorance and their own folly. But apart from any light upon the scripture, in our fancied wisdom we thought we could easily see our way through this trial, or mode of escape through that temptation; that we could shape our own path, design our own way, and model our own end, both in providence and grace. But after a time, when brought into very trying circumstances, so as to despair even of life, then we began to find that much of the light which was in us was darkness; that in ourselves we really had no wisdom to see the snares laid for our feet or to escape them; that

whatever knowledge we might have of the letter of scripture or of the truth in the mere doctrine of it, a thick veil of darkness was drawn over the whole word of God as regarded our experience of its saving, sanctifying power; that we might read the Bible till our eyes dropped out of their sockets, and yet remain in ignorance of the sweetness and savour of divine truth as applied to the heart by the power of God. We began also to see from innumerable stumblings and staggerings, backslidings and wanderings, slips and falls, that we had in ourselves no real or available wisdom to guide our own steps into the strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life, or keep ourselves in it when found; that we could not direct our own thoughts and meditations so as to be fixed upon the things of God; that we could not experimentally understand the scriptures of truth, know the mind and will of God, or find any mode of escape from besetting sins or besetting fears. We thus began to know the meaning of those words, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise" (1 Cor. 3:18); and, again, "We are fools for Christ's sake." (I Cor. 4:10.) Our wisdom then being shown in the light of God's teaching to be folly, a sentence of death was executed against it, and it hung as it were before our eyes as a crucified thing.

5. But then, again, there is our own fleshly holiness which is one of the last things with which we are willing to part. It is as if the youngest and fairest of the little ones of Babylon is to be taken and dashed against the stones. (Psl. 137:9.) The law may have cut to pieces our self-righteousness, as Saul destroyed the Amalekites with the edge of the sword. But as he spared Agag who walked delicately, and the best of the sheep and of the oxen, so we might have had some secret reserve of our own holiness which we spared, when everything that was vile and refuse we were willing should be destroyed utterly. But O, this delicately walking religion of ours! Must that go too, must that be hewed in pieces in Gilgal? Our long and earnest prayers, our diligent and constant reading

of the Scriptures, our careful and continued separation from the world, our consistent lives, our devotedness to the service of God in the house of prayer, and in the observance of his ordinances, our attention to every moral, social, and relative duty—that is, assuming that we had rigidly observed all these matters—must all this fair, pleasing reserve of fleshly holiness, which we have toiled for so laboriously and won so hardly, must this youngest babe die? But do not mistake me here. I am not condemning those things, but condemning the wrong use made of them. They are all good as appointed means of grace, but when they are abused to lift up the heart with pride and self-righteousness, then it is necessary that we should be shown what is their real character, and that that they are so defiled by sin that they cannot stand for a single moment before the eye of infinite Purity. When, then, through trials and temptations, all this rubbish which we have gathered up with so much toil and labour, is scattered like chaff before the wind; when God discovers to the heart and conscience, in the light and life of his Spirit's teaching, his holiness and purity, and the glorious majesty of his all-seeing presence and power; when this fancied holiness of ours is dispersed to the four winds of Heaven, all its beauty becomes filth, and all its loveliness, shame and disgrace. Was not this the case with Isaiah, when he beheld the glory of the Lord in his temple? What was his cry but, "Then said I, 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.) So was it with Daniel when his comeliness was turned in him to corruption (Dan. 10:8); and so with Habakkuk, when his lips quivered at God's voice, and rottenness entered into his bones. (Hab. 3:16.)

Thus have we seen, both from Scripture and experience, how the sentence of death is passed and executed upon all our righteousness, strength, wisdom, and holiness.

II.—But, to come to the second point, let us now see what is the effect of this inward sentence of death. Two things are effected

thereby; 1, the destruction of self-confidence; and 2, the raising up of a trust in God, according to the apostle's description of his own experience: "That we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead."

1. As, then, the sentence of death is felt in our conscience, it cuts off all hope of escape by the deeds of the law, and indeed by any word or work of the creature. To effect this is God's intention in sending the sentence of death into our heart. As an illustration, look for a moment at the condemned criminal to whom I have before referred. He is put in the condemned cell; he is there heavily ironed; the bolts and bars of his prison door are firmly fastened against him; warders are on the watch to prevent him from making the least attempt to escape. See him there in gloom and solitude, shut up without any hope of escape, or any possibility of avoiding his sentence. Or to revert for a moment to my second illustration. Look at a person upon his bed gasping for breath, emaciated to the last degree, worn out with pain and disease, in the last stage of consumption. Now both these persons, by the very sentence of death which they carry in themselves, are precluded from all creature hope; if they are to escape their allotted doom it must be by the interposition of some power distinct from their own. It must be in the case of the criminal, by the Queen in a most unexpected manner showing mercy almost at the last hour; it must be in the case of the consumptive, by God himself almost working a miracle. Thus it is in grace. The effect of the sentence of death in a living conscience, is this, that we should not trust in ourselves. Can the guilty criminal, can the dying consumptive trust in themselves? How can they with the sentence of death against them and in them? But without this experience of the sentence of death, there will always be a measure of self-confidence. I do believe that every person, whatever be his knowledge of the letter of truth, however high or low he stand in a profession of religion, will ever trust in himself until he has felt and experienced something of the sentence of death in his own

conscience, whereby all hope of escape from the wrath to come through creature obedience, wisdom, strength, or righteousness, is utterly taken away. But what a state a man must be in to have the sentence of death in his conscience, so as to despair even of life; not to know what to do to obtain deliverance, and all hope effectually cut off to procure it by any exertion of his own strength, wisdom knowledge or ability! If the danger is very great and pressing; if as Elihu describes, “his soul draw near to the grave, and his life to the destroyers,” if God do not interpose perhaps at the last moment, what can save him from utter despair? And God has dealt so with many of his people, as to lay them in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps, until their soul is full of troubles, and their life draweth nigh unto the grave. (Psl. 88:3, 6.) But it is God’s purpose thus to wean them from trusting in themselves, that they might look out of self to seek help from whom help comes, and hope in Him from and by whom deliverance will be granted. It is thus that the saint of God is taught to cast himself as a dying wretch, as a guilty criminal, as one past all help and hope, upon the bowels of free mercy, upon the superaboundings of sovereign grace, and to depend for salvation on the finished work of the Son of God, and the manifestation of that finished work to his conscience. It is easy to say, “We do not trust in ourselves.” The lowest Arminian will say as much as this; but in what situation are we when we say that we are not trusting to ourselves? Say, for instance, that you were on the very borders of death; say that every evidence of your interest in Christ was removed from your eyes; say that the law was discharging its awful curses into your bosom, an angry God frowning over your bed, conscience recording a thousand unpardoned sins, the king of terrors staring you in the face, and the death-rattle almost in your throat:—then to look round and see what you are in yourself as a poor condemned sinner, and not to have the shadow of a hope as springing from anything you have done or can now expect to do! Were you ever brought here in anticipation, in experience? Here you would have learnt so to

have the sentence of death in you as to despair even of life, and thus be taught not to trust in yourself. But what a way is this for God to take to teach us experimentally! How deep-rooted must be our self-confidence that God is obliged, so to speak, to take such a way as this to root it out! If there were a tree in your garden but lately planted, it might be almost pulled up by the hand; but if it had stood long and struck its roots deep into the soil, if thirty or forty years had passed over its head, it might be the work of a day to remove it. You would need to bring axe and saw to cut it down, and then spade and mattock to dig about the roots, before you could pull it up from the bottom. So God knows what a deep root self-confidence has struck the human breast. It is not then a slight effort that will pull it out thoroughly; he must dig deep, and that with his own hands, and pull it out by the very roots, that he may plant in it the tree of life of his own providing, even Christ in the heart, the hope of glory. Then think not that you are hardly dealt with, or that God is your enemy, because he at times brings into your conscience this most painful sentence of death. Is he an unkind surgeon who, when a patient goes to him with a cancer in her breast, cuts out the diseased part? She may shrink and wince and cry under the keen knife, but the operator knows that every diseased part must be clean cut out, or the disease will spread and be worse than before. And is God unkind if he puts his knife deep into your heart to cut out the cancer of self-righteousness and vain confidence, which even now is mining within? For if there be any left, it will assuredly grow again. Yet it will grow again, for, like the cancer, the roots are too deep to be fully got out, and therefore again and again must the keen knife be thrust in. But his hand is as skilful as it is powerful. He will not let us bleed to death under his hand. All that he does, he does for our good; and this is the object of all these dealings, that we should not trust in ourselves.

2. But this is not the only effect. As, when the old worn-out or barren tree is cut down and taken out of the garden, it is only preparatory to the planting of another and better in its room; as

when the cancer is cut out it is that the breast may kindly heal and health be restored, if God please to bless the operation, so the sentence of death is not to destroy but to save, not to kill, but to make alive. Out of this sentence of death then, there springs by the power of divine grace, a trusting in God “which raiseth the dead.” Most men, and indeed, in a sense, many even of those who desire to fear God’s name, are practical atheists. As far as regards vital faith, they live without God, and without hope in the world. They know little or nothing of any close dealings with God, as not far from every one of us (Acts 17:27); and indeed, so far from coveting any nearer acquaintance with him they view him rather as an enemy, and thus, if I dare use the expression, think him best at a distance. And indeed, how few of the Lord’s own family are brought into any intimate union and communion with the God of all their mercies! And why? Because they have not yet felt their deep need of him; therefore God and they are as if strangers to each other. But the Lord will not suffer his people to be always strangers to him: they shall not live and die alienated from the life of God. Though sometime alienated, and enemies in their mind by wicked works, yet having reconciled them unto himself through the blood of the cross, he will bring them near to his bosom, will make it manifest that they have a place in his eternal love and an interest in the finished work of his dear Son. It is for this reason that he sends the law with its curse and bondage into their conscience, to purge out that miserable self-confidence which keeps them looking to themselves and not unto him. As, then, this is driven away like the smoke out of the chimney by the furnace which God hath set in Zion, and they find that unless God appear for them they must sink for ever, they begin to look out of themselves that they may find some hope or help in the Lord. And as the Lord is pleased to help them with a little help, and to raise up and strengthen faith in their heart, they look unto him, according to his own invitation, “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” And what a God they have to look to! He is described in our text as he who “raiseth

the dead.” These words admit of several explanations.

1. First, as simply pointing out the Almighty power of God. Think, for a moment, of the multitudes who have died since the creation of the world. To concentrate more closely your thoughts, think of some individual who died a hundred years ago, or a thousand years ago. Where is he? Open the grave: where is the body committed to it? A heap of dust; and how much of that dust which was once a human being has long ago been scattered to the winds? How almighty then must be the power of God to collect from the four winds of heaven, the scattered dust of the millions of human beings who have been interred since the foundation of the world! Let us assume for a moment that you are a believer in Jesus. The time must come when your body must be laid in earth till the resurrection morn, in the sure hope that God will then raise you from the dead; that he will know your sleeping dust, call up your body from its narrow bed, and re-unite it to your glorified soul. Mighty must that power be to raise up millions in the twinkling of an eye at the sound of the great trump! But if, as the Apostle here intimates, God must exert the same power in delivering a soul from going down into the pit that he will put forth when he raises up the sleeping dust of millions, what a view it gives us of that mighty power which is needed to liberate, to deliver, and to bless a soul under the sentence of death! Yet nothing less than the same almighty power which raises the dead out of the grave, can raise up a soul sinking under wrath and condemnation unto a good hope through grace.

2. But take the words in another sense: view them as having a reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which Scripture ascribes again and again to the mighty power of God. We have in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, a comparison drawn between the power put forth by God in raising Christ from the dead and the exceeding greatness of his power to those who believe, and it seems plain from the language of the apostle, that this power is one and the same. (Eph. 1:19, 20.) How great then

must that power be! Now the apostle says of himself that he was reduced by the trial which came upon him in Asia to that degree of self-despair that he could not trust in himself; but was compelled by the necessity of the case, as well as led and enabled by the inward teaching of the Spirit and the promptings of his grace, to cast the whole weight of his sinking soul upon him “who raiseth the dead.” He had, no doubt, a view in his soul of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and of the power that God displayed in raising up his dear Son when he had sunk into the tomb under the weight of the sins of millions; and thus looking up to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, as having highly exalted him to the right hand of his power, he felt he could trust in him as able to support him under, and deliver him out of his pressing trial.

3. But take another sense of the words: God “raiseth the dead” when he quickens the soul into spiritual life. Paul wanted the exertion of the same power, the manifestation of the same grace, and a display of the same sovereign authority, as that whereby he had been called and quickened at Damascus’ gate. Many think that when life has been once implanted in the soul there is power to exercise faith. But such persons have never passed through severe trials and powerful temptations, or they would speak a purer language. I am sure that we have no more power to believe after the Lord has called us than we had before. We therefore need that the Lord should put forth again and again the same power which he manifested in raising us up from the death of unregeneracy.

4. But there is one meaning more of the words “God which raiseth from the dead,” for you will observe it is in the present tense, and therefore implies some continued actings of that mighty power. In this sense therefore God may be said to raise the dead in self-condemnation, those who are, through the strength of temptation, sunk into self-despair, and have no hope but in the power of God to raise them up out of that sentence of condemnation and death, which they carry in their own consciences. Have you not sometimes fallen down before God with a feeling sense in your soul that none

but he can save you from death and hell; that it must be an act of his sovereign grace to give you any present or even any hope of future deliverance; that to have your sins pardoned and your soul saved with an everlasting salvation, must come from the bowels of his free mercy; and that he, and he alone, can exercise that power in saving you from what you have most justly merited, even the lowest hell?

If, then, you have felt anything of the sentence of death in yourself and have been brought no longer to trust in yourself, but in God which raiseth the dead, you have had wrought in your soul a measure of the same experience that Paul speaks of as wrought in his. But remember this: a man may have a sentence of death in himself, yet never know what it is to trust in God which raiseth the dead. Saul had the sentence of death in himself when he fell upon his sword. Ahithopel had the sentence of death in himself when he went home and hanged himself. Judas had the sentence of death in himself when he put a halter round his neck. Many such characters have lived and died in awful despair under the tremendous displeasure of God, who never were able by his power and grace to trust in him which raiseth the dead. It is not then conviction, or condemnation, or doubt and fear, nor even a distressing sense of your state before God that can save your soul. These things are necessary to bring you down to his feet; but you must have something given beyond this, even a living faith, whereby you trust in God which raiseth the dead, and cast the whole weight of your soul upon him who is able to save from death and hell.

Now can you find in your conscience those two distinct acts—1, condemnation by the sentence of death in yourself, and yet, 2, a measure of faith communicated to your soul, whereby, looking up to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who raised him from the dead, you feel that you can put your trust in him? But how can you do this if you have no ground to go upon? which brings me to the third point, viz.:

III.—To show how God wrought this faith in his apostle's heart, and "vouchsafed him a gracious deliverance: Who delivered us from so great a death." It was "a great death." The death was so great that it must have killed him if God had not interposed. And so your sins will kill you and sentence your soul to eternal condemnation unless you get some deliverance from their guilt, filth, and power from the same God of all grace from whom Paul got it, and receive it into your breast as a message from Him with the same savour and sweetness that he experienced when he felt that as his afflictions abounded, so his consolations abounded also.

1. "Who delivered us from so great a death." Now in delivering the apostle, the first thing God delivered him from was self-despair. There are two things, the exact opposites of each other, which are greatly to be dreaded, and I hardly know which is the worse, for if one has slain its thousands, the other has slain its tens of thousands: self-confidence and despair. Despair has slain its thousands; self-confidence its tens of thousands. The Lord keep us from both, for the path to heaven seems to lie between the two: on the one hand rise the lofty crags of presumption, on the other sinks the precipice of despair. God delivered Paul from despair, for he tells us that he despaired even of life. I do not say that a child of God ever falls into real despair, but he may feel as much of it as for a time stops the voice of prayer, grievously hinders, if it do not altogether destroy, the actings of faith, and leaves the soul in possession of little else but a sense of guilt and misery. To break up, then, those dark and gloomy clouds of despondency, the Lord graciously sent a ray of hope into the apostle's heart. He does not tell us how it came; but it evidently must have come, or he could not have had the deliverance of which he speaks. It might have been by bringing to his recollection his past dealings with him; it might be by applying some passage of scripture to his heart with power; it might be by favouring him in an unexpected manner with a Spirit of grace and of supplications, enabling him to pour out his heart before him; it might be by vouchsafing a sense of his gracious presence

to support him under his trial, and give him some testimony that he would in due time appear. For in all these ways the Lord deals with his people in delivering them out of temptations and trials. Thus he sometimes delivers by sending a promise into their heart; sometimes by shining with a peculiar light upon a passage of his holy word; sometimes by a blessed manifestation of Christ and a revelation of his Person, blood, and work; and sometimes by strengthening faith and drawing it forth upon his own promises, so that the soul holds him by his own faithfulness, as Jacob held the angel. But in whatever way the apostle was delivered there was a most blessed reality in it, so that he could say in the language of the firmest confidence, "Who delivered us from so great a death." The Lord assured him that however great was the death he should not die under it, but live through it and come out of it unharmed, as the three children came out of the fire and not a hair of their head was singed. So in love to the soul of Hezekiah, he delivered it from the pit of corruption. (Isa. 38:17.) So he assured repenting David by the mouth of Nathan, "The Lord hath put away thy sins; thou shalt not die." (2 Sam. 12:13.) It was "a great death," so great that none but the Lord could deliver him from it. But the Lord did deliver him, as he will deliver all that trust in him; and this deliverance gave him a most blessed testimony that the Lord was his God.

2. But you may depend upon it that he was not delivered except in answer to prayer and supplication; for the effect of a beam of hope shining into the mind or of any manifested presence of the Lord of life and glory, is to raise up a Spirit of prayer and to enable the heart to pour itself out before him. Indeed we may lay it down as a most unerring rule that whenever the Lord is pleased to pour out upon the soul a Spirit of prayer, he is sure in his own time and way to give the answer; for he sends that Spirit of prayer as a forerunner of the answer. It is meant to draw the promise out of his hands and to bring deliverance out of his breast. To be in guilt and condemnation, or under trial and temptation, and yet to be

enabled by the power of God to pour out the heart before him; to confess our sins, to seek his face, to call upon him for mercy, and wrestle with him that he would in due time appear,—this is like the dawning of the day before the sun rises; it is like the parting of the clouds in the midst of a storm, like the hushing of the wind in gale, like the blooming of the grape before we have the fruit,—all being certain heralds and indications of good things to come, and intimations that the Lord will deliver us. Now in proportion as the soul sinks, so must it rise. If you sink very deep, you will need a very long arm and a very strong arm to pull you out. If you fell into a well of only two, three, or four feet depth from the surface of the soil, you might extricate yourself; if it were six or eight feet deep, you would need help from another; but O, if it were twenty or thirty feet deep, how much more then would you require assistance from above to deliver you from death! So in grace: if you have little trials, you will need but little support under them; if your sinkings be few and small, few and small will be your risings; should you sink lower than usually, you will need to be raised up more than usually; but should you sink very deep into trouble and sorrow, then you will need the display of such a mighty and supernatural power to pull you up and lift you out and bring you to the very bosom of God as perhaps you have not yet experienced since you made a profession.

IV.—But, to come to our last point, the apostle not only had experienced a blessed deliverance from so great a death, but he was in some measure enjoying it at the time, and in the strength of faith was anticipating similar blessings for the future. “And doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.” This is one of the richest mercies of delivering grace, that when the Lord is pleased in any measure to bless the soul he does not leave it as he found it, but goes on to bless it more and more, so that day by day it sees and acknowledges God’s delivering hand. Now it may not be above once or twice or thrice in our lives that we are plunged into very deep trouble, brought into such trying circumstances

as I have described, so as to despair even of life. But all through the course of our spiritual life, we shall know something of being continually delivered over unto death. As the apostle says, “I die daily.” The sentence of death will be ever taking place in our conscience against our strength, wisdom, righteousness and holiness; not indeed always or often to the same degree, to overwhelm the soul in guilt or despair, but sufficiently to keep alive the sentence of condemnation in the breast, sufficiently to make us feel that we are still in the flesh, and carry about with us a body of sin and death. The criminal, according to my figure, might be respited; he might be delivered from the hand of the executioner, but he would be remitted to penal servitude for the rest of his life, and thus still carry about with him the sentence of death, though delivered from its full execution. So the Christian; though delivered from death eternal by the blood of the Lamb and from death spiritual by regenerating grace, still he carries with him the sad mementos of the fall. He still is reminded of what he has been and what he ever must be but for the grace of God. Thus there is a continual sentence of death in the conscience of the man who lives and walks before God in godly fear. Every day sentence of death is recorded in his conscience against the world without and the worldly spirit within; against pride in its risings; against covetousness in its workings; against self-righteousness in its deceptive movements; against the flesh in all its cravings. Thus more or less a daily sentence of death is passed in a godly man’s conscience, so that he dies daily in that sense as to any hope or expectation in himself. And as he thus dies in self, the Lord keeps giving him deliverance—not to the same extent, not in the same marked way as in times passed when he needed the special deliverances of which I have spoken. These he does not now need; but deliverances suitable to his actual state and case; deliverance from coldness, carnality, and death by communicating a spirit of prayer; deliverance from love of the world, by dropping in a taste of love divine; deliverance from the snares spread in his

path by causing godly fear to spring up in the heart; deliverance from the power of sin by showing him that he is not under the law but grace. The Lord is always delivering his people—sometimes from evil, sometimes from error, and sometimes from the strength and subtlety of the flesh in all its various deceptive workings. The Lord is ever putting forth his mighty power to deliver the soul. It is but once a year that the trees are sharply pruned; but the good gardener is ever watching how they are going on. And so in grace: sharp pruning times may be rare, yet the husbandman is ever attending to the state of his vine, and purging (or “cleansing,” as the word means) the branches that they may bring forth more fruit. Does not he himself say, “I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment!” (Isai. 27:3.)

2. And this present deliverance made him look forward confidently to the future: “In whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.” The Lord’s delivering hand experienced day by day not only makes and keeps the conscience tender, but faith trusting, hope expecting, and love flowing. He who being thus favoured looks to the Lord day by day as his only hope and help, can also look forward even to expiring moments, trusting that when death comes the Lord will be with him even in nature’s darkest hour, to smile upon his soul, to give him a peaceable death-bed, and then to take his ransomed spirit to be for ever with himself in the realms of eternal bliss.

How kindly, then, yet how wisely, does the Lord deal with his people! If he afflict them, it is in mercy; if he cast them down, it is to raise them up; if he bring a trial, it is as a preparation for deliverance; if he send a sentence of death into their conscience, it is not to execute it and hang them up like a murderer upon the gallows to be a spectacle to men and devils; but to prepare them for the communication of his grace, to make a place for the manifestation of his dying love, to work in them a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, that instead of being, as they deserve, hung upon a gibbet, the scorn of men, they might be monuments in heaven,

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and that to all eternity, of the heights and depths, the lengths and breadths of redeeming love and superabounding grace.

180 The New Covenant and the Blood of Sprinkling

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord’s Day Morning,

March 31, 1861

“And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

Hebrews 12:24

In the two verses immediately preceding our text, the apostle holds up to our view a rich cluster of gospel blessings as the happy and enduring portion of the redeemed and regenerated family of God. But in order to bring them more vividly and impressively before our eyes, he draws a contrast between the two dispensations—that of the law and that of the gospel; his intention being thereby to show more clearly and effectually that the believer in Christ is delivered from the curse and condemnation of the former, that he may enjoy all the blessings and mercies of the latter.

I. I shall, therefore, by way of introduction, briefly touch upon what he has here said upon these two dispensations, that we may, with God’s help and blessing, see more clearly the meaning and force of the words of our text. In order, then, to make the contrast between the two dispensations plainer and stronger, he tells us first what we are not come unto: “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched.” This “mount that might be touched” was mount Sinai, from which the law was given by Moses; and it is called “a mount that might be touched” as being an earthly object, an actual, literal mountain, and as such capable of being seen by the eye, touched by the hand, and trodden by the foot, as by the foot of Moses, or even (though it was against the prohibition) by

that of man or beast. This literal, tangible mount well represented the earthly, visible character of the Law as contrasted with the Gospel, of which the emblem is “mount Sion,” not the literal height of Zion, but that heavenly Jerusalem, which is free and the mother of us all, (Gal. 4:26,) and as such is essentially invisible, spiritual, and heavenly, not to be seen by the natural eye, nor trodden by the actual foot. But, in allusion to the accompaniments of the law on that solemn day when God revealed it from mount Sinai, he speaks of the mountain as “burning with fire.” God, when he gave the law, came down upon mount Sinai in terrible majesty, that it might ever stand before the church of God as a representation of his holiness, justice, and ever-burning wrath against all transgression and all transgressors. Thus we find it recorded in the book of Exodus, (19:16-18,) “And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.” Thus the law was revealed in flaming fire of a character so awful and of an extent so wide that it seemed as if the whole mount burned with it like a furious volcano, and the smoke of this burning mountain ascended as the smoke of a mighty furnace, to make it manifest far and wide, as it cast its lurid flame over the desert and lighted up the surrounding rocks and peaks, that it was a fiery law; that the God who revealed it was a consuming fire, and as such would burn up the transgressor as the flame rolled down the mountain side into the vale below. It was also surrounded with “blackness,” to show that as before a storm the heavens gather blackness, till out of the bosom of the dark cloud issues the forked lightning and bursts the rolling thunder; so blackness covered the mount, as an intimation that behind that black cloud was hidden

the wrath of God which one day would burst forth in thunder and lightning against a guilty world. Besides this blackness there was also “darkness,” to show the nature of that dispensation—that it was a dark dispensation. There was a veil over the face of Moses, its typical mediator. God did not make himself known therein as the God of all grace. It was not illuminated by any beams of love and mercy, and therefore darkness surrounded the mount as a representation that in that dispensation there shone through it no life-giving rays and beams of his gracious countenance. There was “tempest” also, indicative of that coming storm when “God shall come and shall not keep silence; when a fire shall devour before him and it shall be very tempestuous round about him” (Psalm 50:3); when he shall come to judge a guilty world; when all nations shall be assembled before his bar, and his wrath burst forth so that none can quench it against the impenitent and unbelieving.

ii. We need not, however, enter further into these accompaniments of the law given at mount Sinai. It is our mercy that if indeed we believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God we are delivered from standing at the foot of that fiery mount; and that to us the fire and blackness and darkness, the sound of the trumpet and the voice of words, are no longer indications of God’s anger against our sins, but, like a departing thunder storm, have rolled away into the far distance, whilst the light of the sun is shining upon our heads. Having then shown what they, as believers in Christ, were delivered from; that they were not come unto that terrible mount Sinai, but were brought by faith in the Lord the Lamb to a better spot and to a happier mount, the apostle goes on to say, “But ye are come unto mount Sion.” This, therefore, as connected with our text, will demand a few moments’ consideration.

1. Mount Sinai stands in contrast with “mount Sion” as mount Ebal stood in contrast with mount Gerizim (Deut. 27:12, 13): the one the mount of cursing, the other the mount of blessing. Thus as all the wrath of God is on mount Sinai, so all the mercy of God

is on mount Zion. And as all the curses of God fell in blackness and darkness, fire and tempest, upon Sinai's burning top; so all the mercy, love, goodness, and grace of God fall upon mount Zion, and surround it as with a heavenly cloud of most glorious and ever enduring lustre. But why should "mount Zion" be thus selected? For this reason: David, after having taken mount Zion from the Jebusites, made it the place of his residence; it thus became "the city of the great king;" there he reigned and ruled; thence he issued his laws; and thence he extended the sway of his peaceful sceptre over the whole of the holy land. From that circumstance mount Zion became the great type and figure of the gospel of Jesus Christ, or rather of that kingdom of God of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the head and sovereign. For as David sitting upon mount Zion, in the palace built there as his royal seat, issued his commands which were obeyed all over the land; so our blessed Jesus has been exalted, according to God's promise, "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion;" and thus sitting as King in Zion, issues his mandates and sways his peaceful sceptre over the hearts of his obedient people. It is a common idea that mount Zion is a type of the gospel because the temple was built upon it. That, however, is not true: the temple was not built on mount Zion but upon mount Moriah; but Zion was the site of David's palace, and for that reason became a type of the kingdom of our blessed Lord in grace and glory.

2. But he adds, "And unto the city of the living God." This is the church of Christ, in which the living God has fixed his abode, according to his own words, "I will dwell in them and walk in them." (2 Cor. 6:16.) But this church of Christ may be viewed under two aspects—its militant and its glorified condition. In each it is the city of the living God; for in its present militant and suffering state, the church may still say, "We have a strong city: salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." Yes, even in this time state, she may say, "There is a river"—the river of life and love—"the streams whereof make glad the city of God, the holy place of the

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tabernacles of the Most High." (Psl. 45:4.) But more especially in its future glorified state will the church of Christ be the "city of God," for as such holy John saw her in vision. "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Rev. 21:2.) And that this is the apostle's meaning seems evident from the expression, "the heavenly Jerusalem," which immediately follows. This "heavenly Jerusalem," then, is spoken of in contrast with the earthly Jerusalem; for as the earthly Jerusalem was "the city of the great king," so the Church of God, "the heavenly Jerusalem," is the city of our glorious King Jesus. That this heavenly Jerusalem signifies the church of God in both its suffering and glorified state is evident from comparing the words of Paul, where he speaks of "Jerusalem which is above is free and the mother of us all," which she is in our time state, with the words of John which I have just quoted, when he saw the new Jerusalem or the church in glory, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

3. The apostle also speaks of their being come to an "innumerable company of angels," who surround the throne, and who, though not redeemed by the atoning blood of the Lamb, yet are confirmed in their standing by the incarnation of the Son of God; God being pleased to gather up into him as one head elect angels and elect men, that he might be "the head of all principality and power," and that "at his name every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." (Col. 2:10; Phil. 2:10.)

4. He also speaks of their having come to the "general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven." He looked up, or rather looked round, and saw a vast assembly, a multitude that no man could number, exceeding the stars of the sky and the sands upon the sea shore. This is "the church of the first-born," who were redeemed unto God by the blood of the Lamb, as the first-born in Egypt were redeemed by the blood of the paschal lamb, and whose names are written in heaven, as

being inscribed in the Lamb's book of life.

5. He then takes a view of "God the Judge of all," the reader of all hearts, the searcher of all reins, who holds the scales of justice with unerring hand, to whom they are come as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who can be just and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

6. He then speaks of their being come also to the "spirits of just men made perfect;" the enfranchised souls of those justified men who were delivered from all the sins and infirmities of their mortal body, and who, in the presence of Christ, were waiting in expectation of that glorious day when the Son of God should raise up their sleeping dust that they might be for ever, soul and body, with the Lord.

What glorious objects does he thus set before our eyes, and how he speaks of the saint of God as having come far, far away from the fiery mount where all was blackness and darkness and tempest, and being brought by the Holy Ghost, in the actings of living faith, unto this blessed mount Sion, where he enjoys the blessings of the gospel in the manifestations of the love and mercy and grace of God!

7. He then adds the words of our text: "And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

In opening up the meaning of these words, we may

I.—First, with God's blessing, show what is spiritually and experimentally intended by having "come unto Jesus."

II.—Secondly, the character which he bears as being "the Mediator of the new covenant."

III.—Thirdly, "the blood of sprinkling," to which the believer is said also to have come.

IV.—And Fourthly, the blessing ascribed to this blood of sprinkling, that it "speaketh better things than that of Abel."

I.—Look then first at the character of the believer as here drawn by an inspired pen, as here described by an unerring hand.

He is said to have "come," implying that there has been a sacred power put forth in his soul whereby he has been brought away from mount Sinai and come unto mount Sion. And not only so, but especially and above all things he is said to have "come to Jesus;" for that is the grand, distinguishing mark of a true believer.

I. But let us, with God's help and blessing, look a little more closely at what it is to come to Jesus. The Scripture is full of it. Thus our blessed Lord said in the days of his flesh, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28); and again, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37); and again, "If any man thirst let him come unto me, and drink." (John 7:37.) Peter also describes the experience of a Christian as "a coming unto Jesus as a living stone." (1 Pet. 2:4.) But I need not quote passages so familiar to you; let me rather show you what it is to come. And first, what work upon the heart and conscience is necessary before we really do or can come unto Jesus? Before, then, we can come rightly to him we must be taught by the Holy Spirit to feel our need of him. This may seem very simple, and indeed is so in doctrine and theory, but not so in experience, for to come to Jesus is the hardest thing in the world; and no one really comes to him until he has tried every other refuge, every other hope of salvation; until he has been driven out of house and home, made an outcast and ready to perish. Newton justly says,

"Few, if any, come to Jesus

Till reduced to self-despair."

The work of the Holy Spirit, then, in his first divine work upon the soul, in his convincing operations upon the conscience, is chiefly to make us feel our need of Jesus. If he bring us to the law, it is not to rest in it, or to obtain salvation and righteousness by it. If he take us to the fiery mount there to show unto us the blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and cause us to hear the voice of words, until, with Moses, we say, "I exceedingly fear and quake," it is not to leave us there under that burning mountain;

but it is that he may lead us from mount Sinai to mount Sion; that he may bring us to Jesus. But this can only be by divine teaching and by heavenly drawing. As the Lord himself said, “No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him;” and again, “Every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.” (John 6:44, 40.) Our convictions, our distressing sensations of guilt, shame, and sorrow: our doubts and fears, our trials and temptations, our varied afflictions, from whatever source they come or of whatever nature they be, are all so many means in the hand of the Spirit to bring us near unto Jesus; so that if they do not operate in that way or produce that result, they bear no evidence of being of God, or that we have heard and learned of the Father. But many poor souls are a long time before they come to Jesus, at least with any faith in living exercise. This is the case of some from ignorance, their lot being cast in dark places where the gospel is not preached, where Jesus is not held up as the only hope and help, as the only way of salvation from the wrath of God; and others, though they may sit under a clearer sound of truth, yet from unbelief, infidelity, darkness of mind, hardness of heart, pressure of guilt, doubt and fear, and other powerful temptations, though they may feel their deep and daily need of Jesus, yet are kept back by these hindrances from coming to him, so as to receive out of his fulness grace for grace. But the same Holy Spirit who makes us feel our want of Jesus sooner or later discovers him to our soul. The Scripture is full of Jesus: he is the light of the Bible, from the opening page to the closing verse. As God hath set the sun in the firmament of heaven to give light to the earth, so has he set Jesus in the holy word as the Sun of Righteousness to shine through every page. But whilst there is a veil of unbelief over our heart, it is with us as it is in nature when the sun is behind a dark cloud; though he is there, yet we see him not. The promise, however, given to Israel is, that “when it shall turn to the Lord the veil shall be taken away.” (2 Cor. 3:16.) Thus when the soul is enabled to turn to the Lord with weeping and supplication, in the fulfilment of that

promise he becomes in more or less measure discovered to the eye of faith as a suitable Saviour; a divine light is cast upon the understanding, or some ray or beam of his unspeakable mercy and grace shine athwart the dark cloud into the believer’s mind, and by this guiding ray he is led unto Jesus. And thus he is drawn to Jesus by a divine power, according to those words, “None can come to me except my Father that hath sent me draw him.” “I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.” (Jer. 31:3.) None can really come to Jesus by faith except this drawing power is put forth, and this our blessed Lord himself assures us comes directly from the Father. He, indeed, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, works by the Holy Spirit; for that gracious and blessed Teacher acts upon the soul by his secret power and influence, puts cords of love and bands of mercy round the heart, and by the attractive influence that he puts forth in the name and Person of Jesus, draws the soul to his feet, brings it near unto the Lord as he sits upon his throne of grace, communicates strength and power to plead with him as a man pleadeth with his friend, and in due time reveals him as the chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely.

But we must ever bear in mind that it is to those who feel their deep and daily need of Jesus that the invitations of Scripture are addressed: “Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” “Ho! every one that thirsteth come to the waters.” The blessed Lord dropped these invitations to those who were weary and heavy laden that they might come unto him and find rest and peace by faith in him; and thus he spoke to those who were thirsting for salvation, to come unto him that they might drink at the fountain head, and receive the blessedness of his full and finished salvation into their heart. As then the blessed Spirit is pleased to send those and similar invitations home with warmth and power into the heart, he kindles faith to receive them as from the mouth of God, and thus draws it forth into living

exercise upon Jesus; for the Holy Ghost takes of the things of Christ according to our Lord's most gracious promise, and makes them known to the soul. Sometimes, for instance, he takes of his glorious Person, Immanuel, God with us, shows to us his glorious Deity and suffering humanity, and discovers him as sitting at the right hand of the Father, and thus "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." Sometimes he is pleased to show us the efficacy of his atoning blood, that it cleanseth from all sin; at others he graciously discovers the fulness and completeness of his obedience to the law of God while here below, and that it is a perfect righteousness in which we near stand before God without spot or wrinkle. As, then, he reveals and manifests these precious things of Christ to the soul he raises up a living faith whereby Jesus is sought unto, looked unto, laid hold of, and as he is pleased more or less to manifest himself, he is brought into the heart with a divine power there to be enshrined in its warmest and tenderest affections.

ii. But in coming unto Jesus, the soul comes not merely for present help and comfort, but to enjoy all the blessings and benefits of his death and resurrection. Thus it comes to him as a living stone to be built up in him as the foundation which God has laid in Zion, that it may grow up in him as a living stone of the temple of mercy. It comes to him not only with a burden of guilt upon the back which he alone can take away, but that he may always continue to be its Sin-bearer; it comes to him not only with a wound in the conscience which he alone can cure, but with an infinity of leprous sores which will ever want the healing touch of his gracious hand; it comes to him at first without help or strength, and ever continues through life looking to him to make his strength perfect in its weakness. It comes to him helpless in the beginning, that through him help may come; and never ceases to feel its helplessness, that day by day it may learn that God hath laid help upon one that is mighty. And as it comes to him hopeless, that through him hope may be communicated; and as perishing, that

in him it may find life and salvation; so all through its Christian pilgrimage it hangs upon him for fresh communications whereby its hope may be maintained and the power of his salvation enjoyed. Thus as this blessed Spirit goes on to deepen his work, and to discover more and more of the suitability, beauty, blessedness, blood, and obedience of the Lord Jesus, he draws the soul more and more unto him, and the more it closes in with him for life and acceptance, the more it finds pardon, peace, and salvation, through his blood and love. This coming, therefore, unto Jesus is not an act once only done which needs never to be repeated. We must be always coming unto him, for he is our "life," and we only get life as we do come unto him. He is the way, the only way unto God. As then we are always backsliding, we need our backslidings to be continually healed, that we may be ever walking in him as the living way; and as we are continually wandering out of the way through the power of sin and the temptations of Satan, we need to be restored to the path of peace. So that to come unto Jesus is not an act once done in our spiritual life which needs never to be done again; as if having once come unto him and found acceptance in him we may lie upon our oars, for the tide is sure to carry us into harbour; as if having gained one victory we need never fight again, but may go into winter quarters for the rest of our days. So far from that, we shall find that fighting is only then just begun. As then we are continually sinking, we want continually to rise; as we are continually slipping, we want to be continually held up; as we are continually sinning, we want to be continually forgiven. Thus to come unto Jesus is more or less a daily act; nor is there any maintenance of the light, life, and power of God in our souls, except as we are daily coming unto him as the living stone, and continually living upon him as the bread of life.

II.—But to come to our second point, our blessed Lord is here represented to us under a most suitable and heavenly character: he is called the "Mediator of the new covenant."

I. God in several instances has made a covenant with man. He

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made a covenant with Adam in Paradise; he made a covenant after the fall with Noah; he made a covenant with Abraham; and he made a covenant with the people of Israel by the mediation of Moses at mount Sinai. But though some of these covenants, as those with Noah and Abraham, were intimations of the everlasting covenant, what is usually called the covenant of grace, yet others, as being made with man, were essentially and necessarily fragile; for man, in his own strength, was unable to keep their terms and conditions. Foreseeing, therefore, what man would be, and foreviewing the fall and its miserable consequences, God made before all time what Scripture calls an “everlasting covenant” (“through the blood of the everlasting covenant,” Heb. 13:20); what David calls a covenant “ordered in all things, and sure.” (2 Sam. 23:5.) This covenant was made not with man, but on behalf of man; for it was made between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It is called, therefore, “an everlasting covenant,” as having its origin in eternity. This covenant is often called the “new covenant,” in opposition to the old covenant which was given at mount Sinai; and it is called “new,” not that it was a new thought in the mind of God, a new idea that sprang up in his heart, that because the children of Israel could not keep the old covenant he would give a new one of which he had not thought before, which he deemed, perhaps, they might be able to keep; but it is called “new” because it was revealed later in time. The old covenant was revealed through Moses at mount Sinai; but the new covenant, though there were intimations of it in the very early dawn of Scripture, though every type and figure of the Levitical law pointed to it, yet is called new as being revealed subsequently in point of date, and only brought clearly to light in the Person and work of Jesus.

ii. But the apostle has an especial reference here to the prophecy given by Jeremiah, and the tenor of which he had already quoted: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in

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the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.” (Jer. 31:31.) The Lord here promises he would make a new covenant; and the apostle, quoting this prophecy of Jeremiah in the 8th chapter of this epistle, says, “Now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” This new covenant then is “the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure,” revealed and brought to light in the Person and work of the Son of God. Of this new covenant, this better covenant, this everlasting covenant, sealed and ratified by the blood of the Son of God, Jesus is “the Mediator;” so that in coming to him in the actings of living faith, we come to him as the Mediator of the covenant of life and peace.

Now this new covenant had four promises attached to it, and by coming unto Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant, we come into the present enjoyment of these four promises. They are these: I shall go through them in order that I may show you from them the blessedness of this new covenant of which Jesus is the Mediator.

1. The first promise of the new covenant is, “I will put my laws into their mind and write them in their hearts.” The law of mount Sinai was written upon tables of stone; and as an index that they could not keep that covenant, though written by the finger of God upon those tables, Moses threw them down in indignation when he saw the people dancing round the golden calf. Their being thus broken indicated that though written by the finger of God, man could not keep them nor hold them without breaking them. When, then, God would make a new and better covenant, he would not write the terms of that covenant upon tables of stone any more; nor should they be written upon parchment or paper;

but he would take a new way: he would write them upon the fleshy tablets of the heart. But how does God fulfil this promise? He plants his fear deep in the soul, according to his own words: "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." As, then, the believer comes to Jesus in the actings of living faith, God puts forth, so to speak, his finger and traces upon the tablets of his heart the fear of his great name, whereby his conscience is made alive and tender. Upon this soft and tender table, this new heart, this new spirit, this heart of flesh, which he gives when he takes away the heart of stone, he writes also his promises; for the promises of God are given to be helps and encouragements to the saints as they travel through this vale of tears; and as the blessed Spirit applies the sweet promises of the new covenant to the believer's heart, it is as though God himself wrote them with his own finger upon his soul. In the same way God also with his own finger writes his truth upon the heart of his believing people; for he makes the truth known to them by a divine power; and this truth he inscribes, not upon tables of stone, but upon the heart of flesh, the tender spirit which he himself raises up; so that his truth is received into the believing heart and becomes the joy and consolation of the soul. Upon this new heart which he gives as a part of the new covenant, he writes also his precepts that we may obey them, walk before God in all holy obedience, live to his praise, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight. Is not this, then, one of the sweetest promises of the new covenant, that God himself has promised to put forth a secret power in the consciences of his people whereby he writes the terms of it upon their heart, in letters never to be blotted out? Jesus, as the Mediator, takes this promise, so to speak, out of God's hand, and makes it good by writing his laws and his precepts upon the hearts of his loving and obedient people.

2. But there is another promise equally sweet, which is, "I will be to them a God and they shall be to me a people." Here God the Father, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has promised to be a God to all his believing people. Enlisting upon

their behalf all his perfections, he gives himself over to them in all his divine characters and all his blessed relationships; his power, his greatness, his mercy, his love, his compassion, his tender kindness; in a word, what he is as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. What heart can conceive or tongue express what he is in that most blessed character; that most gracious and eternal relationship to his dear people? Every mercy and blessing are freely and unalterably theirs on this ground, that he is their God. But why their God—their God by covenant, their God by promise, and their God by power? Because he is the God of Christ, their covenant Head. As the Lord himself said, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." (John 20:17.) "All things are yours," says Paul. Why? Because "ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." (1 Cor. 3:22, 23.) And as in Christ he has become their God, so are they become to him his people. In every way he has made them his. He has redeemed them by the blood of his dear Son; justified them by the free imputation of his perfect obedience; sanctifies them by the communication of his grace; and will eternally glorify them in the day of Christ's appearing. In this present time-state he is their kind God in providence to supply all their temporal wants; in all their straits and difficulties he watches over them with the unerring eye of infinite wisdom, and upholds them by the mighty hand of infinite power. Whatever be their foes or fears; yea, though he bring them, as the third part, "through the fire, and refine them as silver is refined, and try them as gold is tried," yet when they call on his name he will hear them and will say, "It is my people," enabling them to answer, "The Lord is my God." (Zech. 13:9.)

3. The third promise of this "new covenant" is, "They shall not teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest." To this promise the Lord seems to have special reference when he said, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God." As being, therefore, taught of God himself, they

shall not want human instruction to enable them to know the Lord, for he shall so reveal and manifest himself to them that they shall not need earthly teachers, for he himself by his Spirit will guide them into all truth. It does not mean that they shall not need a preached gospel or not require spiritual teachers, for the gospel is ever to be preached to the end of the world, and amongst the good gifts of God are “pastors and teachers.” (Eph. 4:11.) But they shall not be dependent upon them, for they shall have a better Teacher, as well as a clearer, sweeter, and more powerful Instructor. This promise, therefore, is in blessed harmony with John’s declaration, “Ye have an unction from the Holy One and ye know all things;” and again, “The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you.” (1 John 2:20, 27.) This unction from the Holy One teaches all the saints of God, from the least to the greatest. Thus, in this promise of the new covenant, God himself has undertaken to teach all his redeemed and regenerated people. It is as though he said in it, “Under the law they had instructors and teachers; but they did not profit them. They did not come through them to any true knowledge of myself. Now, therefore, I myself will take them in hand. They shall all know me, from the least to the greatest; for I will reveal myself to them. I will give them my Spirit to lead them into all truth. There shall not be anything good for them to know which shall be kept back; for I myself will give them such manifestations of my grace and glory that they shall all know me as their God, their Father, and their Friend: yes, from the very least to the very greatest of them, all shall enjoy for themselves that eternal life wherein consists in the knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.”

4. And then, not to detain you longer on this point, comes that sweetest and most blessed of all the four promises of the new covenant: “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” This promise embraces in its blessed arms the pardon of all their sins, the

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forgiveness of all their iniquities, and declares that these shall be so completely blotted out that their very remembrance, so to speak, shall be removed from the mind and memory of God.

Look, then, at these four promises: they are all yours, if believers in the Son of God; they are all your happy and enduring portion if you have been brought by the Holy Ghost to mount Zion—to the city of the living God; they are all addressed to you who are come or who are coming to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant.

iii. But let us now look how Jesus is “the Mediator of the new covenant.” I have already shown you that the new covenant was that which God made with the Son of his love before time had birth or being. In order, then, that this new covenant might not fall to the ground in the same way as that made with the children of Israel at mount Sinai, God made Jesus the Mediator of it: he put it into the hands of his dear Son to execute. We being fallen sinners, it was necessary that there should be a Mediator between God and us, for “there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim. 2:5.) This Mediator is the “Daysman,” for whose appearance Job longed as one who “could lay his hand upon us both;” that is, lay one hand upon God as the Son of God, and the other upon man as the Son of Man. Thus our blessed Lord as this Daysman holds the new covenant in his hand, having pledged himself to execute all its provisions. When he came upon earth, he came as the Mediator of this new covenant, that by his perfect obedience to the holy law of God he might bring in a righteousness for the justification of his people; when he died upon the cross, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, he shed his blood as “the blood of the everlasting covenant:” and when God raised him up on the third day, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, he placed him there as the Mediator of the new covenant, that he might ever hold it, so to speak, in his hands, righteously administer it, fully

execute it, fulfil all its provisions, and make valid all its promises. Here, then, is an object for your faith—Jesus as a living Mediator of the new covenant at the right hand of God. We are often pressed down with doubt and fear; darkness, guilt, and bondage again and again take hold of us through the strength of sin, the power of temptation, and the assaults of Satan. We desire to approach unto God; but how can such vile sinners as we are draw near to the pure Majesty of heaven? Here then is an Object for our faith if it be in any measure drawn out into living exercise. God has given us a Mediator between himself and us. In and through him he has laid aside his frowns and has arrayed his face in smiles. He says, “Look not to me as an angry Judge, a consuming fire. Look at my dear Son: he is the Mediator of the new covenant. He ever mediates between me and you. I am too holy, too just, for you to deal with; but here is the Son of my love whom I have set upon my holy hill of Zion, as a Mediator between God and man.” To him, then, you may look; upon him you may cast all the weight of your weary soul. And to assure those who, in their feelings, are often at the greatest distance from God through guilt and fear, the Lord himself speaks as if from the courts of heaven, “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else.” (Isaiah 45:22.) We often fail here, and the reason is, because we do not fix our eyes upon the true, the only Object of faith. But when faith is drawn forth into living exercise, how blessed it is to look unto Jesus as Mediator of the new covenant; to see what the new covenant is, how ordered in all things and sure; what blood it holds forth to cleanse us from all sin; what a glorious righteousness to justify our needy, naked souls; what promises it contains of pardon and peace. When, then, we can look at Jesus with the eye of faith as the Mediator between God and man, and see how he lives at God’s right hand to make this covenant effectual, how every glimpse of his glorious Person, every view of his beauty and blessedness, with every sweet promise applied, every answer to prayer given, every intimation of mercy vouchsafed, strengthen and nurture the new

man of grace. As, then, faith looks to and hangs upon Jesus as the Mediator of the new covenant, it rests upon him to execute it, apply it, and make it good. A sweet confidence thus springs up in the heart that he will not suffer any one part of it to fall to the ground, but will thoroughly accomplish it to the glory of his great name. Now what I want to impress upon your mind is that being such a Mediator, as such we must be ever coming unto him; as such we must be ever pleading these promises with him. We have sins to be forgiven which he only can forgive; iniquity to be pardoned which he alone can pardon; backslidings to be healed which he alone can heal; lessons to learn which he alone can teach; mercy to be obtained which he alone can bestow. As, then, we live under the warm impression of these divine realities, it will be our daily mercy and wisdom, under the teaching of the Spirit, to be ever coming unto Jesus as the ever living Mediator of the new covenant; and as we are enabled more and more to do this, we shall find that in it are stored up all our happiness and all our holiness, all our hope in time and all our salvation for eternity.

III.—But we now come to a very important and blessed part of our text, for in it the child of grace is spoken of as having come by faith to the “blood of sprinkling.”

I. But what is the blood of sprinkling, and how do we come unto it? There is an allusion here to the sacrifices offered under the law and to what was done with the blood. When the victim was killed, it was not sufficient for the blood merely to be poured out at the foot of the altar, but it was “sprinkled upon the altar round about.” (Lev. 3:2.) This sprinkling of blood was therefore a necessary and integral part of the sacrifice. It was so, you will remember, on that ever memorable night in the land of Egypt when the blood of the paschal lamb was sprinkled upon the lintel and side posts of the houses of the children of Israel. It was so when Moses consecrated the people: for, as the apostle says, “Neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according

to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book and all the people.” (Heb. 9:18, 19.) In the same way he sprinkled likewise with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. It was so in a more solemn manner on the great day of atonement, when the high priest took the blood of the bullock and the goat within the veil and sprinkled it upon and before the mercy seat. It was so in the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood, for we read, “And thou shalt take of the blood that is upon the altar and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it upon Aaron and upon his garments and upon his sons.” (Exod. 29:21.) It was so in the cleansing of the leper, for he was to be sprinkled with the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water seven times; and it was so also in the cleansing of the leprous house. (Lev. 14: 7, 51.) In fact, without the sprinkling of blood there was no cleansing, and therefore the apostle says; “Almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission.” (Heb. 9:22.) Now all this speaks to us in type and figure, and points to the blood of the everlasting covenant, the blood of Jesus—here called the blood of sprinkling. But in three different points of view may the blood of Jesus be called “the blood of sprinkling.”

1. First, when our blessed Lord was nailed to the cross, when the nails were driven through his sacred hands and feet, and the spear pierced his side, blood was sprinkled: it sprinkled his holy body as well as the cross on which it was fastened according to the determinate counsel and purpose of God. Not a bone of his holy body was to be broken, but there was an absolute necessity that his blood should be shed; for “the life of the flesh is in the blood, and it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” (Lev. 17:11.) Unless, then, the blood of our blessed Lord had been actually shed, there could have been no atonement made for sin: the sacrifice would not have been a perfect sacrifice. As, then, when the typical sacrifice was offered, the blood of the victim was sprinkled upon the altar, so the cross, which we may view, in a sense, as the altar

on which the Lamb of God was sacrificed, was sprinkled with the blood which Jesus shed as an atonement for the sins of his people. In a higher sense, his Deity was the altar, for it was that which gave virtue and validity to the blood of his humanity; but in a lower sense we may view the cross as the altar also, for on that the sacrifice was offered at Calvary. As then the blood of the burnt offering was to be sprinkled round about upon the altar (Lev. 1:5), that it might be looked upon and unto as actually shed as a propitiation for sin, so the blood of Jesus was sprinkled all about his sacred body that the eyes of God and man might look unto it and upon it as a fountain opened in his holy humanity for all sin and uncleanness. (Zech. 13:1.)

2. When the high priest went within the veil on the day of atonement, it was “not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people.” (Heb. 9:7.) But as we read that the high priest previously made an atonement for himself and his house as a sin offering, in which the blood was put upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense, as well as poured out at the bottom of the brazen altar (Lev. 16:11; 4:7), it is evident that the blood was twice sprinkled, for we read that it was “to be sprinkled seven times before the Lord before the veil of the sanctuary,” as well as put upon the horns of the altar. Thus it was sprinkled first as a sin offering before the veil, and then taken by the high priest within the veil and sprinkled upon and before the mercy seat. It was not sufficient for the bullock and goat to be slaughtered outside the veil, and the blood sprinkled before the eyes of the people and of the priests, but it must be taken within the veil and sprinkled in the holy of holies, in the immediate presence of God sitting between the cherubim and filling it with his manifested glory. So our blessed high priest not only shed his blood upon the cross and sprinkled it there before the eyes of men and angels, but taking it in his risen body up into the holy of holies within the veil, in a sense sprinkled that blood upon the pavement of heaven—in the very courts of bliss, on and before the mercy seat, the throne

of grace; for he is still our High Priest, ever presenting before the eyes of his Father the merits of that blood as our Advocate and Intercessor.

3. But there is a third sense in which it may be called “the blood of sprinkling.” As Moses sprinkled the blood upon the people when he consecrated them unto God and thus made them “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6); and as when he consecrated Aaron and his sons to be priests he sprinkled the blood upon them also; so the Holy Ghost takes of the atoning blood of the Lamb and sprinkles it upon the consciences of God’s regenerated people. It is by the application of this blood to the conscience that guilt is removed. Therefore the apostle says, “Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.” (Heb. 10:22.) And again, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” (Heb. 9:14.)

ii. Now it is to this blood of sprinkling to which we are said to have come. But we come to it only in the actings of a living faith. When, then, we first come to the foot of the cross as poor, guilty sinners; when there we see the agonising, suffering Lamb of God, then we first come to the blood of sprinkling, for there was shed his precious blood; there it ran down from his feet and hands and side. But when looking beyond the cross and the sepulchre we get a view of a risen, ascended, and glorified Jesus as the great High Priest over the house of God interceding within the veil, as our advocate with the Father, and see the efficacy of his precious blood as pleading for it in the very courts of heaven, then in a second sense we come to the blood of sprinkling. And when the Holy Ghost is pleased to purge our conscience by the application of this atoning blood, then again we come unto the blood of sprinkling, or rather, it then comes to us. This indeed is the only true way to know for ourselves that that blood was shed for us, and that we have an interest in it, so that all our sins are cast behind God’s back. In this way only

“have we boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.” (Heb. 10:19, 20.) O may we know what it is ever to be coming to the blood of sprinkling, for in that alone is all our hope and help, our only title to heaven, our only salvation from the wrath to come!

IV.—But this blood, to come to our last point, is said to “speak better things than that of Abel.” The apostle here refers to what we read in the book of Genesis, after Cain had risen up against Abel his brother and slain him. Cain thought that Abel’s blood would be hid; but it had a voice and cried out to God from the ground for vengeance against him. The blood of Abel could not be hidden. It had been shed and the dust had covered it; but the dust could not hide it from the searching eye of God. “And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.” (Gen. 4:10.) Thus this blood kept crying to God for vengeance upon Cain; wherever he went it still pursued, crying “Blood for blood.” Cain therefore went out from the presence of God a condemned man; and though the Lord set a mark upon him that none might kill him, yet he lived and died under the wrath of God as Abel’s murderer. But the blood of Jesus speaks better things than that of Abel. The blood of Christ cried unto God from the ground as the blood of Abel cried. Murderers rose up against Jesus. Wicked Cains surrounded the cross, and in a sense shed the blood of the Son of God. This crime Peter charged upon their consciences: “Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” (Acts 2:23.) But our blessed Lord prayed for his murderers, and we have reason to believe the prayer was answered, and that many of those who imbrued their hands in his precious blood by crying aloud to Pilate, “Crucify him! crucify him!” were saved by the very blood which they virtually shed. In a sense we are all murderers of Jesus. It was not the nails nor the spear that killed the Son of God. Our sins—these were the nails;

our iniquity—this was the Roman spear. But this blood, instead of crying out against us condemnation and wrath, cries mercy, pardon, peace, acceptance, salvation, and deliverance from the wrath of God. And it is ever crying aloud for mercy. As the blood of Abel kept crying out for vengeance against Cain until Cain sank under its accusations into hell; so the blood of Christ will keep crying for mercy until every soul interested therein is saved up into heaven. As then we come unto the blood of sprinkling it is ever crying “Mercy, Father, upon the transgressor; pardon, Father, for the rebel; salvation, Father, for the lost.” Thus its voice is ever crying to God for blessings to fall upon all who come to it to receive salvation by its being sprinkled on their conscience.

Here, then, is a simple description of the believer in Christ drawn by an unerring pen—that he has come and is ever coming unto “Jesus as the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than that of Abel.” And shall he come in vain? Will he and all his petitions be rejected? Does not the Lord himself say, “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out?” If you, then, as a poor, guilty sinner, are coming unto Jesus, to the Mediator of the new covenant, will he spurn you from his feet? If you are coming to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel, will it cry out against your sins or cry for pardon for them? Will your sins prove your ruin? Must you sink under the wrath of God, so justly your due? No; the very fact that the holy Spirit is leading you to Jesus as the Mediator of that new covenant, all the promises of which are pardon and peace, and to look to the blood of sprinkling, are certain testimonies that God himself is drawing you by his Spirit and grace—not to kill you as a Cain, but to bless you as an Abel by putting you into living possession of the blessings which flow through that blood.

But this atoning blood is not for the Cains, the persecutors, who in heart slay the people of God because they can no longer slay them by hand. It is not for the despisers of Christ—those who say, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” But it is for the poor,

humble penitent; the tried and timid believer; the sighing child of God, who is yearning for a sense of manifested mercy. For him it was shed and on him it will be sprinkled. As washed in that blood he now stands accepted in the Beloved, and as sprinkled upon his conscience he will be able to say, even in nature’s last sinking hour, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

181 The Valley of Achor for a Door of Hope

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord’s Day Morning,

April 14, 1861

“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.”

Hosea 2:14, 15

The prophetic books of the Old Testament contain, stored up in them, a rich mine of instruction and edification for the Church of God. But though the mine is so rich, it is proportionately deep; though the ore is so precious, it is locked up in its darkest recesses. Thus we may say of this mine, as Job speaks of another no less deep and valuable, “The stones of it are the place of sapphires: and it hath dust of gold.” But we may add, with him, “There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen; seeing that it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air.” (Job 28:6, 7, 21.) But, besides these inherent difficulties of the prophetic scriptures, an additional hindrance arises to the right understanding of them from this circumstance, that persons either do not know, or do not bear sufficiently in mind, that they are susceptible of various kinds of interpretation. To explain my meaning more distinctly, let me observe that the

interpretation of the prophetic books of the Old Testament is frequently, if not universally, of a three-fold nature:—First, there is the literal and historical interpretation, which was suitable to the time, place, and circumstances under which the prophecy was first and originally delivered. Secondly, there is the spiritual and experimental interpretation, which the Holy Ghost has couched in the letter for the edification of the Church of God in all time. And, thirdly, there is the future or prophetic interpretation, when these prophecies shall be accomplished in their full meaning, and every jot and tittle of them receive a complete fulfilment. Until, therefore, that period arrive, very much of the prophetic scriptures must lie buried in obscurity. This full accomplishment will take place in those times of which the apostle Peter speaks in the Acts of the Apostles, as, “The times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:21.) Take, as an instance to illustrate more fully my meaning, this second chapter of Hosea: it is very difficult to understand, but let us see whether we can bring to bear upon it the modes of interpretation which I have just mentioned.

View it first, then, as the language originally addressed by the mouth of God through Hosea to the ten tribes of Israel who had separated from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, broken off their allegiance to the house of David, and dissolved their connection with the temple and the sacrifices of God at Jerusalem. See how it bears upon their case, where the Lord says, for instance, “Their mother hath played the harlot: she that hath conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.” Here the Lord declares how Israel had sinned against him in the times of Jeroboam; and how that false church which had been set up had “played the harlot and done shamefully” in forsaking the true service of God to worship the golden calves at Dan and Bethel; and that this was done from worldly motives and covetous desires, for “bread and water, wool and flax, oil and

drink.” But, threatening her with future judgments, he adds, “I will also cause her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts:” which prediction was literally accomplished when, first Hazael, and afterwards Tiglath-pileser invaded the land, carried away the people into captivity, and broke them up so completely as a nation that they never held up their head as a people or a church again.

But now view it in a spiritual and experimental sense, and see how the whole chapter bears upon the experience of the saint of God. In his forsaking the God of all his mercies, in his leaving the Fountain of living waters, and hewing out cisterns that hold no water, does he not resemble backsliding Israel of old? To him, therefore, the words apply in an experimental sense, as I shall presently more fully show.

But cast your eyes forward into futurity, if the Lord is pleased to touch the lids with his anointing eye-salve, and see how this chapter, at least as regards the promises contained in it, will be fully and perfectly accomplished in those glorious days when the Lord shall restore his ancient people Israel, and graft them into the true olive tree so as to partake of its root and fatness. (Rom. 11:23.)

But as the spiritual and experimental interpretation is that which chiefly concerns the Church of God, and that from which we are to draw our supplies of instruction and consolation, I shall this morning chiefly confine myself to that signification; and, in so doing, I shall, with God’s help and blessing, bring before you the Lord’s words in our text, and thus divide them by showing you:

I.—First, the way in which God allures his people, by the drawings of his grace.

II.—Secondly, where he brings them by means of these allurements: “into the wilderness.”

III.—Thirdly, what he does to them when he has brought them there: he speaks comfortably unto them; gives them their

vineyards from thence; and opens in the valley of Achor a door of hope.

IV.—Fourthly, what is the blessed fruit and effect of these gracious dealings of God with them in the wilderness: that “they sing there as in the days of their youth, and as in the day when they came up out of the land of Egypt.”

We cannot, however, well understand these dealings of God with the souls of his people unless we first cast our eye upon the preceding part of the chapter. The Lord there lays open the sins that a soul, even a gracious soul, is capable of committing; what it does and ever will do when not restrained by his powerful grace. “Their mother,” he says, “hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that gave me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink. Here is the opening up of what we are by nature, what our carnal mind is ever bent upon, what we do or are capable of doing, except as held back by the watchful providence or unceasing grace and goodness of the Lord. These “lovers” of ours are ancient sins and former lusts that still crave for gratification. To these sometimes the carnal mind looks back and says, “Where are my lovers that gave me my bread and my water? Where are those former delights that so pleased my vile passions, and so gratified my base desires?” These lovers, then, are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, all which, except as subdued by sovereign grace, still work in our depraved nature, and seek to regain their ancient sway. But the Lord here, for the most part, mercifully interposes, nor will he usually let his children do what they fain would do, or be what they fain would be. He says, therefore, “Behold, I will hedge all thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.” The Lord, in his providence or in his grace, prevents the carnal mind from carrying out its base desires; hedges up the way with thorns, by which we may spiritually understand prickings of conscience, stings of remorse, pangs of compunction, which are so many thorny and

briery hedges that fence up the way of transgression, and thus prevent the carnal mind from breaking forth into its old paths, and going after these ancient lovers to renew its ungodly alliance with them. A hedge of thorns being set up by the grace of God, the soul is unable to break through this strong fence, because the moment that it seeks to get through it or over it, every part of it presents a pricking brier or a sharp and strong thorn, which wound and pierce the conscience. What infinite mercy, what surpassing grace, are hereby manifested! Were the conscience not made thus tender so as to feel the pricking brier, we can hardly tell what might be the fearful consequence, or into what a miserable abyss of sin and transgression the soul would not fall. But these lacerating briers produce compunction of soul before God; for finding, as the Lord speaks, that she “shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them,” there comes a longing in her mind for purer pleasures and holier delights than her adulterous lovers could give her; and thus a change in her feelings is produced, a revolution in her desires. “Then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.” The idea is of an adulterous wife contrasting the innocent enjoyments of her first wedded love with the state of misery into which she had been betrayed by base seducers; and thus the soul spiritually contrasts its former enjoyment of the Lord’s presence and power with its present state of darkness and desertion. “Where,” she would say, “are my former delights, my ancient joys, and the sweetness I had in days now passed in knowing, serving, and worshipping the Lord? Ah! he was a kind and loving husband to me in those days. I will return to him if he will graciously permit me, for it was better with me when I could walk in the light of his countenance than since I have been seeking for my lovers, and reaping nothing but guilt, death, and condemnation.” The Lord then goes on to say, “Now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of my hand. I will also

cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees.” By this is intimated the Lord’s chastising hand; that as literally he punished backsliding Israel by sending her into captivity, so will he put into bondage his backsliding people, and will cause their mirth, their feast days, their new moons, and their sabbaths to cease; meaning thereby that he will deprive them of the enjoyment of his presence and of his manifested favour.

But not to detain you too long upon the introduction to our subject, this work which I have thus hastily run through is all preparatory to those gracious dealings which are more especially and particularly unfolded in the words of our text.

I.—We would, therefore, now come to the first point, “Behold, I will allure her.” There is a gracious word in the prophet Jeremiah, the application of which has been blessed to many a soul that truly fears God. “I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.” (Jer. 31:3.) We need not only to be driven by the law, but to be drawn by the gospel; we want not only the thunders of Mount Sinai, but the dew and rain that fall upon Mount Sion; to enjoy the smile of God’s love as well as experience the frown of his anger; for there are the “cords of a man and the bands of love” whereby the Lord draws the soul near unto himself, as well as those terrors of the Lord whereby it is distracted. (Hosea 11:4; Psa1. 88:15.) But how does God fulfil this word in the soul’s happy experience, “Behold, I will allure her?”

1. First, he often sets before the eyes of the understanding and reveals with grace and power to the heart the Son of his love, Jesus, the Christ of God. But wherever there is a view of Jesus by faith, there is an attractive influence attending the sight, according to the words of our blessed Lord, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” (John 12:32.) Wherever, then, Jesus is graciously and experimentally manifested to the soul, and made known by any sweet revelation of his glorious Person, atoning blood, and finished work, a secret yet sacred power is put

forth, whereby we are drawn unto him, and every grace of the Spirit flows toward him as towards its attractive centre. Thus Jeremiah speaks of the saints of God as coming and singing in the height of Zion, and flowing together to the goodness of the Lord. (Jer. 31:12.) And thus Isaiah speaks to the church of God, “Then thou shalt see and flow together, and thine heart shall fear [or, as the word rather means, shall “palpitate” with love and joy], and be enlarged.” (Isaiah 60:5.) This view of Christ by faith is what the apostle speaks of to the Galatians, as Jesus evidently set forth before their eyes. (Gal. 3:1.) As thus set before our eyes, he becomes the object of our faith to look at; (“Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth;”) “the altogether lovely,” to whom love flows; and the Intercessor within the veil in whom hope effectually anchors. As, then, the blessed Lord is revealed to the soul by the power of God, his glorious Person held up before the eyes of the spiritual understanding, his blood and righteousness discovered to the conscience, and his suitability to all our wants and woes experimentally manifested, the blessed Spirit raises up a living faith whereby he is looked unto and laid hold of, and thus he becomes precious to all that believe in his name. Is not all this in strict accordance with the scriptures? for does not our Lord say, “It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me?” (John 6:45.) And how true it is that without this heavenly teaching and this divine drawing no one can really and effectually come unto Jesus; for he himself says, “No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:41.)

2. But besides this—for all are not favoured and blessed with very clear manifestations of the Son of God to their souls—sometimes the Lord allures by sending his word with power into the heart. Thus the apostle speaks of his gospel coming to the Thessalonians, “Not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” (1 Thess. 1:5.) Paul came

and preached the gospel to them; he set forth salvation through the blood of the Lamb; the Holy Ghost attended the word with power; it came to their heart with much assurance that it was the very truth of God; and they received it as the very voice of God speaking to them through the apostle's lips. What was the effect? "They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." Was not this the fruit of his all-victorious grace, and were they not thus allured into his service by the power of God?

3. But again: sometimes the Lord, without applying his word with any great and distinguishing power to the heart, makes his truth to drop with a measure of sweetness into the soul. This is as rain or dew, according to his own gracious declaration, "My doctrine shall drop like the rain; my speech shall distil as the dew." (Deut. 32:2.) Thus the precious ointment upon the head of Aaron is compared to "the dew of Hermon and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." (Psal. 133:2, 3.) The dropping, then, of his doctrine, or, as the word means, his "teaching," as rain, and the distilling of his gracious speech as dew, kindle in the soul a love of the truth, and wherever this is felt there is salvation, for we read of those who perish that they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. (2 Thess. 2:10.) There is a receiving of the truth, and a receiving of the love of the truth. These two things widely differ. To receive the truth will not necessarily save; for many receive the truth who never receive the love of the truth. Professors by thousands receive the truth into their judgment, and adopt the plan of salvation as their creed; but are neither saved nor sanctified thereby. But to receive the love of the truth by the truth as it is in Jesus being made sweet and precious to the soul, is to receive salvation itself. It is in this way that the gospel is made the power of God unto salvation; and therefore the apostle, speaking of "the preaching of the cross," says that "it is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." Now it is impossible that this power should be felt without its

having an alluring effect upon the soul, whereby it comes out from every evil thing and cleaves to the Lord with purpose of heart.

4. But sometimes the Lord allures by applying a promise, an invitation, a sweet encouragement, an unfolding for a moment of his lovely face, and giving a transient glimpse of his grace and glory. Whenever he puts forth this sacred power it has a drawing influence. This made the spouse say, "Draw me, we will run after thee;" feeling her need of this drawing power which God puts forth by the operations of his Spirit and grace upon a willing heart. We, therefore, read of God's people being "made willing in the day of his power" (Psal. 110:3); and to this points the ancient promise made to Japheth. "God shall enlarge [or, as it is in the margin, "persuade"] Japheth." (Gen. 9:27.) The word "enlarge" means literally to "open," and thus persuade or entice, or, as it is rendered in our text, "allure," for it is the same word in the original in both Genesis and Hosea. In these, then, and various other ways the Lord allures his people, and by giving them a taste of his beauty and blessedness, with some sense of his dying love, allures them into the wilderness, according to his own words by the prophet Jeremiah, "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thy espousals, when then wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." (Jer. 2:2.)

II.—But, to come to our second point, where does the Lord by these dealings with their consciences bring his people?—for these allurings are to bring them to a certain point. "Into the wilderness." They would not go there voluntarily: it is a place too desert for them to enter except as allured in a special manner by the grace and led by the power of God. Nor do they for the most part know where the Lord is taking them to. They follow his drawings; they are led by his allurings; they listen to his persuading voice, trusting to him as to an unerring Guide. But they know not the scene of desolation into which he is bringing them: this the Lord usually conceals from their eyes. He allures and they follow, but he

does not tell them what he is going to do with them, or where he intends to take them. He hides his gracious purposes, that he may afterwards bring them more clearly to light. Was not this true in a literal sense of the children of Israel in coming up out of Egypt? Were not they, in a sense, allured into the wilderness by eating the paschal lamb, by passing through the Red Sea, and being baptised in the cloud and in the sea, and especially by the cloudy pillar that went before them and led them into the wilderness? Thus the literal Israel was a type and figure of the spiritual Israel.

But look at the place whither he brings his people—the wilderness. This is a type and figure much used by the Holy Spirit, and conveys to us much deep and profitable instruction. Let us see if we can penetrate, with God’s help and blessing, into the meaning of the emblem.

1. First, then, the wilderness is an isolated, solitary spot, far, far away from cities, and towns, and other busy haunts of men; a remote and often dreary abode, where there is no intruding eye to mark the wanderer’s steps, where there is no listening ear to hear his sighs and cries. Adopting this idea, we may see from it how the Lord, when he puts forth his sacred power upon the heart to allure his people into the wilderness, brings them into a spot where in solitude and silence they may be separated from every one but himself. The church is spoken of in this chapter as “following after her lovers,” but “she could not overtake them;” as she could not find them, they would not seek for her. No inclination have they to follow her into the wilderness: if attracted by her charms they should seek again to entangle her in their embrace, they would immediately leave her upon the edge of the desert. No earthly lover follows her into the wilderness: such cannot bear its solitude. Religion is dull work to the carnal mind; to be alone leaves it too much open to the stings of conscience. To drive dull care away by company and amusements, and shut out all thoughts of death and judgment well suits the natural mind of man. The wilderness, therefore, we take as an emblem of being alone with God, coming

out of the world, away from sin and worldly company, out of everything carnal, sensual, and earthly, and being brought into that solemn spot where there are secret, sacred, and solitary dealings with God. Thus, our blessed Lord was in the wilderness forty days, and was with wild beasts. (Mark 1:13.) Far away from the haunts of men, tempted of Satan, ministered unto by angels, in the wilderness our adorable Mediator held holy fellowship with his heavenly Father. So John the Baptist, his forerunner, was in the wilderness with his “raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loin: and his meat was locusts and wild honey.” (Matt. 3:4.) All this was indicative of separation from the world, and a living in solitude, having no intercourse with any but God. Until then we are brought into the wilderness, we have no withdrawal from the creature, no solitary dealings with the heart-searching Jehovah; nor are we separated in heart and spirit from the world without, or the world within, so as to have any real spiritual intercourse with the God of heaven.

2. But look at the wilderness under another character: it is represented throughout the word of God as a place of trial and affliction. It was so in an especial manner to the children of Israel of old. No sooner did they enter into the wilderness than their trials began: they had no water to drink, no food to eat; a burning sun above, a parched sand below, dried up, as they complained, their very soul. They remembered the “fish which they ate in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic; but now, said they, our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes.” (Num. 11:5, 6.) So it is in grace. The wilderness is a place of trial and affliction; but when the Lord is alluring the soul into it by his teachings and manifestations, it little dreams of the trials and afflictions into which the Lord is bringing it. In the case of the children of Israel, we see how their faith was tried by the perils and hardships of the wilderness; we also see what rebellion and murmuring and fretfulness were manifested by them under it.

They were not in themselves worse than other people; but the wilderness brought to light the sins of their heart. So it is with the people of God; wilderness trials bring to light the rebellion, unbelief, and fretfulness of the carnal mind; and it is this discovery of the evils of the heart under affliction that makes the wilderness a place of such deep and continual trial.

3. But take another idea: the wilderness a place of temptation. It was so with the children of Israel. The wilderness brought out the lusts of their heart; and therefore we read that “they lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.” (Psal 106:14.) God tempted them and they tempted God: that is, God tried their faith and obedience, and they tried God’s faithfulness and patience. Sometimes they were tempted by hunger; then they were tempted by thirst; hot burning winds; fiery flying serpents; wandering Arabs; pursuing enemies, such as Amalek and Edom; a mixed multitude always lusting to return into Egypt; and at last the wrath of God wearing them out till their carcasses fell in the wilderness; all these things tempted them to unbelief and rebellion. Nay, more, the curse of a fiery law; the judgments of God against transgressors; the strictness of the legal ordinances, and the condemnation and bondage of the covenant under which they were, all made the wilderness a place of temptation, so that none came out of it unharmed but the preserved of God. In a similar way the wilderness is a place of temptation to all who are brought into it. Nay, our blessed Lord himself was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, there to endure temptation, there to meet Satan face to face, and there to undergo those fiery trials by which he himself “having suffered, being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted.”

4. But take another idea, equally scriptural, which is, that the wilderness is a place in which there is neither house nor home. It is called “a land not sown” (Jer. 2:2); that is, not cultivated like other lands; in which therefore there is no farm or homestead, no green field or waving corn, but a place in itself so destitute of food that

the traveller must perish unless supplied from some other source. In this sense, the wilderness may spiritually represent those spots in soul experience, where there is no help, strength, or refuge in the creature; in which but for some supply, I might say some miraculous supply from heaven, we must perish. What edge this gave to the complaints of the children of Israel, “Ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” (Ex. 16:3.) Were they not naturally in a pitiable spot when they thus first came into the wilderness? But even afterwards there was no water for them but what came from the rock, no food but the manna which fell from heaven; so that even amidst their very supply, they were ever reminded that they were dependent upon God every day. So when we are taken into the wilderness, we learn through its trials and temptations, that we have neither strength nor wisdom nor righteousness; in fact, that we have nothing and are nothing, and are thus made spiritually and experimentally the neediest of all paupers, and most abject of all dependents upon the sovereign bounty of God.

You little thought, when the Lord was graciously dealing with your soul and giving you to taste something of the sweetness of manifested mercy and the blessings of his grace, that this was all intended to allure you into the wilderness where God might speak with you face to face, and there teach you lessons which are to be learnt in no other spot. It is there we learn the evils of the heart; the darkness of our understanding; the alienation of our affections; the wretched unbelief, infidelity, murmuring and fretfulness of our fallen nature; and there also we learn the wondrous long-suffering, patience, and forbearance of God.

III. But to pass on to our third point, when we come into the wilderness under these alluring drawings of God, then the Lord carries on a certain work, of which he has spoken in the text as threefold, and which I shall therefore, adopting that division, now bring before you.

i. The first promise is that he will “speak comfortably unto her.”

It is in the margin “to her heart;” and I shall adopt that reading as my first explanation of the meaning of the word “comfortably.” God speaks to the heart: that is the special characteristic of his voice. Men may speak to the ear, and they can do no more; but God speaks to the heart, for it is there that his voice alone is heard. All religion first and last lies in a man’s heart. He may have his head well furnished with notions, yet a heart destitute of grace. But not so with the vessels of mercy, for they “believe with the heart unto righteousness;” and it is by the voice of God heard in the heart that a saving faith is raised up in the soul. There God must speak if there is to be any heart religion, any sound or saving experience, any knowledge of the truth so as to be blessed and saved thereby. But in the wilderness we learn the deep necessity there is that God should speak to our heart. We want the Lord himself to speak and the Lord alone; and to speak such words as shall reach our heart and enter with a divine power into our conscience. When you are in the wilderness, you have no friend, no creature help, no worldly comfort: these have all abandoned you. God has led you into the wilderness to bereave you of these earthly ties, of these creature refuges and vain hopes, that he may himself speak to your soul. If, then, you are separated from the world by being brought into the wilderness; if you are passing through trials and afflictions; if you are exercised with a variety of temptations, and are brought into that spot where the creature yields neither help nor hope, then you are made to see and feel that nothing but God’s voice speaking with power to your soul can give you any solid ground of rest or peace. Thus in the wilderness we learn not only the most painful, but the most profitable lessons that God can teach us. There we are stripped of all our own righteousness; there we see the end of all our own wisdom; and there all our native strength and creature confidence fail, give way, and come to nought. But as these fail, they teach us the necessity, the indispensable necessity of looking to the Lord that he may be our all in all. The thirst in the wilderness taught the children of Israel the necessity and blessedness of water

out of the rock; the hunger of the wilderness taught them the necessity and the blessedness of manna from heaven. As, then, in the wilderness by every trial and temptation, our heart is more laid open to our view; as trials more deeply perplex, as afflictions more heavily press, and temptations more continually annoy, we come to this spot in our own conscience: “God himself must be my all in all: it is he and he alone that must save me; from him my hope must come; from him all my strength, happiness, and consolation; I have nothing but what he gives and am nothing but what he makes.” Is not this the language of the way-worn pilgrim in the wilderness? Thus, by these teachings and operations of the Spirit of God upon your heart, you come to this point, that God himself must speak to your heart or you have nothing on which you can hang; nothing to which you can look. Is not this profitable? It may be painful; it is painful; but it is profitable, because by it we learn to look to the Lord and the Lord alone, and this must ever be a blessed lesson to learn for every child of God.

But take the words as they stand, “I will speak comfortably unto her.” We have almost the same words in Isaiah 40:1, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem.” It is in the margin as it is also in our text, “Speak to the heart of Jerusalem.” But what are these comfortable tidings which are to be announced to her, spoken to her very heart? What are those things which alone can give her true comfort? “Tell her,” first says the Lord, “that her warfare is accomplished;” that is, that peace is now her happy portion, for her warfare is ceased, her foes defeated, her battles won, her long, hard, toilsome “appointed time” of military service [margin] fulfilled, and that now she may, at least for a season, rest in the Lord as the all-victorious Captain of her salvation. But is there no other comfortable message for her? Yes. Tell her secondly, says the Lord, “that her iniquity is pardoned.” These are the best of all possible tidings, the most blessed as the most suitable of all good news. The manifested pardon of sin is the best gift of God’s grace that can reach a sinner’s heart; and

indeed without it true comfort there is none. But is there no other message to Zion's heart? Yes. The Lord, thirdly, assures her that "she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." What means this "double?" I understand by it the rich superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin; that is, the Lord is not content simply to pardon, simply to bless with mercy and peace, but will give them so superaboundingly that they shall be double of all her past guilt and sorrow.

2. But again, the Lord speaks comfortably when he assures the soul of its interest in the atoning blood and justifying obedience of his dear Son. Many of the dear saints of God are often very much tried as to their interest in these precious realities. They cannot give up their hope; they cannot altogether deny what God has done for their souls; and yet many anxious doubts and fears distress their mind as to their real interest in the atoning blood and finished work of the Son of God. Satan often takes great advantage of this state of doubt and uncertainty to harass and perplex their mind, and they are thus brought to this point that the Lord alone can satisfy them, that indeed he died for them. When, then, he speaks comfortably unto them, he drops a sweet promise or a gracious word into their heart, and thus makes their interest in atoning blood and dying love plain and clear. This may seem to fall short of a full manifestation of pardoning love, for it does not come exactly in that way; and yet it is in fact the same, for wherever there is a clear discovery of interest in atoning blood there pardon is virtually manifested, for if they have a place in the heart of Jesus and an interest in the work of Jesus, "there is no condemnation" to them as being thus manifestly "in him" (Rom. 8:1); and if no condemnation there must be justification, and, if justification, pardon and peace. (Rom. 5:1.)

3. But as the Lord's people after they have received manifested mercy are brought into the wilderness, and indeed are allured into it by the drawings of everlasting love, and as their trials and afflictions in it are usually very great, they want words from God's

own mouth to support and comfort them under their various and severe afflictions. We have seen already that the Lord brings them into the wilderness, that in that secluded, solitary spot he may himself speak to their heart. Little was spoken by the Lord to his people when in Egypt, except to kill and eat the paschal lamb. He reserved his voice till he had got them into the wilderness, and could talk with them face to face, sometimes "in the mount out of the midst of the fire" (Deut. 5:4), and sometimes "in the cloudy pillar." (Psal. 99:7.) Thus also he speaks in Ezekiel, "And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God." When, then, the Lord is pleased to apply some gracious word or sweet promise to their mind, or to bring home a precious portion of his truth to their heart, he speaks comfortably unto them, and by thus assuring them of their interest in his love and mercy, he raises up their drooping spirit and gives them power and strength to bear the weight of every cross laid upon their shoulders.

4. But again, as another instance of speaking comfortably unto them, the Lord from time to time opens up his past dealings with his people, casts a ray of light on the way that he has led them in the wilderness, renews and ratifies his former work upon their souls, and thus gives them a sweet testimony that what they experienced in times past was really wrought by his gracious hand in the depths of their conscience.

ii. But to pass on to a second wilderness blessing, he adds, "I will give her her vineyards from thence." What is it that causes many of the Lord's family to go heavily, being burdened? Their want of fruit: that they cannot live as they earnestly desire to the glory of God. They desire to walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long; to be fruitful in heart, in lip, and life. They would be spiritually minded, which they know is life and peace; they would ever be enjoying the presence of the Lord; they would glorify

him in all that they say and do. But alas! they cannot be what they would, for they find evil continually working in their heart. The deep-seated corruptions of their fallen nature defile and pollute everything they think, say, and do; and this feeling sense of their innate depravity, and of their total contrariety to all that purity and holiness which they would desire to possess as followers of Christ, casts them down at times into great trouble and distress as well as bondage and confusion of mind. But the Lord still means to make them fruitful in every good word and work, to grant them the desires of their heart, and enable them to live to his praise. How, then, does he effect this? He allures them into the wilderness; thus draws them away from everything that entangles their mind and captivates their affections; brings them into that secret spot where all without and within is a barren waste; shows them the world in its true colours as filled with thorns and briars; and that vanity and vexation of spirit are all it can give. The experience of these things makes them grieve and mourn under the workings of sin in themselves, and as touched with sympathising affections, under a view of the miseries whereby they are surrounded as the lot of all the children of God. This, then, is the fitting spot where the Lord is pleased to speak to the heart of his mourners in Zion, and reveal comforting words to their soul; and as it is under the gracious feelings thus produced, that fruit is borne to the praise and glory of God, it may be truly said that he gives them their vineyards from thence. But is not this a contradiction, or if not a contradiction, a miracle? A contradiction it is not, for it is in the fullest harmony with God's word and work; but a miracle it is, for indeed such is the nature of all God's dealings with his people. They are all miracles of mercy and grace. It may indeed be justly asked, Can we expect to find vineyards in a wilderness? Does the vine grow there naturally, or can it be made to grow there by artificial cultivation? Is not this the very character of a wilderness, that in it is neither vine nor fig-tree, field nor pasture? How, then, can vineyards be found in the rocky desert? By the same miracle that water was brought out of

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the flinty rock. No less a miracle is it that the place where fruit is found, is the last place where fruit would naturally or artificially grow. And yet how this enhances God's grace, and displays the greatness of his power.

But let us now see the Lord giving Zion her vineyards in the wilderness. It is by causing the fruits of his Spirit to spring up in her heart, for that is the wilderness to which our text points. Look at her then in the wilderness, bowed down by grief and trouble. Patience is given her to bear her afflictions with submission to the will of God. Is not this a gospel fruit? Godly sorrow on account of her sins and backslidings is graciously communicated: there is another cluster of grapes on this fruitful branch. Gratitude to the Lord for his patience, long-suffering, and tender forbearance: is not this another cluster of rich and ripe fruit in this vineyard in the wilderness? Giving up everything to his gracious disposal with a sincere and earnest desire, that he would fulfil all his wise purposes, in perfect harmony with his own sovereign will: this is another cluster of grapes on this vine of the desert. Blessing and praising God even for his afflicting hand, thanking him for the furnace, for the trials and temptations which have been so mercifully and wisely overruled for the soul's spiritual benefit. Lift up the leaf which has hidden it from view, and see if you cannot find this rich and ripe cluster hanging upon the vine in the wilderness. Separation from the world; deadness to the things of time and sense; spirituality of mind; holy and heavenly affections fixed upon things above; here are more grapes that grow upon this vine, planted by the hand of God in the strong desert. Walking in godly fear; abstaining from even the appearance of evil; setting the Lord ever before our eyes; living to him and not to ourselves; doing his will from the heart, and walking before him in the light of his countenance; look under the green leaves of a consistent profession and see how these ripe grapes grow in the wilderness into which God allures his people, that he may give them vineyards from thence. How different is nature and grace!

In nature the vine grows upon the sunny bank, or in our climate in the rich border, and needs much care and cultivation of human hands to bring the fruit to perfection. But in grace we do not get the vine with its clustering grapes from the rich bed, or the sunny bank; from digging, hoeing, and weeding the native soil of our own heart; but by the Lord's alluring its by his Spirit and grace into the wilderness, where nature withers and dies, but where he causes the spiritual vine to grow and bear fruit, and the vineyards of his right hand planting, the churches of his experimental truth, to flourish and abound. Have you not often desired to live more to God's glory; to walk more in his fear; to be more spiritually minded; to have the Scriptures more deeply and experimentally opened up to you: and to enjoy more heavenly fellowship with the Father and his dear Son? Sure I am from my own experience, that such is the desire of a gracious heart. But you little thought how the Lord would work in you to will and to do of his good pleasure, and to make you fruitful in every good word and work. You did not think it would be by his alluring you into the wilderness of trial and affliction, temptation and sorrow, and that there he would cause the vine of his grace to take deeper root in your breast and cause the fruits of righteousness so earnestly longed for to grow upon the bough, drooping and trailing from weakness, and yet running over the wall, as was said of Joseph. (Gen. 49:22.) But can you not now see the wisdom and mercy of God in this? If we had not been previously brought down into the wilderness we should be ascribing the fruit to our own exertions, to the natural goodness of the soil, or to our skill in cultivation; but it being so purely and I may say so miraculously the especial gift and grace of God, we must acknowledge him to be the sole author of it, and confess before God and man, "From thee and thee only is our fruit found."

iii. But there is another thing which the Lord promises to do for his church in the wilderness: he will give her there "the valley of Achor for a door of hope." This carries us back to ancient days when a very solemn scene took place in the valley of Achor. You

recollect that before Jericho was taken, God pronounced a solemn curse upon any man that should take of "the accursed thing"—the spoil of Jericho, which was "devoted" to destruction (Josh. 6:17), as lying under the curse of God; and you will remember that a man named Achan, despising God's command, and seduced by a spirit of greedy covetousness, took a Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of 50 shekels weight, and hid them in his tent. You will also call to mind how the eye of God marked it all: how when the lot was cast it fell upon the guilty man; how he was taken into the valley of Achor with all that he had, and how "all Israel stoned him with stones and burnt them with fire. Wherefore the name of that place was called the valley of Achor, unto this day." (Josh. 7:26.) To this solemn transaction, therefore, the Holy Spirit makes allusion in the words of our text, where he speaks of "the valley of Achor" as a "door of hope." Achor means "confusion," and as Achan was stoned to death in it for taking the accursed thing, it may also signify "destruction." "The valley of Achor," then, is spiritually the same place as the wilderness, for that to a child of God often is the valley of confusion where his mouth is stopped through guilt and shame, as was Achan's when the lot fell upon him, and he was obliged to confess his sins before God and man. It is also often to the saint of God the valley of "destruction;" for when the accursed thing, the spoil of this doomed and devoted world, is found in his possession as loved and delighted in, a sense of God's anger falls upon him, and by this all his legal hope and fleshly righteousness are destroyed—stoned as it were with stones and burnt with fire, as a just judgment from God for loving the world which is God's enemy. Have you not sometimes feared lest the judgments of God should fall openly upon you, as having sinned against him as covetously and as wickedly as Achan sinned by taking of the accursed thing, and that your lot might be the same, to be a monument of God's wrath even before the face of man? Have you not even feared lest the people of God should rise up against you on account of your sins and backslidings, and in

a spiritual sense stone you out of the camp with stones or burn you with the fire of just condemnation? I believe that the valley of Achor is at times as needful a spot as the wilderness for a child of God: for as all must be brought into the wilderness there to have their vineyards given, so must they come down into the valley of Achor, the place of stopping of mouths, the low and humble spot of confusion and trouble, that there the door of hope may be opened up with a divine hand in their soul. As there is no fruit to be found in heart, lip, or life till God gives it in the wilderness, so till we come into the valley, the low and humble vale of confusion and destruction, there is no good hope through grace communicated. Here, then, is another miracle, for it is in this valley that God opens a door of hope. When the saint of God is sometimes almost in despair through the pressure of sin, the curse of the law, and the condemnation of an accusing conscience, the Lord in this very valley, where all legal hope sinks and dies, opens a door of hope in his desponding heart. But how does he affect this? He sends down a ray of mercy, a beam of grace, gives a view of atoning blood and dying love, or grants a gracious manifestation of his dear Son, and thus revealing the Lord of life and glory as the way, the truth, and the life, opens a door of hope, whereby the soul enters into his gracious presence by the power of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. As holy John “looked, and behold a door was opened in heaven,” so there is a door of hope opened to the soul even when expecting Achan’s fate in the gloomy valley of Achor. How blessed this is! As Hart says of himself,

“I looked for hell: he brought me heaven.”

When you expected wrath, then to find mercy; fearing judgment, to obtain pardon; dreading punishment, to receive the declaration, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” Is not this an opening in the valley of Achor of a door of hope?

IV.—But let me come now to our last point—the effect of these gracious dealings of God in the wilderness, the gracious fruit of praise and thankfulness for his speaking comfortably to the heart,

giving the vineyards, and opening a door of hope in this gloomy valley. “She shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.”

I have already alluded to the prophetic aspect of this chapter, and that I believe it will be literally and spiritually accomplished in times still to come, when the children of Israel will be restored to the land of their fathers; and then as they sang upon the banks of the Red Sea, so will they again sing unto the Lord a new song, for they will be able to say in every sense of the word, “The Lord is my strength and song, and he has become my salvation.” But we will give it a spiritual and experimental sense as now fulfilled in the hearts of God’s saints. I have already shown you how God allures them into the wilderness. By these allurements he espouses them to himself. When, then, he speaks comfortably to them in the wilderness, gives them these gracious fruits, and opens a door of hope, he revives and renews those former days of chaste, virgin love. These days God himself remembers, for he says, “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.” (Jer. 2:2.) Had you not once a day of espousals when the Lord was first pleased to reveal a sense of his mercy and goodness to your soul, and thus espoused you as a chaste virgin to the Son of his love? Those were the days of early love, when we tasted that the Lord was gracious, and having a view of his beauty and blessedness, fell deeply in love with him who is “altogether lovely.” But, after the days of our espousals, we had to go into the wilderness, there to learn what we are by nature; there to have the deep secrets of the heart opened up; there to have a long succession of trials and temptations, afflictions and sorrows, that we might learn experimentally what this world is, and what we are as sinners in it. Yet the Lord is gracious still even in the wilderness, and brings his people there that he may communicate unto them the blessings of which I have spoken. Under the enjoyment of them, Zion begins to sing; and what is her song? A new song, according

to those words, “O sing unto the Lord a new song” (Psal. 96:1); and yet not new, for it is the same song which she sang “in the days of her youth.” Singing, in scripture, is always connected with joy and gladness, and especially after a turning of captivity; for to sing his praise is the instinctive feeling of the soul when experimentally blessed. But Zion in the wilderness had forgotten her ancient song, nor could she sing it again until the Lord spake comfortably to her heart. She could sigh and groan, weep and lament, but no joyful song could she raise, for her harp was hung upon the willows, and in that strange land she could not sing the Lord’s song. (Psal. 137:2, 4.) But no sooner does the Lord begin to speak comfortably to her in the wilderness, give her her vineyards from thence, and open the door of hope in the valley of Achor, than a new song is put into her mouth, even a song of praise and thanksgiving to her God. Have you not sometimes been obliged to burst forth into a song of praise to the God of all your mercies for an unexpected visit of his gracious presence, or for some discovery of his goodness, mercy, and love? This is singing as in the days of your youth—those youthful days not only in nature but also in grace, when the Lord made himself very near, dear, and precious to your soul, and the world and sin were put under your feet. Many changes may we have seen since then; many lusts and corruptions may have been brought to light; much unbelief discovered; many backslidings and departings from the Lord have been committed, over the painful recollection of we may have still to sigh and mourn. But the Lord, who has begun his gracious work upon the sinner’s heart, never leaves or forsakes the operation of his own hands; for whom he loves he loves unto the end, and from that love not “things present nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature” shall be able to separate its favoured object. “I will see you again,” was our Lord’s gracious promise to his disciples, “and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh it from you.” When, then, the Lord comes again in mercy and love, he enables the soul to sing once more the song of Moses and the Lamb, “as in the days

of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.” It is as it were a revival and more than a revival of the blessed days of old. Under this sweet influence, the soul can say, “What have I to do any more with idols?” Then it can leave the world professing and profane, being separated from both by wilderness trials as well as by wilderness mercies. These dealings of the Lord make a deep and lasting impression upon the mind, for his teachings are to profit, and the fruit of them is to be seen in a clearer and fuller separation from all evil and all error; in greater simplicity and sincerity of spirit; in a deeper conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin; in increased tenderness of conscience; and in a walk before God and man in closer consistency with the precepts of the Gospel and the example of the Son of God when tabernacling here below.

Can you find anything in your heart and conscience that bears any resemblance to these gracious dealings, these divine teachings? Are you in any one part of the path which I have cast up? Is the Lord alluring you; or are you in the wilderness; or is the Lord speaking to your heart; or is he opening in the valley of Achor a door of hope; or is he putting a new song into your mouth? Compare what you hope and believe the Lord has wrought in your soul with these marks of divine teaching as traced out by the pen of the Holy Ghost in the passage before us, and if you can find any one of these gracious evidences, bless the Lord for his distinguishing mercy.

182 Zion’s Waymarks

Preached at North Street chapel, Stamford, on Lord’s Day Morning,

Aug. 18, 1861

“Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. How

long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man."

Jer. 31:21, 22.

The Scripture in some respects much resembles the eyes of a well-painted portrait. Have you not observed how, in a picture of this kind, the eyes always seem to be looking upon you, and still to follow you in whatever direction you may go? Whether you stand before it or at either side of it, even if you retreat into some distant corner, whatever position you take in the room where it is, the eyes of the picture follow you still at every change. So the Scripture looks with its searching eyes upon and into your very heart, nor can you get into any spot or place where these eyes will not follow you; for as it is the word of the living God, it looks out as with his eyes upon the thoughts, words, and actions of men. But the eyes of the best painted portrait are not living eyes. They are representations of the living eye, but in themselves, however beautifully painted, they are at best but lifeless imitations of nature's piercing glance. But assume such a case as this—impossible, I admit, but allowable as an illustration—that by some supernatural power and influence these eyes should all at once be animated into life; that living instead of dead eyes looked from the picture upon you as you stood before it. How different then would be the feelings of your mind! What a revulsion would at once take place in your thoughts! The dead eyes of the best painted portrait exercise no power or influence over your actions. You know it is but painted canvass as inanimate as the wall on which it hangs; but the living eyes of the living portrait following your every movement would at once control every action as witnessing them as much as if the person himself were actually inspecting them. Now this is just the difference between the way in which Scripture looks upon those who are still in their unregeneracy, and those who are made alive unto God by regenerating grace. The Scripture looks out as with the eyes of God upon all men, for it condemns their actions; but all men do

not tremble before its eyes. But let there be the communication of divine life to the soul, then those eyes of God in the word are seen not only to look upon the actions, but a power is felt in them whereby they penetrate into the deepest and darkest recesses of the heart itself.

Take another idea as an illustration, which may give you perhaps a little inlet into the authority of God's word as spoken with power to the heart. Assume that in this congregation there were now several foreigners present—French, Dutch, or German strangers, none of whom understood a word of the English language. Whatever I might speak would then have no power or influence upon their hearts. If I preached law or gospel, if I held out the curse or the blessing, it would equally fail to produce any effect upon their consciences, for this simple reason, that they would not understand a single word of what I spoke. But assume that a miracle could be suddenly wrought as on the day of Pentecost, when every man heard the apostles speak in his own language wherein each was born. Could such a miracle be at this moment wrought, then what before was a mere crowd of unmeaning sounds would fall upon their ears as intelligible words.

Such is the difference between life and death; such is the distinction between the word of God looking out with living eyes as the Lord looked through the pillar of fire and of the cloud unto the host of the Egyptians, and its looking upon men with dead eyes; such is the difference between the word of God speaking with power and authority, life and spirit, to men's consciences as quickened into life by his grace, and its falling upon their ears, as it falls upon most men's hearts, as an unintelligible sound.

Now apply these figures to the passage before us. God speaks in it to the Church, and says to her with a voice of authority and power, "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities." This direction from his lips being found in the word of truth, looks

out as it were with the eyes of God upon his living family as in a certain state; this word of admonition, as being uttered by the mouth of the Lord to his bride, speaks with authority to those who, as united to him in wedding ties, have ears to listen to the voice of their Husband and Head. But if you have no divine life, no spiritual or experimental knowledge of Christ in your heart, these eyes have no life for you, and look upon you like the eyes of a dead portrait, which you see to look at you, yet which do not search the very depths of your soul. The words, though uttered by the lips of God, fall likewise as so many unmeaning sounds upon your ears, and do not enter into your heart as though they were being uttered by the glorious Majesty of heaven personally to you.

But hoping there are children of the living God here present to whom these words may speak as with the Lord's own mouth, I shall, with his blessing, endeavour from them,

I.—First, to show the character of the person who is here addressed, and, in explaining thus, I shall be guided by the special title which the Lord gives her, "O, virgin of Israel."

II.—Secondly, to open up the expostulation which God addresses to her, and the name by which he calls her: "How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?"

III.—Thirdly, to enforce the directions which God gives to this backsliding daughter: "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities."

IV.—Fourthly, to point out the foundation on which the whole of these gracious admonitions are based: "The Lord hath created new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man."

I.—Observe, then, with me, first, the character of the person addressed, and let us see if we can gather up, from the word of truth and from the experience of God's saints, who and what this character is. It is a female personage, and one evidently of great mark and likelihood. As, however, she is called "the virgin of

Israel," and Israel is a typical name in the Scripture for the family of God, there can be no doubt that the Church is here addressed under that title. But why should the Church be called "the virgin of Israel," not only here but in many other places of Scripture? as, for instance, in this very chapter, "Again I will build thee and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel" (v. 4); and again, where the Lord reproving her for her idolatries, says, "The virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing." (Jer. 18:13.) In a similar way the Church is called sometimes "the virgin, the daughter of Zion," as where the Lord says of her concerning Sennacherib, "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee and laughed thee to scorn" (Isai. 37:22); and sometimes "the virgin, the daughter of Judah." "The Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a wine press." (Lam. 1:15.) As it is clear from these passages that by the expression, "the virgin of Israel" is meant the Church of Christ, the virgin spouse of the Lord the Lamb, it will be desirable to explain why the term is used; and, in doing so, I think we may give it a twofold interpretation.

1. First, we may view it as descriptive of the character of the Church of Christ antecedently to the fall, and thus as expressing, in determinate language, what she was in the mind of God, as viewed in the Son of his love, before she fell in the Adam transgression. Nothing can be more plain from the word of truth than that the Church had a being in the mind of God before the foundation of the world, and that before time itself had birth she was given to the Son of God to be eternally his. Thus the apostle speaks of the saints at Ephesus as being "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4); and our blessed Lord, in his intercessory prayer to his heavenly Father, says, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were and thou gavest them me;" and again, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine; and all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." (John 17:6, 9, 10.) Thus we see that the

Church had a being in the mind of God before earth was, and as such was chosen in Christ and given to Christ. Now the question arises whether the Church was thus chosen in Christ and given to him fallen or unfallen. Many good men have believed that she was chosen as fallen; but such is not my faith. I believe that she was chosen unfallen, in all her primitive beauty and purity, as viewed by the Father in all the glorious perfections of his dear Son. We can hardly think that our blessed Lord espoused the Church to himself in all her degradation, in all her guilt, filth, and ruin. As such she would hardly seem a fitting spouse for the Son of God; and I think that we have a striking representation of this in the direction given to the high priest under the law to take a fitting wife for him in his high office. "He shall take a wife in her virginity; a widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or a harlot, these shall he not take; but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife." (Lev. 21:13, 14.) Now as the high priest under the law was a type of the great High Priest over the house of God, we may well see in that direction and in that prohibition an intimation that the Church was espoused to the Son of God in all her virgin purity, as she stood up in the mind of Jehovah in all her native innocency. Not that she ever stood separate from the Son of God, for God loved his people from eternity only in Him, and that with the same love, as the Lord himself declared, "And hast loved them as thou hast loved me." (John 17:23.) She was therefore "blessed in him with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places," and "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:3, 6); and thus, as his chosen and accepted bride, the Church was presented to our blessed Lord in all that perfection, beauty, and glory wherewith she will shine for ever in union with Him. It is true that she fell, miserably fell, in the Adam fall. It is true that she sank, awfully sank, out of that state of purity in which she was viewed by the eye of Jehovah and wherein she was received into the arms of Jesus as his espoused bride. But because she fell from her state of native innocency, she did not fall out of his heart or arms. We therefore read, "Christ loved the Church and gave himself for

it." Does not this expression show that he loved the Church before he gave himself for it? But when did he love the Church? Before or after the fall? Surely before the fall, for did not the Lord tell his heavenly Father that he loved his people as he loved him, and did he not say, "Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world?" (John 17:24.) But further. Was not the union of Eve with Adam in Paradise a type of the union of the Church with Christ? for as Adam was a type of Christ when he was made a living soul (1 Cor. 15:45), so Eve was a type of the Church; and as Eve was brought and given to Adam in Paradise before the fall in all her native innocency, in all her virgin purity, so was the Church presented and given to Christ before she was contaminated by the Adam transgression. It was because he loved her, loved her before the fall, that he gave himself for her after she had become ruined by the fall. Thus though she awfully fell in the Adam transgression, and became defiled from head to foot through the sin in which she was then and there entangled, it did not break the eternal bond of union, did not snap the wedding tie with which she had been already espoused to the Son of God. But now came in that wondrous scheme of eternal mercy and superabounding grace whereby she was to be washed from all her sins in the atoning blood of the Lord the Lamb. Thus redemption came in as part of God's eternal purpose to glorify his dear Son; for the Church being sunk into that awful state of sin and transgression through the Adam fall from which she could not redeem herself, there lay a necessity upon the Son of God that he must die for her, so that he might wash out all her sins in the fountain of his blood and present her without spot or wrinkle or any such thing before the eyes of infinite Purity. Being so deeply sunk in sin, how could she stand up in the courts of heavenly bliss except as washed in his blood and clothed in his righteousness? Thus she has a perfection in the Son of God not only antecedently to the fall but subsequently to it, as washed in his blood, clothed in his righteousness, sanctified by his Spirit, and conformed to his image.

2. But there is another sense in which the Lord may be considered as addressing the Church here by the name of “the virgin of Israel,” which I may term an experimental sense. In this sense I understand it as referring to the experience of the first love of a virgin soul. We must ever bear in mind that the word of truth not only lays down doctrine in its clearest form, but blends it continually with the experience of the saints, and thus truth wears a twofold aspect—truth in the mind of God, truth in the heart of a believer. We find the Lord speaking to the church of Ephesus, “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.” (Rev. 2:4.) This “first love” we may call virgin love, as being the first pure love of the soul before it is contaminated by the sins of a backsliding heart, and thus the Lord says, “Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the Lord; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.” (Jer. 2:2.) What was the state of Israel then? “Israel was holiness unto the Lord.” Such is the Lord’s own testimony to those gracious feelings, holy affections, and pure desires which are ever found in the soul under the first manifestations of his dying love. The heart then is wholly his. Then the spouse can say, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine. Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.” (Song 1:2, 3.) That in this sense the Church may be called the “Virgin of Israel” is plain from Paul’s words, “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2): that is, free from all the contaminating pollutions of evil and error. It is in grace as in nature. No natural love is so pure, so strong its virgin love, when the youthful heart expands itself like an opening rose, or like a climbing plant embraces with its tender yet firm tendrils the first object of its fond affection. So in grace. When the Lord is pleased for the first time to manifest himself after a season of soul

trouble, of great guilt of conscience, of many doubts, fears, painful exercises, and distressing sensations under an apprehension of the wrath of God, he wins every affection of the heart, and in discovering himself as the King in his beauty, makes captive and takes possession of our first, our virgin love. No sooner does he manifest himself we give him our heart, for he is worthy of it, and we love his Person and work, love, blood, and grace, than we [love?] him with a pure heart fervently. This is the day of our espousals, when we go after the Lord in the wilderness, leaving the world, and abandoning everything in it for his sake. How little we care at that time for all its pleasures or all its profits, and how little we court its smiles or fear its frowns! Now at that time there is no room for the entrance of any other love. The love of Christ which passeth knowledge takes and keeps full possession of the soul, and all other lovers are shut out. As in strong natural love, so in spiritual love, there can be but one object, and that one object kills the heart to everything and every person else.

But, alas, this pure virgin love does not abide very long in its power and purity. We carry in our bosom a vile nature; a backsliding, wandering, transgressing heart. We are surrounded also by innumerable snares, gins, and traps laid for our feet by a most unwearied adversary. There is in our carnal mind a dreadful propensity to become entangled in them; and as these get possession of the thoughts and affections, we insensibly wander from the Lord and leave our first love. I may perhaps illustrate this insensible wandering of affection by a case in nature, unhappily too common. Two young people are fondly attached to each other; they never have loved any other, and their love, therefore, is of the strongest, warmest, and most unbroken character. But through some unexpected circumstances, the man is compelled to go to a foreign land. Employment is so scarce, or trade and business so bad, that he can scarcely earn a living for himself in his own country, much less keep a wife, and therefore he feels compelled to emigrate, to see if he can better his condition in Australia, in

the expectation that the woman whom he loves may eventually join him there or he return to her. They part with many lamentations, tears, and protestations of mutual fidelity, and for a time keep their vows with all strictness. But time rolls on; by slow degrees the affections grow cool on one or both sides, and the consequence is that their vows are forgotten, their protestations vanish into thin air, and eventually other lovers come in and occupy the almost vacant heart. He marries another woman, she marries another man, and they see each other no more. I mention this not unusual occurrence merely as an illustration, for we well know that there is no such final separation between the Lord and the soul that believes in him, but to show what takes place sometimes in the heart of a child of God in the gradual declension of his spiritual affections. When he is espoused to the Lord in the first manifestations of his love and grace, Jesus takes full possession of his heart; there is no room then for any other lover, and the soul binds itself with many protestations of continued faithfulness to this blessed bridegroom, to this gracious Head and Husband, who by a discovery of his beauty and blessedness, grace and glory, has won to himself every affection of the virgin heart. If ever we hate sin it is then; if ever we love holiness it is then; if ever we are spiritually minded, which is life and peace, it is then. I hope I can truly say, that when the Lord discovered himself to my soul in his person and work, such were the feelings and affections of my heart. But sooner or later, for good and wise reasons, the Lord withdraws himself. He is like the householder spoken of in the parable, who is said to go "into a far country." (Matt. 22:33.) This withdrawing of the Lord the bride speaks of where she says, "I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake; I sought him but I could not find him; I called him but he gave me no answer." (Song Sol. 5:6.) This withdrawing of the Lord's power and presence made David so often cry, "O Lord, be not far from me; forsake me not, O Lord." (Psalm 35:22; 38:21.) When he thus withdraws himself the soul may mourn over his

absence and beg him to return; but he does not, at least for a time, grant this request. But as his absence is less sensibly felt, room is soon made in the affections for other lovers. The various objects of time and sense, the allurements of the world, the lusting after evil things, with many carking cares, all gather up a power which was sensibly weakened and apparently destroyed when the Lord first made himself precious. The heart must have an object; the affections must be engaged, and therefore if faith, hope, and love are not in strong and sensible operation upon the Lord, there is as it were naturally and necessarily a leaving, a losing of the first love; a wandering in affection from Jesus; a straying after other lovers and other objects to amuse and entertain the mind. But this brings us to our second point, which is to open up

II.—The keen yet tender expostulation which the Lord addresses to the church, and the name by which he calls her, "How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?" She is still a daughter of God and addressed by him as such, though a backsliding one. She has not lost her title to be one of the family of God, though from the power of temptation, the strength of sin, and the subtlety of Satan, she has wandered from her first love, and become a backsliding daughter. The Lord, therefore, whose eyes have ever been resting upon her to take notice of all her ways, meets her as a wanderer from his love, reproves her as having departed from him, and yet tenderly and affectionately asks her, how long she means to go about, roving and straying from her rightful head and husband. It is as if he asked her why she would not return, for his arms and heart were ready to receive her, and he was grieved that she should treat him so unkindly as to forget all his love and all her own vows and protestations, and leave him for other lovers. Now if you know anything experimentally of having loved the Lord with a pure heart fervently, of being espoused to him in days past so as to give him all your affections; and yet, through the power of temptation, the strength of sin, the weakness of the flesh, and the subtlety of Satan, have left your

first love and have backslidden, I do not mean openly, but secretly, from the power of that love once enjoyed; you will see and feel how aptly the Lord addresses to you these words of expostulation, mingled with encouragement. The earlier chapters of Jeremiah abound in such reproofs for departing from the Lord, and yet all are mingled with the most gracious invitations to return. Thus he says "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." (Jer. 2:13.) And again: "What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" (Jer. 2:5.) So also: "And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?" (Jer. 2:18.) Thus, we see how earnestly and yet how tenderly the Lord remonstrates with his people for departing from him, "the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to themselves cisterns broken cisterns that can hold no water." After all he had done for them in his providence and in his grace, might he not justly ask them what they had to do in the way of Egypt to drink the waters of Sihor, that is, the Nile, or what had they to do in the way of Assyria, to drink of the waters of the river Euphrates? Could these turbid, could these foreign streams quench their thirst, and to get at them, must they not leave the waters of Shiloah that go softly? (Isai. 8:6.) What contempt is poured upon the past goodness and mercy of the Lord, when happiness is sought out of him, who is the only true Fountain of delight, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore!

But all this search after happiness in created objects proves useless and vain. Therefore the Lord says "Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way" (Jer. 2:36); or as in the words of the text, "How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?" There is a going about; or as the word here means, a roving and wandering with restless desires, and yet never obtaining rest or peace. But how aptly this expression represents the way in which

the backsliding daughter, when she has left her first love, goes about from object to object, to obtain something to satisfy her restless mind.

1. There is a going about, for instance, to set up a fleshly holiness. Those who have been rightly led of God, who have been chastened by him, and taught out of his law, so as to know its curse and bondage, do not usually afterwards go about to set up their own righteousness as before. They do not in this point resemble those of whom the Apostle speaks, "that they being ignorant of God's righteousness, go about to establish their own righteousness." (Rom. 10:3.) They have been driven out of this false refuge; but they still, as I have said, often go about to set up a fleshly holiness, by which I mean a holiness distinct from that which flows out of the communications of the Lord's Spirit and grace, power, and presence. They are divorced, in a sense, from the law of Moses, by knowing something of its curse and bondage, or they could never have been married to Christ; but from the legality of their self-righteous heart, they have some idea that there is a holiness in the creature which can be obtained by their own diligent exertions. Thus, when they have lost the presence and power of the Lord, they often seek to regain it by an unceasing round of duties, as if these would win him back, or as if they could walk in Christ in any other way but as they first received him as in themselves without help or hope. Now all these attempts to set up a fleshly holiness distinct from that produced by the power and presence of the Lord are a going about, and a real departure in heart from him; for there is no holiness in the absence of Jesus; there is no spirituality of mind, no gracious affections, no delight in knowing his will and doing it where he is not felt in his power and in his love. We may set up for ourselves a fleshly holiness, prescribe for our daily walk a round of self-imposed duties, and please ourselves with a vain imagination of our religious superiority to others; but all these thoughts and views are in reality the mere dregs of self-righteousness, for there is, there can be no real holiness of heart,

no real sanctification of spirit except in the enjoyment of the Lord's manifested presence and the shedding abroad of his love. Is not Jesus "of God made unto us sanctification?" In his favour is there not life? In his presence is there not power? In union with him is there not fruit? In communion with him is there not a fellowship with his Spirit, for "he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit?" (1. Cor. 6:17.) Thus all this going about in the pursuit of fleshly holiness will end where it began—in vanity and vexation of spirit. He would therefore remonstrate with his backsliding daughter, "How long wilt thou go about to set up this fancied holiness of thine? Art thou not comely in my comeliness which I have put upon thee (Ezek. 16:14); perfect in my perfections and glorious as shining forth in the beauty of holiness which thou hast from union and communion with thy Head and Husband? All holiness, except that produced by my Spirit and grace, is deception at the best. There is a worm at the root. It may seem, like Jonah's gourd, to shelter thee awhile, but it will fade, wither, and die under the first hot beams of the sun of temptation." So we have found it. The assaults of Satan, the workings of deep and desperate corruption, the boilings up of rebellion, fretfulness, unbelief, infidelity, and a thousand other evils soon dried up this gourd that we were once so highly pleased with, and we found its root to be in the dust.

2. But take the words in another sense. There is a going about of the carnal mind, in the case of the backsliding daughter, a "gadding about," as Scripture emphatically calls it, to gather up pleasure and delight from earthly objects. How many paradises have you constructed in your ever-teeming fancy! How many lofty castles have you built in the air! How many objects has a fond and wandering imagination painted and is perhaps still painting before your eyes, from which you hoped to gather up something to amuse or entertain your carnal mind! What schemes of pleasure or profit, what speculations in thought or purse, what visions of happiness and comfort, what a swimming in a sea of fancied delight in wife or child, husband or home, house and independence, have been

floating before your eyes like evening clouds all tinted with rays of purple and gold! But night came on, and where were they? Yet whilst so fondly and madly doing this, there was not merely a departing from the living God, but a hewing out of cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water; a gadding about to drink of the waters of Sihor or of the river of Assyria; for instead of being content with happiness in the Lord, there was a longing in your vain mind for some created object to make you happy, a stretching forth of your hands to embrace an earthly lover, a seeking of pleasure in some image created by your carnal heart as a source of delight, distinct from the manifested presence of the Lord.

3. But look at the words as descriptive of another wandering from the Lord. What a going about is often too painfully visible in some who we hope fear God, to enable themselves to rise in the world. What ambition to get on in life fires the minds of most; and some of the people of God are not free from this unholy fire. If the Lord, too, seem in some way to smile in providence, how it feeds this unholy flame. Have you never been caught in the snare; and did you not sensibly feel to rise in pride as the things of time and sense rose in your estimation, and as they came more closely within your grasp? If your business increase, if you are making money, if you are getting on prosperously in worldly circumstances, how this accession of means to gratify it secretly feeds the pride of your heart, and what a train it lays in your mind for a succession of earthly objects, whereby to please and entertain your carnal senses! How this to you new prosperity seems to push you out of the circumstances in which God originally placed you! You might have moved once in a humble sphere, were born perhaps in the lap of poverty and struggled in youth with many difficulties. But now you seem to be climbing up the ladder of life—from being a servant that you have become a master; from being at everybody's beck and call, you have now those whom you can send where you please. As these things then work in your mind, pleasing and gratifying it, how pride works

with them, and how instead of seeking your happiness in the love of God, and deriving all your pleasure from that pure stream of holy and heavenly delight, there is an indulging in those objects which merely feed the carnal mind in its enmity against God and godliness. Drawn aside more and more by these things, you are “going about” bewildered as regards any delight in heavenly blessings; and having lost sight of the sweet views you once had of the Lord, and being deprived of the enjoyment of his presence, you are almost now content to feed on the dust. Or take the other side of the question; suppose that the Lord should not suffer you to rise in the world as you could wish, for indeed there are very few of the Lord’s people who do so rise; say that you are sinking instead of rising; that your farm, or shop, or business, instead of becoming more flourishing, gets more and more drooping. What then? Will those reverses carry your affections upwards? May you not be still a backsliding daughter? Yes; you may equally be “going about” full of carking cares, bowed down by a load of worldly troubles that seem to gnaw your very vitals, and sunk into such despondency as to the future as almost to forget there is a God of providence, or how he has appeared for your help and relief in times past. Thus there is danger in riches, and danger in poverty; a snare in rising, a snare in sinking. There are temptations when business increases, and there are temptations when business diminishes; a neglect of God when providence smiles, and a forgetfulness of God when providence frowns. “They that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” (1 Tim. 6:9.) But poverty has its snares too, for it opens a door for despondency, fretfulness, unbelief, and the sorrow of the world which worketh death.

4. But apart from these peculiar temptations, what a variety of objects the carnal mind can entertain itself with when once the soul has left its first love! How each person has his favourite pursuit, his peculiar besetment; and how as this becomes an idol, which it often will do in the absence of the Lord, it will gradually occupy

the mind and insensibly steal away the affections. From this heart-idolatry arises a “going about” of the backsliding daughter to entertain herself with her earthly lovers. Now the Lord sees all this, and sees too into what a state of confusion and bewilderment his backsliding daughter gradually gets, when losing sight of him, she goes after her idols. When her affections were heavenly and her mind engaged on divine realities, she was walking in the strait and narrow path; her eyes were looking right on and her eyelids straight before her. (Prov. 4:25.) But leaving her first love, and her eyes looking off the Lord, she has got entangled in some snares of Satan; and the consequence is that she has lost sight of the path, is wandering in a wilderness where she cannot make straight paths for her feet, and is become so bewildered that she scarcely knows where she is, who she is, or what she is. She is like a person lost upon a wild moor, or out of the beaten track in a dreary desert, who the further he goes the more bewildered he becomes, and the more he tries the more difficult he finds it to recover the path. Now does not this exactly describe the case and state of some of you here? You cannot altogether give up the belief that God has done something in times past for your soul; you cannot abandon the hope that it was he who began the work, and gave you some testimony of your interest in the love and blood of the Lamb. It may have been long ago; but it was a time never to be forgotten, when the Lord first broke in upon your soul with healing in his wings, and gave you a testimony that indeed he had bought you with his redeeming blood. Oh, how you loved him then and walked with him in sweet communion! But where have you been since, and where are you now? How do you spend the greater part of your time, and what for the most part are the daily exercises of your mind? Perhaps, feeling little else but a wandering heart, ever departing from the Lord, ever hewing out broken cisterns; ever gadding about, first down to Egypt, then up to Assyria; trying if this pursuit can give you any pleasure, or if you can gather up any profit or amusement or interest from this object. Is not this sad

work for a living soul? Is not this a miserable declension from the right ways of the Lord? and does not conscience in your bosom often proclaim it is so, filling you with grief and compunction, and making you cry, "Oh that I were as in months past, as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle?" (Job 29:2, 4.) But like a person who has wandered out of the road, you have gone every way but the right, and now scarcely know where you are or what you are, but often fear lest, like the man that wandereth out of the way of understanding, you should be found at last in the congregation of the dead. (Prov. 21:16.)

Now what I would fain impress upon your mind is that you should see how God looks out upon you in your present state from the eyes of the text, and how his voice speaks to you when he says in it, "How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?" Are you not tired yet? What will be the end of all your wanderings? Will you still persevere in this wretched course? Will this make a happy death-bed for you? Will this roving, wandering desire after earthly good, put down into your pillow when the cold sweats of death stand upon your forehead? Will these schemes and speculations give you peace and ease at the last? You who have been speculating morning, noon, and night, who have been striving after gain or seeking after pleasure, and thus neglected the throne of grace and the footstool of mercy, to whom the Bible has been a sealed book; who have long been strangers to union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, and who are sunk into coldness and apathy, so as to know little either of spiritual joy and sorrow; what have you procured to yourselves by all the wandering desires, restless ambition, and eager speculations of your vain mind? What but present death and future sorrow? For if you are a child of God, you must be brought out of your present state, and it may be by terrible things in righteousness, or as the Lord speaks by the mouth of the prophet, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the

Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts." (Jer. 2:19.)

Now when you begin to hear the reproofs of God in your conscience, and feel that it is an evil thing and bitter to have forsaken the Lord, when you mourn and sigh over your departings from him, and would gladly return, but scarcely know how, would willingly find your way back, but it seems too obscured to discover: then the eyes of the text look out upon you with favourable aspect, and the words that it speaks are words of encouragement to your soul; which brings me to my third point, viz.—

III.—The directions which the Lord gives to his backsliding daughter, "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities."

The Lord here assumes that his backsliding daughter, but still the virgin of Israel, has lost her way, but would fain find it; would return to him, but knows not how to get back into the road. If, therefore, you do not feel that you have lost your way, or have no desire to return to the Lord, these words are not spoken to you. But if you feel that you have indeed lost your way and would gladly find it again, that you might come back to your first love, as saying with the wife spoken of by Hosea, "It was better with me then than now," then these words may be considered as speaking to your conscience, and it is as if the Lord personally said, "Set thee up waymarks."

i. Let us then look at this direction, and see if we can penetrate into its spiritual meaning. Just see for a moment where the person is to whom the words speak. He is represented as one who has lost his way and trying to find it, but unable; pressed, it may be, with hunger and thirst, and in danger of perishing. Now, how it would rejoice the heart of such a wanderer literally if just as he was sinking upon the sand to rise no more, his eyes caught sight of a distant waymark that just rose above the rest of the plain; if when he strained his eyes into the weary distance to take almost

his last look for some indication of the road, he could just see upon the edge of the horizon a pillar or projecting stone, which he knew had been placed there by the side of the road to point out the right path. Would it not put strength into his weary limbs as giving him a sure mark of the right road? and would he not at once turn his steps to reach it that so he might escape from the desert in which he was pent in and all but lost? In this sense he might be said to set up a waymark; not that he himself set it up with his own hands, but with his own eyes; that he set it up in hope and expectation, in joyful anticipation of escape. Apply this idea spiritually to the experience of the backsliding daughter. There are for her spiritual waymarks; that is, gracious indications of the right track. Of course you are well aware that in eastern countries they have no roads as we have, marked out by hedges and travelled over by a long succession of vehicles. Their ways, for the most part, lie over large plains, wide steppes, and dreary deserts, where the track is soon lost and with difficulty recovered, and this is generally pointed out by marks at various distances within sight of each other to guide the traveller. So in grace there are certain waymarks whereby we may know whether we are in the way or not, and by which, if we get out of the road, we may be enabled to find the way back. But as the direction is given to Zion's backsliding daughter, to set up waymarks, let us see if we can show her what she may set up.

1. The first waymark is to have a clear testimony that God had called her by his grace. The first work of God upon the soul, the entrance of conviction into the heart, the application of the law to the conscience, and the first breaking in of that light which shows us that we are sinners and of that life which makes us feel our lost, ruined, undone state: this is the first waymark of the path of life, and therefore the first to be set up by the virgin of Israel. And bear this in mind that the more striking the beginning the clearer the waymark. A little pillar, a slab two or three feet high, would be but a poor waymark in the wilderness. The higher, broader, and wider it is the better. Can you set up this waymark or anything like it? Can

you look back to any time when the Lord began the work of grace upon your soul—when his word entered into your conscience to give light and life, when you were awakened out of your sleep of death, brought to cry for mercy, and had a Spirit of grace and supplications poured out upon you? Set up that waymark, if you can see it distinctly and clearly. It may be a blessed help to you to bring you back once more into the path from which you have wandered, as showing that you are still a virgin of Israel, though you must confess with shame and sorrow a backsliding daughter.

2. Now look at another waymark: the deliverance that God gave you from a burden of sin upon your conscience; the first manifestation in any measure of his pardoning love to your heart; the first gracious intimation of his mercy to your soul. Can you set up this waymark? Can you look back to any sweet time or blessed season when the Lord was first pleased to break in upon your soul with any intimation of his mercy, with any discovery of his pardoning love, with any application of atoning blood to your conscience? If you can, set it up, set it up; take it with both hands, plant it deeply and firmly in the path. These are the two most blessed waymarks, the two most conspicuous of all the rest. The first work of God upon the soul in the conviction of sin by the law, and the deliverance through a manifestation of pardoning love and mercy through the gospel; these are the two greatest waymarks that any soul can set up. And if a backsliding daughter can set up these two waymarks, they will bring her back into the path from which she has wandered. But why? Because they give her a sure testimony that she belongs to the Lord. They are closely connected together, and mutually strengthen and support each other. For if the conscience was never convinced of sin, what room is there for a manifestation of mercy? and what is mercy as separated from a conviction of sin? A presumptuous notion.

3. Now look at another waymark. Has the Lord ever given you any marked answer to prayer? Were you ever in trouble of mind or distress of soul, or under any peculiar temptation, and made it

a matter of special prayer, that the Lord would deliver you from it; and did you soon receive from him a blessed answer? I was once lying under a powerful temptation which made me sigh and groan before the Lord. I made it a matter of earnest prayer that he would deliver me from it; and in a day or two a letter came by the post which immediately opened up in a most unexpected manner a deliverance, and that so plainly that I could not but see in it the outstretched hand of God. Answer to prayer is a blessed waymark. Set it up: it will show you at times that you are in the way; for God never hears prayer unless indited by the blessed Spirit in the hearts of his people. It is true that he hears the young ravens that cry unto him and gives the stranger food and raiment: but it is spiritual prayers and spiritual answers of which I am speaking as divine waymarks to shew the virgin of Israel that the Lord is her God.

4. But let us look along the edge of the desert to see whether we cannot find another waymark. Have you ever had any manifestations of Jesus to your soul, any views of the King in his beauty, any discovery of him to your heart as the Son of God? If you have, set it up; it is a most blessed waymark. Do we not learn from the pen of holy John that “whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God” (1 John 4:15); and does he not say, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself?” (1 John 5:10.) But how can any one either believe it or confess it unless it has been revealed to his soul by the power of God?

5. But can we not find another waymark? Was any promise ever applied to your soul with divine power when in trouble or distress? Did the Lord the Spirit ever bring any word home to your heart to relieve and comfort and encourage you under temptation or exercise? If ever he did, set it up; it is a most blessed waymark.

Now these which I have brought forward are distinguished waymarks which seem to tower above the rest; but you know that on a high road all the waymarks need not be of the same

conspicuous character. There may be several broad and high in order to distinguish the road with greater clearness, and be more evident guides for the lost traveller; but between them there may be smaller waymarks. So it is in grace. We have set up some of the most conspicuous; now let us look at some of the smaller.

6. Has the Lord ever given you any love to his people? We must not overlook this waymark, for it is one of the Spirit’s own giving. “We know,” says John, “that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”

7. Again, has the Lord ever melted your heart under the word of truth, given you a good hope through grace, a sweet intimation of his favour, a prospect of better days, and though you are following the Lord in chains, yet it is with weeping and supplications, and there is an expectation in your soul that he will in due time appear and bless you with pardon and peace? This is a waymark, for it is an opening in the valley of Achor of a door of hope.

8. Do you ever feel any softening of heart into godly sorrow on account of your backslidings, any contrition of spirit or any confession of your sins, so as to long to return to the Lord with a broken heart and weeping eyes? This is a waymark; set it up; it is an indication that you are in the way, for this is “that repentance unto life” which Jesus is “exalted to give” as well as “remission of sins.”

ii. But let us pass on to another of the Lord’s directions to the virgin of Israel: “Make thee high heaps.” In Eastern countries, there being few other means to indicate the road, it was usual at various points to set up not only lofty waymarks, but heaps of stones by the wayside; and it still is the custom to do so, travellers often casting a stone upon the heap to add to its size. Now as the country was often very level, these heaps were sometimes made very high, to distinguish them from other objects. So in grace. The literal “waymarks” seemed to have been hewed pillars, with perhaps characters deeply sculptured upon them; but the “high heaps” were stones simply and rudely piled together without

being hewn out with skill and care like the waymarks. As, then, these heaps consisted of stones, put together, we may view them spiritually as indicative of certain favourable marks of grace, not indeed so clear and conspicuous as the “waymarks,” but no less signs of the road, from being brought together for that purpose. Thus, there are those amongst the family of God who have no very conspicuous waymarks, and yet have a number of gracious evidences, which all put together show that they are in the right path.

1. Take, for instance, any conspicuous appearance of Providence in answer to prayer. It has not the clearness of a blessed answer in grace, or a conspicuous deliverance, or a gracious manifestation, or a sweet promise applied to the soul; it does not bear upon its face the clear writing of the blessed Spirit as these “waymarks” do, but is still a heap of stones, and though the stones are not in themselves very large, and are put together a little confusedly, yet, when together, a good many little evidences may make up a good heap. Thus, if the Lord has appeared to you again and again in providence, you may put all together until you get a heap of them.

2. Or again, have you ever had any particular blessing in hearing the preached word, or in secret prayer, when you have been upon your knees? Has the Scripture ever been opened up to you with any life and power? Or has there ever been any discovery of the suitability of Jesus, or any sweetness enjoyed in his name, “as the ointment poured forth,” which you have tasted, felt, and handled for yourself? You may take all these stones and put them together, the more you have got the better, and pile them up, and it may be you will find them to be a nice little heap. Look at this heap in the light of the Spirit. View this good time of hearing, and that sweet season in prayer; that remarkable occasion when a word came with power, unction, and savour to your heart. Call to mind again this glimpse of Christ, or this gleam of mercy, or this ray of hope, or this sweet encouragement, or this token for good, or this comforting testimony. There has been this brokenness of heart; this

humility of mind; this weeping over your sins; this self-loathing and self-abhorrence; this hatred of sin, this love of holiness; this separation from the world; this spirituality of mind; this spirit of prayer. Put together all these as so many stones upon stones until you get a high heap of them.

But why is the virgin of Israel directed to set up these waymarks and make these high heaps, except that by these means she may be led clearly to see not only the way that leads to Zion, but how to guide her feet back into it? But what if you have no such waymarks, no such high heaps? Where, then, is there any indication that you are in the way, or even desirous to be in the way? Consider these things, and the Lord impress them with his own power upon your conscience.

iii. But the Lord still goes on with his directions to his backsliding daughter: “Set thine heart towards the highway, even the way which thou wentest.” There is a way that leads to Zion, of which we read, “A highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it.” (Isai. 35:8.) In this way of happiness and holiness the virgin daughter of Israel once walked, when she came up from the wilderness leaning upon her beloved; but, alas! in leaving her first love she declined from it; she has got out of the road, lost sight of it, and strayed away into the wilderness. Now the Lord says to her, as she is longing to return, “Set thine heart towards the highway, even the way which thou wentest.” Let thy affections flow out towards that strait and narrow path in which thou once didst walk, when thine eyes as well as thy feet were set upon Jesus; for is not he “the way” as well as the truth and the life? When thou wert walking in him as the way unto God, thou wert not gadding about after every vain imagination of thy carnal heart. Now “set thine heart towards the highway, even the way which thou wentest.” Is not Jesus the highway to God, for no man cometh to the Father but by him? (John 14:6.) Thine heart was then set toward the highway, for it was fixed upon him. Was it not well with thee in those days?

Look back, then, to that happy season, when thou wert prayerful, spiritually-minded, tender in conscience, watchful in spirit, circumspect in life, full of love and affection to the people of God, with sin subdued, the flesh crucified, and the world under thy feet, and all because thine heart was fully and firmly fixed upon the Lord of life and glory. Though it was a very strait and narrow way, for there was no room for sin, the flesh, and the world to walk with thee in it, O what a good way it was to be found in! How it brought thee out of the world; and what a blessed path it was, though bodily sickness, providential trials, sore afflictions, or hot persecution might have attended it! Now, if thou wouldst get back to that spot, the first thing to do is to set thine heart toward it, that, sick of sin, the world, and thyself, thou mayest desire once more to walk in that strait and narrow path. There it is, though thou had forgotten it. "But how shall I find it?" says the soul. "Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps," the Lord answers. Look at his dealings with thy soul in times past; and as thou gettest encouragement from them it will revive thy hope, strengthen thy faith, and draw out thy love. Jesus, as the way, is worthy of all thine affections. Set thy heart, therefore, toward him, for in finding him thou wilt find the highway, even the way which thou wentest in days gone by. If thine heart is really and truly toward it, thine eyes will soon discover it and thy feet will quickly find it. For why is thy way now so dark and obscure? Because the old veil of darkness is come back over thine heart. But if thou turnest to the Lord with all thine heart, the veil shall once more be taken away. (2 Cor. 3:16.) Art thou not weary of thy sins? Art thou not willing to suffer almost anything and everything sooner than be deceived in what regards thine eternal peace? Dost thou not desire to be found at last in the path of life, and die under the sweet smiles of God? Then set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest in days of old, when, in all the tenderness, purity, and warmth of virgin love, thou didst cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, and all thy delight was to serve, please, and obey him.

iv. But the Lord gives his backsliding daughter another direction. "Turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities." By "cities" we may here understand places of fixed abode as opposed to wandering in the wilderness. Zion's cities, here called "thy cities," may, then, be viewed as places where the virgin of Israel had found salvation and rest. Thus we read, "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks" (Isai. 26:1); and thus the ancient worthies are spoken of as "looking for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. 11:10.) In these cities the virgin of Israel had found a sure habitation, and therefore the Lord says to her, "Turn again to these thy cities;" that is, viewed spiritually and experimentally, seek once more that rest and peace, that sure shelter which thou hadst when thou couldst rest within those walls and bulwarks which God has appointed for salvation, and where thou wert secure from the perils of the wilderness. Turn again to those thy cities, for the gates are still open that "the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in;" and if thou keep the truth firmly and warmly in thy heart, those gates will again be opened unto thee.

IV.—Now for our last point, the strong foundation upon which those directions rest. The soul might say, "Lord, how can I do all this? how can I find my way back, for have I not wandered so far as to preclude all hope of return?" "No," he answers; "The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth; a woman shall compass a man." Here we have a clear intimation of that miraculous incarnation of the Son of God which was to take place at the appointed time, and which is the strong, the only foundation on which salvation, with all salvation's blessings, rests. Salvation from death and hell, the full pardon of sin, the righteousness which perfectly justifies, the superaboundings of the free, distinguishing grace of God, all stand on this one foundation, that the Son of God has become man and that not by natural generation, but by a supernatural and miraculous way, here intimated by the expression, "The Lord hath created a new thing in the earth." This is a delicate foreshadowing

of the miraculous conception of the pure humanity of the Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary. In that sense it was true that “a woman should compass a man,” for when a pure virgin compassed in her womb the sacred manhood of the Lord Jesus Christ and embraced him in her arms when brought forth, she “compassed a man” as conceiving and bringing forth a perfect man by the sole influence and operation of the perfect Ghost.

Now is not this the stone, the tried stone, the precious corner stone which God has laid in Zion for a sure foundation? An incarnate God, the Son of God in our nature, his eternal Deity in union with his humanity, in which he suffered, bled, died, rose again, ascended up on high, and is glorified at the right hand of the Father—is not this the foundation of the whole salvation of the Church? And as it is the foundation of all salvation, so it is the foundation of all restoration. This, therefore, is the foundation of all the directions and admonitions of God to his backsliding daughter when he bids her set up her waymarks, make her high heaps, and speaks as in her ears, “Turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?” Thou art a virgin of Israel, though a backsliding daughter; and because the Lord hath created this new thing, this mighty miracle in the earth, therefore mercy can once more reach thy soul; therefore grace can still superabound over the aboundings of sin.

See what a door of hope this opens in the valley of Achor, and what assurance it gives that souls are pardoned and blessed by the sole virtue of the atoning blood of the Son of God. Do you see the connection between the incarnation of the Son of God and pardoned sin; between atoning blood and the healing of all backslidings? Is it not a beautiful connection? How blessed it is to see and feel that because the Lord hath created this new thing upon the earth in the incarnation of his dear Son; that because “to us a child is born, unto us a Son is given,” that “the government shall be upon his shoulder, and that of the increase of his government

and peace there shall be no end.” (Isai. 9:6, 7.) Therefore, O virgin of Israel, “Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest.” There is hope for thee, help for thee, mercy for thee, grace for thee: and why all this? Because the Son of God has become flesh for thee; because mercy, grace, and peace flow through the channel of a Saviour’s blood, and God can be just, infinitely, inflexibly just, and yet the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Thus there is a blessed reason why the virgin of Israel, though a backsliding daughter, may yet set up her waymarks and make her high heaps, and set her heart towards the highway; for there is mercy for her in a bleeding Lamb; there is salvation for her through the blood-shedding, obedience, and death of the Son of God. There is no reason then why any sensible sinner should sit down in despair; there is no cause why any poor backsliding child of God should say, “There is no hope, therefore after my idols will I go.” There is room to return for every poor wanderer; there is mercy in the bosom of God; there is salvation in the blood of Christ; and there is grace superabounding over the aboundings of sin in the pierced side and bleeding wounds of a once suffering but now glorified Immanuel.

184 Salvation and Sanctification, in Present Grace and Future Glory

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord’s Day Morning,

Nov. 10, 1861

“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2 Thess 2:13, 14

Of all the doctrines revealed in the inspired page, not one has called forth so general and so violent a storm of opposition as that of election. The very word excites in some minds a shrinking horror, where it does not provoke absolute scorn. "How unjust, how unfair, how partial, how contrary to all our preconceived notions of the universal goodness, mercy, and love of our great Benefactor, Father, and Friend, would it be if he had chosen some of the human race unto salvation, and passed by the rest! What a cruel tyrant such a doctrine makes God to be! How it tends to foster presumption in some who may deem themselves special favourites of heaven, and to engender despair in others who may fear themselves predestinated to hell! Sooner, then, than believe so horrid a doctrine as this I would throw the Bible away, and embrace infidelity itself." This is but a sample, and a small sample, of the angry speeches which have been hurled against a doctrine that, in spite of all such reasonings and all such objections, is written as with a ray of light in the word of truth, from the opening page of Genesis to the closing page of Revelation. I feel sorry even to quote such hostile and unbecoming language as has just escaped my lips, and would not have done so but to show how the carnal mind of unregenerate man, using all its reasoning powers to overthrow the truth of God, has thus vented itself in idle rage against a doctrine which it so thoroughly abhors, but which it can no more move from its place than the spray of the sea can sweep away the rock against which it angrily beats. For after all that can be said or done, after man has spoken out to the full his bitterest words and vented to his heart's content his angriest expressions we must still come to this point at last, whether men receive the doctrine or not,—Is election a truth revealed in God's inspired book? Do we receive the Bible as a revelation of the mind and will of God? Do we believe that every part and portion of it was inspired by the Holy Ghost? Do we accept it as the rule of our faith; as the only standard of right and wrong; as the only means which God has given us whereby to know himself, "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he

hath sent?" If such be our belief, if such our creed, then whether the doctrine of election be level with our natural conceptions or not, whether it be agreeable or not to our preconceived opinions, we must not set up our reasoning faculties against the inspired word of God; for if we do so, we act in diametrical opposition to our own creed, and pull down with our left hand what we have built up with our right. We say and unsay; deny what we assert, and assert what we deny; lay a foundation and stumble over it; profess to believe the Bible, and then set it up as a target for our infidel arrows. This is Colenso in another shape. This doing and undoing is contrary, then, not only to real religion but to sound reasoning, and convicts us not only of sin but of folly. If, then, we call ourselves Christians and believers of the Bible, we must not presume to bring the enmity and objections of our carnal mind against any one doctrine revealed in it, whether we like it or not; for in so doing we are madly fighting not so much against the doctrine itself as against the sovereign Majesty of heaven, with whose authority it comes invested to the children of men.

But though I am compelled to speak thus, I know well that we never will or can receive God's truth until he makes us willing in the day of his power. But when he has once convinced us by his Spirit and grace of our fallen condition by nature; when he has once opened up to us the depths of the fall, and cut to pieces all our vain hopes of salvation by the works of the law; and especially when he has bowed our mind to receive his word of truth as written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and has given us a taste of its sweetness and blessedness, then all these cavils drop off our minds as the withered leaves drop off in autumn from the wind-rocked trees, and then the question arises in the mind not whether God has an elect people or not, for that point is settled beyond all controversy by the witness of the spirit in the word without and by the echo of our own conscience within; but whether we belong to that happy number; whether our names are in the book of life; and whether we are amongst "the brethren beloved of the Lord,"

whom God from the beginning “hath chosen unto salvation.”

I shall, therefore, with God’s help and blessing, endeavour this morning to bring before you some of the signs, marks, and gracious evidences which the Holy Ghost has revealed in our text by the pen of Paul, that you may compare with them what you hope the Lord has done for your soul, and thus gather up, if it be his will, some sweet consolation or some blessed encouragement to believe that you have a personal interest in God’s electing love. In doing this, I shall, as the Lord may enable, show,

I.—First, that the Lord has from the beginning chosen those whom he has loved unto salvation.

II.—Secondly, the means as well as the evidences whereby he visibly manifests this choice: that he “calls them by the gospel.”

III.—Thirdly, what are the fruits and effects of this divine choice and heavenly calling: “sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.”

IV.—Fourthly, what is the ultimate issue and blessed result for all the elect of God: “the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I.—If you look at the connection of the passage before us with the previous context, you will find that the apostle is speaking of some very awful characters, whose state, case, condition, and end he denounces in some of the strongest language that ever fell from his pen. He is speaking of “a mystery of iniquity,” which was already working even in his day; and which, though restrained for a time, he declares would eventually break out in a most awful manner under the guidance and headship of one whom he calls “that Wicked,” or, as he is sometimes termed, “the Man of sin.”

i. It is not, however, my intention to dwell upon this part of the subject, except to point out one or two features in it which have a special bearing upon our text.

1. First, then, observe that the coming of this Wicked one was to be “after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders.” In this, therefore, as in every other mischief, Satan

would be the prime agent, the head and chief; and he would work upon the minds of men with all his hellish power and craft, so that even “signs and lying wonders” would strengthen and enforce all his schemes.

2. Observe, secondly, that this was to be “with all deceivableness of unrighteousness.” Deceit and ungodliness would stamp all their words and actions; and this “deceivableness” would be as much in self-deceit as in deceiving others; for the “unrighteousness” with which it would be accompanied would blind their eyes, harden their heart, and sear their conscience, till all distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, was utterly lost.

3. Observe, thirdly, their end, that they would “perish,” and that without remedy; for all this deceivableness of unrighteousness would be carried out in, and carried out by “them that perish.”

4. Observe, fourthly, a point which I particularly wish to impress upon your conscience, the ultimate reason of their ruin and perdition; “because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”

5. One more remark, however, I cannot help adding, which is to point out the consequences of their not receiving the love of the truth, that “for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” Let us not, then, charge God with injustice in their condemnation. The sin was theirs. They believed not the truth; they closed their eyes and hardened their hearts against it and all the evidence of it; they had pleasure in unrighteousness; they deliberately preferred their sins, and took such delight in them that they would not part with them. “Is God then unrighteous who taketh vengeance?” as the apostle elsewhere asks. (Rom. 3:5.) Is he unjust in sending them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, when they wilfully reject his truth? Was it not equitable in him to do so, seeing that they deliberately chose sin rather than the service of God, and had pleasure in unrighteousness?

ii. Taking occasion, then, from considering the awful case and condemnation of those who were thus righteously left to fill up the measure of their iniquities, he casts his eyes of love and affection upon his Thessalonian brethren, to whom he appears to have been singularly attached, and who seem to have loved him almost as much as he loved them. In his first epistle to that church he had already written to them: “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.” (1 Thess. 1:2, 3, 4, 5.) In a similar way, his heart being warmed with the recollection of their faith and hope and love when he was with them, and by the good report brought to him when absent from them, that “their faith grew exceedingly, and the love of every one of them all toward each other abounded” (2 Thess. 1:3), he pours out his thankful heart in praise unto God from the firm persuasion he had in his bosom that God had from the beginning chosen them to salvation.

But what proof had he of this? What made him say in his first epistle, “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God?” And why should he speak with equal confidence of them in our text? The reason why I shall have more fully to unfold under my second head. I shall now, therefore, only briefly intimate that it was because “his gospel had come unto them not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”

We stand precisely upon the same spot with him and them. If we are partakers of the same divine calling; if we have felt the power of the same gospel; and if we are possessed of the same faith working in our bosom which wrought in them, of the same hope which supported them, and of the same love which warmed their breast, we stand, so to speak, upon precisely the same footing with

them. We may indeed and certainly do possess less faith, hope, and love than they enjoyed, for ours is a dark and gloomy day, and they were perhaps, as a church, more favoured with those graces of the Spirit than any of the apostolic churches; but there can only be one faith, one hope, and one love, whether strong or weak, little or much. So far, then, as the Lord has called us by his gospel, and made it the power of God unto our salvation; so far as we know anything feelingly and experimentally of “sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth,” we have scriptural evidences as good if not as great as theirs, as certain if not as clear, that “God has from the beginning chosen us to salvation.” We have no other means of knowing our election. We cannot mount up to heaven to read our names enrolled in the book of life. No bright angel or burning seraph comes on flying pinions, as to Daniel, to say to us, “O man, greatly beloved,” “fear not, peace be unto thee.” (Daniel 9:21, 23; 10:19.) We hear no voice speaking in the sky, such as sounded forth when our Lord rose out of Jordan’s flowing stream. We have no supernatural revelation by dreams, or Urim, or prophets of our union with Christ in ancient covenant ties. Such favours have indeed been vouchsafed to some of the sons of light, but God has not promised them to us, nor dare we expect them. We have then to look within, to the evidences that God has given us there; and if we can find the marks of divine life in our bosom, it is a reflection, so to speak, of the book of life held up before our eyes from the throne of God—a transcript from the ancient roll in which the names of the elect were written.

iii. I pass on now then to a fuller and closer consideration of the first branch of our text.

1. Observe first from it that God has “from the beginning” chosen his people unto salvation. From what beginning? From the beginning surely of his eternal purposes of love and mercy toward them. This choice of God did not then begin with their natural creation, nor did it commence with their spiritual calling; but was a choice in the eternal mind of God from the beginning of all time.

We read in the word of truth of two beginnings: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Gen. 1:1.) There was the beginning of time; there was the first stone laid of that arch which sprang as by divine command out of eternity, and on which the whole creation rests, with all its marvellous unfoldings of wisdom and power. Again we read: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1.) In the beginning, then, or "from the beginning," when God created the heaven and the earth; in the beginning and from the beginning, when "the Word was with God and the Word was God," there was a choice made of a people unto salvation; for they were "chosen in Christ," as the apostle speaks: "According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." (Eph. 1:4.) In that beginning, then, when the Son of God stood up as the covenant Head and glorious Surety and Representative of his people; in that beginning of which we can form no conception, but which we believe because God has so revealed it in his word of truth; in that beginning, of which the Lord Jesus speaks under the name of "Wisdom" in the Proverbs: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was" (Prov. 8:22, 23); in that beginning of his eternal purposes of grace, mercy, and truth, when the Son of God was set up as his people's Representative, they were chosen, all and individually chosen in him, and that "unto salvation." Thus they were not chosen merely to certain privileges which might be forfeited; to certain means of grace which might be neglected or abused; to certain conditions of faith and obedience from which they might fall; but they were chosen in the Person of the Son of God unto eternal salvation. I wish you particularly to observe this; for election being a truth so plainly revealed that none can deny it in some form or other, occasion has been taken by many men to explain away what they will not receive, and to undermine what they cannot overthrow. They allow then of an election; but they

say it is either national, as is in the case of the Jews; or to privileges and means of grace, as in Christian churches; or on conditions of obedience, and a fore-view of faith and repentance, as in the case of individuals. Those three sorts of election they will admit of; but an election sovereign, absolute, unconditional; an election unto salvation, indefectible and indefeasible; a salvation firmly secured in a covenant Head, and therefore unalterably safe in him from being ever lost or forfeited; such an election as this, which takes the whole matter of salvation out of the hands of man and puts it wholly into the hands of God, yea, lodges it firm and fast in the very heart of the Redeemer; an election so glorious to God and so suitable to man, they utterly reject and abhor.

2. But O how much is comprehended in that expressive word "salvation," and of being "chosen unto salvation." What a clear, bright, and glorious light it casts upon the infinite foreknowledge and ineffable wisdom as well as sovereign grace of Jehovah! We see from the words, as with a ray from heaven, that there was a foreview in the mind of God of the fall of man with all its awful consequences; that his all-seeing eye and fore-planning heart viewed from the beginning the crash, the wreck, the miserable havoc which the disobedience of Adam would entail on man, the last and best creation of his hands; the utter prostration of the Church of God in and under the ruins of his transgression; and the millions of sins with all their dreadful results which through the breach thus made would rush into, and but for his gracious prevision and provision would utterly overwhelm the souls and bodies of the elect. All this scene of misery and woe, of sin in its birth and sin in its consequences—all this "mystery of iniquity" from the door of paradise down to the very gates of hell—all, all was foreseen by the omniscient eye, and all fore-provided for by the infinite wisdom and superabounding grace of the great and glorious I AM. See, then, and as you see admire the blessed truth, that unless God had chosen his people unto salvation and fixed their state by absolute decree, they would, they must all have been

utterly lost. Man may rebel against the doctrine of election, but had this choice not been, as I have just declared, absolute, and had not every provision been previously made in “a Covenant, ordered in all things and sure,” none, no, none of Adam’s race would have reached the heavenly shore. Such are the demands of infinite Justice; such the claims of a broken Law; such the wrath of God against transgressors; such the purity of his holy nature, that, without the intervention of a Mediator, and without “the blood of the everlasting Covenant” (Heb. 13:20), salvation could not have been devised or accomplished. And looking at the state and condition into which the Adam transgression has reduced all this ruined race, such, I may well add, is the number of their enemies; such the strength of sin; such the craft of Satan; such the power of evil in their wretched hearts; and, to say no more, such the obstacles which obstruct every step of their path to the heavenly city, that unless God had from the beginning chosen them in the Person of his dear Son unto salvation, so as certainly to carry them through all the storms of time and land them safe in eternal glory, none, none even of the elect themselves, could have been saved, but all, all would have perished by the way in spite of their election. Our pride, our ignorance, our self-righteousness, our enmity to God’s ways and word, may reel against all this, and muster objection after objection, and argument after argument, against a doctrine which takes salvation out of our hands, and makes it wholly of the Lord. (Jonah 2:9.) But both from Scripture and experience I feel certain in my own mind that we can have no right and scriptural view of what the fall of man really was in all its miserable consequences; we can have no proper sight or feeling sense of the wreck and ruin which sin has wrought in the whole human race, and the utter helplessness of man to deliver himself from that fallen condition, if we deny, despise, or reject a salvation that is wholly of God. Nay, I will go a step further and say that unless we see, feel, believe, and admire the grace, wisdom, and mercy of God in choosing his people unto such a salvation as this, that salvation can never have

reached our heart; for I am well convinced that if salvation comes with power to the soul it makes us feel that if God himself had not chosen us to salvation, such is the power of sin and such the helplessness of the creature, that neither we nor a single individual of the children of men could be saved. When, then, we are thus taught and led by the Spirit into all truth, instead of regarding election as arbitrary or unjust, or viewing God as a cruel tyrant because he has chosen a certain portion of the human race and left the rest to fill up the measure of their iniquities, we rather adore his wisdom, admire his grace, and say with the Church, “Thy counsels of old are mercy and truth.” (Isai. 25:1.) We rather bless him that he should have chosen his people, and us, we hope, amongst them unto salvation. Standing upon this ground, we see him by faith in the beginning, before the foundations of the earth were laid, viewing creation about to arise, and foreseeing the entrance of sin to mar not only creation, but that work above all others in which he took a special delight—man formed after his own image, fixedly and unalterably determining that where sin should abound, there grace should much more abound.

3. But this question often arises in the bosom of the child of God, and may even now be springing up in yours, “Who and what am I?” He sees in the Scriptures that God has chosen a people unto salvation; and he is deeply convinced that unless he belongs to that number he never will, never can be saved. But now the thought springs up in his breast; the anxious question rises to his lips, “What evidence have I of my personal interest in this sovereign choice? I see,” he says, “and most firmly believe that God has an elect people; I see how highly favoured and blessed that people is. ‘Happy art thou, O Israel,’ he says, in spirit if not in words, ‘Who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord?’” (Deut. 33:29.) “I am well convinced,” he adds, “that they, and they only, will reach the heavenly shore. But who and what am I?” Am I one of the elect? Where are my evidences? Where my tokens for good? Where, O where can I find substantial marks of grace to

assure me that I, even I have a part and lot in this important matter? What reason have I to believe that in the beginning God fixed his love upon me; that he gave me to his only begotten Son in ancient councils; that by virtue of this eternal choice and everlasting love, the incarnate Son of God bore my sins in his own body upon the tree, and washed me from all my iniquities in his atoning blood?" Now this anxious inquiry which may even now be moving in your heart, causing the sigh to arise to your lips and the tear to start to your eye, leads me to

II.—My second point, viz., to show that there are certain marks and evidences given us in the word of truth of an interest in this choice unto salvation. By comparing, then, these marks of grace with what we believe the Lord has done for our soul, we may, with his help and blessing, arrive at a happy assurance, or a sweet persuasion, or, at least, a comfortable hope, that though the gift may seem too great for us, the mercy too plenteous, yet that the Lord has chosen us to salvation, and granted us some sensible evidence of it by putting us in possession of the grace of life. The evidence given here by the apostle is, "Calling," and that calling effected by what he calls "our gospel," that is, the gospel which he and his fellow apostles preached: "Whereunto he called you by our gospel."

Let me, then, open these points as clearly as I can, if not as fully as I could wish, for your edification demands clearness, if my time forbid fulness, that you who have been called by grace and know the gospel in your heart, may read your evidences in the light of the scripture and of divine teaching.

1. First, then let me speak of calling. We are bidden by Peter to make our calling and election sure: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. 1:10, 11.) We see, therefore, that the two are closely connected. We cannot make our election

sure unless we first make sure our calling; for though election is the cause of calling, calling is the only evidence of election. But what means the apostle by bidding us "make our election sure?" Is it not already so? If God has from the beginning chosen us to salvation, is not that choice as sure as God himself could make it? and if he has truly and effectually called us by his grace, is not that calling as sure also as the election itself? It does not mean, therefore, making them sure to God, or sure in themselves, but sure unto us; in other words, we are bidden to give diligence to obtain in our own breast a certain and blessed assurance that we, even we, have most certainly been both chosen and called. We have, first, then, "to make our calling sure," that is, to ourselves; and this we do when, by the shining in of God upon his own work in the heart, we come to some assurance in our own breast that we have been called by his effectual grace. Would we then know the truth of our election, so as to make it sure in our own consciences, we must give diligent heed to examine well our calling; for if that be sure, the election is sure also; for the one hangs upon, and is the certain fruit of the other.

1. But to cast a clearer light upon this point, let me carefully distinguish first between a calling which is not saving and a calling which is. Our gracious Lord says, "Many be called but few chosen" (Matt. 20:16); and we find the Holy Spirit also speaking of old in words of solemn import: "Because I have called, and ye refused" (Prov. 1:24.) Thus we see that there is a calling which is not the fruit of election, and which may be refused. This calling cannot be made sure; for it is general, and belongs to all to whom the word comes; as the apostle says, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel, for Esaias saith, Lord who hath believed our report?" He then adds: "But I say, have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world." (Rom. 10:18.) This call, then, is to the ear not to the heart; the outward sound of the gospel in the letter, not its inward voice in the spirit.

2. But I must distinguish also in effectual calling between being called by the law and being called by the gospel; for the apostle says, "Whereunto he called you by our gospel." The law, properly speaking, does not call, and yet has a powerful hand in our calling. When the Lord first begins his work of grace upon our heart we are ignorant both of the sound and the power of the gospel; nor do we know usually what it is even in the bare letter of truth. At any rate, it has not reached our heart as a joyful sound, for though we may be diligent readers or even students of the Now Testament, we may be and usually are, from various circumstances, enveloped in the densest ignorance of the doctrine which it teaches, of the grace which it reveals, and of the glory which it promises. The law, then, is that ministration with which we have first to make a close acquaintance. Moses speaks from Sinai before Christ speaks from Zion. To convince of sin is the first work of the Spirit upon the heart. "And when he is come he will reprove [margin "convince,"] the world of sin." (John 16:8.) Guilt of conscience, then, and consequent distress of mind under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, are among the first evidences of a divine change being begun. So it was with the publican in the temple: so it was with those who were pricked (or rather "pierced") in their heart under Peter's first sermon. The gospel at this time is at a distance from us. We have not yet been made willing in the day of Christ's power, nor have we heard his voice or seen his glory. Until then the law speaks, our conscience is not so heavily laden with the weight of guilt as to feel the need of atoning blood; nor are we so stripped of every rag of creature righteousness as to feel we require the justifying obedience of God's dear Son to screen us from the wrath of the Almighty. The first work, then, of grace is to kill rather than to make alive; to wound rather than to heal; to bring down rather than to lift up; to reveal the law rather than the gospel. For "balm is useless to the unfeeling." Salvation with all its superabounding grace is but an empty sound to those who have never felt themselves cut off from all help or all hope. So, in a sense, there is a calling under and

through if not by the law, in the first teaching and operations of the Spirit of God, bringing the soul under its condemnation as a ministration of death. But when the law has done its office, and the sinner is slain by its killing power, then there comes to his aid and deliverance, what the apostle speaks of here, the calling by the gospel. When the gospel utters its melodious voice; when pardon is proclaimed through the sacrifice of Jesus; when peace reaches the heart through atoning blood revealed to the conscience; when the glad tidings of salvation by grace are no longer a mere sound in the letter, but are made the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; when heavenly light shines into the mind; when divine power attends the word to the soul; when faith is raised up, hope casts its anchor within the veil, and the love of God is shed abroad, then, and there is the calling of which the apostle here speaks—a calling by the gospel. If you doubt my words, I would appeal to your own conscience, if you know anything of the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Did the law ever give you any hope of salvation? Did the fear of death or hell ever impart any consolation to your wounded spirit? Did you ever read your name in the book of life when you were under the schoolmaster Moses, especially when you felt his angry rod, coming down again and again upon your sore back? Does not the apostle say, "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Gal. 2:21); and again, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:20.) If this be so, then no man under the law ever

"Read his title clear

To mansions in the skies."

No one under conviction of sin and distress of conscience, from a sense of the wrath of God in a broken law, could ever say he had a good hope in the mercy of God, for mercy has neither name nor place in the bosom of the law. It is a ministration of death, and therefore can never communicate life; a ministration of condemnation, and therefore can never reveal justification;

a ministration of wrath, and can therefore neither manifest nor communicate pardon and peace.

This, then, is the reason why the apostle speaks of “calling by the gospel” as its peculiar and distinctive blessing; for the gospel sounds an invitation to those who are under the law, and therefore calls them from death to life, as being a ministration of life; from condemnation to justification, as being a ministration of righteousness; from guilt and wrath, bondage and terror to pardon and peace, as being a revelation of salvation through the atoning blood of the Son of God. When, therefore, the sound of the gospel trumpet, like the silver trumpet on the great day of Jubilee, reaches the ears and heart of the captive exile, he hasteneth that he may be loosed. (Isai. 51:14.) The scene now changes; the storms of God’s wrath blow over; the day-star appears in the dawning morn of the gospel day, “a morning without clouds” (2 Sam. 23:4), until the Sun of righteousness in due time rises with healing on his wings. As, then, the gospel is thus made the power of God unto salvation, the soul is enabled to listen to, and embrace it as a joyful sound. Now just in proportion as faith receives it, hope anchors in it and love embraces it, is evidence given of our being from the beginning chosen unto salvation.

III.—But I now pass on to show from our text that there are certain fruits and effects wrought in the soul by a divine power when it is thus called by the gospel to salvation, and to a knowledge of it. And I think it very necessary to examine ourselves by these fruits and effects, so as to make diligent search and earnest inquiry how far we have been put into a spiritual and experimental possession of them, and how far we can at present realise their presence and their power. It is easy to say, “I believe the gospel; I believe in Jesus Christ; I have heard the truth now for many years, nay more, I have made a long and consistent profession of my personal knowledge of it; I am surprised, therefore that you doubt my religion. What do you mean by casting any suspicion upon me or upon it, for I have none myself?” But if you do not doubt for yourself, will you

not let others doubt for you? Self-confidence is not always a proof of safety; nor does offence at the bare suggestion of examination always prove its non-necessity. None profess greater indignation at being suspected of cheating than those who habitually use short weights and measures; but all their bluster does not prevent the weights and measures being examined by the lawful inspector and condemned. So a man may have no doubt of his own religion and be very angry with those who suspect it, and yet, when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, be very lacking in those evidences which God has given of his being from the beginning chosen unto salvation.

Two gracious evidences are here given us of a personal interest in this eternal choice. One is “sanctification of the Spirit,” the other “belief of the truth.” Those two fruits and results of God’s eternal choice of his people, as seen in the light of the Spirit, overturn, in a moment, many of the cavilling arguments which are brought against the doctrine of election, and to which I have already referred. Some, for instance, say “that is a licentious doctrine; that men may consider they are ‘elect,’ and then abandon themselves to the commission of every crime; that if a man can only believe he is chosen of God and certain of going to heaven, there is not any iniquity in which he may not freely indulge, without the least fear of God’s anger now, or of eternal punishment hereafter.” Now the language of the Holy Ghost here gives the lie to all such vain objections of the carnal mind—to all such ill-founded, angry cavillings against the truth of God. It lays down two divine marks as brought forth in the heart, lips, and life of the saints of the Most High, and reveals, as with a ray of heavenly light, the divine truth that if any are chosen to salvation, they are not chosen to live in sin, nor chosen that they may abandon themselves to all manner of iniquity; but that the same omnipotent and irreversible Will, and the same eternal decree which fixed their standing in Christ Jesus the Lord, and chose them to salvation from the beginning in him, determined also the work of grace upon their heart; that

there should be given unto them “the sanctification of the Spirit,” to make them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; and that there should be wrought in them “the belief of the truth,” with all its liberating, sanctifying effects. We will examine these two evidences of an interest in the electing love of God separately, as it is of the deepest importance that we should understand them clearly and realise them experimentally.

i. I shall consider, first, therefore, “the sanctification of the Spirit.”

1. Observe, first, the peculiar force of the word “through;” it is “through sanctification of the Spirit.” All the elect of God must therefore pass through sanctification. It is a path not merely into which, but through which—through the whole length of which they must, pass; so that, as there is no salvation from the curse of the law except through the blood and obedience of the Son of God, so there is no salvation from the inward defilement and inordinate power of sin except through the sanctification of the Spirit. The Bride must stand not only washed in Christ’s blood and arrayed in Christ’s righteousness that she may lift up her head without sin or shame in the presence of Jehovah; but she must be a partaker also of that “holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.” Christ’s righteousness is her wedding dress, arrayed in which he says to her, “Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee.” This is her title and her warrant to heavenly bliss; but she needs an inward meetness, for she must have a queenly heart as well as a queenly robe. The two are beautifully brought together in those words of the Psalmist: “The king’s daughter is all-glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold.” (Psalm 45:13.) She is “all-glorious within,” as well as “clothed with wrought gold.” The Spirit clothes her outwardly when he brings near and puts upon her the wedding dress; and the same Spirit gives her her inward glory when he sanctifies her by his special grace. Thus Christ not only “loved the Church and gave himself for it,” but also “sanctifies and cleanses it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious

Church”—glorious without and glorious within, “not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing” to mar her outward beauty, and to be also “holy and without blemish,” so as not to mar her inward glory. Sanctification, therefore, is as indispensable unto salvation as justification. “But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:11.) Heaven is a holy place. Its enjoyments and employments are all holy. “Holy holy, holy is the LORD of hosts,” is the eternal cry of created angels and ransomed spirits. There must be, therefore, a sacred meetness for this holy employment and spiritual enjoyment communicated to the soul before it can be fitted for those habitations into which nothing that defiles can ever enter. How glorious must be that place of which we read, “The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.” (Rev. 22:4, 5.) That they may thus see his face and ever serve him in the beauty of holiness was eternally provided for in the covenant of grace. In the same wondrous scheme of eternal love which contrived their salvation, provision was made for the Holy Ghost to sanctify by his indwelling power, influence, and operations the elect of God, and thus qualify and fit them for those heavenly mansions which were prepared for them. He being a divine Person in the Godhead, and as such taking a part in the covenant of grace, engaged, with a foreview of the depths of the fall, to regenerate them, to give them a new heart and a new spirit, to take possession of their soul, and fill them with every holy grace and every heavenly fruit. He thus pledged himself to breathe into them in their time-state an element of holiness in which they might hereafter eternally swim as in an ocean of purity and love, and without which heaven itself would be to them but a hell. He did not undertake to sanctify their carnal mind their Adam nature, but to breathe into them a

new spirit, a spirit of perfect holiness, capable of expanding into heights and depths of purity and love beyond all conception or description.

ii. But our present business is with his divine operations in their time-state.

1. Thus he first sanctifies their understanding by casting a holy light into their mind to understand spiritual things. Of this the apostle speaks where he begs God to give unto the Ephesians the “Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened.” (Ephes: 1:17, 18.) This communicates a spiritual capacity to understand spiritual things, as the Lord “opened the understanding” of his disciples “that they might understand the scriptures.” (Luke 24:45.) By these spiritual eyes, the enlightened saint sees the Person of the Son of God, beholds his finished work upon the cross, views his atoning blood, his justifying obedience, his dying love. This is the “anointing which teacheth of all things, and is truth, and is no lie.” By this “we know the things that are freely given to us of God.” (1 Cor. 2:12.) By this the veil of unbelief and ignorance is taken off the heart, and with open face we behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:18.) Thus the glorious things of God become revealed and adapted to the spiritual capacity of the child of grace, so that he is at home and in his element in the sweet enjoyment of them. Have you not found sometimes, as you read the Scripture, that a ray of divine light seemed to shine upon the sacred page, and you felt it so blessedly to illuminate your mind, and so raise up faith to believe the divine testimony, that you could say with Jeremiah, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart?” With it came also a tasting that the Lord was gracious, so that you could say that the word of God was sweeter to you than “honey and the honeycomb.” Sometimes when, as your mind was enlightened by a ray of spiritual light, you have seen the glorious doctrine of a Triune God, and admired and adored with holy wonder the divine mystery of the Trinity. At

another time, illuminated by the same Spirit, you may have seen by faith the glorious mystery of the Person of the Son of God—seen the eternal Son in the bosom of the Father; then traced him coming down from heaven to earth; seen him take flesh in the womb of the Virgin; viewed him lying as an infant in Bethlehem’s lowly manger; witnessed his miracles, heard his words, followed him to the garden and to the cross, and seen him laid in the silent tomb. Then you have seen him issue from the tomb, and ascend to the Father, to be the great high priest over the house of God. Have you not seen these things as if unfolded to your view in the sacred page, and as you saw you admired and wondered? Now in all this the Holy Spirit was sanctifying your understanding, illuminating your mind with heavenly light, and bringing eternal things with power into your soul.

2. But he not only illuminates the mind; he also softens the heart and melts the spirit by communicating gracious sensations. For he not only gives light to enlighten the mind, but communicates life, and feeling, warmth and tenderness to soften and melt and, as it were, spiritualise the soul; to water it as with holy dew; to fertilise it with heavenly anointings; to enrich it with gracious influences; to animate it with divine motion; to mould it after the image of Christ; and breathe into its inmost depths the very spirit and mind of Jesus. This gracious work upon the heart constitutes the grand distinguishing difference between the dry, cold, intellectual moonlight of those who are only in the letter, and the warm, heavenly sunlight of those who are blessedly in the Spirit. This renewing power, this regenerating influence, this fertilising, quickening operation of the Holy Ghost on the soul, whereby he creates it anew in Christ Jesus, and adorns it inwardly and outwardly with every gracious and holy fruit, will ever distinguish “the sanctification of the Spirit,” which is the fruit of eternal choice, from that dry, intellectual knowledge in the head of a professor, which leaves him with no more grace in his heart than was possessed by a Balaam and an Ahithophel.

3. By this gracious work upon the heart, the Holy Spirit also gives spiritual affections, and thus enables the believer to fulfil the precept, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Col. 3:2, 3.) He thus sanctifies the affections, fixes them on things above, and fills the soul as with the very breath of heaven. Light, life, and love—light in the understanding, life in the soul, love in the heart; is not this “sanctification of the Spirit?”

iii. But there is another heavenly fruit which God in our text is said to impart, that forms a further blessed evidence of an interest in this electing love—namely, a “belief of the truth.” Let me endeavour to lay this before you as a necessary evidence of your being chosen unto salvation.

The truth of God is revealed in the Scriptures, and can only be received by faith. If, then, we believe it not, we have no manifest interest in it. But if we believe it, we have so far an evidence in our favour. But to put this evidence more clearly before you, let me point out two distinguishing features which ever accompany a belief of the truth; for the truth of God has two precious properties when applied to the soul by a divine power.

1. The first is to make free, according to the Lord’s own testimony, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31, 32.) We by nature and practice are bond slaves to sin and Satan. We are the sport of the Prince of the power of the air, who takes us captive at his will. We are held down also by many hurtful lusts; or, if free from gross sin, are bond slaves to pride, covetousness, or self-righteousness. Perhaps some idol is set up in the chambers of imagery, which defiles all the inner man; or some snare of Satan entangles our feet, and we are slaves to sin, without power to liberate ourselves from this cruel slavery. We groan under it, as the children of Israel under their burdens, but, like them, cannot deliver ourselves. But sooner or later the truth comes to our aid; the truth as it is in Jesus flies to the rescue of God’s oppressed

family; the blessed Spirit opens it up and seals it upon the heart with a divine power. As, then, under his gracious influences they believe the truth and feel its power and savour in their heart, a liberating influence is communicated; their fetters and shackles are loosened; the bondage of sin and Satan, and the power and strength of evil are sensibly broken, and a measure of holy freedom is enjoyed. Look at this point in the light of your own experience—your surest testimony next to the word of God. Were you not in bondage under the law, and feared that its curse and torment was the beginning of eternal woe? How were you delivered? How were you brought out from under that cruel schoolmaster? By some application of God’s truth to your heart; by some manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ; or by the discovery of the gospel by the power of God to your soul. There is no other way of getting from under the bondage of the law but by the application of the gospel, and by believing what the gospel reveals. As the truth came, then, to your heart as the very word of the living God, power came with it to believe; faith was raised up to credit the testimony; and as faith began to credit the truth of God and receive it in hope and love, there was a sensible loosening of the bonds; and then the chains and fetters dropped off of themselves. It is with the soul as it was with Peter in prison: when the angel came, and a light shined in the prison, and the angel’s words fell upon his ears, “the chains fell from off his hands.” There remained nothing then to bar his exit; for “the iron gate that leadeth unto the city opened to them of its own accord.” (Acts 12:7-10.) So whatever chains or fetters may hold the soul; let the angel of mercy come; let the message of salvation be revealed, the chains of unbelief drop off, the iron gate of hardness gives way, and the truth makes the soul blessedly free.

But take another case. Not having a clear view of the gospel, of its fulness and freeness, you might have been kept in hard bondage for years by legality or ignorance. Hoping and endeavouring to be what God never meant his people to be—perfectly free from all the workings of corruption, you were held down in bondage

and condemnation from feeling so much of your own inward sinfulness. When you were entangled in an evil, despair seized hold of you, and all without and within was darkness, confusion, and bondage. But how were you delivered? I cannot enlarge upon this point, as my time is nearly gone; but I may briefly ask, Was it not by the word of truth—by the gospel? by seeing and believing that salvation was a finished work? by seeing and feeling that those for whom Jesus died are freely justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses?

2. But now look at the “belief of the truth” under another form, as affording an evidence of interest in God’s eternal choice—truth in its sanctifying influence. Our blessed Lord thus prayed to his heavenly Father on behalf of his disciples: “Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.” (John 17:17.) Truth sanctifies. Error hardens the heart; leads to presumption; takes the soul away from the light of God’s countenance; draws it aside from under the testimony of his word; and leaves it to wander, as if without a guide, in the midst of confusion, and frequently to fall headlong into the open ditch of evil. But truth not merely softens and liberates the heart from the power of sin, but has a most blessed, sanctifying power and influence upon the soul. If ever the truth of God reached your conscience, it communicated a sanctifying influence to your spirit; it raised up a warm and affectionate love to everything which that truth reveals. Wherever the love of the truth is received, it separates from the world, influences the heart and life, and is attended with every good word and work. Thus to believe the truth not merely liberates the soul from the bondage of the law, with all its guilt and condemnation, but sanctifies the heart to the worship and service of God. Spirituality of mind is thereby communicated; communion with God is sought and sometimes enjoyed; deliverance from evil that it may not grieve us is earnestly desired; and the time longed for when sin shall no more pollute the conscience, or separate between God and the soul.

Now can you find any print of these two gracious marks on your soul? Have you any reason to believe that the Spirit of God has ever come into your soul to sanctify it and communicate those gracious influences, whereby the heart is drawn up into the enjoyment of heavenly blessings? Has the truth of God ever come home with unction, savour, and power, so as sensibly to deliver you from the influence of sin and sanctify you to the service of God? Your answer, perhaps, is, “Well, I scarcely know what reply to give to your questions. I hope I feel at times holy influences, spiritual desires, gracious affections but O, taking me in general, I find so much coldness, darkness, and death; my heart is so evil, my nature so corrupt, and every member of the old man so utterly foul, and often so alive and active toward everything that is evil, that when I closely examine myself by such marks and evidences, such is the opposition within, and such the conflict between the old man, and the new, that I scarcely know what answer to give about myself as to who or whereabouts I am.” If it were not so, there would be no conflict. Sanctification is not a progressive work, nor does the Holy Spirit sanctify the members of the old man, so as to make them holy. The old man remains, what he ever was, in all his integrity. No change takes place in the corrupt flesh: it is ever corrupt, and will be so to the very grave’s mouth. It is the “new spirit” of God’s own creation in which holiness dwells, for it is the very workmanship of God. With this light upon it, you can now perhaps see through the mists which so often blind your eyes. Do you not at times see and feel that there is that in your soul which nothing but the power of God could have wrought? that there are or have been there felt and experienced holy sensations, spiritual affections, heavenly desires, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, hope in his mercy, love to his name, renunciation of self, and with all this that sweet spirituality of mind which is life and peace? There are times, then, when these mists and fogs are dispersed by the beams of the Sun of righteousness, and then you can read what God has

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done upon your heart. Were it not so, we must sink down into despair. But under these renewals of God's goodness and mercy, intimations of his favour, whispering of his love and grace, and gracious revivings of the work of the Spirit, hope springs up in the bosom, and with hope faith embraces once more the Lord the Lamb, and love again cleaves to him with purpose of heart.

It is, then, from these gracious evidences, that there is from time to time gathered up any real testimony that God has "from the beginning chosen us to salvation." We may well wonder at the mystery, how God should have chosen such sinful creatures, not merely such mere atoms and specks in creation, but such polluted worms of earth in whom to magnify the riches of his grace. But after all our wonder, we must still come to this point, which helps us to make diligent search: "If not chosen, what is my state and case? I must either be chosen and saved, or passed over and lost. It is with me, then, heaven or hell, salvation or damnation. It is, therefore, a most important matter, to come to some decision whether God has chosen me to salvation. If not who am I and where am I and what will be my awful condition when I come to lie upon my death-bed?" So we cannot blink the inquiry, nor leave it a matter of conjecture, but from time to time anxiously long to come to some clear decision whether God has chosen us or not, because upon that turns the question whether we shall be for ever with Jesus, or with the lost in the abyss of eternal woe.

IV.—But passing to our last point, we are called in it to look away from the fleeting things of time and sense, to see what is the ultimate issue and blessed result of this election of God and of this work of the Spirit upon the heart: "To the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

1. There is a glory which our Lord has as one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, in one undivided Essence. But that is not the glory here spoken of.

2. There is also a glory which our blessed Lord has as the eternal Son of the Father, of which John speaks so clearly: "And we beheld

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his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." But that is not the glory here spoken of.

3. There is also a glory which he has as Immanuel, God with us. But that is not the glory spoken of in the text. For none of these three kinds of glory can his people possess. They may and can see them; but they cannot partake of them; for the intrinsic perfections of Jesus as God are not communicable to man. The finite can never become infinite; humanity can never become Deity nor a creature possess the omnipotence and omniscience of the Creator.

4. But there is a glory which the Lord Jesus does give to his people, and of which they can partake. Our blessed Lord, therefore, said to his heavenly Father, in his intercessory prayer for his disciples, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one." (John 17:22.) This glory is that of perfect conformity to his own glorified humanity, as we read: "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." (Phil. 3:21.) This glory is given in grace, for grace is glory begun; and springs from a believing view of him: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3:18.) The consummation of this glory is reserved for a future state, when the Church will be "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband;" when she will be perfectly conformed in body and soul to his glorious image, will see him face to face, and enjoy the bliss of his presence without a veil between. God is essentially invisible. The Deity, therefore, of the Son of God cannot be seen even in eternity as it is in itself; but it will shine through his glorified humanity in all its uncreated splendour. To see this glory and be a partaker of it, is the happiness of heaven. Our gracious Lord, therefore, said, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast

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given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24.) Nothing short of the revelation and communication of this glory could satisfy the heart of God; and nothing short of the partaking of this glory can satisfy the heart of man. Heaven short of this would be no heaven to his soul. Not to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; to have no view of the glory of an incarnate God; not to be conformed to his glorious image, so as to be perfectly holy both in body and soul—were these things denied, there would be no heaven at all for the redeemed among the children of men. But God, in giving the saints heaven as their happy home, gave them with it an eternal weight of glory. He has designed that all whom he has chosen unto salvation should reach the heavenly shore; that none should suffer shipwreck by the way; that sin should not be their ruin; that Satan should not succeed in any of his devices against their eternal safety; but that every member of the mystical body of Christ should be for ever with their glorious Head in the realms of bliss, to behold and be partakers of the glory which shall be revealed when he comes and all his saints with him. It is the prospect of this glory which animates the Christian in all his battles against sin, and encourages him never to quit the field until victory crown the strife. It nerves his heart in all the troubles and trials of this mortal state, still to press forward to win this immortal prize, that he may safely reach that land where tears are wiped from off all faces; and where the glory of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost will be seen and enjoyed through the glorified humanity of Jesus without a cloud to dim its rays, or intercept its eternal lustre.

185 The Whole Armour of God

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning,

Dec. 22, 1861

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye

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may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand."

Ephesians 6:13

In the verse immediately preceding our text, what a vivid picture does the apostle set before our eyes of the enemies with whom the Christian has to combat in fighting the good fight of faith! "We wrestle not," he says, "against flesh and blood;" that is, not against flesh and blood only, for surely one who has given such a description in Romans 7 of the conflict between flesh and spirit could not mean that there is no opposition between the one and the other worthy of the name of a wrestling match. Have we not daily to wrestle against the opposing or alluring world without; against all the power of corruption within? Does temptation never assail us? Do the lusts of the flesh never strive for mastery? Is sin in us a dead thing which neither lives, nor stirs, nor moves? Every Christian must feel that "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and that these are contrary the one to the other." (Gal. 5:17.) And if the one is contrary to the other, what must their irreconcilable opposition produce but a conflict? That daily, unceasing conflict, then, were enough to task all our strength. Were there no other enemies but those we meet with in an opposing world without or encounter in a corrupt nature within, we must fail and fall unless made more than conquerors over both through him that loved us. But the apostle overlooks, so to speak, for the time the conflict which there is in the new man of grace against flesh and blood to direct our thoughts to a severer combat, to a more arduous and continuous battle, which is not against flesh and blood, but "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Observe his language here, and look at it under two different aspects. See first the number and nature of our foes; secondly, the position which they occupy. By "principalities and powers, the ruler of the darkness of this

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world and spiritual wickedness," we are to understand, as is expressed in the margin, "wicked spirits;" and by "high places," we are to understand the air above us, as Satan is called in this epistle "the prince of the power of the air." (Eph. 2:2.) It is, then, as if the apostle would represent the very high and wide atmosphere with which we are surrounded, the very air which we are ever breathing, as tenanted, I might rather say infested with a whole posse of infernal spirits; as if an innumerable company of devils were in the sky watching our every movement; sometimes making deadly thrusts at us by open violence, and at others seeking to entangle our feet in their accursed wiles; but whether by force or fraud, ever plotting with each other our eternal destruction. If you cannot believe or realise this, only look at the way in which he describes them. Do but consider the language which he employs, and bear in mind that they are inspired words, which, as such, are to be received in implicit faith. He describes them, then, as "principalities, as powers, as the rulers of the darkness of this world, as spiritual wickedness," or "wicked spirits" [margin] "in high," or, as the margin reads, "heavenly places." Let us seek, with the Lord's help, to penetrate into the meaning of these words. There is, we have reason to believe, what is sometimes called "a celestial hierarchy;" in other words, the blessed angels themselves are not all of one rank or condition. This seems plain from various parts of Scripture. In this very epistle, for instance, we read of our blessed Lord being exalted "above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21); and again, "To the intent that now unto the principalities, and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." (Eph. 3:10.) These expressions—principality, power, might, and dominion—seem to show us that there are different ranks in the angelic host. Again, Gabriel speaks of himself as standing in the presence of God (Luke 1:19), which would seem to imply some distinguished privilege, and thus Michael is called in Daniel "one

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of the chief princes" (Dan. 10:13), and by Jude "the archangel." It is not indeed a decided matter of faith; still we may believe that there is a difference in rank between such angels as Gabriel or Michael and other angelic beings, who are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." I should not, however, have touched upon this point but for the purpose of casting some light upon our text. It would seem then from it that Satan, who was once a pure and bright angelic spirit, has counterfeited this celestial hierarchy by an infernal hierarchy of his own, of which he is the head; for we read of "the devil and his angels who fought against Michael and his angels." (Rev. 12:7.) Thus in imitation of the ranks and orders of angelic beings, there are, we have reason to believe, ranks and orders of infernal spirits; and as these possess all their former angelic power, though now perverted into malice and wickedness, and as they exert this influence over this world, they are styled by the apostle "principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness (or "wicked spirits,") in high (or heavenly) places." But you say, "Who sees them? who feels them? What evidence have we that we are surrounded by these infernal spirits, all plotting our downfall? You tell us so, and you try to prove your point; but what evidence have we that we are surrounded by such infernal foes, or that we have to fight a battle for our life against them?" Well, the time may come when you may have these infidel doubts resolved in a manner that may prove a day of the deepest distress you may ever pass through; or you may learn it by being entangled in some snare of their laying which may well-nigh break every bone in your skin. But because they are invisible are they less real? Because you may not at present feel their power, is that power less strong? No; just the contrary. It is because they are invisible that, though so little dreaded, they are all the more formidable; it is because they exert apparently so little power over you that they really hold you in an iron, though to you it may seem but a silken, vice. For it is not so much the open violence as the

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secret stratagems of Satan that we have to dread, the hidden snares which he spreads for our feet, the subtle influence which he exerts over our carnal mind, the crafty suggestions, the infidel thoughts, the sensual imaginations, the rebellious murmurings, the lurking enmity, all which he, as it were, inspires with his infernal breath. James speaks of the tongue as “set on fire of hell.” (James 3:6.) This gives us a clue to the way in which Satan acts. When the tongue is speaking “vanity,” or “boasting great things:” when it “defileth the whole body, and is full of deadly poison,” who sees that Satan is setting it on fire? And if this be the case with the sins of the tongue, why should it not be with every other sin also? So that though we have no visible evidence of these infernal spirits hovering over us as so many unclean birds in the sky; if we hear not their voice or see not their form, yet this is the very reason why we have actually to dread them more, because the less they are seen the more power they exert. We are bidden, therefore, by the apostle to “put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” It is not, you see, his open violence so much as his secret craft that we have to dread. So great is this that but for three circumstances, all men without exception would fall a prey to his wiles.

1. The first is that the spiritual and eternal life of all the saints of God are secure in the Person of his dear Son. His own words are, “My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” Yea, he gives if possible a stronger reason still: “My Father which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” (John 10:28, 29.) All the sheep of Christ are therefore bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord the Lamb; they are all secured in the oath and promise of God which he made to the Son of his love in the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, when he declared that “his seed should endure for ever and his throne as the days of heaven.” (Psalm 89:29.) Satan, therefore, may battle and buffet, bite and bruise, harry and harass, worry and wound, tease and torture,

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enchant and ensnare the family of God; but he never can pluck out of Christ’s hand the least member of his mystical body. Did not the Lord himself thus express to his Father his heavenly will, “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me?” (John 17:24.)

2. But there is a second reason why Satan cannot eventually prevail over the least member of the Lord Jesus. Our blessed Lord has spoiled him of his dominion over them. Thus we read that “he took part of the flesh and blood of the children, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14); and again, “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it,” that is, his cross. Thus, when he went up to heaven he “led captivity captive,” and dragged these infernal spirits bound at his chariot wheels, depriving them of all their power to destroy his people. (Col. 2:15; Eph. 4:8.)

3. But there is a third reason why the saints of God are not to be overcome in this strife; and that is, because God has provided an armour for them, clad in which they shall be able to stand against all the wiles of the devil.

This brings us to our text, in approaching which this morning I shall

I.—First, show you, as the Lord may enable me, what this armour is, called here “the whole armour of God;” and what it is “to take it,” or “put it on.”

II.—Secondly, how by taking the whole armour of God we shall be able “to withstand in the evil day.”

III.—Thirdly, the caution that when “we have done all,” or, as the margin reads, when we have “overcome” all, then in that hour of our greatest danger still “to stand.”

I.—In opening up and describing the whole armour of God, it will be necessary, with God’s help and blessing, to look at the several parts as the Holy Ghost has here brought them to our view

by the pen of Paul.

i. I shall therefore, commence with the girdle. “Stand, therefore, having your loins girded about with truth.” Of course you are well aware that Eastern nations are not dressed as we are; that they wear not tight, close-fitting garments, suitable to the industrious, active habits of Northern climes and European nations, but loose flowing robes, which however inconvenient they might be to us, are well adapted to their climate and habits. But as even they sometimes must exert themselves in husbandry, in war, or in the chase, they are obliged to gather and gird them tightly round their loins when they address themselves to anything which requires active exertion. In their houses, sitting upon their sofas and cushions, these robes are allowed to fall lightly from their persons. But it would not do to work in the field or go to battle in this fashion. The Jews, therefore, and other Eastern nations, always had at hand a broad and strong girdle, by means of which they could fasten their dress firmly round them and yet leave the arms at full liberty to hold a mattock or wield a sword. This will explain the reason why in the Scripture we so often meet with the phrase of “girding up the loins,” that is, to take the first step towards active exertion. Taking that idea, then, the apostle bids us as the first step “to stand,” that is, to arise from a sitting posture, to get upon our feet, and prepare ourselves for the coming fight, by “having our loins girt about with truth.” This is then the first and undermost part of the armour, without putting on which the rest of the pieces could not be properly got on, or be made to fit each in its place. This girdle or belt is spoken of as the “girdle of truth.” By the word “truth” here, I understand two things: 1st, sincerity, for that is the basis of all Christian profession; that is the first piece of armour which we have to take up to make us right and tight, to keep our loose garments together, and to gird up our loins for the coming battle. As Elijah girded up his loins when he ran before Ahab; as Gehazi was bidden to gird up his loins and lay the prophet’s staff upon the child’s face; as our Lord himself bids his waiting disciples, “Let your loins be girded

about, and your lights burning;” so must we gird up our loins to fight the good fight of faith, to run with patience the race set before us, to be daily and hourly prepared for the Lord’s coming as a thief in the night. But without the girdle of sincerity, honesty, uprightness, and truthfulness, what is our profession worth? If not absolutely armour, the girdle of truth must be put on, or there is no possibility of taking up the other pieces. Mark, then, that the first requisite of a Christian is sincerity. But do not mistake my meaning. There is much sincerity which is not “the girdle of truth.” When I speak then of sincerity, I understand by it what the apostle calls, “godly sincerity.” (2 Cor. 1:12.) There is a sincerity even in religion which at best is but a rotten girdle. Is not the papist sincere? I have seen them in days past at their devotions, and I have seen sincerity, though a blind and superstitious sincerity, stamped upon their every feature and gesture. But this girdle was woven with human fingers in an earthly loom. The girdle of truth is of heavenly manufacture, and in a sense resembles our Lord’s garment, that it is “without a seam,” of one piece, “woven from the top throughout.” There is in it, therefore, no intermixture of lindsey-woolsey, no rotten threads, no part weak whilst the rest is strong. As in a chain the strength of the whole is determined by the tenacity of the weakest link; so the strength of the whole girdle is determined by the weakest part; every part, therefore, throughout must be equally strong or it will break asunder at the rotten place. A girdle that will never break was never woven by human fingers. Nothing else but godly sincerity of which every thread is of divine manufacture can stand the strain which sin and Satan will surely put upon it. Who could be more sincere than Paul when he was persecuting the church of God? He “verily thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth;” but that verily thinking was not sufficient to make him right in the sight of God when “being exceedingly mad against the saints of God, he persecuted them even to strange cities.” He needed sincerity of another kind—sincerity of God’s own giving,

such as was communicated to him at Damascus' gate. No man is really sincere until God makes him so; for there can be no real sincerity without divine light, no real earnestness without divine life. We play with religion until God makes us in earnest; at least I know it was so with me. I had my fits and starts about religion and thought I would be religious some day or other, having a great respect for it and for religious people. But the world always broke in upon my resolutions, and swept them away. It was like a child at the seaside trying to stop the incoming tide by taking its little wooden shovel and throwing up a heap of wet sand. I never was sincere until God made me so by planting his fear in my heart.

But "truth," as the girdle of a Christian soldier, means not merely sincerity, but an experimental knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. We are to have "our loins girt about with truth," which implies taking truth up with a believing hand and putting it round us so as to strengthen us for action. And as I have just shown you that there must be no rotten threads in the girdle of sincerity, so there must be no mixture of error in the belt of gospel truth. The girdle of truth must be made of pure truth without. If there be in it the least intermixture of error, it will be like a rotten piece in a literal girdle: it will break where it is rotten. How we have lately seen this in the controversy concerning the Sonship of Jesus! How many a girdle of men who were thought "valiant for truth" has broken in this part. They held their error in secret; but when a strain was put upon their girdle it broke where it was rotten. In order then to be firm and strong, it must be throughout pure and perfect, which the truth of God is as revealed in the word. Whatever error a man may hold, that is his weak point; and sooner or later he will find as the prophet declares, "instead of a girdle there shall be a rent" (Isai. 3:24); for like the girdle which the prophet hid by Euphrates, it will by means of this error become "marred and profitable for nothing." (Jer. 13:7.) This makes me, then, so zealous against error, for I see its tremendous consequences. I may be called a man of a bitter spirit, because I warmly denounce it. But why do I denounce

it but because I see in what a perilous state the souls of men are who are entangled in it? To be given up to believe a lie is one of the most dreadful judgments of God. No, my friends, if we are to fight the good fight of faith, we must hold the truth experimentally and feelingly in its purity and power; and so far as I am enabled to do this my loins are girded with the girdle of truth. As with our blessed Lord, "truth was the girdle of his loins and faithfulness the girdle of his reins," so truth and faithfulness, the truth as it is in Jesus, and faithfulness to what we believe and know for ourselves, must be the girdle of ours. But you may ask with Pilate, "What is truth?" Truth is that inspired revelation of himself and of his mind and will which God has made known in the Scriptures, and which the blessed Spirit reveals with power to the heart of his people; such as the doctrine of a Three-one God; the true and proper Sonship and Deity of our blessed Lord; the Deity, personality, and divine operations of the Holy Ghost; to this I may add what are usually called the doctrines of grace, and, not to occupy your time and attention unnecessarily, to sum up the whole in one expression, the truth which maketh the soul free. Now in proportion as we know the truth in the sweet experience of it, and have it brought into our heart by the power of God, are our loins girded with this heavenly girdle; for bear in mind it is to be worn, not looked at, clasped and buckled round us, not held loosely in the hand.

2. But look now at the second piece of armour of which the apostle speaks and which we have next to put on, "the breastplate of righteousness." The breastplate was one of the most important pieces of armour that in times of old, before the invention of gunpowder, shielded the warrior, for it protected the vital parts. The heart, the lungs, the liver, all these vital organs were protected by the breastplate, which was made sometimes of pieces of iron or steel overlapping each other, and sometimes of a single solid piece of metal. So in grace: the heart, which is the seat of all vital feeling, whence the streams of healthy blood are propelled

through every artery and vein; the lungs, whereby we inspire the vital air, the pure breath of heaven, and breathe forth prayer and supplication to God; and the liver, whereby we obtain a healthy appetite to digest the bread of life, the food on which we live: these inward organs, so to speak, of the new man of grace must be protected by a breastplate. What is that? “The breastplate of righteousness.” Our own righteousness? What protection will our own afford? I remember reading many years ago in Lord Macartney’s “Embassy to China,” that in one part of their voyage they saw upon a Chinese fort, which made a show of averting their progress, a number of men walking on the ramparts in splendid armour. After exchanging a few shots the fort was taken, and what did they find this armour to be? It was all made of glittering paper burnished up to represent steel. These men were set up for show to frighten away our ships. Their armour could scarcely have repelled a child’s arrow, much less such weapons as are used in our naval service. So would be a breastplate of our own righteousness; like the Chinese paper armour, it might be shining to the eye, but as weak as water against a hostile thrust from our implacable foe. O we want a better breastplate than one of paper, or even iron, if it be manufactured from nature’s mine and welded by human hands. We want a breastplate of Jesus’ own righteousness, in which there is no flaw or chink. We read of Ahab, that a man at a venture drew a bow, but the arrow reached his heart, for it pierced the joints of his harness, or, as the word there means, armour. You see there was a joint, or a place where the plates did not fully overlap each other; the arrow found out that joint; and though he had a breastplate on, yet because there was a chink or faulty spot in it, the arrow drank his blood through it, and he sank down in his chariot a dying man. So our breastplate, if it be of human manufacture, will have these faulty places; a piece of goodness here and a patch of righteousness there, like a bed quilt, a tiling of shreds and patches. What sort of protection will this be when the enemy against whom we fight

urges his deadly thrust? But there is a breastplate which he never can pierce, the breastplate of Christ’s righteousness. As Hart well says—

“Righteousness within thee rooted
 May appear to take thy part;
 But let righteousness imputed
 Be the breastplate of thine heart.”

But as other parts of the armour are to be considered, I must dismiss this piece with one solemn admonition. Christ’s righteousness, not your own, must guard your bosom as your breastplate in battle, as well as be your wedding dress when the battle is done.

3. “And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” The ancients generally wore sandals—a kind of sole loosely fastened on by ties; but when they went into battle they wore greaves, a kind of strong leather boot reaching a good way up the leg, which, being covered over with small brass or steel plates, protected their lower limbs from blows. The apostle alludes to these military greaves where he speaks of our feet being “shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” We have to stand firmly and strongly on our legs if we contend with our enemy. A loose fitting sandal may do for peace, but we want something stronger and better for war. This strong, firm, iron-bound shoe is the gospel of peace, that well fits the foot: it is a firm shoe which will not come off in the mud, nor allow Satan to cut at our feet so as to overthrow us in our goings. It is called here “the preparation of the gospel of peace,” but the word “preparation” also means the readiness, the alacrity which this gospel shoe gives us; for as the military shoe gave the warrior alacrity to move forward, lent him firm standing, which he could not have had with his naked foot or by his shifting sandal, so that he could maintain his hold upon the soil, even though the ground were slippery with blood; so if once we have the gospel shoe well fitted on, have the gospel of

peace put on, as it were, by the Blessed Spirit, so as to be closely wrapped round our feet and legs, and can stand firmly in it by the renewings and revivings of his grace, we shall then maintain our standing in the very teeth of hell, in the very face and under the hottest fire of Satan. But if we stand upon a broken law; upon the ever-shifting soil of creature merit; upon the quicksand of our own resolutions, or our own present or future exertions; or upon ground made slippery through the commission of secret or open sin, and the blood and gore of a guilty conscience all spilt upon it, we shall certainly fall in the day of battle. Nothing but the gospel, the precious gospel, called here “the gospel of peace,” as revealing and bringing peace to the conscience, “the peace of God which passeth all understanding,” can secure a firm standing for our feet, if we are to fight against Satan and all his embattled hosts. And as there was a fitness, and what we may call a suitability in the armed shoe to the warrior’s foot, as not only protecting the flesh, but bracing and strengthening the muscles, so when the gospel comes in sweetness and power as a message of mercy, a revelation of peace to the conscience, it not only protects from hostile blows but binds up; not only guards but braces the Christian warrior’s foot, and gives him a firm and solid standing in the field of battle. To be well established in the truth is an inestimable mercy; and indeed without it there is no power to resist temptation, overcome the world, fight against Satan, or triumph over death and hell.

4. But now comes a very important piece of armour. We have seen the girdle of truth; we have looked at the breastplate of righteousness, and we have examined the greaves of the gospel of peace. But the warrior is not yet complete: there are still unprotected parts in which he may receive a dangerous thrust. He must have a shield, then, that he may ward off every blow from whatever quarter it may come. And what is the shield of the Christian soldier? What is called here the “shield of faith.” This shield then will require a little examination. Observe, then, that it is not faith itself which is

the shield, but the Object of faith. This seems plain from what God said to Abram, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” (Gen. 15:1.) What is the happiness of Israel but that the Lord is her salvation, her shield, and her sword? “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency?” (Deut. 33:29.) And is not “the Lord God a sun and shield?” (Psl. 84:11.) It is not then our faith, much less any natural goodness, strength, or wisdom of our own that will avail us in this terrible conflict. But it is having Christ between us and Satan, interposing his Person and work, blood and righteousness; and thus, by faith, taking and making him our shield and buckler, we shall “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” It is called the shield of faith, because faith alone takes hold of Christ as our buckler. The expression “fiery darts” is an allusion to a customary mode of warfare in ancient times. They used to wrap arrows round with tow, or some other inflammable material, which they set on fire, and then shot them over the walls into the besieged city, which, if they alighted upon any wooden building or other combustible surface, either set the town in flames or produced such confusion as to distract the combatants while the enemy stormed the place. Thus they were to the ancients what shells are now.

By these “fiery darts,” or, as the word literally means, darts which have been set on fire, we may understand Satan’s infernal suggestions, his diabolical insinuations, his infidel reasonings, the hard thoughts which he raises up in the minds of God’s people, the rebellion, peevishness, fretfulness, and despair that he is permitted to hurl against them as so many flaming arrows. But why are they so much to be dreaded? Because we carry within us a whole magazine of combustible material. Lying deeply hidden in our carnal mind, almost like the barrels of gunpowder once concealed under the Houses of Parliament, there is a countless store of the most inflammable matter, which these fiery darts, if

they reach it, can in a moment explode. Had we no such corrupt nature, no such inflammable material, Satan might shoot his fiery darts against us without doing us any more injury than the literal arrow would injure a wall of stone. But we carry about such a mass of inflammable material that it only needs one fiery dart to set the whole on fire. Have you not sometimes felt such rebellion working in your mind, such hard thoughts of God, such enmity, such dregs of filth, such horrid thoughts and fearful blasphemy, that it seemed almost as if you were possessed of the devil? And at other times such swarms of infidelity have swept over your mind that you seemed to have scarcely a grain of faith left. There has been and still is much talk about the "Essays and Reviews;" but I have long had the substance of the Essays and Reviews in my carnal mind. I need not read Essays and Reviews to stir up infidelity: I have had enough of that working in my own heart for many a toilsome year, and even now scarcely a day passes without one or more of these fiery darts being hurled at my soul. I have neither read them nor do I mean to read them; but I believe there is scarcely an objection which these Essays contain that I have not had previously in the depths of my reasoning mind. I do not mean that they have been worked out as these enemies of the cross of Christ have set them off with argument and erudition; but perhaps some may have occurred to my mind which they have not glanced at; for I have often felt the truth of a remark made by Halyburton, that the Lord hides from such men the greatest difficulties that lie against religion; for being in nature's blindness they have not light to see them; and also in tenderness to the faith of the weak, does not permit all their subtleties to be published. We know, therefore, what these men mean and the awful end to which they are driving, which they themselves cannot see, as being shut up in unbelief, because we have the counterpart in our own bosom. But the snares in which they are trapped to their own destruction are our temptations; as their glory is our shame, and their rejoicing our misery. But how

distressing it is to the believing soul to find such infidel reasonings in his wicked heart, and how when this furious storm blows he seems almost driven from his anchorage!

But again, what desponding thoughts often rush into the breasts of many a poor child of God, who is not subject perhaps to, and may never once have experienced those infidel temptations to which I have alluded. Satan can work according to our natural constitution, education, habits of thought, and in any other circumstances in which we may widely differ from one another. If I have a reasoning mind, he can adapt his fiery darts to stir up in me infidel thoughts. If I am of a desponding turn, he can fill me with the most gloomy, melancholy feelings so as to make me almost despair of salvation. If I am naturally peevish or fretful, he can work upon those fretful feelings, and raise up most awful rebellion, self pity, and hard thoughts of God. He knows exactly our constitution, and wherever he sees a weak point there will he shoot in a fiery dart.

But how shall we meet these fiery darts of Satan? There is only one way. By taking the shield of faith, holding up Jesus presenting as it were against these darts the Person, the work, the blood, and the love of the Lord the Lamb. But how can we do this? By an act of faith, by believing in the Son of God with all our heart, let Satan say what he will. Satan may say that he is not the true and real Son of God. "Yes, but I say," the soul answers, "he is: God has revealed him to my soul as such; and besides this inward testimony I see it shining as with a ray of divine light in the Scriptures. In spite, then, Satan, of all your suggestions and all the reasons and arguments of unenlightened, uninspired men, I still hold by this truth; for it has been ratified in my inmost heart; He is, he is the Son of God." There you take the shield of faith, for by faith you hold up Jesus, as the Son of God, against the fiery dart. Or again, if Satan say that the Scriptures are not true, or not inspired; that they are only like other books, written by the pen of man; "O, but," you say, "I know

they are true and inspired by the Holy Spirit, for I have felt their power; they have been applied to my soul; I have been comforted by them. They are true; they are inspired of God, let Satan say what he will." This is taking the shield of faith, receiving into it the fiery dart, and thus quenching its flames. The ancients were accustomed to protect wooden buildings against fiery arrows by covering them with wet hides, which quenched the fire. To this there is an allusion in the expression, "to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Or Satan may rouse up in your mind a storm of rebellion against God, and represent him as your angry Judge or vindictive enemy. But you say, "Can I rebel against so merciful a God, who has done so much for me in body and soul? Shall I contend against him who has blessed me and held me up in the paths of truth and righteousness so many years?" Here is again a taking of the shield of faith to quench the fiery dart which of itself would be enough to set all your carnal mind on fire. Or if Satan shoot a burning arrow of despair into your desponding mind, which seems for a time to penetrate deeply, and to be kindling the most gloomy feelings within; in the strength of faith once more you take the shield with, "Did not the Lord once appear on my behalf? Did he not visit and bless my soul on this or on that occasion? Yes; I have felt his presence, seen his glory, tasted his love, and enjoyed the superabundings of his grace. Satan, avaunt! You cannot reason me out of this, nor make me believe that the Lord has never blessed my soul." Here again is the shield of faith; and by this shield as thus held up against it the fiery dart is quenched and falls harmless to the ground. But I would not have you to think that I mean we can always or indeed often do this. My object is merely to point out what the shield of faith is, and how the Christian warrior uses it; but I by no means intend that he has any strength to do so except as enabled by the power of God.

5. But let us pass on to another piece of the armour. There is "the helmet of salvation." The head is a vital organ; therefore needs well protecting, for a blow there might be instantly fatal. The

Lord, therefore, has provided a piece of protective armour for it, called here "the helmet of salvation." This is more fully explained by the apostle in another epistle, "And for a helmet the hope of salvation." (1 Thess. 5:8.) But what does the head, spiritually and experimentally viewed, represent? What is it naturally? Is it not the directing organ of the whole body? All our senses are in our head—the eyes by which we see; the ears by which we hear; the nose by which we smell; the palate by which we taste. May not then the head, spiritually viewed, represent the active senses of the living soul, whereby it sees Christ by the eye of faith, hears Christ by the ear of faith, tastes Christ by the palate of faith, smells the sweet savour of his name as the ointment poured forth by the nose of faith, and may I not add, praises and blesses him by the tongue and lips of faith? The head, then, is the representation, so to speak, of that united assemblage of living organs whereby Christ is apprehended as all our salvation and all our desire. But if the head be spiritually all this, it will need some protection. View then, the protective armour provided for it, here called "the helmet of salvation," and see whether you have not already found it able to cover your head in the day of battle. Have you not already had some deadly thrust against it? Satan, if he could, would have put out your eyes, so that you could no longer see Christ by the eye of faith; would have stopped your ears, so that you never more could hear a word of consolation from his lips; would have stuffed your nose with dirt and mud, that you never could have smelt again those garments of his which smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia; would have vitiated your palate by his poisonous drugs, so that never again could you have tasted that he is gracious; would have tied your tongue and muzzled your lips to prevent you from pouring out your soul in prayer and supplication, or in praising and blessing his holy name. A good hope through grace is called "the helmet of salvation," as being "the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins." (Luke 1:77.) Does not Satan often seem to cut at your very hope of eternal life, just as if, with all the strength

and malice of a French cuirassier at Waterloo, he would cut you down at a stroke by cleaving your head in twain? Now, how could our poor, unprotected head stand against such a deadly blow? but there is a taking of the helmet of salvation. How so? By receiving salvation into the heart as the free gift of God; so that if salvation by grace has reached your heart, the helmet is already put upon your head to shield it in the day of battle.

We have looked thus far at the defensive weapons provided for the Christian warrior in the armoury of God. But he has given us something more than defensive armour. It would not have been enough for the ancient warrior to go into battle with only defensive armour, however strong or well put on. He needed a sword as well as a shield. The Lord, therefore, has not kept this weapon back from the spiritual warrior. Here it is, "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." But you may perhaps ask, Why should the sword be needed by a Christian soldier? Is he not to submit to every injury, and when smitten on the one cheek meekly turn the other? Yes, as regards his fellow man, but not as regards his infernal foe. Are we to let him shoot his fiery arrows and deal us all manner of sword-thrusts, and we not return as good as he gives? Surely not; for of course it is spiritual, not natural fighting; blows upon the soul, not blows upon the face, that we are now talking of; for the sword of the Spirit is not the sword of Gideon or a Damascus' blade, but the word of God. To understand how this is wielded, see how our blessed Lord dealt with Satan in the wilderness. Satan came to him with all his infernal subtlety, actually tempting him to doubt, or at least visibly prove by a miracle, that he was the Son of God. But how calmly, how blessedly our Lord met his suggestion. With what weapon? "It is written." This was the sword of the Spirit. But see its effect. At once Satan gave back, and pressed that temptation no more. He could not overcome "It is written." That thrust from the hand of the Lord pierced him through, for he well knew that what God had written must be fulfilled. He knew not only the omnipotence of Jehovah, but that he was a God that could not lie,

and that God would cease to be God if his word could fall to the ground unaccomplished. He trembled, therefore, at God's word in the hands of his dear Son. His own pangs convinced him that what God said must be fulfilled, for he was carrying in his own bosom the penalty of his ancient disobedience to the revealed will of Jehovah, when God said, "Let all the angels of God worship him," and he refused from pride to do so. So it is now. No other sword but that of the Spirit, which is the word of God, can beat him back. Creature arguments, logical reasonings, good works and good resolutions, vows, tears, and promises, are of no avail against Satan. There is only one weapon whereby we can fight him to any purpose, and that is the word of God. But observe, that it must not be merely the letter of the word. It must be the "sword of the Spirit," and therefore a spiritual sword, which can only be taken in hand when the word of God is applied with a divine power to your heart, and you have a living faith in it as made "life and spirit" to your soul. It is of no use my bringing forward a text to resist a temptation of Satan, unless I can make that text my own; in other words, unless I can handle that sword as one who knows how to wield it. To take up a text and not know the sweetness and power of it, would be like a child taking up a warrior's sword without having the warrior's hand. He might play with the sword, but what is the sword of a giant in the hands of a child? The sword of Scander-Beg, a famous Albanian warrior against the Turks, used to be shown at Vienna. A man who once looked at and handled it said, "Is this the sword which won so many victories? I see nothing in it; it is but a common sword." The answer was, "You should have seen the hand that wielded it." So it is not merely taking a text, adopting scripture language, and quoting passages, which will beat back the fiery assaults of Satan. This is having Scander-Beg's sword without having Scander-Beg's arm. But it is having the word of truth brought into our heart by the power of God, faith raised up to believe that God himself speaks it to our heart, being thus enabled to wield it in the strength

of the Spirit and by the power of faith in living exercise, to resist every hellish thrust. In this battle we must not give way. To flee is to be conquered, for, as Bunyan well says, there is no armour for the back. We must fight, even if we die fighting; resist even unto blood, striving against sin. I tell you again and again that we must never give way; even if we fall we must get up again and fight on; for “a just” (that is a righteous) “man falleth seven times and riseth up again: but the wicked,” that is those abandoned to their wickedness, “shall fall into mischief;” that is, open wickedness under the power and condemnation of which they shall ever lie. (Prov. 24:16.) Do we not read, “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise” (Micah 7:8); and again, “Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down.” (Psalm 37:24.) Thus even if in this conflict you should slip and fall, lie not still as a conquered captive, but get up again and fight. “Resist Satan, and he will flee from you.” He is a conquered enemy; he cannot destroy you if you are the Lord’s. The word of truth, therefore, is full of most gracious promises, and sweet encouragements “to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ,” and never in heart or hand submit to be conquered by sin or Satan.

6. But now comes another weapon of no less importance than the preceding, which is “all prayer.” Unless we have this last addition to all the rest of our armour, it may prove like a coat of mail upon a footman at the Lord Mayor’s show. The Lord Mayor’s footman might wear the armour which an ancient knight wore, retained as a memorial of the days of chivalry in the Tower; but how would he acquit himself if he had to stand against a knight of old, to meet Richard Coeur de Lion or Saladin in the tented field? How would he acquit himself in real combat without knowing by long exercise the use of his weapons? So unless we have this blessed grace and gift of “all prayer” to exercise us well in the use of our weapons, to keep them all clean and ready for active service, we might appear to be dressed up in knightly armour, but could we stand the least thrust of a hostile blade? Does not the apostle say, “Praying always

with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit?” Observe the words “Praying always with all prayer and supplication.” Then it is not praying sometimes but “always,” that is, at all times as the Lord enables; and that with “all prayer,” that is all manner of prayer, public, private, mental, vocal; and “all supplication,” which is something more earnest, more importunate, more fervent, more beseeching, more wrestling than prayer, having in it more of Jacob’s spirit and petition, “I will not let thee go except thou bless me.” And observe also, it must be “in the Spirit,” not in the mere utterance of words; not in the mere form and custom, not lip labour, and tongue service, but as Jude speaks “praying in the Holy Ghost” (Jude 20); and as the apostle speaks of himself “I will pray with the Spirit and with the understanding also” (1 Cor. 14:15); for it is not we that pray but “the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Rom. 8:26.) Without this Spirit of grace and of supplications poured out upon us from on high (Zech. 12:10), we cannot even see the pieces of armour which God has provided. We cannot see the girdle, or the breastplate, or the greaves, or the shield, or the sword, or the helmet; still less can we put them on. But when the Lord is pleased to bless us with the Spirit of prayer, then we see the girdle of truth and put it round our loins; then we see the breastplate of righteousness and clasp it firmly over the chest; then we see the shoes and put our feet into the Gospel as the Gospel of peace; then we take up the helmet of salvation and place it on the head; then we draw the sword of the Spirit out of the sheath and flash it in the very face of Satan.

7. But now comes one more qualification still for the Christian warrior, which is to “watch thereunto with all perseverance.” The direction for the Christian warrior is to be ever upon the look out; never to be off his guard; never to take his armour off nor lay his sword aside. When have saints fallen? In unguarded moments. How did David fall? By walking on the house-top instead of being with his army, and not guarding his eyes from wandering. He fell from want of watchfulness. You perhaps have found the same. You

have been entangled in a snare of Satan. What you then did was not done wilfully, presumptuously; but you were off your guard, and Satan took advantage of your defenceless state to overcome you with his wiles. We need therefore, watchfulness, so as to suspect everything and everybody, and none so much as ourselves, and that “with all perseverance,” so as never to drop asleep. You know the penalty of a sentry being found asleep at his post. It is death by the articles of war. We are sentries; the enemy is watching us and we must watch him. We must watch eyes, ears, tongue, hands, feet, hearts—yea, we must live in a constant attitude of holy watchfulness or Satan will surely gain the advantage of us. But you will say, “What hard work this is!” Yes, it is hard work, very hard work; not a work for sluggards and cowards; but remember this, that there is salvation at the end of it, and, I may also add, there is no salvation without it, for only “he that endureth to the end shall be saved.” It would be hard work for you to be in a military or naval engagement, fighting perhaps up to your ankles in blood; but if you were there in the Queen’s service, you must fight. You must not run away from the field; you must not dive into the hold. So it is hard work to be ever struggling against sin and Satan, putting on the armour and keeping it bright; but what is the consequence if we don’t do so? Defeat. And what is defeat in this battle? Death and woe for ever. Satan is never so well pleased as when we are careless and thoughtless and without our armour on. So it comes to this: I must either put on the armour of God by faith, or else perish entangled in the wiles of Satan. It is not as though it were with us a matter of indifference, as I might eat a meal or not; put on a coat or not; sleep a certain time or not. Salvation is not, like these bodily acts and a thousand others, a mere matter of indifference. It is whether my soul is to be for ever in the enjoyment of bliss or for ever under the wrath of God. The apostle, therefore, says, “Take unto you the whole armour of God, that” —

II.—To come to our next point, “you may be able to stand in the evil day.” There is “an evil day” that comes upon each and all.

And what is the evil day? The day of Satan’s power; the day of temptation; that day which indeed is and ever will be an evil day unless that armour is put on to enable us to stand. Whatever day that may be, which is to you a day of temptation, that for you is an evil day. The sun may shine brightly in the sky and nature wear its most smiling aspect; all may seem pleasant without and within, but it will be an evil day for you if Satan lay a snare and you fall into it. It will then be our wisdom and mercy to see beforehand the approach of this evil day—and there are always symptoms of the evil day coming. Rain does not fall without clouds; night does not come on until the sun has sensibly left the sky; so the evil day does not come upon the Christian without warning from above. Look out and see; even now perhaps there is a gradual diminution of the light; clouds begin to gather; heavy drops fall upon the pavement; the storm is coming; the evil day approaching. What unclean bird is that in the sky, like the fabled roe, or condor of the Andes, spreading his dark wings and whetting his beak and claws? I see, I see; I hear, I hear the rushing of his wings; Satan is at hand; I must put on my armour. Where is my girdle—where my breastplate—where my shoes—where my shield—where my helmet? The enemy is at the gates; the battle-trumpet is sounding. I shall be overcome unless I put on my armour. Where, too, is my sword, my Jerusalem blade, that I may fight with Satan and give him blow for blow and thrust for thrust? Here, then, is the soul in “the evil day,” praying and watching, taking the shield of faith and putting the armour on. It is by doing this, and only by doing this, that it “stands” in the evil day. But where are we if there is no armour on, no girdle of truth round the loins, no sincerity before God or man; no breastplate of Christ’s righteousness to guard our heart; no hope of salvation to cover our head; no gospel of peace in which our feet may stand, no shield of faith to hold up against the fiery darts of the wicked one, no sword of the Spirit wherewith we may return blow for blow? Why, we must be overcome. Like a naked man in the midst of armed warriors, we must surrender

before the uplifted sword cleaves our skull. You see then the necessity there is that the Christian should not only know there are these pieces of heavenly armour, but should put them on as God has bidden him. And he does put them on when the Lord is pleased to put them on for him, for he alone “teacheth our hands to war and our fingers to fight.” He does equip himself when the Spirit calls to arms and gives him power and strength to put on the various pieces. Only so can he withstand. But is he safe then? Some of the greatest victories have followed the most seeming defeats; it was so at Marengo, where Buonaparte defeated the Austrians just as they had gained the day; and some of the most disastrous defeats have followed in the very train of victory, as Ben-hadad found to his sorrow. (1 Kings 20:29.) When an army has gained a battle, it reposes upon its arms, wearied with the conflict. If a fresh attack be then made, how soon a victory may be changed into a defeat. But some of you may not understand and others object to my natural figures and historical allusions; I will give you, therefore, Scriptural examples. Look at Lot, Gideon, and Jephthah. Hezekiah fell by pride after the Lord had cast all his sins behind his back; Peter denied Jesus after a glorious revelation of him as the Son of God. How suitable, therefore, the exhortation of

III.—Our third point, “having done,” or, it is in the margin, “overcome all to stand.” Now suppose you have overcome all your foes and fears. You have put on the girdle of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. Well shod have been your feet; well protected has been your head; able to quench the fiery darts has been your shield; sharp and trenchant has been your sword. As soon as this has been the case with you, well what next? Now pride begins to work,—vain-glory and self-confidence. You congratulate yourself on the victory gained; you get off your guard; stand at ease; and think you shall see war no more. Surely now you may take a little rest; surely now you need not be quite so prayerful, so watchful, or so persevering as before. Now this is the very time for Satan to make a fresh assault. David did not fall into sin when

fighting against Saul: he was upon his guard then, and we see how nobly he twice acted when his enemy was in his grasp. But when he had defeated his enemies he remained idle at home, and then overcome by temptations he slipped and fell, most awfully fell, and left a name covered in some respects with disgrace, and a most solemn warning to the saints of God to take heed to their feet. May we learn wisdom from such examples! We may have fought, we may have conquered, and then exulting in the victory fall a prey to the next temptation. We are never really secure until we exchange time for eternity. But meanwhile there is no security for any, be he young or old, except in the grace of God, and that mighty power whereby he keepeth those that are his by faith unto salvation. The Lord enable us to put this armour on: he has provided it for us; he can equip us with it; and by the power of his grace can bring us off more than conquerors through him who loved us.

186 The Walk In The Fields And Among The Vineyards

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on
January 5, 1862

“Come, My beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee My loves.”

Song 7:11, 12

I Do not often preach from the Song of Solomon, and this chiefly for two reasons. First, though this holy book is full of rich and choice experience, it is couched for the most part in language so figurative and allegorical that it needs more grace and wisdom than I possess to be sure I should always give the correct interpretation of the figures employed for that purpose by the blessed Spirit. And, secondly, the church of God, generally speaking, is not in a state fit to understand, receive and experimentally realise the lessons of holiness and truth contained in this portion of the

Word of God. The Song of Solomon, as you well know, is a sacred nuptial song, and may be generally described as conveying the mutual expression of the love of Christ and of the church under the figure of a bridegroom and a bride delighting in each other's company, and giving vent to their affection in tender, yet chaste and holy language. But the church of God at present is rather a lone widow than a joyous bride; rather spends her time in fasting than in feasting; is rather complaining than courting; and rather sits by the rivers of Babylon with her harp hung upon the willows than pours forth in sweet melody the songs of Zion.

But the difficulties which I have named are neither of them insuperable. As regards the first objection, though much of the Song of Solomon is so allegorical and figurative as often to elude our endeavours to understand its spiritual meaning, yet there are figures in it which we seem in some sense able clearly and experimentally to comprehend as seen through the thin mist of the allegory; and, as regards the second difficulty, there are passages also which meet the present experience of the children of God, because, though expressions of love, yet are they couched rather in the language of tender desire than of actual enjoyment. Take, for instance, such a passage as: "Because of the savour of Thy good ointments Thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love Thee." So 1:3 Any true believer who has ever felt Christ's name to be sweet and precious can understand the experience contained in those words, even though in many points his faith may fall short of full assurance or present enjoyment. So again, "Draw me, we will run after Thee." So 1:4 There we have the experience of a soul longing to be drawn by "cords of love and bands of a Man," and to run after Jesus that it may overtake Him, gain possession of Him, and follow in His footsteps, all which may fall very short of full assurance. Again, "By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not." So 3:1 There we have the experience of a soul, mourning under desertion and the hidings of God's face, seeking the Lord,

and yet unable to realise His presence or His power. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" So 8:5 There we have the expression of a true-hearted child of God coming up out of this wilderness world, cleaving to Jesus with purpose of heart and leaning upon Him with all his strength, as the only object of his warm affection. Almost all these passages are couched in figurative language, yet easily intelligible, and certainly not beyond the experience of the greater part of the family of God.

We shall perhaps find, if God help me this morning to bring forth the choice experience of our text, the words before us to possess both of these characters. First, though the language is highly metaphorical, yet is it sufficiently intelligible through the light veil of allegory to present us with a visible portrait, and that no less than of a face beaming with the light and beauty of a very gracious experience; and yet, secondly, the experience thus portrayed in it is not of a character so high in spiritual enjoyment as to be beyond the reach of those who know something of the breathing forth of the sincerity of love into the bosom of the Redeemer.

Let us then approach the words as they present themselves to us in the express language of the blessed Spirit, and see whether we cannot gather up from them some spiritual instruction, or gracious encouragement, or divine consolation, or profitable admonition.

I.—Observe, first, the invitation which Christ for He is the speaker here addresses to His beloved to accompany Him in His evening walk of love: "Come, My beloved let us go forth."

II.—Secondly, the place where He invites her to go in company with Him. "Let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages."

III.—Thirdly, the object of their journeying together thus hand in hand: "Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth."

IV.—Fourthly, the entertainment which He promises her

when they have gone through their survey: "There will I give thee My loves."

I.—I have just hinted my opinion that it is our Lord who speaks here. The commentators, I believe, and amongst them I may name Dr. Gill, ascribe the words to the church; but, according to my view of the subject, they are much more appropriate in the lips of the Redeemer. Let me give you my reason. The invitation, "Come, My beloved," seems to fall with more propriety from the lips of the bridegroom than from those of the bride. He leads, she follows. He draws, she runs. He invites her to come: she listens to His invitation, and gladly takes hold of His proffered hand. Is not this more suitable, more becoming their mutual relationship? Would it not be so between lovers naturally? Is it not more becoming maidenly modesty to be asked than to ask, to be courted than to court, to be invited to take an evening walk than to give the invitation? But when we look at the exalted dignity of the heavenly Bridegroom, full though He be of most gracious condescension, it must strike us at once upon higher grounds that it is more becoming for the Lord to give the invitation to the church to walk with Him than for the church to invite Him to walk with her.

I. But now look at the tender expression by which he addresses her: "My beloved." This is His language throughout the whole Song to His spouse and bride. Whatever the church be in herself, and no language can describe the depths of her debasement through the Fall, she is dear and near to the heart of Christ. Two things must always strike us with wonder, and I may say holy admiration, when we can realise them experimentally in our own bosom.

First, that Christ, viewed by faith as the eternal Son of God in all the glory of His uncreated Deity, should ever have loved any of the human race at all. Did you ever attempt to realise the feeling that He, who is eternally God, should ever have condescended to love a creature like man? When I say "love," I do not mean that general approbation which God has as a Creator in the works of His hands, but that warmth of peculiar and tender affection,

which we mean by the term. Is it not sufficient to fill our mind with wonder that the great and glorious, self-existent I AM should love a finite creature such as man? We can understand how equals can love equals, or even superiors inferiors when the disparity is not very great; but that He who fills heaven with His glory should love, with all the warmth of infinite affection, man, the creature of His hand—this indeed is a mystery. David felt this when he said, after a contemplation of the glories of the starry heavens, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour." Ps 8:4,5 Such also was Solomon's feeling when he had built the temple. "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee: how much less this house that I have builded?" 1Ki 8:27 But when we consider what man is, not only as a finite, but as a fallen creature; when we contrast the purity and holiness of God with the impurity and defilement of man; and when we bear in mind how hateful sin is in the eyes of Him who cannot look upon iniquity, well may we stand astonished that a God so holy should love sinners so vile.

But the second thing is calculated also to strike us with wonder and admiration. The mystery, which never can be fathomed in this life and most probably will be equally unfathomable in the life to come, is that God should have loved some and not have loved others. Why He should have loved Jacob and hated Esau, chosen David and rejected Saul, are mysteries inscrutable to creature intellect. But though unfathomable by the line of human reason, they are still truths as clearly revealed in the Word of God as those doctrines which lie more within the compass of our understanding; and therefore should be received in faith, not cavilled at through unbelief. It will be our mercy, instead of puzzling our minds over this mystery, still less cavilling at it, to have such a testimony in our own conscience as Paul had of old, when he could say, in the full assurance of faith, "He loved me and gave Himself for me."

When, then, we look at the church in her present fallen condition, we may stand astonished that our gracious Lord should feel any love towards her. But so it is. Love is self-moving. Even in natural love, none can tell the source from which it springs. All we know of it is that it flows freely, of its own self-movement, towards its object. So it is with divine love: it flows forth spontaneously without seeking any other cause but its own self-movement, or any other object but that to which it softly yet strongly tends. "God," we read, "is love." 1Jo 4:8 That is His name; that is His nature. But if any ask why God loved any of the sons of men, all we can answer is, "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1Jo 4:10 And if any ask how we may know this love, all we can reply is, "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." 1Jo 4:16

1. But love cannot exist without requital. Is not this true in human love? How many a poor girl has died of a broken heart from unrequited love! How many a man has been almost driven to desperation by the object of his affections breaking her plighted troth and wedding another! It is in divine as in human love. Divine love needs requital. But there is this peculiar feature in divine love, and one in which it far exceeds all earthly affection, that it never knows the want of requital; it never feels the want of faithfulness. You may love an earthly object, and may have no requital. You may fix your affections upon one of the opposite sex and have them blighted, the object being unfaithful. But not so in heavenly love. It always meets with requital; it never meets with unfaithfulness.

But how can this be? Am I walking on sure and safe ground here, or advancing anything not in strict harmony with the Word of truth and the experience of the saints? Do you, then, think it possible that divine love can be thrown away? What is the cause of human love not being always requited? Is it not because the lover is not able to kindle a mutual flame in the bosom of the beloved? But can this be the case with divine love? To think so would be to

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cast a doubt on the power of the Almighty, as well as be expressly contrary to the Scriptures of truth. What do we read there? "We love Him because He first loved us." 1Jo 4:19 And again, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto US."

It is impossible, therefore, that divine love should be disappointed by meeting with no requital. It is true that you may sometimes doubt and fear whether Jesus loves you. But these very doubts and fears imply that you have some love toward Him; and if you love Him, you may be certain He loves you. Love to the Lord is a sure sign of a new and heavenly birth, "for every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." 1Jo 4:7 And you may be certain also of His faithfulness to you, even though you are often unfaithful to Him; for those whom He loves, He loves to the end; and "if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself." Joh 13:1 2Ti 2:13 If, therefore, He has once loved you, He will never leave you. Those two bitter drops which often turn the whole cup of human love into a draught of almost unmixed wormwood and gall, want of requital and unfaithfulness, are never found in love divine. These two things, then, you may depend upon, if indeed you love Jesus with a pure heart fervently—that your love is requited by His; and that He will be faithful to every promise ever spoken by Him to your heart.

2. But love cannot exist without communion—the mutual enjoyment of each other's society. It is so in earthly, it is so in heavenly love. Our blessed Lord, therefore, speaking in the words before us, invites His beloved "to come," implying that she was to take His proffered hand, that they might "go forth" in the enjoyment of each other's tender and affectionate society. She willingly accepts the offer. She is too pleased with His company not to listen when He invites. He leads, she follows; and hand in hand they go forth together.

II. But now look at the invitation couched in the expression, "Let us go forth." There is something very experimental in this

kind and loving invitation; something that must not be passed over if we would bend our ear to listen to the voice of the Lord. He had already said, "Come." That was, so to speak, the calling note, the first sound of the love trumpet to rouse up the attention of the bride. She hears; she rises; she obeys the call; she takes the proffered hand, and now the Lord says, "Let us go forth." The idea contained in the expression seems to be that Christ and the church are to go forth out of everything which can interrupt their mutual enjoyment of each other's society. The world is looked upon as a distracting place, like an over-crowded metropolis, full of noise, smoke, din and bustle, where their communion would be interrupted by every passer-by. In order, therefore, to enjoy sweet communion without interruption, He takes her by the hand and invites her to go forth with Him.

But what is implied in the expression "going forth?"

1. Separation from everything which interferes with the love of Christ. He finds her in the world, sometimes allured by, and entangled in its flesh-pleasing snares, and sometimes overborne with its burdensome anxieties. Forth, forth from both of these must the child of God go if he is to walk hand in hand with Jesus. It cannot be a trio—Jesus, the soul and the world. In natural love, a trio is no company. There must be two only to enjoy the wished-for society. So in grace; it must be Christ and the soul, the soul and Christ, or else there is, there can be, no sweet communion. The world must not interpose nor separate the two by turning its face into the midst, for it comes worse than a mere casual visitor, or an unwished-for interfeerer. It is a rival. And what can be worse company for two lovers than the presence of a rival? The love of the world and the love of Christ cannot dwell in the same bosom: "For if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1Jo 2:15

The first step, then, toward communion with Christ is to come out of the world: "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive

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you." 2Co 6:17 If we are entangled in the love of the world, or fast bound and fettered with wordly anxieties, and the spirit of the world is rife in our bosom, all our profession will be vapid, if not worthless. We may use the language of prayer, but the heart is not in earnest; we may still manage to hold our head high in a profession of the truth, but its power and blessedness are neither known nor felt. To enjoy any measure of communion with the Lord, whether on the cross or on the throne, we must "go forth" from a world, which is at enmity against Him.

2. So also there must be a going forth from all sin. Christ never can have any fellowship with sin; for what fellowship hath Christ with Belial? If we are indulging in any sin, secret or open, there can be no fellowship with the Lord the Lamb. We must go forth out of it and leave all its abominations behind. But how can we do this? How can we crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts? How can we deny ourselves; cut off right hands or pluck out right eyes; tear a beloved idol from the breast; and say to every iniquity, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" This we cannot do for ourselves; but the Lord can do it for us and in us. And this He does when He says, "Come forth." With the word of a king there is power; and by that power He can enable us to go forth out of all evil and out of everything hateful in His holy eyes.

3. But the invitation bids us also go forth out of the professing church. Christ is not there. There lies indeed the body, once animated with life divine; but the animating spirit is fled, and now there is nothing but a lifeless corpse. So it was with the church of old. The Lord once was "with the church in the wilderness" Ac 7:38; but the presence and the power of the Lord left it; and then that which was once the house of the Lord became the den of thieves. This going forth from the professing church was foreshadowed by the bodies of the beasts, whose blood was brought into the sanctuary, being burnt without the camp. The apostle, therefore, says, "Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore

unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.” Heb 13:12,13 This I had to do now many years ago; for when I found and felt the power of God’s truth upon my heart and conscience, I was as much obliged to “go forth” out of the professing church as I was out of the world and out of sin.

4. But this invitation of Christ implies also that we must go forth which is the hardest thing of all to do out of self. It is easy in some measure to leave the world; easy to leave the professing church; and, though more difficult, yet there are cases in which persons may even leave their sins, as the dog is said to have left his vomit, though he returned to it again. But to go forth out of self—there is the difficulty; for this said “self” embraces such a variety of forms. Still, to deny it, renounce it, and go forth out of it lies at the very foundation of vital godliness. This was strikingly intimated by our blessed Lord when He said “Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” Mr 8:34

But what varied shapes and forms does this monster self assume! How hard to trace his windings! How difficult to track the wily foe to his hidden den, drag him out of the cave, and immolate him at the foot of the cross, as Samuel hewed down Agag in Gilgal. Proud self, righteous self, covetous self, ambitious self, sensual self, deceitful self, religious self, flesh-pleasing self—to detect, unmask, strip out of its parti-coloured clothes and changeable suits of apparel this ugly, mis-shapen creature, and then stamp upon it, as if one would crush with the heel of our boot its viper head; who will do such violence to beloved self, when every nerve quivers and shrinks, and the coward heart cries to the uplifted foot, “Spare, spare?” But does not the apostle say of himself, “I am crucified with Christ” Ga 2:20; “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” Ga 6:17; “I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for His body’s sake.” Col 1:24 All this is “suffering with Christ, that we also may be glorified together; a mortifying, through the Spirit, of the deeds of the body;” a being “always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest

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in our mortal flesh.” Ro 8:13,17 2Co 4:11 Unless there is a going forth out of self by this self-crucifixion, there is no walking hand in hand with Christ, no manifest union, no heavenly communion with Him; for there can no more be a partnership between Christ, the soul and self, than there can be a partnership between Christ, the soul and sin.

II.—But now let us direct our attention to our next point—the place of appointment, the trysting spot, to which the blessed Lord invites the beloved of His soul to go forth with Him: “Let us go forth into the field.”

I. What is the leading idea here? There are several.

1. The first I shall name is that of leaving the noise, smoke and din of a large metropolis, where there is no privacy, no opportunity for retirement, for the quiet calm of a lonely field, where we may indulge in prayer and meditation, or retire into one’s own bosom and commune with one’s own heart. The sounds and sights, the bustle and confusion of the busy town often prevent that calm repose and sacred communion to which the Lord would invite His believing people. He would take, then, His beloved as if by her hand and lead her out of the noise and din of the crowded town that she might find opportunity for a little quiet meditation. Even naturally how pleasant it is to an inhabitant of the crowded metropolis to get away from its smoke and din into the quiet country; and if a truly godly man, and blessed with a spirit of meditation, there to meditate upon the precious truth of God. Isaac, you will recollect, went out to meditate in the field at the eventide when he lifted up his eyes and saw the camels coming, announcing the arrival of the wife whom the Lord had found for him. I have myself found the field to be a suitable place for meditation, and often walk there on a Saturday evening for that purpose.

Thus the field in our text may represent the secret meditation of the soul. The saints of God in ancient days were much given to meditation. “My meditation of Him shall be sweet,” Ps 104:34 “O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.” Ps 119:97

“When I remember Thee upon my bed and meditate on Thee in the night watches.” Ps 63:6 “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.” Ps 4:4 Meditation is very profitable, and for ministers who would profit the church of God indispensable. Paul therefore says to his beloved Timothy, “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.” 1Ti 4:15 Meditation is to spiritual food what digestion is to natural food: without it there is no nourishment from the Word of truth. But it is an employment that very few are able or willing to exercise themselves with; in fact, to meditate upon the Word of truth requires a spiritual mind, heavenly affections and a soul under peculiar divine impressions, whereby sacred realities become not only suitable food, but the very element in which we live and move.

2. But again, “the field” may spiritually represent a place of secret prayer. How often even literally will the child of God go into the field that he may have an opportunity for pouring out his heart before the Lord! You that have families, some, it may be, surrounded and often sadly worried with crying children, living in small confined houses, with little opportunity for secret retirement, scarcely able perhaps to call your sleeping room your own; how gladly sometimes you go forth into the fields where no eye can see you but the eye of God, and no ear hear you but the ear of God, that you may pour out your heart without interruption! The very calm quiet of the field suits your frame. The soft fresh air blowing upon your face cheers and refreshes your body; the lark twittering in the sky; the face of lovely nature spread before your eyes; the thorough solitude of the scene far away from the dusty roads and all sights and sounds of sin, all favour a spirit of prayer as you lift up your eyes and heart to heaven. If you are in trouble, there you may groan unheard; if dejected, there you may sigh, and neither wife nor child catch the sound; if favoured with access to the throne, there you may have communion with the Lord; and there, if business admit, you may sometimes stay in the grassy field till the shades of evening gather around you, and the

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stars shine forth in all their beauty and glory. Then you can go to your home refreshed and strengthened with your walk in the field, for the Lord has gone forth thither with you, and His company is the best of all. Thus the field may fitly represent that secret prayer which is the very life of the soul, and without which there can be no communion with the Lord of life and glory.

3. But “the field” also may signify a place of self-examination; for it may spiritually imply retirement, abstraction, solitude, quiet, being alone with God. Persons for the most part hate solitude. They love to live in a crowd, and thus, for the most part, escape the torment of being alone. Nay, how many of those who we hope fear God seem to be afraid of self-examination! And why is this, but because they fear that self-examination may bring things to light which might cover them with shame, and they are unwilling to be humbled or put their mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope? But how good self-examination sometimes is! Does not the apostle say, “Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” 2Co 13:5 And again, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.” 1Co 11:28 How the Psalmist seems as it were to spread himself out before the Lord as he walked in this field of self-examination: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Ps 139:23,24

II. But let me give the words a somewhat more enlarged signification. When the Lord says to His beloved, “Let us go forth into the field,” it would seem as if He invited her to go with Him hand in hand, and see what was spread before their view. In His company, and taught by His Spirit and grace, she would see what she could not, with her own unassisted vision, ever descry.

1. He would bid her, for instance, look, first, at the field of creation. What an ample field of meditation is here; and how delightful it is to leave the crowded city and look upon the calm

and quiet face of nature! But how much more sweet it is to be able to do this with a spiritual mind, and to conceive from it heavenly delight! Then as you view the sun walking in his brightness, or see the moon illuminating the dark night, and the stars glittering like so many diamonds in the sky, how the glory of God shines forth as thus traced out in these beautiful heavens! Men enjoy the warmth of the sun, or the light of the moon, and look, some with careless and some with admiring eyes, upon the constellations of the heavens; but how few see that the hand of God gave to them their being, and how fewer still can say, in the language of Cowper, “My Father made them all”! But we cannot see this field of creation with believing eyes except we walk hand in hand with Christ, His grace enlightening the heart and His glory illuminating the soul.

2. But there is another field—the field of providence; and into that field, as in the preceding, we can only go forth, so as to take of it a believing view, as we can walk hand in hand with Christ. The field of providence is full of various paths, and these are often so intricate that we should soon lose our way unless we had such an unerring Guide and Companion. Now when the Lord is pleased to take us hand in hand and lead us into the field of providence, then, whichever way we look, we see that “all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.” Ps 25:10 Look back and see the path of providence in which the Lord has hitherto led you up and down this wilderness world from your very infant days, and you will find mercy stamped upon every part of it. You could not indeed see it at the time, for the Lord “brings the blind by a way that they know not;” but you see it now, if at least you are walking in the field hand in hand with the Lord. However crooked that path once apparently was, it is now all made straight; however it seemed then to diverge from the right way, and almost to lose itself in a tangled maze, yet it is now seen all to have tended to one centre.

But, if blessed with a living faith as you are walking with the Lord in this field, you can also look forward as well as backward,

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and believe that as the Lord has appeared thus far as a kind God in providence, He will ever still appear in the same way on your behalf, that He will never leave nor forsake you, but be ever opening fresh fields for admiring and adoring His wondrous hand in providing for your wants. But we are not always nor often here. How often we take, as it were, our hand out of the Lord’s and then we grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes! Then we feel, when we are not walking hand in hand with the Lord, the field of providence is obscured, its paths become intricate and confused, and, having lost the hand which holds the clue, we see little else but an inextricable labyrinth.

3. Then again there is the field of experience; and what a copious field is that in which to walk with Christ as your guide! But how faint our steps, unless we can walk in this field also hand in hand with the Lord! If, however, seeing light in His light, you take a view of the Lord’s dealings with your soul, and look at all you have passed through in your mind from the day when the Lord the Spirit first quickened you into spiritual life, what a field is spread before you! The sighs and groans that have gone up out of your bosom; the tears which have dropped from your eyes; the convictions of sin which have pierced your conscience; the mournings after the Lord and over your sins and back-slidings—can you not see the leadings and teachings of the blessed Spirit here? Look, too, again at the first breakings in of mercy upon your soul; the dawning beams of light upon your mind; the promise applied; the Person and work, the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus discovered; the salvation brought home with a divine power to your heart—what a field of sweet and gracious experience the soul can sometimes see spread before its eyes which at other times is hidden from view! But O how different it is to cast one’s eyes over this field without Christ and with Him! Without Him all is darkness; with Him all is light.

4. Then, again, look at the Scriptures; what a field there is spread before our eyes in the inspired Word! What holy truths,

what encouraging invitations, what comforting promises, what gracious precepts, what a field of richest, choicest treasure does the inspired Word contain for the soul to walk in hand in hand with the blessed Lord! As He guides it through the sacred page, illuminating the whole with heavenly light, how it testifies of Him both in Old Testament and New! Of Him all the prophets speak; to Him all the rites and ceremonies point, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy; and as He is the Word incarnate, so is He the sum and substance of the Word written. But He must walk with us in this sacred field, and do to us as He did to His disciples: “Then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures.” Lu 24:45 What is all doctrine without him? Separate from Christ, from His power and presence, doctrine is but notion, speculation and mere opinion. What again are the promises separate from Christ? Unmeaning declarations. For “all the promises of God in Him are yea and in Him Amen unto the glory of God by us” 2Co 1:20; and therefore out of Him they are neither “yea” nor “Amen,” that is, they have no affirmation and no confirmation. And again, what are the precepts distinct from Christ? Burdensome commands, without end or motive for their performance. We see, then, how needful it is to possess the power and presence of Christ in the whole field of heavenly truth and in every portion of it.

III. But we will now advance to another invitation from the same gracious lips and addressed in a similar manner to the church: “Let us lodge in the villages.” It is as if the Lord said to her, “Now we have spent the day together in the field, seeing the beauty and glory of God in these various departments of providence and grace. Night is coming on; where shall we tarry during the night season? We will not go back to the noisy town. Tomorrow will bring us fresh employment in the calm, quiet country; but we cannot stay all night in the field. Let us lodge in the village.”

1. Of course there is spiritual instruction communicated here. Let us see, then, if we can gather up the divine meaning of the

words. These villages, taking a spiritual view of them, seem to represent gospel churches. Villages are naturally distinct from the great metropolis, and yet they are different from solitary houses. We may view them, then, as little clusters of habitations gathered out of the world, not town houses situated in all the smoke and din and noise of the thronged streets, but quiet abodes in the country, far, far away from the bustling city. As, then, the Lord invites His bride to lodge with Him in the villages, they seem to be places in which she could lay her head down and sweetly enjoy the rest to which He invites her. But how does this agree with the other part of the invitation to go forth into the field? In this way: there is not only enjoying sweet communion with the Lord in the field, but there is enjoying sweet communion with His people in the church.

As, then, we are brought into spiritual union and communion with those who fear God, and especially by being members of a gospel church, there is a lodging of the soul in the village; there is a finding rest and repose, not only in the enjoyment of the Lord's presence, but in the love and affection which Christians mutually bear to each other. And though this mutual love and affection amongst the members of the mystical body of Christ be not frequent in our day, yet still there is a measure of it enjoyed by every quickened soul; for love to the brethren is the first evidence of the work of grace upon the heart, according to God's own testimony: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” 1Jo 3:14

2. Yet it is after all but lodging in the villages, merely tarrying for a night, enjoying just a short space of refreshment in the company of those who fear God, but no long permanence of Christian communion, through the various circumstances which often disturb Christian harmony and peace. How few churches really walk in mutual love and affection! What strife and division, what jealousies and suspicious coldness, if not unkindness, often

divide the churches of Christ! But when Christ and the bride are together in the enjoyment of each other's company, then it is well with the villages; then does union prevail in the churches; and in that peace and union Christ and His bride can lie down together in the silent watches of the night.

III.—But their morning's work is already decided upon. If they repose for the night in the village, it is only that they may in the morning examine the village crops and see for themselves what fruit is to be borne by them. "Let us get up early to the vineyards: let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth." There was work to be done which could best be done in company. They had had a season of mutual communion in the field; they had spent the night in the villages in communion with the churches that fear God, obey His precepts, walk in His ways, and keep His ordinances. But there was work to be done in the early morning.

1. "Let us get up early to the vineyards." I have observed in Scripture how much is said of getting up early in the morning. We have in Abraham's remarkable history three several intimations of his rising early in the morning; and they were three very important occasions in Abraham's life.

The first instance of his getting up early was after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, when he rose up early to see whether God had heard his prayer for the deliverance of Lot; and he saw from afar, almost with the dawning light, that the smoke of the accursed cities of the plain rose up as the smoke of a mighty furnace. Ge 19:27,28

The next was when he had to send away Hagar: "And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder and the child, and sent her away." Ge 21:14 Being obliged by Sarah's indignation at Ishmael's mockery to remove that thorn out of her side, and assured by God's own word that he should hearken unto her voice, he no longer delayed obedience. He felt deeply the stroke, yet he

rose up early in the morning to show that he would no longer harbour in his house one that was an enemy to his wife's repose, and that in doing so he was doing the will of God from the heart.

The third time he rose up early in the morning was the most painful act in the whole history of Abraham's life, when he took his son Isaac to offer him as a burnt offering upon the very spot on which the temple was afterwards built.

But we do not understand the expression here in its literal sense; we give it a spiritual meaning, as implying activity and diligence. I have, however, observed there is very little good to be expected from persons who accustom themselves to lie in bed in a morning; it argues an indolent body and an indolent mind. But of course the Lord here speaks figuratively as implying that diligence of soul which is manifested by a diligent body in getting up early, and not losing precious moments on a bed of sloth.

2. But where did the Lord invite His bride to go with Him in the early morning? To the vineyards. Now this spiritually and experimentally describes a searching examination into the state of the churches as they lie naked and open before that holy and heart-searching God with whom we have do. Christ and His bride had been walking in holy communion with each other; they had been lodging in the villages in sweet communion with the churches, and now they were to go together upon a tour of examination. They were to direct their steps towards the vineyards, to see what was going on there, how the vines looked, whether they were healthy, whether the canes had been well ripened, whether the foliage was strong and verdant, and what prospects they generally presented of fruit for that year. The figure, of course, was adapted to that country and clime. As in our country, farmers get up early in the morning to inspect the state of their flocks and herds, and to look over their fields so as to form some judgment of their present and future state, so in Palestine, where vineyards were the chief productions of the country, their owners and cultivators would naturally rise up early in the morning to examine the state of

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their vines. In the Scripture the vineyard is a standing figure of the church of God. “My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill” Isa 5:1; and so our Lord speaks. “A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen.” Lu 20:9 So in the very Song before us we read, “My vineyard which is Mine is before Me.” So 8:12

Now, as a vineyard is a collection of vines and thus typifies a church, so each vine may be considered as typifying an individual believer as one of the church, When, then, the Lord had said to His beloved, “Let us get up early to the vineyards,” He adds, “Let us see if the vine flourish,” that is, let us look at individual cases. Thus, every believer should examine the state of his soul before God, and that with all that diligence, earnestness, and activity which are shadowed forth by getting up early for the work. Do not you think that it would be good sometimes thus to examine the state of your soul before God? Might you not sometimes well ask yourself, “Is my soul flourishing? Does it wear a healthy aspect? How does it look, viewed by a spiritual eye?” When the farmer goes into his field, he can see in a moment whether the crop is healthy or not, whether there is wireworm at the root, or mildew on the stem, or blight in the ear. When an experienced gardener goes into a vinery, he can see at a glance the exact state of the vines. The appearance of the foliage and the general aspect of the vines betray in a moment to his experienced eye whether the red spider, or scale, or mealy bug, is infesting the house. It requires no minute examination; as disease in the human body betrays itself at once to the experienced physician, so a skilful eye detects at a glance disease in the vinery.

So it is, or should be, in grace. If I have a spiritual eye, directly I look into my soul, I can see whether it is healthy or unhealthy, whether the leaves of my profession be curled and mildewed, or whether they be green and verdant and give promise of a good crop. Think of the farmer who never goes into his fold-yard to examine the state of his flocks and herds, and who is too idle even to walk the breadth of his farm to see the state of his crops! Is such

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a man fit to be a farmer? What can such a man expect as his end but the workhouse? So the Christian, who has a crop of far more importance than all the wheat that grows in the farmer’s fields, and of more value than all the sheep folded upon the farm, should look into the state of his soul to see whether it be flourishing or not. If prayer, if praise, if reading the Scriptures, if self-examination, if meditation, if faith, hope and love, and other graces of the Spirit are all active, lively and vigorous, then the vine is flourishing. If prayer is cold, formal and dead; if the Scriptures are little read or with a careless eye; if there be no self-examination, no meditation, no spirituality of mind, no going forth of faith and affection—then the vine is not flourishing. There is something wrong at the root. To use gardening language, the grapes sometimes “shank off,” that is, become wizened and sour. The cause of this generally is, I believe, that there is something wrong at the root; that they have been chilled with the cold rains, and therefore what is called “root-action” is become unhealthy. In almost every plant it is at the root that disease begins. If ever you see even a plant in a flower-pot unhealthy, depend upon it there is something wrong at the root. It is over-watered or under-watered, or from some other cause the root has become diseased, and root-action is suspended or unhealthy.

So it is in religion; if there is anything wrong with a man, it is almost sure to be something wrong at the root. “The root of the matter,” Job said, “is found in me.” Job could appeal unto God that the root of his religion was right. If “the root” had been wrong, “the matter” would not have been right; but as long as the root was sound, like “the teil tree” of which the prophet speaks, though “it cast its leaves, the substance would still be in it,” to put forth in due time boughs like a plant. Isa 6:13 If a man’s religion has no root, or if the root be injured by disease, it will be sure to discover itself in his profession. He cannot have a prosperous soul—prosperous inwardly and prosperous outwardly—unless the root be deep in the soil, and unless it be full of active fibres, drawing up secret

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nourishment from that river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God. Then he shall be “as a tree planted by the waters and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.” Jer 17:8

3. Connected with this, therefore, comes the next question, whether “the tender grape appear.” The first look was at the general aspect of the vine. Was the wood well ripened; were the leaves well and fully grown; was there any appearance of mildew, blight, caterpillar, or any other noxious thing in operation to destroy the prospect of the crop? Well, if the first view were satisfactory, if the general aspect of the vine were favourable, now comes a closer examination to see whether “the tender grape” is appearing. Where is the opening blossom? If there be no blossom, there will be no fruit; and if there are no buddings of the tender grape, we shall look in vain when autumn comes for ripe clusters.

This “tender grape,” spiritually viewed, seems to signify the tender graces of the soul. Depend upon it, nothing is more opposed to vital godliness than hardness of heart in the things of God. The tender conscience, the humble mind, the broken heart, the contrite spirit: these are true and scriptural marks and evidences of the grace of God. In fact you will find that every grace of the Spirit partakes of this tenderness. Grace is an exotic; it is not a native plant. It cannot stand the frost, nor the cold east winds. It comes from the warm climate of heaven, and needs careful cherishing that it may live and grow. Thus the tender grape may represent that fear of God in the heart which makes the conscience tender; those inward actings of faith, whereby, as with so many tendrils, the Person and work of Christ are laid hold of; the first tender sensations of opening love toward the Lord, when, by some discovery of Himself, He for the first time makes Himself precious to the believing heart; the tender claspings of a good hope through grace, which lay hold of the finished work of the Son of God.

The tender grape may also spiritually represent the tender

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sensations of the soul under divine teaching, whereby it mourns over sin, laments its shortcomings and looks to the Lord with weeping eyes and sorrowful heart for pardon and peace. If we see no tender grapes in the spring, there will certainly be no rich, ripe clusters in the autumn. Full fruit indeed was not yet come; but this is what the Lord was looking for—whether the tender grape was budding out of the stem or opening its bloom. To me there is nothing more sickening than the hardness which one sees in so many of our preachers and professors. The dry, hard way in which they preach the most solemn doctrinal truths of the gospel is most repulsive to a spiritual mind, and makes one greatly fear whether such men ever knew anything of the power of truth for themselves in a tender conscience.

4. But there was also something else which the Lord in company with his bride was to look for: “And the pomegranates bud forth.” The pomegranate is a fruit not peculiar to, but very common in the Holy Land, and is distinguished by a bright green leaf and a beautiful crimson flower, succeeded by a rich, ripe, red fruit, of which the juice is peculiarly luscious and sweet. The Holy Spirit therefore seems to have taken the pomegranate throughout Scripture as an emblem of choice gospel fruit. The high priest wore upon his robe pomegranates interchanged with golden bells. The golden bells sounded his approach in the tabernacle and loudly proclaimed his coming; but the pomegranates silently proclaimed that he was to bear fruit unto God as well as sound forth his praise. It would seem from the Scripture that there was something peculiarly delicious in the juice of the pomegranate, and that it was mingled with wine to give the latter more flavour. Thus, the spouse says, “I would cause Thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranates.” So 8:2 As a delicious fruit they were therefore planted in oriental gardens: “Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits.” So 4:13

Thus the pomegranate, as a spiritual emblem, signifies gospel fruit. The Lord and His church went forth therefore hand in hand

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to examine whether these pomegranates were budding forth—whether, in other words, there was promise of fruit in the churches. They were not looking in the expectation of finding pomegranates fit to be gathered; they did not go so far as that. Being the time of spring when they took their morning walk, fruit was not yet to be found upon the bough. Their examination was directed rather to see whether there was any appearance of a future crop. By this is intimated that the Lord deals very tenderly and gently with the soul, not expecting ripe fruit in the spring, but examining what marks there were of divine teaching in the early bud. Do you ever look into your soul to see whether these pomegranates are budding forth; to search and examine what you can find of the graces of the Spirit; what buddings forth of hope and love you can trace out; what marks of heavenly teaching, what tokens or testimonies of interest in the blood and love of the Lamb, and what prospects for eternity?

But how true it is that we cannot see these fruits in ourselves, whatever measure there be of them, except in company with Christ! Christ does not invite the bride to look into her own heart except in His company; but when favoured with His presence and smile, she may look and see whether the pomegranates are budding forth. And they will always bud forth when she is in company with the Lord, for then His grace is in operation; and when His grace is in operation, then the tender grape gives a good smell and the pomegranate richly blooms, if we look into our heart in seasons of darkness, desertion and desolation, we shall see no fruit there. These tender blossoms shut up their leaves in the cold north wind; they are afraid to come forth except when the sun shines. But when the sun shines, the tender grape appears and the pomegranate buds forth; for in the presence of the Lord there is a springing up of every Christian grace. Thus you see that the Lord does not invite us to be poring over our heart to find what good there is in the dark night of cold desertion. Does He not say, “Let us get up early to the vineyards,” as if to see them under the beams of the rising sun, and

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as favoured with His company? If the bride had gone forth into the vineyard without Him or in the dark night, what would she have seen of the appearing of the tender grape, or of the budding forth of the early pomegranates?

IV.—But this brings us to our fourth and last point; the entertainment which He has promised to give His beloved bride when the tender grape appears and the pomegranate buds forth: “There will I give thee My loves.” If we are all in darkness and confusion, doubting and fearing as to the reality of the work of grace upon our soul, there is no seeing anything of the tender grape, no viewing anything of the budding of the pomegranate. They may be there blooming and budding, but we cannot see them. But when the Lord is pleased to cheer us with His presence and company, then we see light in His light, and behold, in the teaching of His Spirit, what is hidden from us when in a state of darkness and desertion. It is for this reason He says, “There will I give thee My loves.” Observe the expression, “loves,” in the plural number. And may we not well ask what “loves” are these? They are many.

1. There is first His everlasting love; for He says, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.” It is a sense of Christ’s everlasting love which rejoices the soul when shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. For if this love had beginning, it might have ending; but being from eternity, it reaches to eternity.

2. Then there is dying love—the love our Lord displayed in dying upon the cross for such poor miserable wretches as we feel ourselves to be. If we can but view His dying love upon the cross, and have a sweet testimony that He loved us and gave Himself for us, then, under the constraint of this dying love, we can give Him all our heart, hate sin with a perfect hatred, desire to be conformed to His suffering image and be found walking in His blessed footsteps.

3. Then there is pardoning love, when He is pleased to bless

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the soul with a sight and sense of His atoning blood, and reveals that love which was stronger than death and triumphed over death and hell.

4. Then there is His forbearing love, bearing with all our misbehaviour, backslidings, wanderings and transgressions, which is never provoked to give us utterly up, though we deserve to be abandoned for our sins and crimes for ever and ever.

5. Then there is His restoring love—"He restoreth my soul"—whereby He restores us out of a state of carnality, darkness, and death, lifts up once more the light of His countenance and enables us once more to love Him with a pure heart fervently.

All these and other flowings forth of His love are spoken of here as His "loves." And these He gives to the soul of His own free grace, uncalled for, unmerited, undeserved, the spontaneous effusion of His own heart, which is full of the tenderest affection to all that love and fear His great name.

Was it not well worth going forth to enjoy all this? Was it not a blessed journey for His spouse and bride, when she could leave the world and sin and self behind, and go forth in such sweet company? O that we might be thus blessed! What is there worth living for or dying for but this? But how rare for the soul to be thus favoured! And yet, say what men will, there is no real happiness anywhere else but in this knowledge and enjoyment of the love of Christ; no real separation from the world by any other power than this; no other real meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light but what this union and communion with the Lord reveals and seals.

The Lord of His infinite mercy establish these truths in our heart, favour us from time to time with the sweet experimental enjoyment of them, and give us to live and die in His most blessed embrace!

187 The Work of Faith, the Patience of Hope, and the Labour of Love

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day

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Morning,

March 1, 1862

"Your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope."

1 Thess. 1:3

When our blessed Lord rose from the dead and went up on high to appear in the presence of God for us, as our personal Representative and interceding High Priest, he "received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." (Psa. 68:18.) Now these gifts which he received on our behalf were twofold:—First, "gifts," in the usual sense of the term, that is, the extraordinary gifts of the blessed Spirit, which were principally vouchsafed for the edification of the Church; and, secondly, the graces of the Spirit in his quickening, sanctifying power, whereby the people of God are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Now we find the word of truth drawing a very clear distinction between these two things—the gifts of the Spirit and the graces of the Spirit.

But in order to set before you this distinction in a clearer light, I will read to you the testimony of the word to the "gifts" of the Spirit as distinct from his "graces:" "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every one severally as he will." (1 Cor. 12:8-11.) And again, "And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts." (1 Cor. 12:28-31.) We see from these

passages the nature of these gifts—that they were more for the edification of the Church than the personal benefit of their owner; that some of them, in particular, as prophecy, the gifts of healing, and of tongues, were strictly miraculous, and therefore temporary and transient, passing away when not absolutely needed; that they did not necessarily constitute their possessor a partaker of grace, though he might be so, and in most cases was so; and that they differed much from each other in operation and administration. (1 Cor. 12:4-6.) The end and object of these gifts was the building up of the Church on her most holy faith, as the apostle so clearly and beautifully explains: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” (Eph. 4:11, 12.)

But in examining more closely the nature of these gifts, we must draw a distinction between those which were miraculous and those which were not. The miraculous gifts, such as prophecy, healing, speaking with tongues, passed away with the apostolic age, and ceased when the canon of scripture was closed. But the gifts of the ministry, as of “pastors and teachers,” still abide, and will do so as long as there is a necessity for “the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ;” in other words, whilst the Lord has a people upon earth. But whether these gifts passed away as strictly miraculous or whether they still abide in the Church for the work of the ministry, they possess alike this distinctive feature, that they are but for time, not for eternity; for the edification of others, and are neither saving nor sanctifying to the possessor; that when accompanied with grace, they are highly to be prized, but should be jealously watched over lest they puff up with pride and issue in a terrible downfall.

But the graces of the Spirit, as distinct from his gifts, are of a very different nature. This made the apostle say, “But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.” (1 Cor. 12:31.) What was “the more excellent way”—a way

excelling all the best gifts of the Spirit? The way of grace; and more especially the way of that prime grace, “charity” or love. And why more excellent? Because, unlike gifts, it never fails, but abides for ever and ever. Thus he says, “Charity [or love] never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.” And then he adds: “And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” We thus gather up one distinctive feature of graces as opposed to gifts, and especially of the three leading graces—faith, hope, and love—that they abide, their seat being the heart, which the Lord claims as peculiarly his own, their Author and Finisher the Lord of Life and glory, and their end the salvation of the soul.

But there is another distinguishing characteristic of these three graces, faith, hope, and love, which is, that they are what I may call working graces. It is a great mistake to think that a Christian is not a worker. There is no man who works like him. As Hart justly says,

“The Christian works with all his power,

And grieves that he can work no more.”

And yet with all his working it is not he that works, but the grace of God which is in him, as said the apostle of himself, and in so doing well expresses the experience of every real Christian: “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” (1 Cor. 15:10.) Thus though the Christian works, it is not really he who works but the grace of God in him, and it is this which makes a Christian such a paradox; that is, such an apparent contradiction both to himself and to others. At one time, none more earnest, more diligent, more active, more zealous, more bent upon every good word and work; and yet at another, how slothful, how indifferent, how cold, lifeless, and dead, as if he had neither a grain of grace nor a spark of feeling. Sometimes

he is as watchful as a sentinel in the face of an advancing enemy, and anon drops asleep in the sentry box, overcome with weariness and listlessness. Sometimes so filled with the Spirit of prayer and supplications as if he would seize heaven by storm and take the kingdom of God by violence; and then seeming scarcely to have a breath of prayer in his soul. Sometimes he loathes and abhors himself in dust and ashes as exceedingly vile, the very worst and basest of all sinners; then again is puffed up with a sense of his own importance as if there were no such saint as he, or if a minister, no minister like him for gifts and abilities, usefulness and acceptance. Sometimes his affections are so fixed on things above, that it scorns as if he had no care and no desire for anything but the presence, love, favour, and glory of God; then at another time his heart is as cold as ice and as dead as a stone. Sometimes the things of eternity lie so weightily and yet so warmly upon his breast, that it seems as if nothing else were worth a single thought; and then come trooping in the cares and anxieties of this present life to engross his mind and carry him away to the very ends of the earth. Thus the Christian is a contradiction to himself; and yet with all this, the point still remains good, that every grace of the Spirit in him is a working grace. And not only so, but every grace of the Spirit has its own work to perform and its own end to attain.

Look, for instance, at the words of our text, to which these remarks are meant to be introductory. We read there of “a work of faith, a labour of love, and a patience of hope.” See how the apostle brings before us these three abiding, these three working graces, and how he assigns to each its particular office. He tells the Thessalonian believers that he “remembered without ceasing their work of faith, and their labour of love, and their patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and their Father;” being persuaded, from what he saw of those Christian graces in them, and their activity and energy, that they were the people whom God had blessed: “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.”

In endeavouring, with God’s help and blessing, to unfold the

mind and meaning of the Spirit in these words, I shall seek to describe, as the Lord may enable,

I.—First, “faith” and its “work.”

II.—Secondly, “hope” and its “patience.”

III.—Thirdly, “love” and its “labour.”

You will observe that I have rather inverted the order of these two last Christian graces, for as they stand in our text love precedes hope. My reason for so doing is that this is not only the spiritual and experimental order in which these three graces succeed each other in the heart, but that in which the apostle has himself arranged them in another place: “Now abideth faith, hope, love; these three, but the greatest of these is love.”

I.—Let us first, then, look at faith and its work; and in so doing I shall attempt to show you faith under these six distinct aspects:—1, faith in its nature; 2, faith in its work; 3, faith in its opposition; 4, faith in its examples; 5, faith in its victory; and 6, faith in its fruits. For I wish to bring before you as clearly as I can a living, breathing, speaking portrait of this heavenly grace as featured in the word and as drawn upon the heart of the child of God, that you may have some testimony in your conscience whether you are the favoured partaker of it or not.

i. Now in examining the nature of faith, we may direct our first glance at its birth and origin, and in so doing shall soon see from the word of grace and the experience of the family of God that, like Paul’s call to the apostleship, it is “neither of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.” (Gal. 1:1.)

Are we not expressly told that those who received Christ (and how could they receive him but by faith?) “were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God?” (John 1:13.) And so declared our Lord when he said, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:6.) We may lay it down, then, as a most certain truth, that faith is a plant which does not grow in the native garden. Does not our Lord say, “Every

plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up?" (Matt. 15:13.) If, then, faith is not to be rooted up, in other words, if it is to be an abiding grace, it must be planted by the Father's hand, and thus testifies also James: "Every good gift and every perfect gift" (and is not faith both a good and perfect gift?) "is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17.) Faith, then, is an exotic, a tender plant from heaven's own warm, happy clime, where no cold blasts chill, no frost or ice destroys, no blighting east wind withers the flowers that ever bloom and the fruits that ever grow in that celestial paradise. If faith, then, be of this divine origin we shall seek for it in vain among the children of this world. And such is the Lord's testimony to ancient Israel, even those whom he had brought out of Egypt, and who therefore had the strongest reasons to believe: "And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith." (Deut. 32:20.) Nay, the Lord the Spirit says even more than this of that generation which witnessed Christ's miracles: "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (John 12:37-40.) But besides this scriptural testimony, we have only to appeal to the experience of every saint of God whether he does not carry in his own bosom the inward conviction that faith, true faith, saving faith, the faith of God's elect, the only faith worthy of the name, is the pure, special gift of God. In fact, such is the express language of the Holy Ghost: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." (Eph. 2:8.) And again: "Unto to you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to

believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." (Phil. 1:29.) You will also find amongst the fruits of the Spirit, of which we have a blessed catalogue by the apostle, "faith" expressly mentioned: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith." (Gal. 5:22.) And if a fruit of the Spirit, how clear the conclusion that her birth and origin are not of the flesh.

But now having thus hastily glanced at faith's celestial origin, we may be better prepared to examine its nature; what it is in itself as a peculiar and distinct grace of the Spirit. And I think that to determine this we cannot do better than take the apostolic definition given in Hebrews 11:1: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Two things are here said of faith which I shall separately consider. 1, That it "is the substance of things hoped for." By "substance" I understand what we call subsistence; in other words, that faith gives a substantial existence to those things in which the soul hopes, making them real, clothing them, as it were, with life, and enduing dim and distant shadows with a present and positive existence. Not that, like a magician's wand, faith alters the nature of things, or makes that to exist which did not exist before, but it gives them an inward subsistence, so that they are as if actually present—handled, tasted, and enjoyed as personal realities. Now faith does this in several ways which we shall see better after we have considered what are—"the things hoped for." These are twofold—present grace and future glory. Thus the work and witness of the blessed Spirit, with his teachings, support, and consolations; the forgiveness of sin, a sense of God's favour, his hand to be with us all through the various scenes and changes of this mortal life, a peaceful deathbed, and a triumphant entrance into the kingdom of God, with a blessed expectation of when Christ appears to see him as he is and to be made like unto him, are "things hoped for." Now faith gives to these things thus hoped for a solid subsistence in the bosom in various ways. First it convinces us of their reality by mixing itself with the promises, as

Abraham believed the word of promise: "Thus shall thy seed be." Then it gives the soul a taste of the sweetness and blessedness of the things hoped for, for by faith we taste that the Lord is gracious, and "Unto you which believe he is precious." (1 Pet. 2:3, 7.) "O taste and see that the Lord is good." (Psa. 34:8.) As the word by which faith is raised up in the heart is "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," the eternal realities thus revealed have a peculiar weight, a weight in some degree proportionate to their importance, and this gives them a substance compared with which all earthly things are but a shadow. Be assured that if your faith do not give eternal things a deeper place in your heart, a stronger hold on your conscience, and a warmer claim upon your affections than the things of time and sense, your faith is not the substance of things hoped for, nor the faith of God's elect. Faith also gives an earnest of the things hoped for, for they are revealed to faith, and as this earnest is attended with the witness and the seal of the Spirit it brings joy and peace. The apostle, therefore, says, "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:22); and so testifies Peter: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (1 Pet. 1:8, 9.) Thus we see that faith is not a notion, an opinion, or a fancy, but a most solid, substantial blessing, and as such gives eternal realities an abiding place in the heart.

But, 2. faith is also "the evidence of things not seen." What are those things not seen? Such divine things as the mystery of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the Unity of the divine Essence; the glorious Person of the Son of God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the blessed Spirit; the complex Person of Immanuel, God with us: the efficacy of his atoning blood as purging a guilty conscience; the suitability of his glorious righteousness as "justifying from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses;" his resurrection from the dead; his ascension up on high; his personal intercession at the right hand of the Father,

his second coming in glory with all his saints and angels. These are some of the things not seen. As the apostle speaks, "The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." And so, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for those that love him." But faith sees them, as our Lord said to his disciples: "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also." (John 14:19.) But how did they see him except by faith? the same faith as that whereby Moses "endured as seeing him who is invisible." (Heb. 11:27.)

Thus faith has an inward evidence, a spiritual testimony that the things unseen to mortal eye are true; and as thus endued with spiritual sight, it penetrates the veil spread over all things here below, and entering into the very presence of God, brings down the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven as personal realities. Such, then, is a short description of the nature of faith; this being its leading, its distinguishing feature, that it credits God's testimony, believes what God has said on the sole authority of his word as made life and power to the soul by the blessed Spirit.

ii. But now we come to faith's work; for faith is not an idle, sluggish, indolent grace. It has much to do; yea, it has everything to do, for without it nothing is done to any purpose, for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23.)

1. But what is faith's chief work? It is to believe in the Son of God. "This is the work of God," said our blessed Lord when asked, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." (John 6:28, 29.) And we have a testimony to the same effect from the pen of holy John, where he says, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." (1 John 5:13.) But you may say, "Why, this is not such hard work." This would not be your language if you knew anything of the difficulty of faith, or if you knew the difference, the

solemn, eternal difference, between a faith that is merely natural and historical, founded upon reason and argument, and the faith of God's elect which embraces for itself, under a divine and heavenly power, the Person and work of the Son of God as a living reality, and draws a holy influence out of his glorious fulness to purge the conscience from guilt and filth, and to fill the soul with all joy and peace in believing. But this difference which you know not is deeply wrought in the heart and conscience of the people of God. They well know you might as well attempt to create a new sun and launch him in the sky, as to raise up a living faith in the soul in and upon the Son of God by your own strength and power. They know it through a deep and abiding sense of the unbelief of their heart by nature, and its utter inability to raise up a faith which works by love, purifies the heart, overcomes the world, gives free access to God, obtains answers to prayer, and is attended with the sensible approbation of the Almighty.

2. But not only is it the work of faith to believe in the Son of God, but to live a life of faith upon him; not merely to penetrate into the presence of God and apprehend the Person of Christ within the veil, but also day by day to live upon his glorious and ever-flowing, overflowing fulness—as the apostle so sweetly describes his own experience in this matter: “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Gal. 2:20.) This, then, is faith's work, to be ever looking to the Son of God as the Way, the Truth, and the Life; to be ever living upon his fulness, ever receiving out of it supplies of heavenly grace. But as this can only be done by prayer and supplication, it is faith's work to call upon his holy name, though sometimes it may be from the very ends of the earth; to plead with him, and talk with him as a man talketh with his friend; and thus, in the active operation and living exercise of this heavenly grace, to wrestle with him as Jacob wrestled with the angel, so as to bring down into the heart a blessing from his mouth.

3. But again, another part of the work of faith is to stand; for

by faith we stand. (2 Cor. 1:24.) And what is it to stand? When we consider what there is in sin and self to carry us away, O to stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand! is not this the work of faith? Yes; to stand upon our feet against the floods of error which are sweeping as in a torrent round the Church; against the floods of evil which are streaming over the world; against the deluge of the iniquities of our own vile heart; against the floods of temptation out of the mouth of Satan; still to stand, and stand firmly on the ground of truth and a good conscience where the Lord has placed us,—this, this is indeed the work of faith.

4. But again the work of faith is to fight as well as to stand. We are called upon to “fight the good fight of faith;” and we are told that “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” So we are provided with a heavenly suit of armour, and above all with a precious shield, “the shield of faith, whereby we shall quench all the fiery darts of the wicked;” for, as Hart says,

“Christians are called not to play, but fight.”

Our daily experience is more or less an experience of conflict. We have to fight against besetting sins; against the snares and temptations laid every moment for our feet; against the daily unceasing influence of an ungodly world; against the very things that our carnal heart most fondly loves; and against the workings and arguments of our natural mind, which are all opposed to a life of faith. All these things we have to fight against, and to resist even unto blood, striving against sin. But we shall see, perhaps, more clearly what the work of faith is, by examining, in the light of the word and of Christian experience, our next point;

iii. The opposition which faith has to encounter. Now we have to measure a man's work, not only by what he does, but by the difficulty which he has to encounter in doing it. It is like ploughing two different kinds of land: you must not measure how much work a man does in a day merely by the number of furrows he

can draw; you must consider whether he is ploughing stiff clay, or light fen soil. So we must not measure the work of faith with power by the quantity executed, but by the difficulties to be encountered in doing it. It seems at first sight an easy thing to believe in the Son of God, an easy matter to live a life of faith upon him, an easy task to fight the good fight of faith. But when we come to measure the work of faith by the opposition it has to encounter in doing these things, then we find that it requires the power of God in a man's soul to enable faith to do the work assigned to it. For look at the opposition offered to it.

1. Look, first, at the unbelief of man's heart. O what an opposition is made to every act of faith by the unbelief which is, as it were, the very life-blood of our natural mind! Have you never sighed, cried, and groaned under the unbelief of your heart? Have you never felt it such a heavy load and presenting such a mountain of difficulty, that when you tried with all the power of your soul to believe in the Son of God and to raise up a living faith to apprehend him in his blood and obedience, there was an opposition raised up in your heart to the actings of faith by the weight of unbelief that pressed it down? By this opposition, then, you may know something of the power of faith which is needed and the work of faith as exercised in that power to surmount this unbelief.

2. But there is also the opposition of the reasoning mind; for the reasoning mind of man is thoroughly opposed to all the actings of living faith in the soul. There is not an argument against the truth of God which the reasoning mind of man does not at times raise up and seek to employ against all that God has revealed in his holy word; for well nigh everything in the word of God, I will not say is contrary to, but is above reason. The mystery of the Trinity; the complex Person of Christ; his work upon the cross; his atoning blood and obedience; his resurrection from the dead; his ascension on high; and his being now in heaven at God's right hand, with the whole work of the Spirit upon the heart,—all these truths are not contrary to reason: they would not be truth if they

were: but they are above it; as the Lord says, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isai. 55:8.) Now our reasoning mind is opposed to these truths, because it cannot bring them down to its own level; and not being able to apprehend them by the exercise of its own faculties, it is opposed to the exercise of faith upon them.

3. But look again at another source of opposition. How Satan can work upon the carnal mind, and what suggestions he can and does make use of to oppose the work of faith with power. How subtle his arguments; how strong his suggestions; how artful his insinuations; and how all are directed against the work of faith to lay hold of and live a life of faith upon the Son of God. Sometimes he insinuates, "How can these things be true?" Sometimes, "How do you know you have any interest in them?" Sometimes he magnifies the greatness of our sins before we were called by grace, and sometimes the sins we have committed since, urging from them both, "For you there is no hope, for you have sinned beyond the reach of mercy." Thus there is an opposition to the work of faith with power, not only from the reasoning of our natural mind which falls in with these suggestions of Satan, but also from the strong and subtle temptations of the wicked One, even on the ground that the very things are true which he has just before denied.

4. But there is another source of opposition still, and that is a guilty conscience. Nothing hardly seems more opposed to the work of faith with power than a guilty conscience; for that is closely connected with an unbelieving heart, which made the apostle say, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." (Heb. 3:12.) And why is it "an evil heart of unbelief" but because it is accompanied with "an evil," that is, a guilty "conscience?" Nor can the voice of faith be heard except as this guilty conscience is purged by the application of atoning blood; which made the apostle say, "Let us

draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Heb. 10:22.) But the conscience, even when it has been once purged, often, through fresh contracted guilt, sinks down into depths out of which it seems as if it could not emerge, and thus loses sight of the Person and work of the Son of God.

iv. But we pass on to our next point, which, with God’s help and blessing, may give a clearer light still on this work of faith—namely, the examples which God has given in his word of the power of faith; and we will take two, which the Lord has especially afforded for our instruction. One is that conspicuous example, the faith of Abraham; for he is set before us as “the father of all them that believe,” who are therefore said to “walk in the steps of that faith which he had being yet uncircumcised.” (Rom. 4:11, 12.) Now just for a few moments take a glance at Abraham’s faith, and see its nature, end, and object. The instance to which the apostle especially refers of Abraham’s faith is where the Lord appeared to him in the dead of night and said, “I am thy shield and exceeding great reward;” and then took him forth and bade him behold the stars in the sky, saying, “Thus shall thy seed be.” Now we read that “he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” (Gen. 15:1, 5, 6.) That was therefore, an act of justifying faith. He believed the promise of God, its coming home to his soul with divine power. But this is the point to which I wish to draw your attention, that his faith, though it was a justifying faith, yet it was of such a nature that it was believing against hope. “Who,” he says, “against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform.” This, then, was Abraham’s faith. It was

a firm credence in the promise of God made to him, and yet a faith that lived under opposition, hoping against hope, and being fully persuaded that what God had promised he would perform. Our faith, then, if it be genuine, must resemble that of Abraham. It must anchor in the truth of God as made life and spirit to our soul. It must meet with every opposition from without and within; from sin, Satan, and the world; from nature, and flesh, and reason all combined against it. But in spite of all, it must hope against hope, and be fully persuaded that what God has promised he is able to perform; and thus by perseverance and patient waiting obtain the victory. Take one more example, that of Moses: his faith was of this nature. “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” (Heb. 11:24, 25.) The peculiar character of the faith of Moses was this, that though he was highly exalted and might have enjoyed all the treasures and pleasures of Egypt, yet he deliberately preferred to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy all that wealth could offer or carnal pleasure present; “having respect to the recompense of reward.”

v. Now I pass on, having shown these examples, to point out faith’s victory; for if we are to be saved, our faith must gain the day; we must have a faith that shall triumph over death and hell and gain a glorious conquest over every internal and external and infernal foe; as John says, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” This is just the state, then, in which the matter stands: we must either conquer or be conquered; we must either gain the day and be crowned with an immortal crown of glory, or else sink in the strife, defeated by sin and Satan. But none of God’s people will be defeated in the fight; and yet they often seem, as it were, to escape defeat by the very skin of their teeth; yet faith will sooner or later gain the day, for Jesus is its finisher as well as its author. He will crown the faith of his own gift with

eternal glory. He will never suffer his dear family to be overcome in the good fight of faith, for he will give strength to every weak arm and power to every feeble knee, and has engaged to bring them off more than conquerors. Thus as the Lord the Spirit is pleased to work in the soul by his living energy, he strengthens faith more and more to believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, to receive more continual supplies out of his fulness, to wrestle more earnestly with God for a spiritual blessing; to stand more firmly in the evil day against every assaulting foe; to fight more strenuously the good fight of faith, and never cry quarter until faith gains its glorious end, which is to see Jesus as he is in the realms of eternal day. Your faith may be weak; it may seem at times to be reduced to its lowest point; but as sure as Jesus has fought the battle, won the day, and is now crowned with honour and glory, so surely he will bring you off more than conqueror, as being the purchase of his atoning blood; for no member of his mystical body shall perish, but all shall be saved in him with an everlasting salvation.

vi. Now just one word about the fruits of faith. The grand fruit is the salvation of the soul: for this is the end of faith, “receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul.” But every spiritual fruit hangs round faith, in rich, ripe clusters: for a faith without fruit is a faith dead before God. A faith that does not live to God’s praise, walk in God’s fear, delight itself in the Lord, and bring forth to his Honour and glory, does not wear the stamp of heaven upon it. It is not accredited as being the faith of God’s elect, nor does it bear a single mark of being coined in heaven’s mint as bearing Christ’s image and superscription.

II.—But let me now direct your attention to the second of these three abiding graces, which is another part also of our education for eternity—hope and its patience. You will observe that each of these three Christian graces has its peculiar office and operation. Faith has its work, hope has its patience, and love has its labour. To illustrate these different features, we may perhaps avail ourselves of a comparison:—Faith is like a young man in the beginning of

his strength, with all the activity, and energy, and agility of youth. Hope is like a man past the activity and agility of youth, and yet possessed of a strong power of endurance of hard work, and bodily labour. And love may represent a man still further advanced in life when his constitution being inured to hard work, and he being now a thoroughly skilled workman, is able to go labouring on beneath the burning sun or amidst the winter frost without flagging or weariness.

I proposed to show you “hope and its patience.” But as on a late occasion when preaching upon the gates of the city I spoke at some length on the nature of hope, and how it was raised up in the heart, I shall not now enter on that part of the subject, but shall confine myself chiefly to the description of its work which is here called “patience.”

1. Now “patience” in Scripture not only means patience in the ordinary sense of the term,—that is, meekness, quietness, and gentleness, submission and resignation to the will of God, without murmuring, fretfulness, or rebellion, but it also signifies, and that more usually, what is generally understood by the term endurance. This we shall perhaps by and by more clearly see to be the peculiar work of hope, and one more adapted to it than the more familiar meaning of patience, as implying resignation and submission. In religion, we want not only to commence but to go on—to end well, as well as to begin well. Hence the need of endurance.

Now when we examine the passages in Scripture which speak of “patience,” we see that in them all this faculty of “endurance” is chiefly intended. The apostle says, for instance, “Let us run with patience the race set before us.” (Heb. 12:1.) Now what quality is chiefly needed in running a race? You will perhaps say, “Swiftness of foot.” It is true. But suppose the race is a long one—one of some miles. Is not something else needed then? Surely; and what but endurance—staying power, strength of wind and limb, perseverance, and that firm determination not to be beaten which would sooner die than yield? Is not this quality more needed in

running a race, especially a race which is to last a whole life, than quiet submission to affliction, or what we generally understand by the word, “patience?” Take again what is said of Job by the apostle James: “Behold we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” (James. 5:11.) I would just remark that the words translated, “endure” and “patience,” are the same in the original, so that we might read it thus: “Behold we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the endurance of Job.” Job was not very patient, for he cursed the day of his birth, but was wonderfully enduring. How he bore up under the loss of all his children, the destruction of all his property, the fierce assaults of Satan, the taunts of his wife, the sore boils from the sole of his foot unto the crown, and, worse than all, the arrows of the Almighty drinking up his spirit. How he endured the greatest sufferings of body and mind, and by endurance proved that “the root of the matter” was in him. This “endurance,” then, is the peculiar work and province of hope. We see this sometimes naturally as well as spiritually. Many a man is very active, agile, and alert, but has no power of endurance, no hard muscle, no reserve of strength. He can do a measure of work at first, but when it comes to long toil, hard labour, and unwearied endurance of exertion, his muscles being weak and flaccid, and he possessing no strong stamina of constitution, he breaks down under the load. This, then, is the peculiar office, I might almost say the special beauty and blessedness of hope, that it is an enduring grace; a grace that wears, lasts, and holds out, and, however tried, never gives way. Have you not often found this, that give up what you may, you never can give up your hope? There you do well; for to give up hope is to fall into despair; and observe that as it is the work of faith to believe against unbelief, so it is the work of hope to hope against despair. Hope in scripture is compared to an anchor, and said to enter within the veil. Now what is the chief virtue and value of an anchor? It is not to do, to do; to work, to work; its duty is to lie still and never

move; never to break, never to drag, never to come home. The anchor does its work in the dark; it sinks quite out of sight into the sand, and is so constructed that the stronger the ship pulls, the deeper it buries itself, and the harder it holds. This tenacity, this stiff obstinacy, this hard, unyielding gripe [grasp, control] is the peculiar excellency of an anchor, without which it would be altogether useless. If it be well made, if the iron be tough and well hammered, it will bite the ground and bite hard; and if the cable be equally strong, so as not to part asunder, the ship will safely ride out the heaviest storm. Such an anchor to the soul is hope—power to endure, never to break, never to give way, being its chief excellence as well as its peculiar work.

But now look at the connection between faith and hope. Faith gives to things hoped for a subsistence, and then hope takes hold of the things that faith thus realises, and anchors in them with tenacious grasp as if it would not, could not, must not, dare not let them go, for to let them go is to be lost altogether. If ever you have had a promise applied to your mind with divine power; ever had a revelation of Jesus to your soul; a word from his mouth; an application of his atoning blood to your conscience; or any shedding abroad of the love of God in your heart, hope lays firm hold of the blessing thus communicated, and will not let it go. Just as the anchor lays firm hold of the ground, and by firm holding saves the ship; so the grace of hope saves the soul, (for “we are saved by hope.” Rom. 7:24), by not letting go any spiritual blessing that ever the Lord has dropped into the heart.

2. But hope has its opposition as well as faith, for as faith is opposed by unbelief, so hope is opposed by despair. Despair is a most dreadful feeling, but it is one by which the family of God are often beset. We must seek relief against it by hope.

“To cause despair’s the scope
Of Satan and his powers;
Against hope to believe in hope
My brethren must be ours.”

Here, then, we want the anchor. The storms of apprehended wrath that beat upon the soul; the strong current of guilty fear; the tide of unbelief rising higher and higher; the rocks of open perdition that lie in sight, with breakers covering them with surf, and dashing against them so many wrecks; the fears of the mariner lest the cable should part or the anchor should come home,—all this well represents what hope has to endure, and how by endurance it overcomes all opposition. So David encouraged his soul still to hope in God when cast down within him, under the sweet assurance that he should still praise him. (Psa. 42:11.) Hope of salvation is our helmet (1 Thess. 5:8), as faith is our shield, truth our girdle, righteousness our breastplate, and the word of God our sword. Let us, then, keep our helmet on, for to put it off is to go bareheaded into the battle.

3. But hope has its end as well as faith; and what end is this? all that we want and all that we desire—fruition, or enjoyment; for as faith will be swallowed up in sight, so hope will be lost in fruition.

4. And not only has hope its end, but its fruits; for it would indeed be inconsistent with such an eminent grace of the Spirit as hope if it were a barren tree, or, like Ephraim, bore fruit only to itself. John gives no countenance to a barren, unfruitful hope: “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” (1 John 3:3.) Now the fruits of hope are twofold—inward and outward.

Patient expectation is the chief inward fruit of hope, as the apostle speaks: “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” (Rom. 8:24, 25.) To stand, then, upon its watch-tower, looking out for the Lord’s appearing, who is “good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him,” is a special fruit of hope, as we read: “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” (Lam. 3:26.)

To submit to God’s will; to sit alone and keep silence, humbly

confessing sin, and putting the mouth into the dust, is another fruit of hope: “He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.” (Lam. 3:28, 29.)

To take the Lord as our satisfying portion, knowing that in his favour is life, is another inward fruit of hope: “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.” (Lam. 3:24.)

And to add another berry to the cluster, let me just name one more inward fruit of hope—a humble recollection of past miseries and mercies: “My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.” (Lam. 3:20, 21.)

And hope has its outward fruits also, such as separation from the world; a cleaving close to the family of God; a living not to sin and self but to the Lord; and a conduct and conversation becoming such as profess to be waiting for the Lord’s appearing.

III.—But as time presses, I must hasten on to the last of the three abiding graces, and the greatest of the three, which therefore I have placed last: “Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” But love in the words of our text has a “labour” as well as faith a “work,” and hope a “patience.”

i. But what is love? for as I have defined the nature of faith and hope, so now I must speak a few words upon the nature of love. But how can I describe it, how dissect and anatomise this heavenly grace; how pourtray her beautiful features, or paint her lovely, engaging form? Love cannot be described; it must be felt to be known; but as a help to understand its nature, you may consider some of the features of earthly love. Love delights to be with the beloved object; to see the face; to hear the voice; to be near the person; to be kindly addressed by; and above all to revel in the delightful consciousness of loving and being loved again. Such is a slight sketch of some marks of earthly love; and heavenly love, in a higher and purer sense, in those points much resembles it. Wherever the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost and the Lord makes himself dear, near, and precious, there

will be a delight in the Lord's company; in looking upon the Lord's face; in hearing the Lord's voice; in enjoying the Lord's presence; and above all things, in the sweet consciousness that the Lord loves us as we love him.

ii. But this love has a "labour." It is not a cold, dead, sluggish grace which has no work to do and no heart to do it. It has to labour, and that very hard; for a love that will not work is a love that must not eat. But what is love's labour? Chiefly twofold, inward and outward.

1. The inward labour of love is to labour against the coldness, deadness, and hardness, and especially against the enmity of the carnal mind. For as "the work of faith" is to strive against unbelief, and "the patience of hope" to endure and bear up against despair, so "the labour of love" is to toil and struggle against the enmity and opposition of the carnal mind.

But it has also to labour under and against the suspicions, the jealousies, the disappointments, the denials of the smiles and presence of the beloved Object. Often, too, has it to labour in the dark, without one cheering word or encouraging look; often to sigh, mourn, and endure sharp pangs, cruel fears, and tormenting suspicions through the delay of the coming of the Beloved. "Why," it cries, "is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" Truly this love has to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things; for love never faileth. Like the fire from heaven on the brazen altar, love once kindled is never suffered to go out. Thus love has to labour and sometimes very hard, in order to secure the promised blessing, and reap its choicest fruit—the sweet consciousness and enjoyment of the Lord's love. But as in the case of faith and hope, love has its peculiar opposition; and the labour of love is made manifest in proportion to the opposition it encounters and the triumph it obtains over it. If there were no enmity of the carnal mind, no doubts and fears, no coldness, jealousy, suspicion, or disappointment, there would be no labour of love to work against them. But by this very labour

it becomes manifested as an operative grace—as "a loving, not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

Another inward labour of love is to please the Object of its love, by submission to his will, by patient suffering under the weighty cross, by obedience to his precepts, and a fixed determination to make his word its rule, his glory its supreme object, and his favour its highest and only reward.

2. But love has its outward labour as well as its inward, as we read: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed towards his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." (Heb. 6:10.) "The love of Christ," says the apostle, "constraineth us;" and to what? "That we should not henceforth live unto ourselves but to him who died for us and rose again." (2 Cor. 5:14, 15.) Separation from the world; living to the praise and glory of God; walking in his fear; a desire to please, a dread to offend our best, our only Friend; a seeking to do good to the souls and bodies of men; a godly obedience to every precept and every ordinance for the Lord's sake; adorning the doctrine with a consistent, unblameable walk, conduct, and conversation—all this will be the outward labour of love; for all these fruits show the reality, the earnestness, and the depth of that love to Christ, which is the peculiar feature of one born of God. And as love will thus labour for the Lord, so will it labour for the Lord's people; for wherever this love is there will be a desire for their good, carrying them warmly upon the heart, sympathising with them in trouble and joy; bearing and forbearing with them in tender affection, and seeking their spiritual benefit and profit. Love will not encourage a spirit of strife and division, but rather will desire to walk in sweet union with all the family of God in a spirit of meekness, avoiding all that may grieve or stumble. This is love's labour; for all this will meet with every kind of opposition from without and within; yet love, true love, can and will conquer all.

But to draw to a conclusion, these three graces of the Spirit

have each their separate work in order to keep them alive and healthy. It is in grace as in nature—with the soul as with the body; it must have air and exercise. What is our body without these two things?

Can health be maintained without them? A man may lie upon his bed or sleep in his chair till he can scarcely walk from indolence and indigestion. It is air and exercise that keeps the body healthy. So it is spiritually. The graces of the Spirit need to be often exercised and well aired to keep them healthy—aired with the pure breath of heaven, and exercised with the operations of the Holy Ghost drawing them forth into activity and energy. And just as in nature a man gains health and strength by using his limbs and working his muscles, so in spiritual things these graces of the Spirit gain strength by use and exercise. Faith by working hard; hope by enduring much; and love by labouring long in the face of difficulties, become each more strengthened, more confirmed, more active, healthy, and energetic. It is a false faith to sleep all day in the sluggard's arm-chair; it is the hypocrite's hope who endures nothing for Christ's sake; it is love in lip and tongue and name that undergoes no labour to please the beloved Object. Look at these things in the light of your own experience. See whether you can find not only faith in your heart, but its work; not only hope, but its patience; not only love, but its labour. The apostle remembered without ceasing their work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope. His eye was fixed not so much upon their Christian graces as their exercise of them. As, then, he looked upon them and saw their faith working diligently, their hope suffering patiently, and their love labouring unweariedly for the glory of God and the good of his people, he was satisfied they were the graces of the Spirit wrought in their heart by a divine power. And well may I add in the spirit of the apostle, that there is nothing more satisfying to a minister's eye or comforting to his heart than to look round amongst his people and see not only their faith, but their work of faith; not only their hope, but their patience of hope; not only

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their love, but their labour of love. I leave those things to your conscience, that you may examine for yourselves how far you know them by a vital experience of their truth, their reality, and their power.

188 No Condemnation

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning,
March 30, 1862

“There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

Romans 8:1

I cannot read your thoughts or tell your feelings, but as far as regards my own, I almost daily find that my faith, if indeed it is to be the faith of God's elect; if it is to work by love and purify my heart; and if the end of it is to be the salvation of my soul, needs three things: First, a foundation on which to stand; secondly, an object to embrace; and thirdly, a power to give it birth and maintain it in being. But as this is a very important point, for on it depends our state for eternity, let me, with God's help and blessing, explain my meaning a little more fully and clearly. The Scripture, you must be well aware, lays a very great stress upon the possession of a living faith. I will just quote a few passages—they are indeed innumerable—but I will quote a few just to show you the importance which the Scripture attaches to the possession of a living faith: “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:1.) Without faith, then, there is no justification, and without justification there is no peace with God. But if no justification, what awaits us? Eternal condemnation. If no peace with God, in what state are we for time or eternity? Enemies and aliens now, and enemies and aliens for ever. “He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that

believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:16.) If, then, I believe, I am saved; if I believe not, I am damned. Salvation, therefore, or damnation depends on this narrow point, whether I possess faith or whether I possess it not. Take another passage: “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” (John 8:24.) If, then, I believe not in the Son of God and that he is the promised Messiah, I shall die in my sins; and if I die in my sins, my soul must sink into eternal perdition. One more passage: “Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” (1 Pet. 1:9.) If, then, I am blessed with faith, there is an end of that faith which I am to receive, and that end is a most blessed end, for it will be the salvation of my soul. If faith, then, be such an important grace—and who can deny it in the very face of such passages?—how needful it is that we should look and examine whether the faith we profess is indeed such a faith as that to which the Scripture attaches such amazing importance. To recur, then, to what I first started with, that a living faith needs three things, let me now open them up. 1. First, then, faith must have a foundation on which to stand; for otherwise it can not only have no stability, but even no existence. Did you ever see a building without a foundation? And does not the strength of the building, as in the Lord’s parable of the wise man’s house, depend upon the strength of the foundation? Now, Jude tells us that we are “to build up ourselves on our most holy faith” (Jude 20); and Paul assures us that “faith is the substance of things hoped for” (Heb. 11:1), implying that there is a solid reality in faith; that it is not a castle in the air, but a substantial possession. He, therefore, speaks of the “stedfastness of faith,” and of being “established in the faith.” (Col. 2:5, 7.) What, then, is this foundation? The sure word of God. Look at the case of Abraham, who in Scripture is called “the father of all them that believe,” because as the features of a father are stamped upon the child, so our faith to be genuine must have the features of Abraham’s faith stamped upon it; and as the child walks in the footsteps of his father, so all true believers walk “in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham which he

had, being yet uncircumcised.” (Rom. 4:11, 12.) Now what was the foundation of Abraham’s faith? Was it some ancient tradition as an echo of the past, some opinion of men of learning or repute, some fancy of his own mind, or some argument of his own reasoning faculties? No; none of these or anything like them, but the word of the Lord; for we read, “After these things, the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” But the word of the Lord on which his faith rested and by which he was justified was that which the Lord spake to him, “Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.” These were the memorable words which the Lord himself spake to him; and this was the foundation of his faith, for we read that “he believed in the Lord, and it was imputed to him for righteousness.” (Gen. 15:1, 5, 6.) Now if you and I are to be possessed of Abraham’s faith, and it is to be imputed to us for righteousness, we must believe as Abraham believed, and the foundation of his faith must be the foundation of ours, which was the word of God, and that word a word of power to his soul. This, then, is the foundation of our faith—not fancies, not notions, not opinions, not airy dreams, nor vain speculations; not the traditions of past ages, or the reasoning of learned men; but the infallible word of truth, spoken by the mouth of God, inspired by the Holy Ghost as revealed in the Bible which we hold in our hands, and made experimentally known by a divine power to our heart.

2. But secondly, our faith, if it be the faith of God’s elect, must have an object to embrace. Faith as a grace of the Spirit, may be compared to an eye, an ear, and a hand. But the eye must have something to see, the hand something to grasp, and the ear something to hear. If there be nothing to see, what is the use of looking; if nothing to grasp, what is the use of stretching forth the hand; if there be nothing to hear, what use is there in listening? Eye, ear, and hand would have been bestowed in vain, without a suitable object for each organ. So faith has an object. That object

is the Person of Christ. Thus, my faith, as an eye, must look to the Person of Christ; as a hand, must embrace the work of Christ; as an ear, must hear the voice of Christ. As, then, my faith looks to the Person, takes hold of the work, and listens to the voice of the blessed Lord, there is in every way an object which that faith embraces.

3. But again, thirdly, my faith, if it is to be the faith of God's elect, must "stand not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God;" for I have no faith by nature which can save my soul. I have an unbelieving mind, nor can I by any exertion of my own, overcome this natural deep-seated unbelief, or raise up such a faith as works by love, purifies the heart, overcomes the world, triumphs over death and hell, and lands the soul safe in eternity. The Scripture declares what all experience confirms, that faith is "the gift of God," and a fruit of the Spirit; that it springs out of a divine operation upon the heart, and is raised up by the mighty power of God in spite of unbelief, and, so to speak, upon its very ruins. This is the reason, then, why I feel daily to want these three things. I repeat them again, to impress them more clearly on your mind and memory; a foundation on which my faith can rest; an object which it can embrace; and a power which can maintain it in living exercise.

Now apply this to our text. What do we see in it? We may see, I think, in it three things standing forward in clear and gracious prominence, as laid hold of by faith.

I.—First, the state and standing of the saints of God; for of them the text speaks; they are "in Christ Jesus."

II.—Secondly, the blessedness of their being in that state; that there is for them now "no condemnation."

III.—Thirdly, their spiritual character and description; that they "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

I.—We will then, first, with the help and blessing of the Lord, direct our attention to the firm state and standing of the saints of the Most High. Brief is the word, but deep and inexhaustible the

subject. They are said to be "in Christ Jesus." By the expression "in Christ Jesus," we are to understand the union which the saints of God have with Christ Jesus. I need scarcely tell you that "in Christ" is an expression which occurs very often in the pages of the New Testament. As an instance of its frequent occurrence, you will find it repeated, if I mistake not, eleven times in the first thirteen verses of the first chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians. But take a few scattered passages which I just name as instances out of innumerable others. "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago." (2 Cor. 12:2.) "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness." (1 Cor. 1:30.) "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colosse." (Col. 1:2.) "To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi." By the expression "in Christ," is meant then the union which the saints of God have with the Lord Jesus, which is viewed as so close and intimate, that they have, as it were, no existence out of him.

i. But in order to open up this union more clearly and distinctly to our view, the Scripture uses figures. And there are four figures especially, which the Holy Ghost has used in the word of truth to illustrate and open up the nature of this union.

1. One is used by our Lord himself—the stem of a tree and its branches. "I am the vine, ye are the branches." Look at that figure; see how pregnant it is with heavenly truth. Observe a vine in the spring; see how all the branches come out of the stem. They have no existence but in the stem; they come out of it at first as tender buds, gradually opening and elongating themselves, but having their very being in it. Cut off from the stem, they wither and die; abiding in the stem, they bear leaf and flower, and fruit. So close and intimate is this union that we can scarcely form a conception of a bud or branch of a tree, as distinct from the stem in which it dwells, and out of which it issues. So with the union that the Church of God has with her living head. She comes out of him mystically and spiritually, as the bud comes out of the stem of the vine; expands under the showers of heaven and the smiles of the

warm sun into leaf, into flower, into fruit, having no life or being, growth or maturity, except by virtue of her personal union with the Son of God.

2. Look at another scriptural figure, equally pregnant with blessed truth: the head and the members of the body. “Not holding the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.” (Col. 2:19.) Again, “We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” (Eph. 5:30.) How close, how intimate is that union! Did the members of our natural body ever exist by themselves, or out of union with the head and with each other? Of what use would they be if they existed separately and had no union with the body? Without union with the body my arm would be of no more use or value than the arm of a corpse; my eye would be a lump of lifeless flesh; my tongue as cold and as silent as that which lies mouldering in the grave. How close, then, how intimate must the union of Christ’s members be with him as their mystical head, if they are as much in him as my arm is in my body, or as my eye is in my head!

3. But take another figure, equally clear and equally scriptural; that of a building, of which Christ is the foundation and corner stone, and his people the living stones, standing upon and united with the foundation: “Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.” (Eph. 2:20, 21.) In a building does not every stone virtually rest upon the foundation? for they are all cemented and banded together so as to make one compact harmonious building, having union with it and each other. What is a loose brick or stone, just ready to fall upon the head of the passing traveller? Can it be called a real part of the building any more than a stone lying on the high road? Only, then, as it is cemented into union with the other stones, and rests upon the foundation, can any stone be called a part of the building.

4. Take another figure of the Spirit’s own giving; the union of

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man and wife, which is so close that the Scripture speaks of them as “one flesh.” How close must that union be which gives them one name, one interest, one heart! A union it is the most intimate of all possible unions, because devised by the Lord in Paradise, and created by his taking Eve out of Adam, so that she actually was in Adam before she was formed of him and for him; a part of his body before she had a separate existence of her own. What a sweet type of the union which the Church has with Christ as her husband! Thus, the Church is called the Lamb’s wife (Rev. 19:7), and her Maker is said to be her husband (Isai. 54:5), so that he says to her, “And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord.” (Hosea 2:19, 20.)

Just look at these four figures, and see how clearly and how beautifully they set forth the intimate, the indissoluble union between the members of Christ and him their glorious Head.

ii. But the question may arise in our mind, When did this union first take place? Of course it must have had some birth or beginning, and the Scripture may afford us some clear intimation not only of its existence but of its origin. Now as it is to endure through and beyond all time it could not well commence in time. But we are not left to conjectures when it began. The Scripture assures us its date is from eternity—“I have loved thee with an everlasting love”—there is eternity; “therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee”—there is time. (Jer. 31:3.) If this stagger our mind, let us ask ourselves what is time with him who is one eternal Now? Time is much with us; but nothing with God. With God it is all eternity; for he is the great and glorious “I AM that I am,” the one eternal Now; and Jesus, the Son of his love, is “the same yesterday, to day, and for ever.” We must not then take the mere, the passing, fleeting, perishing days of time to limit to them and fix in them transactions of such importance as the gift of a people to the Son of God, that in them he might be eternally glorified.

Surely such a solemn transaction as the incarnation of the Son of God with all its consequences was worthy of eternal thoughts and eternal counsels. And if known beforehand to the all-seeing eye of God were the people who would be saved by the incarnation and death of Jesus, we cannot think it unbecoming his wisdom that he should give them beforehand a standing in his dear Son. It is true that this conclusion seems opposed to sense and nature, and one might almost burst out, as many doubtless have already done, "Why, what nonsense you talk! How can a man have union with Christ before he had birth or being?" Let us look at this objection. I will give what answer I can to it: not indeed to silence the cavils of reason, but to satisfy such as are willing to bow to the authority of the word of truth. I allow that it may seem nonsense; as many have called it in their scoffing language, to give man an existence in eternity before brought into being on the stage of time. But scripture stands when reason fails, and objections perish with the objectors. Do we not read, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world?" (Eph. 1:1.) If, then, God chose his people then, had they not a being in the mind of God before he chose them? If I choose this or that object, it must have a being before my eyes can rest upon it, before I can want to possess it. So if God chose his people in Christ before the foundation of the world, they must have had a previous being in the mind of Him who sees the end from the beginning, or how could he have chosen them? What did our Lord say to his heavenly Father in his intercessory prayer? "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." "And all mine are thine, and thine are mine." (John 17:6, 10.) Thus we have it on the Lord's own testimony, that all his people were God's before they were his, and were made his by gift; and if by gift, surely by eternal gift. We, thus, come at once to the date and circumstances of this union, and on the testimony of the words of truth, believe and preach that the saints of the Most High were God's by eternal foreview and by eternal choice; and that before all worlds the Father gave them to his dear Son to be members of his

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 mystical body, to be branches in him as the only true vine, to be living stones in him as the living temple, and to be his spouse and bride, for ever to enjoy his company and his love. Having, then, Scripture on our side, and taking our stand upon the firm basis of the word of truth, we may well pay little heed to the murmurs and objections of those who would arraign the only wise God at a bar of unsanctified reason.

iii. But now arises a question of much more deep and vital importance, "All this is very true; I neither doubt nor dispute it; but how am I—for this is a personal matter—how am I to know that I have a union with the Son of God? I admit," you say, "that what you bring forward is very precious truth: it is so plainly written in the word of God that no sunbeam can make it more plain than it shines forth there. But ah! The question comes home to me, to my heart and conscience; have I an interest in this precious truth? What is it to me if there be this heavenly union if I have no part nor lot in the matter?" Let us see if we can answer this question too. Observe, then, that there is a time union as well as an eternal union, and that only by realising our interest in the one, can we realise our interest in the other; for if we have no part or share in the time union, we have no right to believe we have a part in the eternal union. But how shall we know our interest in the time union? I will give you three marks by which you may know if you now are truly and vitally united to Jesus as a member of his mystical body.

1. First, do you believe in the Son of God? This is a very vital point, the question of questions. You will remember that Philip would not baptise the eunuch before he could say, "I believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God." (Acts 8:37.) Can you say the same, and that not merely in the letter but in the spirit, as believing with your heart unto righteousness? Now if you believe in the Son of God with a living faith, you certainly have a union with the Son of God; for it is by embracing him, receiving him, hanging upon him, and cleaving to him by faith that this time union is both

obtained and maintained. But let me open this up a little more clearly. View where and what we are before faith comes. Shut up in unbelief, condemned by the law and by a guilty conscience, having no peace with God, and no comfortable prospect of eternity. Who, that knows and feels this miserable state can say that he has any union, that is, any sensible, manifest union with the Son of God? But the Lord the Spirit is pleased, in his own time and way, to manifest Christ to your soul; a ray of divine light shines into your heart, revealing the Son of God with power. Under the light, life, and power of this revelation of Christ to your soul, faith is raised up to believe in his name, and to receive him into the heart's warmest, tenderest affections. This is beautifully described by the beloved disciple who wrote as one who had seen with his eyes, and his hands had handled the Word of life,—”He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Here power [or privilege, margin] to become the sons of God is connected with a heavenly birth and a receiving Jesus. But why did they receive him? What did they see in him to receive and embrace? The Holy Ghost shall tell us: “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:11, 14.) Don't you see that it was a sight by faith of the glorious Person of Christ as the only begotten of the Father which raised up faith in their soul; that by this faith they embraced him as the Son of God; and that this receiving of him into their heart by faith brought about a union with him, that is, a union of love, for faith worketh by love? But as this is a matter of vital importance, let me explain it a little further still from the word of truth and the experience of the saints. I have already brought before you the Lord's own figure of the vine and the branches, as illustrative of the union between Christ and his people. But the Scripture gives us another figure descriptive of their

union with Jesus, that of a shoot, or, as it is sometimes called, a scion grafted into a stock. It is a figure which Paul uses to describe the blessedness of union with Christ: “And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree.” (Rom. 11:17.) Now apply this figure to a Christian. You by nature are of a wild stock; you grew upon the old olive tree in which, as of Adam's fallen race, you had your earthly being. But a strong yet merciful hand, by the ministration of the law and the condemnation of a guilty conscience, as a sharp knife wielded by the Spirit, cut you out and off from the old stock. There, for a time perhaps, you lay bleeding upon the ground, clean separated from the old stock, but not united to the new. But the same hand that cut you off from the old stock put you into the new—the good olive tree which is Christ Jesus the Lord, that as grafted into him you might partake of his root and fatness. In grafting, there is a bringing together of stock and scion. The stock is cleft, and as if wounded for the scion, and the scion cut to fit closely into the stock. So a wounded Christ and a bleeding soul, bleeding like a shoot cut from its native tree, are well suited to each other; and, when brought together by the blessed Spirit, unite and become one. This union may, at first, as in the literal graft, be very weak, very tender, needing much care and protection. But the stock and the scion take to each other; there is a union, a coalescing together; sap flows out of the stock into the scion; it becomes one with it, and by and by it grows, expands, and bears leaves and flowers and fruit. So it is with the believer and Jesus. There is a being grafted into Christ as the scion into the stock, a flowing of the sap and virtue out of Christ's fulness into the soul, and a growing up into him in all things (Eph. 4:15), whereby the branch bears the green leaf of a consistent profession, the blooming flower of hope and love, and the rich, ripe fruit of a holy, godly life.

2. But I will give you another mark of this time union with Christ, which is, being made a partaker of Christ's Spirit. This

mark cuts as it were both ways, for and against, according to these two texts: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9); and again, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." (1 Cor. 6:17.) If, then, we are joined to the Lord, in other words, have a union with him, this is the closest of all unions. A man and his wife are one flesh, but Jesus and the saint are one spirit. If possessed of this we are one spirit with him; we understand what he says; we have the mind of Christ; we love what he loves, and hate what he hates. But out of this spiritual union flows communion with him, intercourse with him, communications from him, and the whole of that divine work upon the heart whereby the two spirits become one. The Spirit of Christ in his glorious Person and the Spirit of Christ in a believing heart meet together, and meeting together as two drops of rain running down a pane of glass or two drops of oil, kiss into each other, and are no longer two but one. Now if you have been ever blest with a manifestation of Christ, your spirit has melted into his, and you have felt that sweet union and communion with him that you saw as with his eyes, heard as with his ears, felt as with his heart, and spoke as with his tongue.

3. I will give you another mark of this time union with Christ, which is love. This, too, like the last cuts both ways. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema, Maranatha." This puts all who love not the Lord Jesus Christ under a solemn curse, sealed with the declaration that "the Lord cometh," as the word, "Maranatha," means, to execute it. But take it the other way, as a sealing evidence: "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him." (1 John 4:16.) Surely then to love the Lord with all your heart is an evidence that you have a union with him, and that he dwelleth in you; for "love is of God, and he that loveth knoweth God." Have you never, never, never loved the Lord Jesus Christ? Has he never at any time been the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely in your soul's esteem? Has he never revealed his glorious Person, never shed abroad his

love, never come to you in the lonely hours of the night with a comforting promise, or a sweet word, or a gracious smile, or a heavenly touch? Or if not so highly favoured and blest, still in reading the word, in hearing him set forth in a preached gospel, in meditation and contemplation, has your soul never or ever you were aware been made like the chariots of Amminadib, caught up as it were into some sweet views of the King in his beauty, which made you one of his "willing people," as the word Amminadib means, in the day of his power. Look, then, and see if you have these three marks—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, a union with him through one Spirit, and a love to him as the altogether lovely; and if you can find yourself in possession of them you have a most undoubted testimony that you are one with the Lord the Lamb, that you are "in Christ Jesus," and that not only by eternal union, but by present spiritual oneness, as a member of his body, the Church.

II.—But let us now pass on to consider the blessedness of being in Christ Jesus, of having an eternal and spiritual union with the Son of God. This blessedness, as unfolded in our text, runs thus: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

There is not a more blessed declaration than this in the whole word of truth. It is the sweetest note sounded by the gospel trumpet, for it is the very crown of the whole Jubilee. Is not condemnation the bitterest drop in the cup of trembling? the most thrilling, piercing note of that terrible trumpet which sounded so long and so loud from Sinai's blazing top that all the people that were in the camp trembled? (Exod. 19:13, 16.) Condemnation is the final execution of God's righteous Law, and therefore carries with it all that arms death with its sting and the grave with its terror. The apprehension of this; the dread and fear of being banished for ever from the presence of God; of being lost, and that without remedy; of sinking under the blazing indignation of him who is a consuming fire, has filled thousands of hearts with horror. And

it must be so as long as the Law speaks in its thunders, as long as conscience re-echoes its verdict, and as long as the wrath of God burns to the lowest hell. O the blessedness, then, of that word of grace and truth, worthy to be sounded through heaven and earth by the voice of cherubim and seraphim, "There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

Let me then open this subject experimentally, and, in so doing, let me show you, first, what the apostle does not mean, and, secondly, what he does mean.

i. He does not mean that there is nothing condemnable in us. As long as we carry about with us a body of sin and death, a nature corrupt to the very core, sin will lurk and work in our breast, and if we have a conscience made tender in God's fear, it will condemn us for the evils which thus daily and hourly manifest themselves; which may indeed be resisted and subdued, but are never eradicated. The apostle does not, therefore, mean that there is nothing condemnable in us by the eye of God, or nothing condemnable by our own conscience, for this would imply that we were perfectly free from the very being and indwelling of sin. He himself, though a saint and an apostle, could confess, "That which I do I allow not;" and so great was the pressure of the law of sin in his members that he cried out as if in agony, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:15, 24.) Nor does he mean that we are not condemnable even in many things by the judgment of our Christian brethren; for no man can so walk that there shall not be seen in him many infirmities and blemishes, even when preserved from more grievous slips, which may bring upon him condemnation, and just condemnation too, from those who hold the scales of the sanctuary with even hand. Peter, though the prince of the apostles, fell under condemnation from his brother Paul, because "he was to be blamed," and Barnabas, though "a good man and full of the Holy Ghost," was "carried away with dissimulation." (Gal. 2:11, 13.)

ii. But what the apostle means is, that there is no condemnation

to them which are in Christ Jesus of such a nature that God shall ratify it against them so as to be an availing sentence of their eternal destruction. Whatever the saint of God may feel or fear, whatever thunders the law may peal in his ears, whatever be the condemnation of his own guilty conscience, however in some things justly censured even by his own brethren; or, to take wider ground, whatever hard speeches of friends or cruel arrows of foes may be hurled against him, there is no sentence of condemnation against him from the mouth of God which shall be ratified at the great day. But why and how is this? "Because he is in Christ Jesus." And if he be in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation from the mouth of God to fall upon him, so as to banish him for ever from the presence of the Almighty. The law, it is true, condemns every soul found under it. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Look of the law to do them," will stand in all its unmitigated sentence when the world is in a blaze.

1. But why, you may justly ask, should not the saint of God fall under the condemnation of that fiery law? He is a sinner by nature; that he cannot deny when he has such daily proof of it in his own bosom. He is or has been a sinner by practice; and if he is, by the restraining grace of God, prevented from being immoral or ungodly, he still has the seed of every sin within. Why, then, should not the law take him by the throat and say, "Pay what thou owest?" Why? Because he is in Christ Jesus. But why should that be available? Because Christ Jesus endured the curse of the law in his own body on the tree; for he was made a curse for us. If Jesus, therefore, endured that curse, that curse never can reach the members of his mystical body, for he endured it for them. If it were otherwise, God, so to speak, would be unjust to demand the penalty of the Law from his dear Son, and when he had paid it to the last mite, then re-demand payment from those for whom he had rendered full satisfaction. Upon that ground, therefore, that the blessed Lord was made a curse for them, the curse shall not touch those who are in him.

2. But again, does not the law require a perfect obedience? Does it not say, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself?” Love is the fulfilling of the law, and therefore not to love is to disobey it. Now have you rendered to the law that pure and perfect obedience? Have you loved God and your neighbour as the law commands? “I have not,” you say; “I cannot. My obedience, to be agreeable to the law, must be not only a perfect but a spiritual obedience. I have not rendered that obedience; I cannot render it.” Where then am I, where are you, to look to escape the penalty of disobedience? To the obedience rendered by Jesus the Son of God, which was an obedience without spot or infirmity, and spiritual, for he had the Spirit without measure, and was “a lamb without blemish and without spot.” This, then, is the reason why, if I am in Christ Jesus, the law cannot curse me, nor exact an obedience which, if I fulfil not, the wrath of God will fall upon me; because my Surety, my Representative has endured the curse, paid the debt, and rendered the obedience.

3. But again, there is my conscience which needs to be pacified. Does my conscience never condemn me? I should speak falsely if I said “No.” My conscience sometimes condemns me almost all the day long. I cannot live an hour without hearing its accusing voice. “What!” say some, “are you then living in sin?” God forbid! But though not living in sin, I cannot live without sin. I have sinful thoughts, sinful imaginations, sinful desires, sinful passions, and very sinful feelings. I cannot look without sin, nor speak without sin, nor hear without sin,—no, nor can I preach without sin. I have been sinning all the time I have been preaching this morning, and my conscience tells me so this very moment; nay, there is even sin mingled with my very confession. You will think me, perhaps, a very bad man not to be able to preach without sinning. But what if I go a step further and tell you what some of your consciences will ratify, that you too have been sinning all the time you have been hearing? In the face, then, of even our present experience, to go no

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 further, can you, can I, say our conscience never condemns us? But if so, how can it be true that there is “no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus?” Why, because if I am in Christ Jesus, I am loved in Christ Jesus; I am chosen in Christ Jesus; I am justified in Christ Jesus; I am pardoned in Christ Jesus; and I am saved in Christ Jesus. If, therefore, my conscience condemn me, God is greater than my heart and knoweth all things. So that though I have the daily condemnation of a guilty conscience, yet if all my sins are washed away by the blood of the Lamb and my conscience is purified from guilt and filth by the blood of sprinkling, I shall not at the great day be condemned; and even now, so far as the power of that blood is felt, I am free from all condemnation.

4. But again, look further. There is the consummation of all things in the judgment of the great day, when we shall all stand before the bar of the Almighty Judge, and receive the things done in the body whether good or bad. Then there will be the open, the final, the everlasting condemnation of all not in Christ Jesus, and the wrath of God will fall upon them to the utmost. But who shall stand when the Lord appeareth? Who shall endure the scrutiny of that awful eye that reads every heart? Who can escape the vengeance of that God who is a consuming fire? Will the rocks and mountains shield the trembling, guilty children of men from the outstretched hand of the Almighty? No; all who in that day are found out of Christ the Lord must sink to rise no more. But if we are in Christ Jesus, members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones, united to him in eternity by the hand of God and brought near in time by a living faith, so as to realise the heavenly blessing, we shall not be condemned in that great day; for “there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” You will not be condemned before your great Judge in that terrible day if found one with the Lord the Lamb.

To show this, let us take a glance at the representation of the day of judgment in the gospel of Matthew. (Matt. 25.) Are not the sheep represented there as set on the right hand of the throne

of the Son of man, and the goats on the left? But was there any condemnation of the sheep? What was the language addressed to them by the Judge on his throne? "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Was there any voice of anger, or word of condemnation uttered against them there to stay the invitation to inherit the kingdom? Did the Law interpose its curse? Did conscience whisper its guilt? Did the justice of God bar the entrance? No; every condemning tongue was hushed; mercy alone reigned there; grace alone superabounded there. But what was the sentence pronounced by the mouth of the terrible Judge upon all who were set on his left hand? "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." These were found out of Christ; they had neither substitute nor surety; therefore, they had all their sins upon their own head. Such being their miserable state and case, the law condemns them with a thousand thunders; their awakened conscience, loaded with the guilt of a thousand crimes, ratifies the verdict; no place of escape is afforded them, no refuge, no shelter; for who can interpose between justice and them? And thus, they sink for ever under the wrath of the Almighty. But there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, for that has been borne for them; and now washed in the blood, clothed in the righteousness, and sanctified by the Spirit and grace of the Son of God made flesh for them, they enter into the enjoyment of their eternal inheritance.

iii. "These," you will be perhaps ready to say, "are blessed things; I do not doubt their reality and truth, for I see them so plainly revealed in the word of God; but I want to get into them." So do I, or rather I want them to get into me. But do you never get into them, or rather, do they never get into you? Is it all wrath, bondage, guilt, and misery with your soul? Is there no sweet union with Jesus ever felt, no embracing of his glorious Person, no sprinkling of his blood, no lifting up the light of his countenance, no gracious touch of his heavenly hand? Or, if you cannot rise so high, is there

in your heart no faith to believe in his name, no hope to anchor in his mercy, no love to flow forth to him who is altogether lovely? I cannot think this. Matters surely are not always so desperately bad with you who fear the name of God that there never is any breaking in of divine light, never any communication of divine life, never any testimony of divine love? Or if now, perhaps, you are walking in darkness and the shadow of death, look back. Has there never been a time when Christ was revealed to your soul? Was there never a sweet moment when faith embraced him, hope anchored in him, and love flowed forth towards him? Surely, there was once a day or hour when Christ was made precious to you, and though that never to be forgotten visit may be long past, and many changes have since taken place, though waves of trouble have rolled over your breast, and seas of temptation have almost flooded your little bark, and though neither "sun nor stars for many days have appeared," as in the no small tempest that fell upon Paul in the Adriatic, yet he that loves, loves to the end; and true, most true are the words,

"Did Jesus once upon me shine,

Then Jesus is for ever mine."

Let us not belie our own consciences. I can say, you can say, that Jesus has been made precious to our souls, and that we have seen the King in his beauty. Does not this prove that you are a believer? And if so, surely he will never remove you out of his own body; for even if you be but a foot, ever grovelling in the dust, "the Head cannot say to the feet, I have no need of you." (1 Cor. 12:21.) May you believe this and take comfort from it; to see and feel that for those who are in Christ Jesus there is no condemnation, will strengthen your faith and encourage you, whatever be your present state of darkness and gloom, to anchor in the sure word of promise, and to believe in spite of unbelief.

III.—But we have yet to consider our third point, which describes, as with a ray of light, the present spiritual state of those to whom there is no condemnation: "Who walk not after the flesh,

but after the Spirit.” This description consists of two points, which I shall have to lay open as far as time admits. First, what the saint of God does not walk after, and, secondly, what he does.

i. He walks not after the flesh. Two things here demand our earnest inquiry. 1, What is meant by the flesh. 2, By walking after it.

1. What are we to understand by the expression “the flesh?” This word takes in the whole of that fallen nature, both in body and soul, which we have inherited from our first parent. It does not, therefore, mean merely those gross, sensual lusts, which are so sad a part of our original inheritance, but embraces every faculty of body and mind which we possess as children of Adam. 2. To walk after the flesh, carries with it the idea of the flesh going before us, as our leader, guide, and example, and our following close in its footsteps, so that wherever it drags or draws we move after it, as the needle after the magnet. To walk, then, after the flesh, is to move step by step in implicit obedience to the commands of the flesh, the lusts of the flesh, the inclinations of the flesh, and the desires of the flesh, assume they whatever shape, wear they whatever garb, bear they whatever name they may. See how wide a net these words cast forth; how thick the crop, how wide the sweep, how sharp the edge of this scythe! Can any of the fallen children of Adam escape being taken by this net? Who is there, from peer to peasant, who must not fall before this keen scythe? All will admit that those who walk after the lusts of the flesh, who are abandoned to the grosser sins of our nature, have no manifested mark of being in Christ Jesus. The common moral sense of men, the voice of natural conscience, the outspoken verdict of society at large, all proclaim, as with one voice, that sin and religion cannot be yoke-fellows. But are the grosser and more manifest sinners the only persons who may be said to walk after the flesh? Does not natural religion, in all its varied forms and shapes, come under the sweep of this all-devouring sword? Yes; every one who is entangled in and led by a fleshly religion, walks as much after the flesh as those who are abandoned to its grosser indulgences. Sad it is, yet not more

sad than true, that false religion has slain its thousands, if sin has slain its ten thousands. This, perhaps, you would all here assent to if I were to confine myself to the lower ground of that common religion which does not even clothe itself in a gospel dress; which has not learnt so much as the voice of Jacob, but wears alike the garments and speaks in the tones of Esau. But what will you say, if I bring you on higher ground, and take you as you sit under the sound of the gospel? There is a fleshly faith and a fleshly hope and a fleshly love amongst those of a sounder creed and purer language than the common religionists of the day; and a man that walks after this carnal faith and hope and love in the very courts of the Lord’s house, is as much walking after the flesh as though he lived and died a drunkard on the ale-house bench. Our earthly Zion is overrun with a fleshly confidence which is but presumption; a fleshly knowledge which is but ignorance; and a fleshly talk which is but boasting. But to walk after the flesh, whether it be in the grosser or more refined sense of the term, is the same in the sight of God. To walk, then, after the flesh is to be ever pursuing, desiring, and doing the things that please the flesh, whatever aspect that flesh may wear or whatever dress it may assume, whether moulded and fashioned after the grosser and more flagrant ways of the profane world, or the more refined and deceptive religion of the professing church.

ii. But not to detain you longer on this part of the subject, let me now endeavour to unfold what it is to walk after the Spirit. I have already shown that to walk after a thing, in the language of Scripture, means to pursue it with desire, and to do so habitually. Thus we read of “mockers walking after their ungodly lusts” (Jude 18) as a mark of the wicked, and a “walking after the commandments” of the Lord (2 John 6) as a mark of the righteous. To walk, then, after the Spirit is to walk as the Spirit leads, guides, directs, and teaches. The flesh is the motive power to those who are in the flesh; the Spirit is the moving influence to those who are in Christ Jesus.

But let me open this point a little more fully.

1. To walk, then, after the Spirit is to walk after and in a revealed Christ—not a Christ in the letter, but a Christ in the Spirit; not a Christ in the word only, but a Christ in the heart, formed there the hope of glory. The work of the Spirit is to reveal Christ, to glorify him, and make him precious to believing hearts; to apply his blood to the conscience, to discover his righteousness, and to shed abroad his love. To walk, then, after the Spirit is to follow his gracious discoveries of the Lord Jesus to the heart, and to realise them by a living experience of their sweetness and blessedness.

2. But again, the Spirit leads into all truth. This was the promise given by Christ to his disciples: “Howbeit when he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.” (John 16:13.) It is impossible for us to know the truth savingly and experimentally, except the blessed Spirit guide us, as it were, into the very bosom of it. Till then its beauty and blessedness, its liberating, sanctifying influence are hidden from our sight. But if I am guided by the Spirit into all truth, if he himself condescend to lead me into the truth as it is in Jesus, and enable me to walk in the truth as he leads me into it, then I may be said to walk after the Spirit.

3. But again, the Spirit is spoken of in the word of truth as an Intercessor, teaching us how to pray and what to pray for; nay, he himself is represented as “interceding for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” If, then, I pray in the Spirit, I walk after the Spirit, for I walk in that path of prayer and supplication in which he is pleased to lead me. He has promised to help my infirmities; and therefore if I find my many infirmities helped by his grace and overcome by his power, then too I may be said to walk after the Spirit.

4. But the Spirit is also the author of faith, hope, and love, for these are fruits and graces which spring from his work upon the heart. If, then, I believe in Jesus with a spiritual faith, if I hope in him with a spiritual hope, and love him with a spiritual love, I walk after the Spirit; for the Spirit moves me both to will and to do those

things; and as he leads I follow.

5. But the Spirit is also a Spirit of contrition, of brokenness, of humility, of godly sorrow for sin and honest confession of it. If, then, I am ever blessed with humility, contrition, repentance, and godly sorrow for sin, I walk after the Spirit.

6. But the Spirit is also the Comforter of God’s people, for that is the name which our blessed Lord himself gave him. So that if he ever comfort your heart with his choice consolations, and you walk after his comfort, desiring to drink into it, and following after everything which may promote it, you follow in the steps in which the Comforter leads you.

7. But if we walk after the Spirit, we shall also be spiritually minded, which is life and peace; our affections will be fixed upon heavenly realities where Jesus sits at the right hand of God; for all this is his special work, and nothing short of his power and influence can produce it. If then we are favoured at any time with this spirituality of mind and these heavenly affections, it is a proof that we are walking after the Spirit.

8. But again, through the weakness of the flesh and the power of temptation, we often fall into a state of coldness, darkness, hardness, and even miserable carelessness in the things of God. Then the Spirit has to revive our drooping graces, bring us out of this miserable state of carnality and death, to lead us to the fountain once opened for all sin and uncleanness in the blood of the Lamb, to renew our hope, strengthen our faith, and impart to us fresh confidence. As we then walk in the light, life, and power of these gracious revivals, we walk after the Spirit.

9. But the Spirit also brings the children of God out of the world, separates them from its maxims, pleasures, and pursuits, draws their heart into union with the Son of God, tramples earth under their feet, and gives them grace to mortify the whole body of sin and death. As then they are enabled by his power to do these things, they walk after the Spirit.

In this walking after the Spirit lies much, if not all, of the power

of godliness. Nor indeed is there any real happiness or comfort without it. For immediately that we cease to walk after the Spirit and walk after the flesh, we lose our evidences, we can no longer see our signs, and all the sweet promises of the gospel and our interest in them are hidden from view. Thus we find by soul experience that if we walk after the flesh we shall die, not indeed eternally, but as to any enjoyment of heavenly blessings; but if through the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the body we shall live.

Now see the necessity of this, as I may call it, gracious caveat, this holy proviso. A man might be so deluded by sin and Satan as to say, without any divine warrant, "I am in Christ Jesus; there is no condemnation to me." My friend, let me put in the Spirit's caveat, let me look at thy walk, for that must be the ruling test. How art thou walking? Art thou walking after the flesh? Is that thy ruling influence and directing guide? Art thou buried in the world; art thou sunk in covetousness; is thy heart uplifted with pride; art thou doing, daily doing the things that are contrary to godliness? My friend, yours is a vain religion, an empty confidence which may prove your eternal destruction. You may talk of being in Christ and one with Christ; but your walk contradicts it. You are still in the flesh, and therefore you cannot please God. Or take even a saint of God entangled for a time in almost a similar snare: even he may be for a time so blinded and hardened by a snare of Satan as to say, "Well, though I do slip and stumble about, and give way a good deal to the movements and influences of my carnal mind, it does not at all diminish my confidence. Once in Christ, always in Christ, is my motto." O, my friend, you have got into a vain confidence. If your conscience were tender, you would see you were standing on very dangerous ground. The Lord send a chastising scourge to bring thee back, for at present thou art sadly out of the way. You may despise the doubts and fears of those whom you call weaklings; but the very doubts and fears and misgivings of God's saints, are often employed as so many gracious whips in the hand of God, to bring back wanderers into the path of truth and righteousness; for the

Holy Ghost has given us this description of a Christian walk, not only to comfort the saints of God, but as a mark to show the way in which all true believers must tread to maintain their evidences alive and warm in their breast.

But time admonishes me to draw to a close. Blessed are they who are in Christ Jesus, and more blessed still are they who have the sweet confidence of it. But depend upon it, if we are to enjoy this sweet confidence, it must be by walking after the Spirit. Directly we lose sight of the leadings and teachings of that blessed Guide and Comforter, get into self, and begin to walk after the flesh, we lose our confidence, our hope sinks, and our faith is sadly dashed. See, therefore, the mercy and blessedness of being enabled to walk after the Spirit, that you may be enabled to enjoy the presence of God, to have your signs and evidences clear, and to be favoured with that holy assurance, of which John speaks, "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." (1 John 3:21.) But I will add one word for those who have not this confidence, and yet have a living faith in the Son of God. If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

189 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 testimony 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. Uncction

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 discernor 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 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 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! 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 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, miserable, 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 depravity.

(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 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.

190 The Work Of His Ministering Servants

Preached at the Zion Chapel, Calne, Anniversary Services on July 20th, 1862.

"Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people."

Isa.62:10

Two cities are spoken of in Scripture, both alluding, to the church of God; one in her militant state, the other in her triumphant state. The description in Revelation 21 & 22 of the New Jerusalem shows the state of the church triumphant; that in Isaiah 26:1-3, the city for which God hath appointed salvation for walls and bulwarks, represents the church militant. The New Jerusalem, seen in vision, had three gates on each side, which differed from the gates which

the church militant has now to enter. These gates are now entered consecutively. First, as in ancient citadels, the barbican, which admits into the outer court; then the second; then the gate into the citadel.

This Scripture is a voice. To whom? "Ye that make mention of the LORD" (ver.6). By whom addressed? Addressed by God to his ministering servants, whom he has sent to go before his flock, and instrumentally to lead them into green pastures. To these he gives five commands, which I shall speak of as laid down in the text. I. "Go through, go through the gates." How emphatic this repetition by the Lord, showing how necessary that ministers should have themselves proved the reality of the truths they bring before their hearers! They must go through before they can lead others through. Who would trust his life with a captain who did not understand navigation? Who would trust a pilot to pilot him up mighty Thames unacquainted with its meanderings? Who would trust his life in a train with an amateur for a driver? So no one can truly ministerially obey this Scripture who has not himself experimentally passed through these gates. No human education or advantages will help a man through. I had my share of them; but Oxford could not teach me my religion, nor could aught short of God the Holy Ghost.

The first gate, then, that both preachers and hearers must through is Regeneration, which is indeed a strait gate. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way" (Matt.7:14). This is illustrated, among other illustrations, by Bunyan's dream of the desirable state of the saints at Bedford, and the strait narrow space he had to squeeze through; so that at last, after much squeezing, he sidled in, as he graphically expresses it. The next gate is Faith. This reflects light on the first gate, and is intimately connected with it.

The next is Hope. You will say, "Should not hope be placed first?" No! How can we hope for what we do not believe? How can hope enter within the veil unless we believe in Jesus there entered? The next is Love. The door of faith, the door of hope, and the strait

gate are spoken of in Scripture; but love is not directly spoken of as a door; yet it is entered. John saw a door opened in heaven, and the God of love, and the objects of his love there. And experience proves that when new life, faith, and hope are realized, love also will be known and felt. And this will be manifested by a deliberate, advised, and affectionate aim to keep his precepts. This important part of the gospel, the precepts, I am grieved to say, is so little dwelt upon by preachers; yet the keeping of them is the proof of love.

II. "Prepare ye the way of the people." This is another work God gives his servants ministerially to do. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. To prepare this way is to set him forth as the sinner's only hope, his only salvation, his All and in all, as the Scriptures testify of him, and as the Holy Ghost reveals him to the soul of the poor and needy self-destroyed sinner who is drawn to him; showing from the Scriptures the work of Jesus, what he came to do; describing the characters, and the characteristics of those for whom he came to do this mighty work, in dying the just for the unjust; and showing that sinners need just such a Saviour, and he is just suited to such sensible sinners. This is preparing the, not a, way for the people.

III. "Cast up the highway." We see in wet lands and muddy roads, in Wiltshire and in Berkshire, a way made higher than the muddy wet roads, in order that travellers may travel with comfort. And it is the same in many places referred to in the Bible. This requires spade and mattock, with persevering strength and assiduity. This has its parallel in the third work God sets his ministering servants to do. It is done by showing that, though the road lies through much perplexity, much temptation, felt failures, fouling one's garments, and many and heavy troubles, yet the everlasting love of God, the watchful care and providence of God, and the restoring power of God, are still in exercise on the behalf of both great and small, who are really in the way, or passed through the gates; in showing that his everlasting love will surely carry on and perfect what he has begun; in inciting to filial confidence in him,

by scripturally and experimentally showing his watchful care, his everlasting love, and his wondrous display of it in the Person and work of his Son, in the promise and possession of the Holy Ghost, in his continuous leadings, and in his precious promises; this is casting up the highway. Ministers must show the everlasting love, watchful care, and unalterable purpose of God to bring his redeemed ones safe to glory. Though the way is rough, yet all the promises are Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus (2 Cor.1:20).

IV. "Gather out the stones." That is, ministerially expose errors and heresies. Some roads have large stones; yea, some, in some countries, have boulders in them. To gather out these requires Herculean strength, levers, bars, &c.; but they must be gathered ministerially out of the way of the simple. On our knees we must use the lever, pickaxe, &c. Love would make me alight, as well as duty, from my carriage, to endeavour to remove the boulder, lest my dear wife and children should be capsized. Some men (nay, demons, I call them), have put stones on the railway lines to send numbers into eternity. But, shocking as this is, what is this diabolical act compared to that of those who propagate errors, such as deny the Godhead of Jesus, and his eternal Sonship; God's everlasting love to his people, and their certain enduring to the end; the chastisement of God's people for their sin, &c.? We must get on our knees effectually to use the lever of God's Word, so as to root up these boulders, and thus make a plain path; and then fill up the hole left with truth in the love of it.

Other stones are difficult and perplexing Scriptures, and knotty and seemingly contradictory experiences. To explain these, as God enables us, in the light of other parts of the Word, and one's own experience of God's delivering hand, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, is to instrumentally gather out the stones. And as literally, sometimes, where Macadam is not followed, the obstacles are weighty, so are the stones hinted at. God help you to remove them.

V. I cannot say much about lifting up the standard for the

people. I will only say that a standard is used as a rallying point. It has other uses, which I cannot now enter into. The banner or standard is love. I appeal to you who are ministers. Have you passed through the gates of regeneration, faith, hope, and love? Are you preparing the way of the people? Are you casting up the highway? Are you gathering out the stones? Are you lifting up the standard for the people? If so, as of the ability that God giveth, God bless you in your deed. I claim no authority over you, though I thus appeal; but, being a fellow-labourer who has long been in the way and ministry, and having in my own soul proved these things, I in love exhort you and stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance. God bless his Word.

191 The Superaboundings Of Grace Over The Aboundings Of Sin

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day morning,

October 12, 1862

“But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 5:20, 21

Wherever we go, wherever we turn our eyes, two objects meet our view—sin and misery. There is not a town nor a village, nor a house, nor a family, no, nor a human heart, in which these two inseparable companions are not to be found;—sin the fountain, misery the stream; sin the cause, misery the effect; sin the parent, misery the offspring.

But some of you may perhaps be inclined to say, “I do not altogether see with you here; I think you take much too gloomy, too melancholy a view of the case. But this is just like you. You are always telling us what sinners we are, and what we feel, or ought to

feel, on account of our sins, just as if we were some of the basest, blackest characters in England. I admit there is a great deal of sin in the world; but I do not see so much sin in myself as you represent, nor do I feel so much misery and wretchedness in consequence of it as you are continually talking about.” That may be the case, but may it not arise from your want of sight or from your want of feeling? The fact may be the same, though you may not see or feel it. A blind man might be led through the wards of a hospital, and say, amidst all the pain and suffering on well-nigh every bed around him, “I see no disease; where is the disease they speak of? People are always talking about the sickness and suffering in the hospitals; but I don't see any.” Or a person in full health and strength might be struck suddenly down with apoplexy, or fall into an epileptic fit, and be really a most pitiable object, yet himself feel no pain or misery. So your not seeing sin may arise from want of light, and your not feeling it may arise from want of life. You must not, therefore, judge of the non-existence of sin by your not seeing it, or conclude there is no evil in it because you do not feel it. There are those who do see it, there are those who do feel it; and these are the best judges whether such things as sin and misery exist.

But a question may arise, “How came sin and misery into this world? What was the origin of sin?” That is a question I cannot answer. The origin of evil is a problem hidden from the eyes of man, and is probably unfathomable by human intellect. It is sufficient for us to know that sin is; and it is a blessing of blessings, a blessing beyond all value, that we know also there is a cure for it.

Let me give you two illustrations of this. A poor woman has, she fears, a cancer in her breast. She goes to a surgeon and says, “I have a hard lump here, and such sharp, darting pains, just, it seems, as if I had knives driven into me.” “O,” the doctor says, “my good woman I am afraid indeed that you have a cancer. How did it originate? Had your mother one or any of your family? Have you had a blow there? O,” she says, “I cannot tell you: I can only

tell you what I have felt and what I feel. Never mind how it came. Here it is, Can you cure it?" Or a young man loses strength and flesh, becomes pallid, is worried with a hacking cough and flying pains by day, and is restless and feverish all night. He goes to a doctor and says, "I am afraid I am ill, my chest feels so bad." "O, my young friend," the doctor replies, after due examination, "I fear there is some disease in your lungs. Was your father or your mother consumptive? Did any of your brothers or your sisters die of decline? Have you been living in close rooms without air and exercise? How do you think your disease originated? Well, I cannot tell you anything about its origin, or whether I got it from my father or my mother. My chief concern is whether it can be cured."

So you see it is not the origin of a thing, whether bodily disease or moral evil, which we have to look to. We may not be able to tell how evil originated, but, like the poor woman with a cancer, or the consumptive youth, may be able to tell from our feelings that it exists. This, indeed, is the first step in religion, for as the Lord said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Mt 9:12,13 When, then, the deep-seated malady of sin is opened up to our view, and we begin to feel that there is no soundness in us, and nothing but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores, then arises the anxious inquiry, "Is there a cure?" Now, through God's unspeakable mercy, I can assure you, from His word and in His name, that there is a cure for the malady of sin, and that there is a remedy for the misery and distress which are the sure consequences of it when laid with weight and power upon the conscience. Yes, there is "balm in Gilead—there is a physician there;" there is One who says of Himself, "I am the Lord that healeth thee" Ex 15:26; One to whom the soul can say, when the healing balm of a Saviour's blood is made effectually known: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." Ps 103:2,3

To unfold the malady and discover the remedy, is the grand

purpose of the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures of truth; but I do not know any single passage of God's word in which malady and remedy are more powerfully and more closely brought together than in the words of the text. What sin is and what grace is, are there indeed clearly depicted by the Holy Ghost, written by His unerring pen as with a ray of light. I despair of being able fully or even adequately to open up to your view the depths of truth contained in it, for who can fathom the measureless ocean of abounding sin or lay bare the treasures of superabounding grace? But as the text is one dear to my heart, and one which I wish not to lose sight of for a single day of my life, I shall endeavour, with God's help and blessing, to bring before you something of what I have been led to see and feel in it; and as sin and grace are here so vividly contrasted and brought, as it were, to meet each other face to face, I shall attempt from it to show,

I.—First, Sin as an abounding flood; Sin as a despotic tyrant; Sin as a cruel executioner.

II.—Secondly, Grace as a superabounding tide; Grace as a reigning monarch; Grace as a sovereign giver of eternal life.

III.—Thirdly, how all these inestimable blessings are "through righteousness" and "by Jesus Christ our Lord."

I.—You will find all that I have stated, and much more, in our text. In fact, language can never utter, as heart can never conceive, the depths of infinite mercy which are stored up in it. It has been a feast for millions. The Lord enable me to spread the table with some of the choice provision revealed in it, and give you an appetite to feed upon it—an appetite well sharpened by a feeling sense of your sin and misery; for it is only those who painfully know the aboundings of sin, and blessedly know the superaboundings of grace, who can sit at this table as hungry guests and hear the Lord's words, "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." So 5:1

1. I said I would show you sin as an abounding flood—"where sin abounded," and I shall take as a figure, to illustrate

my meaning, an occurrence which caused a great deal of temporal suffering and distress in an adjoining county, and indeed, from its nature and consequences, produced much apprehension through the country generally. Last Spring, if you recollect, there was a flood in Norfolk, which devastated at least six or seven thousand acres of some of the finest land in England, just at a season when everything seemed to promise fair for abundant crops. I shall use that figure to show you the abounding flood of sin. But I must first explain the circumstances to make my figure more perspicuous, for most of you, probably, are but imperfectly acquainted with them. A low lying tract of land, of many thousand acres, called the Bedford Level, besides a large portion of adjoining country, is artificially drained by the River Ouse, and from its naturally low situation is below the level of the sea at high tide. It is, therefore, necessary that there should be strong, high banks, with flood-gates at the mouth of the river, that it may discharge at low tide the drainage of the surrounding country, and then before the tide again rises that these gates should be closed to keep out the sea. But it so happened, through negligence or some other cause, that a breach was made in this dyke. And what was the consequence? The German ocean, at high tide, entered through this breach, and every successive tide made it deeper and wider, until at last it burst over the whole country, and flooded more than 6 acres of land, the salt water destroying all the crops and carrying consternation and peril through the whole district.

I shall take that figure, therefore, to illustrate my first point—sin viewed as an abounding flood; and, in so doing, I shall consider the German ocean to represent sin; the land smiling in beauty and verdure the soul of man in its primitive state as created in the image of God; and the dyke that kept out the waters man's innocency in Paradise. Look, then, at sin raging in the bosom of Satan as the German ocean tossed its angry billows in wild confusion upon the Norfolk coast. Wave after wave beat upon the shore; but not one drop could get in so long as the dyke stood. But when a breach was

made, though in itself but small, then burst in the German ocean. So as long as man stood in his native purity and uprightness, sin might rage in Satan's boiling breast, but it could not enter into man's bosom. But when temptation came and was listened to, giving heed to the tempter made a gap in the dyke of man's innocency, and then through the breach sin rushed in, as the German ocean into the fair fields of Norfolk. And what was the consequence? It flooded the soul of man; defaced and destroyed the image of God in him, utterly ruined his native innocency, and left upon his conscience a whole mass of ooze and sludge, under which he has ever since lain as a guilty sinner before God. This was not like the flood in Norfolk, to be drained off by pumps and carried back to the ocean whence it came. There was no re-constructing of the dyke, no re-building of the floodgates. When once sin had burst in, no power of man could ever throw it back.

I said in my introduction that the origin of evil was a mystery unfathomable by human intellect. But you will observe that there is a distinction between the origin of sin and the entrance of sin. The origin of sin is not revealed to us, for it existed in the bosom of Satan before it came into this lower world. But its entrance into us we know. The Scripture is clear here. "By one man sin entered into the world." And the entrance of death is as plainly revealed as the entrance of sin, for the Holy Ghost adds "and death by sin." Nor are its universal consequences less plainly revealed: "And so death passed upon all men; for that [margin "in whom"] all have sinned." Ro 5:12 That sin at once flooded the whole heart of man is evident in the first man that was born of woman. What was he? His brother's murderer. How abounding, how fatal must have been the flood when, out of mere envy and jealousy, one brother should have shed another's blood, as if only just outside the very gates of Paradise!

But in order to gain some insight into the abounding of sin, let us look at it in a variety of particulars, because we must come to dose detail, to practical facts, to experimental feeling, before we

can really be made sensible of the truth of God's word in so plainly and positively declaring that sin "abounded."

i. Look at it first, then, as abounding in the world at large. Who that has any eye to see or any heart to feel cannot but painfully realise the pressing, the overwhelming fact that sin awfully abounds there? What dreadful murders, what desperate suicides, what acts of violence and robbery, what hideous deeds of uncleanness, what Sabbath breaking, and that systematically encouraged by cheap excursion trains on the great leading railway lines; what neglect of all public and private worship; what contempt of God and man; what daring rebellion against everything holy and sacred; what awful ungodliness and infidelity are displayed to the most superficial view as running down our streets like water, not only in the metropolis, but in all our great towns. These are but waifs and strays thrown upon the shore by the waves of the sea of sin; mere passing specimens which come to light of thousands of unseen, undiscovered crimes. But even where the surface of society is unruffled by these waves of open sin, what a sea of iniquity is buried beneath the still water! What envy, hatred, malice, jealousy, cruelty, and sensuality lie hidden under smiling faces, and what a rooted dislike to everything spiritual and holy is covered up under an outward form of religion and morality!

ii. When we look at the professing Church are things really any better? Does not sin abound there? It is true there is thrown over it a veil which seems to give it a rather more decent appearance: but under that veil, could it be suddenly torn off, what sins we should see to lurk and work. What hypocrisy; what self-righteousness; what hatred of God's truth; what contempt of the saints of God; what pride and worldliness: what giving way to every sensual inclination; what contentment with the mere forms and shadows of religion and setting them up in place of the substance and the power; what ignorance of the true and spiritual meaning of the Scriptures; and what a deadly opposition to the inward life of God and to all who know it, preach it, or profess it!

iii. But come still nearer home. Look at the Church of God; the little flock, gathered out of a sinful world and a deceptive profession. Do we not see sin abounding even there? What strife, division, contention, suspicion, jealousy, hard thoughts and hard words do we see often rending asunder the Church for which Christ died. What little living to the glory of God; what little walking in humility, simplicity, sincerity, godly fear, spirituality of mind, and godly obedience do we see in many who, we hope, after all, are really partakers of distinguishing grace.

iv. But come nearer, closer still. Look to your own bosom; search and examine well the daily working of sin in your own heart. May we not say, I am sure I can for one, sin abounds? We hope that, by the restraining grace of God, sin does not indeed abound in our words or works—the Lord forbid it should! But if it be kept back and restrained there by the fear of God and the power of His grace, does not sin awfully abound in our thoughts, in our imaginations, in our desires, in the working of our carnal mind? Who that knows himself in the teaching of the Spirit can say that sin has not awfully abounded in him, not only before he was called by grace and made alive unto God by His quickening breath, but since he has known the truth of God in its power? What sins does conscience register against light, against conviction, against our better judgment, against the warnings of God in His word, and, what is still more painful, against mercies, blessings, privileges, and all that the Lord has done for us both in providence and in grace! What miserable unthankfulness; what base ingratitude; what reckless oblivion of all the Lord's mercies; what self-seeking; what pride; what lusting after evil things; what confusion often in prayer; what unbelieving thoughts; what want of fixedness and steadfastness in the ways of God; what lack of self-denial, crucifixion of the flesh, and doing the things which God has commanded, as well as professing them! Surely, when we take a view of what we are as sinners before the eyes of infinite Purity and Holiness, is there one who knows his own heart and

is honest before God who must not say, "Sin has abounded in me?" It is our mercy if the Lord restrain by His Spirit and grace the outward acts of sin. But there is not a heart that knows its own bitterness which will not confess that sin hath abounded and still abounds in it.

But there are some other ideas connected with the figure of a flood which I do not wish wholly to pass by.

A flood penetrates. It does not merely flow over, but penetrates into every place where it comes. So sin has not merely rolled over the human heart with its polluting tide, but has penetrated into every faculty of body and soul. Into every look, every thought, every inclination, every imagination, every passion, and I may well say every principle of the human mind, has it deeply and thoroughly penetrated so as to defile and pollute them through their whole length and breadth. It has also filled our body with the seeds of sickness and disease, and carried mortality into every thread and fibre of our bodily frame.

But a flood comes down also with sweeping force. Such was the flood in Norfolk. Cattle, crops, fences, even houses were swept away by it. So sin, as an abounding flood, has swept away not only man's innocence, but all his strength; and still sweeps away all promises, vows, resolutions, attempts at reformation, and hurls them along in a tide of confusion.

But a flood, also, the more it is resisted the stronger it is. So with the flood of sin. It not only sweeps away all the dams and dykes which nature sets up, but is rendered more violent by opposition. This the apostle found: "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead." Ro 7:8 He tells us here how sin "took occasion by the commandment:" that is, the very law set up against it only made sin work the more strongly, putting as if fresh life into it; for "without the law sin was dead," that is, was not stirred up into living activity and power.

II. But now let us look at sin under another character, as a

despotic tyrant. "Sin hath reigned." Sin is not a passive thing in man's bosom. It is not contented to lie there as a stone, or even as subject to man's better thoughts. Nothing will satisfy it but the throne, nothing content it but to hold the reigns of government. The very nature of sin is to assert dominion over every faculty of man's body and mind. Nothing less than absolute authority over both will ever content the craving of this restless tyrant: The apostle therefore says "it hath reigned." How sin reigns in every worldly breast! What little check is put upon thoughts or words or works, of whatever kind they be, by natural conscience; or if it speak, what little heed is paid to its voice! Whatever sin bids natural men do, they do it eagerly. Sin leads them captive at its will. They have no will of their own, but obey eagerly, obey submissively, whatever sin commands. Sin has but to issue the word, and they do what it bids. Sin has but to lead, and they follow in the path Where it guides. Sin has but to show itself as king, and all knees bow before it; all hands are active to do its behests, and every foot is obedient to move in the directed path.

Nay, we ourselves, who have, we trust, the fear of God in our bosom, and know something of the Lord Jesus Christ by a living faith, have melancholy evidence that sin "hath reigned," if it do not reign now. What were we in a state of nature? Had not sin then absolute and uncontrolled dominion over us? I don't know that I was worse in my carnal days than other young men of my age or station in life. Indeed, I was in some measure restrained by moral and honourable considerations from being altogether given up to gross abominations, and had a not altogether undeserved character at college for a respect for morality and religion. But if ever I was restrained from sin, it was not from any thought about God. If ever I was kept from positive, absolute evil, it was not because I had any sense in my conscience that there was a God above who watched my actions, and who would one day bring me to His bar. I certainly had no conscience about evil thoughts, or light and foolish words, or a general course of pride and worldly

ambition. So I know from my own experience that where the fear of God is not, and the conscience is not made alive and tender, we sin eagerly, we sin greedily, we sin thoughtlessly, so far, at least, as regards any spiritual restraint. If we abstain from sin in outward action, it is from respect to our character, or from moral constraints, or from fear of man, or want of temptation and opportunity, or from not being entangled with bad companions, or from some apprehension of damaging our worldly prospects. God is not in our thoughts; nor do we abstain from evil either through a desire to please Him or a fear to offend Him. If, therefore, you have not been altogether abandoned to open crime, nor given way to every vile lust of your fallen nature; if your station in life, your sex, the warnings and example of careful parents, the restraints imposed by society upon general conduct, and other moral considerations have preserved you from outward evil, think not that sin has not reigned the less over you. It has reigned in your thoughts, in your inclinations, in your lusts, in your desires, in your pride, in your ambition, in your contempt of God and godliness, in your aspirations after earthly grandeur, your love of dress, fashion, and respectability, in the general neglect and contempt of everything gracious and spiritual, heavenly and holy; in building your hopes below the skies, roaming and revelling in a vain paradise of a gross and sensual imagination.

A man does not know himself who cannot look back through a long vista, sometimes of years, and see how in infancy, in boyhood, in youth, in manhood, up to the very time when grace set up a rival throne in his heart, sin reigned in him. He lived not to God, not for eternity, but for time. He lived not to please God, but to please himself or his fellow creatures. He lived not as one who had a soul to be saved or lost, but as one who had a body to feed and clothe, adorn and gratify, and a mind to please, I will even say, cultivate, but not to devote to the service of God and the good of His people. If this be not the reign of sin, tell me what is. Who is our King but he whom we obey? He is our Lord and master whom we serve;

and if we serve him willingly, the stronger master he is. Is not this the apostle's argument, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" Ro 6:16 To be the servant of sin, is to acknowledge sin as our king.

But does not sin even now to a great extent reign even in the breasts of those who desire to fear God? It does not, indeed, reign as before, for its power is broken and checked; but still it is ever seeking to regain its further dominion. How suitable then the precept, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" Ro 6:12; and how blessed the promise, "For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Ro 6:14

3. But sin is worse than this: it is a cruel executioner; for we read that "sin hath reigned unto death."

In one of the paintings in the tombs of Egypt—for they still retain their ancient pictures in all their freshness in that dry climate—there is represented an Egyptian monarch, of almost gigantic stature, supposed to be Sesostris, the Shishak of the Scriptures 1Ki 11:40, holding in his hand a drawn sabre, and pursuing a crowd of helpless victims, some of whom he is holding by the hair of the head, at the same time wielding the sabre to sever their necks asunder. Now this is just the picture which the Orientals drew of their despotic sovereigns, and much corresponds with a similar representation in the Nineveh sculptures, where a warrior king is represented in his chariot with his bow and arrow aiming at a crowd of wretched fugitives. Such is sin in our text; not merely a despotic monarch, as I have already brought him before your eyes, but himself a cruel executioner, for he reigns "unto death," and never spares a single victim the finishing blow. He is not satisfied with the life of his subjects; their obedience to his behests, their implicit acquiescence with all his demands: he craves their blood. He snuffs after it as a hungry tiger or famished wolf, for nothing can satisfy him but the death, the cruel death,

of all his subjects. For this sanguinary thirst, this unrelenting, murderous disposition and determination, I call him not only a despotic tyrant, but I style him a cruel executioner.

His reigning unto death carries with it a meaning beyond the mere separation of body and soul; for death in Scripture has three distinct meanings—death temporal, death spiritual, and death eternal. Unto each and all of these three kinds of death hath sin reigned and reigns still, for the sceptre is not yet struck out of his hand, nor the sword wrenched from his grasp.

i. See him, then, first reigning unto death temporal; for “by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that [margin, “in whom”] all have sinned.” This was the fulfilment of God’s word to Adam: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” What a reign is here; what slaughter, what devastation, what universal sway! Sin as universal as death, and death as universal as sin.

ii. But there is another death which is more fatal even than this. When sin entered into man’s heart and set up its throne there, it not only brought about the death of the body, but a worse death, even the death of the soul: that alienation from the life of God, that death in trespasses and sins, that moral and spiritual death which the Scriptures speak of, which has paralysed all man’s mental faculties Godward, which has utterly ruined the image of God in him, and cast him into a state of enmity and rebellion, misery and helplessness, out of which there could have been no escape but for the interposition of sovereign grace. I have read of a Spaniard who, when his enemy was in his power, promised he would spare his life if he would blaspheme Christ. The poor wretch obeyed, but no sooner had he spoken the fatal word than the Spaniard thrust his sword into his heart. “Now,” he cried, “this is revenge, for I have not only killed his body, but I have killed his soul.” So it is with sin; it not only killed man’s body, but at the same stroke it killed man’s soul.

iii. But there is still another death unto which sin hath reigned,

which this cruel executioner inflicts as the last purpose of his wicked mind, the last act of his destructive power,—the second death, eternal death, banishment, eternal banishment, from the presence of God, into those gloomy regions, where hope never comes; where there is for ever weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth; that abyss of woe, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. View, then, this cruel executioner bringing out his subjects in their long and gloomy files, and inflicting upon them these three kinds of death: death temporal, death spiritual, death eternal.

But what are we? What are we? Merely hearers of these said things? Merely spectators of the execution, witnessing it as if it were a summer holiday? No; we are all bound and chained together in the gloomy file, awaiting, as it were, our time and turn; for as sin hath reigned as our tyrant, so it is or will be our executioner. There is not a person here present within the reach of my voice in whom sin has not, in purpose, done all these three things. The sentence is passed; you are but awaiting its execution. You are all doomed to die; sin will execute upon you the death of your body; it has already brought about the death of your soul; and it will, but for sovereign mercy, bring about the death of body and soul in hell, where the impenitent and the unbelieving will for ever lie under the terrible wrath of the Almighty.

These things, however painfully they may strike our mind or chill our blood, we have to see and feel each one for himself; and this is the reason why I so strongly insist upon them, for I am well persuaded that no one will ever know or truly and really value the deliverance which God has provided from them, until he has seen and felt, and is deeply and inwardly persuaded of their reality. But I shall not leave you in this miserable case. God has not left you there, nor should I, standing up in His name, act consistently with my position or profession as His servant if I were to leave you there either. I shall therefore pass on to our second point, which is,

II. To bring before you grace as countervailing sin in three respective points. We will now, then, view grace as a superabounding tide; grace as a most benign and clement sovereign; and grace as the sovereign disposer and giver of eternal life.

It is in these glorious triumphs of sovereign grace that the main blessedness of the Gospel consists. Grace meets and vanquishes sin at every point. Is sin a dark, filthy polluting flood? Has it burst through the dyke of man's primitive innocency, utterly defaced the image of God in him, penetrated into every thread and fibre of body and soul, and abounded even to overflowing in every thought, word, and act of heart, lip, and life? Grace shall meet this abounding flood and superabound over it. Does sin reign with despotic sway over the elect of God, subjecting them to his sceptre and lording it over them with iron hand? Grace shall descend from heaven in the Person of the Son of God, shall wrest the sceptre from his grasp, and reign in his stead. Does sin, as a cruel executioner, deal against his hapless victims death and damnation with every blow? Grace shall beat the sword out of his hand and breathe life into his slaughtered victims—a life which shall never die. These points we have now to consider.

1. First, then, view grace as a superabounding tide. The Lord does not take the same means of clearing away the flood of sin as human skill devised and human hands achieved in the case of the Norfolk inundation,—by casting it back into the ocean from whence it came. The Norfolk dyke was after a few failures again reared up; the flood-gates again were fixed; the tall chimneys again smoked; the restless pumps again worked; and the sluggish Ouse again received into its patient bosom and bore into the sea the wide waste of waters which had wrought such destructive effects. But sin's dark, polluting tide could not be so thrown back, nor the dyke of man's native innocency be again set up. God takes, then, another way to repair the ruin which sin had wrought as a polluting flood. He brings a superabounding tide of free and sovereign grace which shall rise over sin, hide it from view, and completely bury it from

the eyes of infinite Justice. We read therefore in our text, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Sin rushed in upon the soul of man as an abounding flood; but grace comes in upon the soul of man as a superabounding tide—not merely to repair all the mischief which the flood has caused; not merely to remove the deluge and restore the fields to their former verdure; but to cover from view the flood itself by a superabounding tide of blood and love.

The superabounding of grace over the abounding of sin is a most blessed theme, and I may well falter in my tongue to set it forth. But let us endeavour to look at it in the light of revealed truth, and see whether it does not meet all our wants and all our woes.

Look, then, at grace in its sovereignty, as issuing out of the bosom of a three-one God. I showed you how sin issued out of the breast of Satan as the flood in Norfolk issued out of the bosom of the German sea. This is, you will remember, a scriptural, though it might seem to you a strange, figure: "And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood." Re 12:15 Now grace issues out of the bosom of a triune Jehovah to superabound over the flood of sin which rushed out of the mouth of Satan.

i. The first rising of this began in Jehovah's sovereign councils, and issued forth in the provisions of the eternal covenant "ordered in all things and sure." God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost—the three Persons of the glorious Godhead—contrived and entered with each other into an eternal covenant, in which every blessing was provided for the elect of God: a Mediator chosen and set up in the Person of God's dear Son; an atonement of sin determined on in His incarnation, sufferings, bloodshedding, and death; a justification devised in His perfect obedience to the law of God; and a salvation provided which should be "without money and without price" on the part of man, but perfectly effectual for every purpose of God. In this everlasting

covenant, then, we have the first rising of that superabounding grace which saves a guilty race by abounding over all the floods of sin.

ii. Now come down from heaven to earth. We have seen the fountain: now look at the stream. View the Son of God coming forth from the bosom of His Father, and assuming the flesh and blood of the children into union with His own divine Person. Then by the eye of faith trace Him through His life of obedience and suffering to the garden in which the agony began, and to the cross on which the agony was accomplished, and see in the atoning blood, and dying love of Jesus, the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of superabounding grace. See in the sufferings, the bloodshedding, and the sacrifice of the Holy Lamb of God the rising on earth of that tide of heavenly grace which hides, for ever hides, from the sight of eternal Justice the flood of sin, with all its filth and sludge and ooze, which had ruined the image of God in man, and has swept and is still sweeping myriads into an abyss of endless woe.

iii. But look a little further: come down to the appointed time and hour when the Lord was first pleased to arrest you on the broad road to hell, and see how it was sovereign grace which began that work upon your heart which will never die. This is the first springing up—"Spring up, O well"—this is the first springing up of the life of God in the soul which was given you in Christ Jesus before the world began. What else could have met and arrested the tide of sin which was bearing you along? How superabounding was grace over that dreadful flood of sin which was fast hurling you into destruction!

iv. Now come a little further on to the happy day when grace in its superabounding tide burst in upon your soul in a revelation of Christ, in a manifestation of His dying love, in some application of His atoning blood, or some view of Him as bearing your sins in His own body on the tree. Was not this visitation of mercy all of superabounding grace?

v. And now next take another view of this deep, rich, and

heavenly tide, and see how grace is daily superabounding over all the boundings of your sin, and guilt, and filth, and folly; how it heals backslidings, pardons iniquities, covers the naked soul with a robe of righteousness, washes out the most damning spots, and brings the vanquished rebel to the feet of Christ, to admire and adore the mysteries of His dying love. Can we speak too highly of superabounding grace? I will say for myself there is not in the whole book of God a text I seem to love more than, or so much as this; nor is there a day scarcely in my soul's experience when I have not reason to make mention of it before the Lord, confessing the abounding of my sin and looking to Him for the superabounding of His grace. It is a passage of Scripture very dear to my heart, for it so unfolds two things which I have had so long to learn in daily experience: the abounding of sin in my carnal mind, and the superabounding of grace in the Person and work of the Son of God, in which alone I can have any well grounded hope.

But let us bear in mind that grace has to superabound over the boundings of sin, not only in covering it from the eyes of God as with an overwhelming tide of love and blood, but also as a subduing, restraining stream. There is a most gracious promise in the word of truth, which should be as dear to us as any of those promises which speak of pardoned sin. "He will subdue our iniquities;" and observe the connection between the pardon of sin and the subduing of it, for it adds, "And Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Mic 7:19 It is not the law but the gospel to which is attached the blessing of sin restrained as well as of sin pardoned. "Sin shall not have dominion over you." Why not? "For ye are not under the law but under grace." Ro 6:14 I showed you before that the law only stirred up sin, as a dam thrown across a flood makes it rise the higher. "Without the law," says the apostle, "sin was dead;" and again, "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." Ro 7:5 But the glory of grace is that whilst it pardons sin, it also subdues it, and, swelling over its

restless tide, holds it down in its bed as by an overwhelming wave.

2. But grace is also represented in our text as a most benign and clement monarch. "Sin hath reigned unto death." Shall grace then leave the sceptre in the hand of sin? Shall grace let sin reign over the people of God as it has reigned before, and maintain its usurped dominion? What hereditary right has sin to reign over the family of God? No more right than Pharaoh had to reign over the children of Israel. Are they not redeemed by the blood of the Lamb? Is sin therefore ever to hold them fast in its iron chain? No; grace shall come in all the majesty wherewith God has clothed her princely form, shall wrest the sceptre out of the cruel tyrant's hands, break it asunder, dethrone him, and take her seat upon the heart over which sin has ruled with such daring and despotic sway. O how cruelly has sin reigned in the heart of man! Hurrying him on to every, vile abomination, plunging him into every depth of misery and crime, and then hurling him impenitent and unbelieving into an abyss of endless misery!

But sin is not easily dethroned. It will struggle for power to its latest gasp; will seek every opportunity to recover its authority, and will not let the prisoner go until again and again it has made the iron enter into his very soul, and plunged him sometimes almost into the depths of despair. But God's promises are sure; they are all "Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus." Grace shall reign through righteousness unto eternal life; and those in whom grace reigns shall themselves reign also: "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Christ Jesus." Ro 5:17 Is not Christ stronger than Satan? Is not His righteousness greater and of more avail than all man's disobedience? Is not "the grace of God and the gift of grace" beyond the offence of Adam and all its consequences? As the apostle argues, "But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as

it was by one that sinned, so is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification." Ro 5:15,16 Blessed conclusion to which he brings us! "Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Ro 5:18,19

This opens a way for the reign of sovereign grace. The removal of sin by the blood of the Lamb and the gift of righteousness by the obedience of the Son of God, lay open a royal road in which grace as a victorious sovereign comes in the fulness of her triumph. As she thus comes, she sweetly guides, softly controls, and reigns and rules in the bosom, not by law but by gospel, not by threats and terrors, but by the greatest and best of all authority, the authority of love. Grace by her gentle sway, constrains the thoughts, enlarges and ennoble the affections, makes obedience sweet, and thus endears the precept as well as the promise. Grace reigns by bringing about submission to God's will under all trying dispensations, by planting the fear of God deep in the heart, making the conscience alive and tender; by producing brokenness and contrition of spirit; by showing the exceeding sinfulness of sin; and by raising up earnest desires and prayers that it may never be permitted to reign in us and over us as it has reigned before. This is the reign of grace which you must feel and know for yourself as well as its superabounding tide of pardoning love. Has not sin reigned over you? Have you not eagerly, greedily, in times past followed all its behests, given way to every vile lust and base inclination, and been led captive by it at its will? If, then, the reigning yoke of sin is to be shaken off, and you are to be the loyal subject of sovereign grace, in a similar way, you will have to listen to its inward admonitions, to yield to its subduing restraints, and to be as plainly and evidently under the dominion of grace as you have been under the dominion of sin.

How strongly does the apostle urge this, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." Ro 6:12,13 To be made free from sin in its reigning power and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, is the distinguishing mark of the people of God. We cannot serve sin and God too. "His servants we are to whom we obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness." "To be made free from sin and to become servants to God," will here give us "fruit unto holiness," and hereafter "the end everlasting life." Ro 6:22 The reign of grace must be as conspicuous as the reign of sin, or it may well be asked, "Whose servants are ye?"

But this is the mercy for mourning saints who are sighing and groaning under a body of sin and death, that God has decreed that grace not only may reign, but that it must reign. Were it left to us, we could no more rescue ourselves from the dominion of sin than the children of Israel could deliver themselves from the house of Egyptian bondage. But they sighed and groaned by reason of the bondage, and their cry came up unto God. He had respect unto His covenant, and looked upon them and delivered them. Ex 2:23,25 So God has determined on behalf of His people that sin shall not be their eternal ruin; that it shall not plunge them into crime after crime until it casts them at last into the gulf of endless woe, but that grace "shall reign through righteousness unto eternal life."

But it must reign here as well as hereafter, for by its reign here its eternal triumph is secured. It must then subdue our proud hearts, and never cease to sway its peaceful sceptre over them until it has secured in them absolute and unconditional victory. Now this is what every sincere child of God most earnestly longs to feel and realise. He longs to embrace Jesus and be embraced by Him in the arms of love and affection. As the hymn says,

Yet now, subdued by sovereign grace,

My spirit longs for Thy embrace.

He hates sin, though it daily, hourly, momentarily works in him, and is ever seeking to regain its former mastery; he abhors that cruel tyrant who set him to do his vilest drudgery, deceived and deluded him by a thousand lying promises, dragged him again and again into captivity, and but for sovereign grace would have sealed his eternal destruction. Subdued by the sceptre of mercy, he longs for the dominion of grace over every faculty of his soul and every member of his body. "O," he says, "let grace reign and rule in my breast; let it not suffer any sin to have dominion over me; let it tame every unruly desire, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Thus, he who truly fears God looks to grace, and to grace only, not merely to save but to sanctify; not only to pardon sin but to subdue it; not only to secure him an inheritance among the saints in light, but to make him meet for it.

3. But there is one feature more in the character of sovereign, distinguishing grace brought before us in our text which I have still to explain, as countervailing the mighty power of sin. From the words, reigning "unto death," I took occasion to describe sin as a cruel executioner, whom nothing could satisfy but the death of his victims. In that description we saw how sin, in establishing its reign to the utmost over fallen man, carried out its unrelenting cruelty in sentencing him to three kinds of death,—death temporal, death spiritual, and death eternal. Now grace must thoroughly repeal this three-fold sentence, and perfectly undo all that sin has done, or it would not be all-reigning, all-conquering grace. Let us see whether its triumphs extend thus far.

i. Does it, for instance, undo what sin has done by abolishing death temporal? Who can say so as long as we have such melancholy proof of the contrary in the sound of every passing bell, in the sight of every yawning grave, every widow's wail, and every orphan's tears? Yet, in spite of all these sounds and sighs of woe, these daily spectacles of mortality, grace does triumph in abolishing death as regards the people of God. Is not this the

testimony of the Scripture? Do we not read that the grace which was “given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,” is now “made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel?” 2Ti 1:9,10 But how can it have abolished death if death still reign? We may thus explain it. Death remains, but its name and nature are changed, for though the saint dies, it is not death to him—it is but sleep.

The word death, therefore, is not often made use of in the New Testament as expressing the decease of the saints. Of Stephen we read, for instance, “And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” Ac 7:60 The Holy Ghost would not allow that Stephen died; He therefore changed the word death into sleep. So we are bidden “not to sorrow for them which are asleep even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” 1Th 4:14 “We shall not all sleep,” that is, die, says the apostle, “but we shall all be changed.” 1Co 15:51 In this way death itself to the saint of God is turned into sleep. It has not only lost its sting and is robbed of its victory, but has lost also its name and its nature; so that when the saint, after a life of faith and suffering, is at last laid down in his grave, it is but as the laying of a babe in the cradle by its watchful mother, that it may rest in sleep till the time of its waking. The resurrection morn will come, the trumpet will sound, “the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.” 1Th 4:16 Then the sleeping dust will be raised—not as it was deposited in the tomb in corruption, in dishonour, and weakness, but in incorruption, in glory, and power, meet companion for an immortal soul, and designed to dwell for ever with Christ in indissoluble union in mansions of bliss. Does not grace triumph even here, and take the axe of death out of the hand of the executioner?

ii. But now view the triumph of grace over death spiritual. Has

not grace reigned over it already in quickening the soul dead in sin? Does not grace give in regeneration a spiritual life, restore the image of God in man so marred and defaced, make the saint of God a new creature in Christ, and thus thoroughly undo that death in sin, that alienation from the life of God which sin executed upon us in the fall? Indeed, without the communication of spiritual life, no other gift of God would be of any avail; for without it there could be no union with Christ, for “he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit;” and without it there could be no life eternal, for this consists in the spiritual knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.

iii. But now view death eternal, the awful separation from the presence of God, everlasting banishment into the blackness of darkness for ever. Has not grace met and defeated sin in this field also? There is no second death for the saint of God; for him there is no worm that dieth not, and fire that is not quenched. When he dies he only rises to take possession of that “eternal life” unto which grace must reign.

Our text declares, blessed be God, that grace must “reign unto eternal life;” so that unless grace bring the saint of God through all his troubles and sorrows into the enjoyment of eternal life, it would not be reigning grace, triumphant grace, all-conquering grace, but would fail just where and when it was most needed. This is its chief beauty, this its grand and glorious blessedness, this its distinguishing feature, that it reigns unto “eternal life.”

Can we then think too well, can I speak too highly, can I set forth too unreservedly grace like this? Sin, as a destructive tide, stemmed back; sin, as a despotic tyrant, dethroned; sin, as a cruel executioner, met front to front on the battle field by the Captain of our salvation, defeated at every point, his sword wrung from his grasp, and triumphed over unto life eternal!

III. But I must now just drop a few words upon our last point, on which I shall be brief. All these blessings of sovereign grace are “through righteousness,” and “by Christ Jesus our Lord.” Both

these points I must speak unto, and I wish that time allowed me to enter into them more fully, for they are full of grace and glory.

The reign of grace is “through righteousness,” and this in several senses.

1. First, all that grace is, has, and does, ever is and ever must be in perfect harmony with the righteousness of God, viewed as being of purer eyes than to behold evil, and as One who cannot look upon iniquity. If any one of God’s attributes were to suffer any diminution or infringement, He would cease to be unchanging, unchangeable in all His glorious perfections. We must ever, therefore, bear in mind that in all that God does, He is scrupulously just. The Judge of the whole earth must do right. Grace, therefore, must be in perfect harmony with His eternal and infinite justice. But how can this be? Must not the justice of God suffer if the sinner be unpunished? No. Why? Because the Son of God has obeyed the law which we have broken—obeyed it as we never could have done, and has thus preserved and guarded God’s righteousness from suffering the least infringement, nay, rather, has invested His very justice with a new, brighter, and more blessed character. Thus by the obedience of His dear Son, God can now be “just and yet the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Ro 3:26. “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” Ro 5:19 In this sense, grace reigns, “through righteousness,” riding as it were in the very chariot of God’s justice, and casting rays of divine glory upon that eternal righteousness in which He shines forth with such resplendent majesty and holiness.

2. But look now at the words “through righteousness,” as admitting another and equally scriptural sense. There is a righteousness which the Scripture calls “the righteousness of God,” meaning thereby, not the intrinsic righteousness and eternal justice of God as infinitely pure and holy, but his way of saving a sinner through the obedience of His dear Son. In this sense, the apostle uses the expression, “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for ‘there is no difference.’” In this passage “the righteousness of God” means the way which God takes of saving sinners through Christ’s righteousness, as is evident from what follows, that “there is no difference” between one saved sinner and another, either as regards sin or justification from sin, “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” so that there is no difference there; and all “are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:” so that there is no difference there. Through this righteousness, then, grace superabounds over the abounding of sin, and reigns, gloriously and triumphantly reigns, unto eternal life. Grace, therefore, flows, not as a wild waste of waters over the world, without any banks to restrain and guide its course, but it flows “through righteousness.” Thus it flows in perfect harmony with every righteous attribute of God; one bank is His eternal holiness, the other is His infinite justice; the channel between them, so to speak, is the perfect obedience of His righteous Son. Through this channel, then, the superabounding tide of grace flows; and thus not only the mercy of God is declared, but also His righteousness, as the apostle speaks, “To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Ro 3:21,22,26

3. “Through righteousness” also does grace reign as regards its administration, for Christ’s sceptre is a righteous sceptre. So God Himself calls it when He addressed him in ancient prophecy, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre.” Ps 45:6 Thus, also, we read, “Behold a king shall reign in righteousness” Isa 32:1; and of Him it is declared that “he shall judge thy people with righteousness and thy poor with judgment.” Ps 72:2

4. But there is still another sense in which we may take the words. If grace superabound over sin and wrest the sceptre out of its hand, it is to bring forth those “fruits of righteousness which

are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God.” Php 1:11 Grace never leads to sin, but to holiness. The superabounding tide of grace fertilises the soil wherever it comes; for like the river Nile, it carries fertility in its very waters, and manifests itself by the crops of every good word and work which it produces. Its reign is one of beneficence, of doing good to the bodies and souls of men; and thus as it sits enthroned in the believing heart, it manifests its authority by constraining its happy subject to live to the honour and glory of God.

But now a few words upon that expression which seems so fully and blessedly to crown the whole, “by Jesus Christ our Lord.” It is all by Jesus Christ. All grace, first and last, is in Him and by Him; for “it hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell;” therefore a fulness of grace, for “of His fulness have we all received, and grace for grace.” No human merit, no creature works, no natural righteousness have place here. It is a pure temple of grace. No sound therefore “of hammer or axe or any tool of iron is to be heard” in this temple while it is in building. 1Ki 6:7 Like the pure river of water of life which John saw proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, it is “clear as crystal”—unsullied, unclouded, unpolluted by human merit or demerit.

And as it is “by Jesus Christ,” so it is by Him as “our Lord.” Is He not worthy of the name? Has he not a right to all we are and have? Is He not “our Lord,” to whom we owe our heart’s best obedience? “Our Lord,” before whose footstool we reverently bow; “our Lord,” at whose feet we humbly lie; “our Lord,” to whom we look to reign in us and over us by His sovereign grace; “our Lord,” of whom and to whom we may well say, “O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.” Isa 26:13

I leave what I have said to your consideration. Be assured it is well worthy of your deepest thought and most careful meditation. But as “power belongeth wholly unto God,” I will now only add, may the Lord, the Spirit, if it be His will, seal what I have spoken this

morning with His own unction upon your heart and conscience!

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Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord’s Day Morning,

Oct. 26, 1862

“For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.”

Mark 9:49, 50

In endeavouring to ascertain the mind and meaning of the blessed Spirit in the word of truth, it is very desirable, and in some cases absolutely indispensable, to consider what is commonly called the context; that is, what precedes and what follows the text. For want of attending to this rule, men have sometimes sadly misunderstood and misapplied the word of God. To explain more clearly my meaning, I will give you two instances of this misapplication. Writing to the Corinthians, the Apostle says, “Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.” (2 Cor. 12:16.) I have sometimes heard that passage interpreted as if the apostle really meant that he was crafty, and that he had actually caught them with guile; from which this most unwarrantable inference has been drawn that craft in religion is occasionally allowable, so that if you cannot catch people by fair means you may do it by foul. Now nothing can be further than such a meaning or such an inference from the mind of the Spirit, and nothing more contrary both to the Spirit and practice of the apostle. The words that he there uses are not meant to express his own spirit or conduct, but are put by him into the mouth of an objector. His object in writing as he does to the Corinthians in that and the preceding chapter was to show how disinterested he had been in all his conduct towards them; that he neither had nor would be “burdensome

to them,” for he sought not theirs, but them, not their gifts, but their graces, not their money but their souls. But he introduces an objector. Well, be it so, I did not burden you. Let it be granted that I acted so far, disinterestedly. But was there no ulterior object in all this, no secret craft in all my apparent disinterestedness so as to catch you by guile, as if I would do by another what I would not do myself? This objection he at once answers: “Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?” (2 Cor. 12:17, 18.) By thus appealing to the conduct of Titus and a brother he repels the accusation of having caught them by guile, for he would not craftily employ others to do what he would not do openly himself. When we thus look at the context, we see in a moment how wrong is the interpretation that Paul actually used craft, and caught the Corinthians with guile and deception.

Now let me give you another instance of a similar misinterpretation of a passage from not considering the context. The apostle, writing to the Corinthians, says, “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.” (1 Cor 10:32.) I have heard this passage applied to the lukewarm, neutral ministry of the day, as if it meant that a man might so preach as to give offence “neither to Jew nor Gentile, nor to the church of God,” and that such preaching as offends nobody was by it condemned as destitute of all point and all faithfulness. Now, if we look at the context, we shall see that the apostle is not speaking about preaching at all, but of Christian walk and conduct, especially in eating or not eating meats offered to idols. He therefore says, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence;” put not a stumbling block in the way of anyone; “neither to the Jews”—put no stumbling block in their way; “nor to the Gentiles”—put no stumbling block in their way; “nor to the church of God”—put no stumbling block in its way. I might name other instances, but I have said enough to

show how from not taking a view of the context, men may totally misunderstand and sadly misapply the word of truth.

But you may say, perhaps, “You are talking about connection, but what connection has all this with the words of your text?” I will show you. Did not the text strike you, when I gave it out, as having something strange and mysterious in it? Being “salted with fire,” and the sacrifice being “salted with salt”—was there not something to you in the very sound of the words that appeared extraordinary and difficult of comprehension? Well, perhaps it may help us to understand the meaning of this difficult and mysterious text if we look shortly at the context, trace the connection, so as to gather up some consistent idea of our Lord’s meaning, for he speaks here. And it will be our wisdom and mercy if we can not only understand but give heed to his words of grace and truth, for surely no man ever spake like this man.

In the preceding verses, then, the Lord had been speaking of matters of offence, that is, stumbling blocks, over which we might fall into evil: “And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched.” (Mark 9:43.) The hand here is used typically and figuratively of an instrument of evil, whether of violence, or theft, or any other sin which may be perpetrated by it. If, then, says the Lord, thy hand be to thee a minister of evil, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched. The Lord does not mean that we are to lay our hand literally down upon a block or chop it off with axe or hatchet; but that we are to do that violence to our sins, to our inclinations, to our tempers, and to our lusts, as we should do literally to our hand if we were to cut it off at a stroke. So, “if thy foot offend thee,” be to thee a cause of stumbling—and the foot here signifies those deviations from the straight and narrow path, whether into unbelief or into error, or any other departure from the way of truth and righteousness to which we are prone—”if

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thy foot offend thee," do what? "Cut it off." Do to it as to the hand: "It is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched." Then comes the solemn iteration, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." "And if thine eye"—that inlet to evil, whether to covetousness, as in the case of Achan, or sinful lusts, as in the case of David;—if thine eye cause thee to offend, pluck it out—not literally. If you could tear it out and trample it under foot, as so much "vile jelly," as one of our poets calls it, that would not pluck out the lust which is seated far beyond our reach, and would still exist in all its vigour, making to itself an eye of imagination when the eye of sense was gone. No, the Lord does not bid us injure the eye, which can read the word of truth and guide us upon errands of mercy and love, as well as be an inlet to evil. He would have us spare the eye, but not spare the lust which is in the eye, but do it as much violence as you would do to the literal eye if you tore it from the socket. "It is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire." Then again comes for the third time that solemn iteration, which someone has well called "an emphasis of terror:" "Where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." What worm but the worm of a guilty conscience that ever feeds upon the never-dying soul? What fire but the eternal fire of God's displeasure, which no remorse will ever quench? Now come the words of our text: "For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt." What is the connection between these words and those which I have just been explaining? I believe this. The worm is a type of corruption, as feeding upon it; the fire is a representation of the anger of God, who is a consuming fire. From this corruption you must be preserved by salt; from this fire you must be delivered by being salted with fire. If you die in your sins, unsalted, unseasoned, the undying worm of remorse, bred from your corruptions, will ever gnaw your guilty conscience. Unless salted with fire, you will not be preserved from that corruption which is in the world

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through lust, and which, if not delivered from it, would plunge body and soul into the lake of fire.

But not only must you be salted, but your sacrifices also. Every sacrifice, to be acceptable with God, must be salted with salt. Following up this connection, our Lord then says, "Salt is good:" but he adds a solemn caveat that even when salted the salt may not be permanent; and then where is the remedy? "If the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it?" He then closes the whole with a gracious exhortation: "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."

In endeavouring to open up the mind and meaning of our blessed Lord here, as I have thus simply sketched it, I shall,

I.—First, show you, from his own words, the goodness of salt. "Salt is good," and in what that goodness consists.

II.—Secondly, the salting of the sacrificer: "Every one shall be salted with fire."

III.—Thirdly, the salting of the sacrifice: "Every sacrifice shall be salted with salt."

IV.—Fourthly, the case assumed: "If the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it?"

V.—Lastly, the exhortation: "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."

I.—The goodness of salt: "Salt is good." How is salt good? Literally and figuratively, naturally and spiritually. We will look at both the cases in which we have assumed the goodness of salt.

i. Why is salt good literally? What is the salient point, the most prominent feature of its goodness? It is an efficient preservative from corruption. There is a tendency in everything here below to decay. Life, whether vegetable or animal, is ever tending towards death. It seems like a law impressed upon every living thing, that as soon as born it hastens to die; and with death immediately begins corruption. In spring, how green the leaf! but when death touches the stalk, and it drops from the autumnal bough, how soon reduced to rottenness and dust! How active and energetic

are body and soul of man in a state of health and strength. But let death strike the fatal dart, how corruption at once lays hold of the human frame, and the stouter and stronger the body the quicker and more immediate its effects. Thus there is a natural tendency to corruption in everything here below, for nothing seems to escape the gnawing tooth of time. Dissolution, decay, and corruption press hard upon life, and unceasingly dog its every footstep. But there is an antidote against corruption, and that is salt. To illustrate this, let me bring before you two or three familiar instances:—

1. First cast your eyes over that wide-spread ocean, which covers perhaps nearly three-fourths of this globe. What would it be without salt? A seething mass of corruption. But God has well and thoroughly salted it, and has thus preserved it from being what else it would be—a mass of putrid water, spreading desolation over the earth.

2. Our very bodies as now constituted must have salt in them, or even life itself would not keep them from corruption. “Salt in our bodies?” say you; “what do you mean by that? Have we salt in our flesh?” Let me give you two simple proofs of it. When the harvestman is engaged in the field, reaping the corn or loading the wain, how salty are the drops of sweat which fall like so many beads from his manly brow! When the poor widow sits beside her husband’s corpse, how briny the tears that roll down her cheek! Are these not plain evidences that we must have salt in our bodies, salt in our blood, or why are sweat and tears so salty which are formed out of the blood? Yes, the very salt in our bodies, which he who made us has put into us, keeps them from corruption.

3. But I will give you one more proof of which perhaps you have never heard. There was a punishment formerly inflicted upon criminals in Holland of this nature. When condemned to death, the prisoner was taken back to his cell, and debarred of all salt to his food. Not a single grain was allowed to enter into anything which he ate or drank. What was the consequence? In a short time worms bred in his inside, and he miserably perished by a slow and

lingering death, every part of his body full of corruption.

4. But take the familiar instance of preserving meat. Is not that preserved from corruption by salt? Salted meat is familiar to us all as arrested from corruption by the entrance of salt into every part and pore.

Now look at this in a spiritual sense. Unless we have something rubbed as it were into us to preserve the soul from corruption, will it not perish in its lusts, and be thus for ever unfit to enter into the glorious presence of a holy God? How good, then, must salt be in a spiritual sense to preserve our souls from becoming here and hereafter a loathsome mass of corruption and putrefaction! I shall show you by and by how the Lord uses fire instead of salt thus to save and purify the soul. But take this first as the leading idea of salt, that it is an antidote against corruption. I may observe here that in a figure it is always well to catch the leading idea, as that not only enables us to see the mind and meaning of the Spirit prominently therein, but casts also a ray of light on secondary and subsidiary meanings.

ii. But salt is good in another sense: it gives savour and flavour to our daily food. Job asks, “Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?” (Job. 6:6.) From the banquet of kings to the poor widow’s cold potato, salt is on the table: food would be flavourless without it. In the interior of Africa salt is extremely scarce—so scarce that you may almost buy a slave for a handful of it. Children there will run for miles after the traveller for a few grains of salt, which if they get they will suck with as much relish as children here the richest confections made from sugar. In this sense, perhaps, the Lord said to his disciples, “Ye are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13), meaning thereby that by them was the earth not only preserved from corruption, but even by their presence upon it was made to have flavour and savour before God, and thus be acceptable before him.

iii. But take another idea of the figure, closely indeed allied to the first, viz., health. I have shown you before that the presence

of salt in our bodies is indispensable to a state of health, and that the absence of it engenders disease and death. What salt is to the body that grace is to the soul. "Have salt in yourselves," the Lord says in our text, that is, "have the grace of God in your hearts"; for without this there is neither life nor health. So holy John, writing to his well-beloved Gaius, breathes for him this prayer: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." (3 John 2.) But without grace there can be neither soul health nor soul prosperity.

iv. But take now another meaning of the emblem, which is more especially a Scriptural one, that of perpetuity. We read in the Scripture sometimes of a "covenant of salt." "Ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons, by a "covenant of salt?" (2 Chron. 13:5.) And again, "All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the Lord, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute forever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord unto thee and to thy seed with thee." (Numbers 18:19.) A covenant of salt signifies a covenant which never can be broken, for as salt is a natural preservation from corruption, it became an emblem of perpetuity and lasting endurance.

v. But I must name one more meaning of the figure salt. It is an emblem of friendship and peace. As such, even to this day in Oriental climes, salt becomes, when eaten between two parties, a token of friendship; and I understand that the wild Arab will never plunder or ill use the traveller with whom he has eaten salt. I have read a remarkable anecdote to illustrate this. A robber once broke into the palace of a prince, and having collected a very large booty was on the point of carrying it away, when he struck his foot against something on the ground. Stooping in the dark to touch it, and then tasting his fingers, he found it was a lump of salt. He was so struck with having eaten salt in the house of his victim, that at once he fled away, leaving all his booty behind. Salt thus

being an emblem of peace, our Lord said in the text, "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."

II.—Now let us carry these leading ideas of salt into that part of our subject which we proposed to consider in the second place; I mean the salting of the sacrificer; "Every one shall be salted with fire."

i. I showed you in my introduction, that there must be an operation of God's grace upon our heart to preserve us from the fire that is not quenched, and that this was by salting the soul with fire; the fire being used in the hands of the Spirit to produce that spiritual effect which I have explained to you salt sets forth in emblem and figure. The soul has to be preserved from corruption—from the worm that dieth not; to have savour and flavour before the Lord; to be made and kept healthy and prosperous; to enjoy a perpetuity of God's favour; and to be blessed with his friendship and peace. Now that these blessings may be brought about, it must be salted and that by fire. Let us now then view the various ways, for there are more than one, by which it is thus salted.

1. There is, for instance, the law, which the Scripture calls a fiery law. "The Lord came from Sinai; from his right hand went a fiery law for them." (Deut. 23:2.) We know that when it was given, Mount Sinai "was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire" (Exodus 19:18); and again, "And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire." (Deut. 4:12.) But why is it called "a fiery law?" Because therein is manifested the eternal indignation of God, who is a consuming fire. But it is a fiery law, not only in its first manifestation, but in its application to the conscience, for it burns up and consumes all creature righteousness, the wood, hay, and stubble of all human merit. But it also sets fire to our corruptions, making them blaze up and burn with greater strength and fury, as the apostle found: "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sin, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death." "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner

of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.” (Rom. 7:5, 8.) For these three reasons, its manifestation, its application, and its conflagration, the law may well be called “a fiery law.”

But the question may arise, How is the soul salted by the law? In this way. By its application it is preserved from perishing in the corruption of sin or the corruption of self-righteousness, for the fire it kindles acts in the soul as salt does literally in the body, or as used to preserve meats from spoiling. It delivers the soul from the corruptions of the world; it burns up all creature righteousness, wisdom, and strength, and thus instrumentally preserves it from sinking under the wrath of God, either as laden with all the guilt and weight of a nature corrupt to the very core, or as clothed in a righteousness which he can never accept, as stained and dyed with all our native filth and folly. The law indeed does not sanctify the heart nor purge the conscience, but instrumentally it salts the soul from perishing in its corruptions. It also gives savour and flavour to a man’s prayers and conversation; communicates a healthy appetite for the food of the gospel; is a needful preliminary for a knowledge of the everlasting covenant; and leads the way into a state of peace and friendship with God.

2. But take another way in which the sacrificer is salted with fire. There is the fiery trial of which Peter speaks: “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.” (1 Pet. 5:12.) The “fiery trial,” then, is not a strange thing which happens only to a few of the Lord’s family, but is more or less the appointed lot of all. Do we not hear the Lord saying to his Zion: “I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction?” (Isa. 48:10.) All, then, that are chosen must pass through the furnace of affliction, and all know experimentally the fiery trial, for by it they are made “partakers of Christ’s sufferings.” But this is indispensable in order to be partakers of his glory. “If so be that we suffer with him that we may be also glorified together.” (Rom. 8:17.) Thus they suffer with him, “that when his glory shall be revealed they may be glad also

with exceeding joy.” But this suffering with and for Christ in the furnace of affliction salts the soul; preserves it from corruption; communicates health; gives it savour and flavour; is a token of interest in the everlasting covenant: and is a seal of friendship and peace with God.

3. But there is another fire with which you must be salted—the fire of temptation. Temptation is to the corruptions of the heart what fire is to stubble. Sin lies quiet in our carnal mind till temptation comes to set it on fire. There is not a single sin ever uttered by the lips or perpetrated by the hand of man which does not lie deeply hidden in the recesses of our fallen nature; but they do not stir into activity until temptation draws them forth. Well then did the Lord bid his disciples pray: “Lead us not into temptation” (Matt. 6:13); and again, “Pray that ye enter not into temptation” (Luke 22:40); for temptation is to our corrupt nature as the spark to gunpowder. Have you not found this sad truth, how easily by it are the corruptions of our wretched heart on fire, in enmity, rebellion, unbelief, infidelity, and every kind of daring and dreadful iniquity which I shall forbear to name?

But the question may well arise, How can this fire of temptation salt the sacrificer? Why, in temptation we learn what sin is, its dreadful nature, its aggravated character, its fearful workings, its mad, its desperate upheavings against the Majesty of heaven, and what we are or should be were we left wholly in its hands. The pungent salt of temptation enters into the smarting pores of our conscience, salting it as with fire, and making it sore and tender. By the workings of this tender conscience under temptation we are delivered from becoming a prey to corruption either of sin or of self-righteousness; life and power are put into our prayers; savour and flavour into our words and works; and a clear separation made between faith and unbelief—the strength of the creature and the strength of the Lord—what we are by nature and what we are by grace.

4. But the word of God also is compared to fire. “Is not my word

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like as a fire, saith the Lord?" (Jer. 23:29.) So the Lord speaking of his word which he would send forth after his resurrection, says, "I am come to send fire on the earth, and what will I if it be already kindled?" The word of the Lord is compared to fire, as being quick and piercing, penetrating into men's hearts and consciences. It is therefore said by the apostle to be "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow." (Heb. 4:12.) Of Joseph also when in prison we read that "the word of the Lord tried him." (Psa. 105:19.) The word of truth when applied to the heart with divine power tries the family of God, whether they be right or wrong, whether they possess the fear of God or not. It is thus sometimes as "a burning fire shut up in their bones" (Jer. 20:9), salting them to the very depth of their conscience, and trying every part of the experience to the very quick. But by this fire the child of God is well salted, for by it he is preserved from corruption in doctrine, experience, lip, or life. By it also he is made acceptable to the family of God, for there is in his conversation a savour and a flavour which a salting fire alone can communicate. By it, too, health is communicated, for the word of salvation brings with it health and cure; and by the power of the word in the promises he also enters into the blessedness of a covenant of salt, and finds peace and friendship with God.

5. But there is one more fire of which I must speak, as salting the sacrificer, and that is the most blessed salt which can enter into his soul—the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. This comes down from heaven into the soul, as the fire fell upon the brazen altar, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices when Solomon dedicated the temple (2 Chron. 7:1); or as the blessed Spirit came down upon the apostles when they were baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire on the day of Pentecost. No fire that salts the soul can be compared to this for power and efficacy, for it inflames every holy, tender, and gracious affection, lifts up the heart to where Jesus sits at the right hand of God, and,

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whilst it enkindles every affectionate desire of the bosom, burns as in a holy flame of jealousy against everything that God abhors. Thus the apostle, speaking of the effects of godly sorrow for sin, says, "Yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge" it wrought in you. (2 Cor. 7:11.) Does not this fire of love and sorrow, love to God and sorrow for sin, well salt the child of grace? Speaking of the outcast babe in Ezekiel, the Lord says, "Thou wast not salted at all." No, for "none eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee." (Ezekiel 16:4,5.) But the Lord of his infinite grace and boundless compassion, salts the babe of grace when he spreads his skirt over it.

We have seen, then, how by these different fires the child of God is salted, and we have also seen how by means of them he is preserved from the corruption that is in the world through lust; from the corruption of his own hypocritical heart; and from corruption in doctrine, in experience, and in practice: for none of these corruptions can live in the fire either of wrath or love. For "the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:13): and as nothing carnal, hypocritical, or self-righteous can stand the flame, the believer comes out of them all like gold tried in the fire—his dross and tin purged away "by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning." (Isai. 4:4.)

ii. But I showed you also that salt gave savour and favour to the most tasteless food; in fact, that food could not be tasty or relishable without it. So it is with God's people: it is by the fire with which they are salted that there is a savour and flavour communicated to them, which cannot be obtained by any other means. What substitute can you find for salt to make your food wholesome and savoury? What substitute can you find for grace, especially grace tried in the fire, to flavour your soul and make it savoury to God and man? I shall show you this more at large when I come to the salting of the sacrifice. I am now showing the salting of the sacrificer; for we are to offer ourselves living sacrifices unto God as well as our offerings, and both we and they are only acceptable

as salted with this salt, to give us savour and flavour at his altar.

iii. But salt, I before intimated, was an emblem of a covenant, and that one of perpetual endurance. The Lord has made a covenant with his dear Son on behalf of this people, and this is a covenant of perpetuity, never to be broken, but to endure for ever and ever. But this covenant has “bonds” into which we are to be brought. “And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.” (Ezek. 20:37.) This is eating the king’s salt, or being “salted with the salt of the palace” (Ezra 4:14); for when in the East parties ate salt together, it was a token of a covenant between them. Thus in India it was a common phrase among the Sepoys, or soldiers of the old Indian army, that “they had eaten the Company’s salt,” and were thus bound to be faithful to their engagements. When, then, we taste the fire we are salted with the King’s salt, and are thus brought into the bond of the covenant.

iv. But this covenant is also a covenant of peace. “My covenant with him was of life and peace” (Matt. 2:5); and thus, by eating the salt of the covenant, he is brought into a state of reconciliation, by which he obtains peace and amity with God. We read of “the blood of the everlasting covenant,” and this covenant is a covenant of peace; for peace is the fruit of it, peace the substance of it, and peace the blessed effect of it.

III.—But now, to come to our next point, not only is the sacrificer to be salted with fire, but the sacrifice also is to be salted with salt. Are not these the Lord’s own words, “For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt?” There is an allusion here to the command of God given by Moses, that with all their offering they should offer salt. (Lev. 2:15.) There was an express prohibition of two things to be offered under the law—leaven and honey, at least, in the offerings which were made by fire (Lev. 2:11); and no doubt there was a spiritual significance in this prohibition, for “leaven” typically signifies malice and wickedness as well as hypocrisy; and “honey” is a symbol of sin

and sinful pleasures. Neither, then, of these was to be offered in any offering of the Lord made by fire, though honey might be offered among the first fruits; but salt never was to be lacking. I have already shown you the typical and figurative meaning of salt—that it preserves from corruption; gives food savour and flavour; is an emblem of a perpetual covenant; and is a figure of amity and peace. With salt, then, as emblematic of these fruits of the Spirit, was every sacrifice to be seasoned. But now let us look at the various sacrifices which the salted sacrificer has to offer.

i. Which is the first? Himself. Does not the apostle say, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service?” (Rom. 12:1.) But in presenting his body, the sacrificer has to present with it his soul; for he might give his body to be burned and yet unless there were love in his heart it would profit him nothing. (1 Cor. 13:3.) It is to be also “a living sacrifice,” that it may be “holy and acceptable unto God;” and if it be a living sacrifice, there must surely be life in the soul of the sacrificer. When, then, and how does he present this living sacrifice? When he sacrifices his lusts, his passions, his inclinations, his darling projects, and all his most cherished schemes of worldly happiness and pleasure, and lays them down at Christ’s feet as immolated, so to speak, by his own hand. The grace, which enables him to make these sacrifices, salts them, puts savour into them, preserves them from the stench of self, and makes them acceptable to God. Here we trace the connection between the salted sacrificer and the salted sacrifice. The Lord says, “If thine eye, or thy hand, or thy foot offend thee, cut it off.” “But, Lord,” you say, “can I make such a sacrifice? Can I sacrifice my hand, or my foot, or my eye, or,” to come to things more intelligible, “my darling lusts? Can I sacrifice my fond inclinations, my ambitious projects, my darling schemes of rising in the world, and all that my carnal heart desires, and all this with my own hand? Must I do with them, and to them all as thou biddest me,—cut them off and

cast them from me? I cannot do it. It is a task beyond my power.” But when the sacrificer has been salted with fire; when he knows something of a fiery law burning up his creature righteousness; something of the fiery trial that separates the dross from the tin; something of the fire of temptation inflaming all the combustible material of his carnal mind; something of the fire of God’s word trying him to the very quick; and, above all, something of the love of God descending from heaven as a holy fire into his bosom, then he can make the sacrifice, yes, any sacrifice. We see, therefore, that the sacrificer cannot offer the sacrifice until he himself has been salted with fire; for, till then, he has neither will nor power. But his being salted with fire enables him to offer the sacrifice; for the fire purifies him from the corruptions of self, and endues him with spiritual strength.

But there is one point which I wish here most particularly to insist upon, lest my meaning be misapprehended. The ground of acceptance is one thing; the state of acceptance is another. The ground of acceptance is the blood and righteousness of the Son of God; the state of acceptance is sanctification by the work of the Holy Ghost. These two things are brought together by the apostle, “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:11.) It is an indispensable preliminary to all spiritual worship, that the person of the worshipper must be accepted before the offering can be acceptable. The worshipper is accepted as being washed in the blood and clothed in the obedience of the Son of God; that is his real, his only ground of acceptance. But when he comes as a sacrificer, the spiritual worshipper must not only be accepted as standing in the blood and obedience of Jesus, but he must have that work of God upon his heart whereby he stands before him as a priest to offer sacrifice. The apostle, therefore, says of the saints of God that they are “a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet. 2:5.) But in order to be priests, they themselves must be salted

with fire, and thereby consecrated to the service of God, as was Aaron, when the blood of the bullock offered as a burnt sacrifice unto the Lord was put upon the tip of his right ear, and the thumb of his right hand, and the great toe of his right foot. He was thus consecrated by blood; and when Moses took of the anointing oil, a type of the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit, he was consecrated also by oil. So now by blood and oil is the sacrificer consecrated—the blood of the Lamb, and the unction of the Holy Ghost. This, then, is the reason why the Lord salts the sacrificer, that when he comes before the throne with a sacrifice, he may not offer strange fire nor stand before the Lord a profane wretch, without any spiritual offering in his hand, or any spiritual desire in his heart, which is in the sight of God no better than offering swine’s blood upon his altar, or having broth of abominable things in his vessel. (Isa. 65:4, 66:3.) But he is to come before the Lord not only washed in the blood and clothed in the obedience of Christ, but as a spiritual worshipper, for the Father seeketh such to worship him; and if he be a spiritual worshipper, he must have been divinely made so as having been salted with fire. Now, then, he comes before the Lord with his first acceptable sacrifice, which is himself. Does not the apostle say, “Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Cor. 6:20.) Do not both belong to him? Are they not his? Can you call them your own? Then when you give them to the Lord you must still say with David, “Of thine own have we given thee, for all is thine own.” (1 Chron. 29:14, 16.) Have you never been able to do this, to present your body and soul before the Lord as a sacrifice that he would take you and make you what he would have you to be? First present yourself and then present your offering. But do we not see now more clearly the necessity of being salted with fire, and of the sacrifice being salted with salt, that you may offer an acceptable offering? For a man may present before God a sacrifice, and that sacrifice not be accepted, as not salted. The Lord gave a special charge to the children of Israel,

to which I have before alluded, that salt was never to be lacking from the offering. "Every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt." (Lev. 2:13.) A man may offer a sacrifice without salt. How many ministers have left the church of England and gone over to Popery! They have made, in so doing, the greatest possible sacrifices—sacrifices, perhaps, of which you are little aware, but which I well know, as having personally known in former days some of the men and something of their position—men of learning, amiability, family, and every prospect before them in life. Great was their sacrifice, but we should deny our firmest convictions if we believed that they or it were salted with salt. How many young women again of rank and family, in the prime of life, with bright prospects before them, courted, and admired by the world, and possessed of everything which could please and gratify the female heart, have given all up and gone into a nunnery, there to endure the most humiliating privations, to be for ever shut up in solitude and poverty, undergoing the severest penances and a daily course of most mortifying discipline. Are not these great sacrifices? But, alas! with all this there was no salt. It was not the grace of God nor the operations of his Spirit upon their heart which made them do this. But the sacrifice was not the less; nay, indeed, greater to the flesh, for there was no grace to support them under it. I have brought forward these two instances to show how persons may offer themselves in sacrifice, but the whole be unacceptable to God, and one to which they were no more led by the operation of the Holy Spirit than the king of Moab was, when he took his eldest son and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. So you also, in your narrow sphere and without their sacrifices, may do many things as you think for the Lord, but if the salt be lacking, they are tasteless, unacceptable, unaccepted. But having been yourself, by the power of God's grace, salted with fire, then you may offer a spiritual sacrifice. As the apostle speaks,

"to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

2. What, then, is the next sacrifice after you have offered yourself, laid body, soul, property, prospects, all you are, all you have at his feet, for the Lord to do with you as seemeth good in his sight? A broken heart; for a broken heart is God's sacrifice. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." (Psalm 51:17.) But the Lord enables you to offer it by salting you with fire. The law; the fiery trial; temptation; his word; and especially his love revealed to the soul, produce brokenness, contrition, humility, lay the soul low at his feet; and this brokenness of heart is a spiritual sacrifice; it is salted with salt, for the grace of God is in it to season it and make it acceptable.

3. Prayer, again, and praise are spiritual sacrifices for they are the "calves of our lips" which we render unto God. (Hosea 14:2.) To these sacrifices we have a reference in the prophet Isaiah, where, speaking of the sons of the stranger, the Lord says, "Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." (Isai. 56:7.) But that they may be accepted upon God's altar they must be salted with salt. How many prayers are offered up publicly and privately that never spring out of a broken heart, a contrite spirit, or a humble mind; are never salted by the Spirit's operation, and therefore not acceptable before God; for the salt is lacking from the offering; and the salt being lacking, it is not preserved from corruption; it is not seasoned or flavoured; has no part or lot in a covenant of perpetuity and peace; and lacking all these things, is not acceptable to God or to his people.

4. Your conversation with the saints of God must be also seasoned with salt to be a spiritual sacrifice. "Let your speech," says the apostle, "be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." How tasteless, how flavourless, how unprofitable, how unacceptable to a spiritual

mind is the conversation of most professors of religion in our day! Of old, when “those that feared the Lord spake often one to another, the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him.” (Mal. 3:16.) But would the Lord hearken and hear the conversation in our day, or write it down in a book of remembrance? We should be ashamed, I believe, many of us to read it ourselves were it written down faithfully. Conversation to be profitable should be seasoned with salt; then it will be “good to the use of edifying and will minister grace unto the hearers.” (Ephes. 4:29.) Without this it will be “a corrupt communication.” But if the sacrificer is not well salted with fire, salt will be lacking from his conversation. What flavour is there in an unsalted tongue? Soft indeed it may be, pappy, and pulpy; but how soon tainted unless salt be well rubbed into its pores. An unsalted tongue ministers death, not life, barrenness and condemnation, not fruitfulness and grace. Rather hold your tongue in the company of God’s people than be to them a minister of barrenness and death. But how many great religious professors can talk readily upon carnal topics and worldly subjects, and anything and everything but God and his Christ or the work of grace on the heart.

5. The preaching of the word, the ministry of the Gospel, is also a spiritual sacrifice; and many a man has sacrificed his comforts, his health and strength, and his very life to the ministry, made himself prematurely old, and brought upon himself disease and suffering which have shortened his days by the arduous labours and anxieties connected with holding forth the word of life. But his tongue, too, must be seasoned with salt, or it will not minister grace to the hearers; will have neither savour nor flavour, neither power nor pungency, neither force nor faithfulness; will neither rightly divide the word of truth, nor take forth the precious from the vile. But the salted tongue can only move as influenced by a salted heart. The minister, therefore, must be salted with fire, know something of the fiery trial, be exercised with temptation, feel the power of God’s word in his conscience and something of

the love of God, that he, in offering the sacrifice, in preaching the Person, the work, the blood, the righteousness, the grace and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, may bring these heavenly truths before the people well seasoned with salt.

6. Gifts and acts of liberality to God’s people—these are also spiritual sacrifices. The apostle speaks highly of them, when writing to the Philippians, he says, “But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.” (Phil. 4:18.) But why were their gifts a sacrifice “acceptable, well-pleasing to God?” It was not the greatness of the amount, but it was because grace was in the givers, and being sent to Paul under the influence of love, they were seasoned with salt. It was this which made them acceptable. Men may give large sums of money away—and I speak to the praise of many in saying what a vast amount is now being raised for the suffering operatives of the north. I confess that I much admire the benevolence and liberality all through the land which has thus been called forth. Still, all of it may not be a salted sacrifice. Apart from a natural feeling of benevolence and compassion to the sufferers under what we may well call this national calamity, may not other springs move the outstretched hand? I would not discredit so good a work; but to make it a sacrifice acceptable to God it must be salted with grace, and not be done through ostentation or the force of example. I am daily receiving contributions from gracious individuals and the collected liberality of churches and congregations for our famishing brethren, which I am distributing amongst them: and what is thus given in the fear of God, with an eye to his glory and from love to his people will be viewed by him as a spiritual sacrifice, seasoned with salt. So that whether a man do much or little—and some can do nothing in aiding the saints of God—it is a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God when it springs from spiritual motives, and is salted with the salt of his grace.

IV.—But we now come to a case which the Lord assumes as

possible: “If the salt have lost its saltness, wherewith will ye season it?”

i. The Lord assumes the case here that the salt may have lost its saltness—lost everything which makes its valuable; and I have read that this is the case sometimes in Eastern countries. I think it is Maundrell, or some old traveller in the East, who gives an account of his once coming to what appeared to be a mass of rock salt. He naturally stretched forth his hand to take a piece, but, when he tasted it, all the saltness was gone: it had been washed out by the deluging rains which in those climates fall at certain seasons from the skies. The substance and appearance remained the same; but the reality, the savour, all that made it salt, was gone. I have also read of a similar instance in the salt lakes of those countries. When the lake becomes partially dry in the summer, it leaves a crust of salt upon the shore. Upon this the summer rains fall, washing out all the saline particles, but not injuring its outward look. It has thus all the appearance of salt, but none of the reality. This being a common phenomenon in those climates, the Lord assumes it as a case spiritually in the visible Church of God, and asks a very pregnant question: “If the salt has lost its saltness, wherewith will ye season it?” Observation and experience abundantly show us that the saint of God for a time may lose his saltness. Being salted with the King’s salt, and this being a covenant of life and peace, he cannot altogether lose it, but he may lose much, very much of its savour. There may be a few particles of salt left, enough to save him, but not enough to make him savoury either to God or man. We frequently see this in old professors, who in times past seemed to show the possession of salt; but what with worldly cares, family anxieties, the hurry and flurry of business, the lapse of time, the want of gracious revivals, the growth in them is not in grace, but in covetousness and in worldly mindedness, and the deadness natural to advancing years, they at last sink into the spot of which the Lord here speaks—they lose their saltness. Is not that a deplorable case that your last days should be your worst; that

your carnality should be so great and your spirituality so little as to cause considerable doubt in those who fear God whether you possess the grace of God at all? And is it not lamentable that the sacrifices you offer, or pretend to offer, before God should be unacceptable, because they have lost their saltness? There was a time with you, perhaps, when you had some brokenness of heart and contrition of spirit before God: your heart is hard enough and careless now. There was a time when you could make sacrifices, give up anything for the Lord’s sake: now you can scarcely make any sacrifice at all; scarcely squeeze out half-a-crown, though your pocket is full of them, for a poor child of God. There was a time when your prayers went out of a feeling, believing, warm heart: now they are cold and wandering, and there scarcely seems to be any life or power in them. There was a time when you met the family of God, and your heart burnt within you when you talked of the precious things of Christ; and now you can meet them, and your conversation be as carnal as that of any worldling. There was a time when you could praise the Lord with joyful lips; and now not one word of praise swells your note. There was a time when you could give liberally out of your poverty; and now you are so screwed up as to be hardly able to part with sixpence out of your wealth. Your salt has lost its savour; and though it preserves its appearance, yet, like the rock salt that Maundrell touched and tasted, it has lost all that made it really valuable. Does conscience smite you at all under the strokes which I am dealing at it? Are you sensible that you have lost your saltness? that you are not as in times past, and that if you possess the grace of God at all, it is at a very low ebb in your soul?

Well, now, the Lord asks the question, “If the salt have lost its saltness, wherewith will ye season it?” There is something to my mind very expressive in the way in which the Lord puts the question. The Lord does not say, “wherewith shall I season it,” or “wherewith shall it be seasoned:” but “wherewith will ye season it.” How will you bring back the saltness? You cannot do it; but the

Lord can do it for you, if it be his holy will. But how does he bring it back? How does he re-season the salt? How did he give the soul it in the first instance when he salted the sacrificer? By the fire. Then he puts you back into the fire to give you back the salt. Don't you see the blacksmith do something like, if not exactly, this? Here is a piece of rusty iron, an old hoop, or a horse-shoe picked out of the dust: he can make it new; and you know how he does it. He puts it into the fire, brings it to a white heat, hammers it well upon the anvil; why, it comes out brand new. Don't you know that the very best rifles which are manufactured are made out of old stub nails grubbed out of the mud of the London Streets? So the Lord can re-fire as well as refine his people's graces. To revert to our figure, he can put them into the furnace of affliction, and in that fire he can salt them over again. This is the way whereby the Lord usually restores the saltness which is lost. Temptation, the fiery trial, his word cutting them to the very quick, salts them again; and when thus put into the furnace, once more his love descends as a holy fire into their heart, and they are salted as with fresh salt; or, to change the figure, they renew their youth like the eagle. What a mercy it is that, partially, if not fully, the salt can be restored, because I have pointed out that salt was an emblem of a perpetual covenant as well as of amity and peace; for the saint of God, having been once salted, surely cannot lose all his saltness, and so be cast out of all acceptance with God, as the priest would reject the meat offering brought to him by the worshipper which had no salt upon it. If he could lose the grace of God, he must go where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. Gifts, usefulness, a state and standing in the Church, knowledge, profession, and a name to live may all come to an end; but the grace of God in the heart of a saint is unperishing, imperishable.

V.—But we are now perhaps prepared to listen to the exhortation which fell from our Lord's lips: "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."

1. That is the grand thing. Have salt in yourselves. Look to

yourselves. Don't be spending all your eyesight, and all your hearing, and all the energy of your body and soul upon others, forgetting and neglecting what much more deeply concerns you, your own salvation and the knowledge of it. Look to yourselves. People go about trying to convert the world who never were converted themselves. Don't you fall into that error. Have salt in yourselves. Look at your own heart and see what salt you have there. The Lord, you see, bids his people look in the first instance to themselves, and examine themselves how matters really stand with them before his heart-searching eye.

But what is it to have salt in themselves? The grace of God in their heart; for salt is an emblem of grace. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt;" for as I have shown, grace preserves the soul from perishing in the corruption of the flesh. It is by grace we are "made partakers of the divine nature, and thus escape the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Pet. 1:4.) This salt of God's grace is to be upon their heart to make it right before him; upon their lips, that their conversation may be becoming the gospel, and their speech seasoned with salt; and in their lives, that their walk may be salted, their feet be salted, their hands salted, and every member of their body be salted, so as to be preserved from every corrupt communication, and every evil and corrupt way. I speak unto you in his name, my hearers, this day, "Have salt in yourselves." As a church, have salt in yourselves, that you may be preserved from corruption; for the church that loses its salt will soon only be fit for the dunghill. As a congregation, meeting together for the worship of God, to call upon his holy name in spirit and in truth, and to hear his word faithfully preached, have salt in yourselves, lest the Lord come and remove the candlestick out of its place. Yea, to all here present who desire to fear his name and to tremble at his word, I say have salt in yourselves, that you may have the comfort of God's presence and blessing upon a dying bed, and when the body drops into the grave may enter into the joy of the Lord.

2. But the Lord also added, "Have peace one with another." Salt, we know, was the emblem of peace. So the Lord bade his disciples have salt in themselves, and eat salt with one another. But this peace, like every other gospel fruit, must be salted with salt. It must be, therefore, peace on a right footing, peace on a gospel bottom, for there may be peace where there is no salt. Is there not a crying, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace?" We have too much of this false peace both with God and man. As a heap of stones will lie together very comfortably, so there may be false peace and false union among people and in churches where the stillness of death reigns. But as a sacrifice without the salt was unacceptable, so a false peace or a peace without salt is of no avail to assure the heart or to walk comfortably with the family of God. Grace in the heart, peace in the conscience, and peace with the brethren, these are choice blessings. Can I do better than leave the words ringing in your ears, "Have salt in yourselves and have peace one with another?"

194 The Wine of Astonishment and the Banner of Truth and Love

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning,
Dec. 21, 1862

"Thou hast shewed thy people hard things: thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment. Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth."

Psalm 60:3, 4

When the ever-living, ever-glorious Son of God left the bosom of the Father, in which from all eternity he had lain, to tread this vale of sin and sorrow, he came to do the will of him that sent him. Such was his own declaration even before he came into a time state. "Then said I, Lo, I come [in the volume of the book it is written of

me] to do thy will, O God." (Heb. 10:7.) In a similar spirit, in the days of his flesh, he expressly said, "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38.) To understand this more clearly, it will be desirable to see what this will of God was which his only begotten Son came down from heaven expressly to do. This will, then, was, that he should obey and suffer: obey the law which we had broken, and suffer the penalty, its curse and death, its consequence, which we had incurred. But this obedience and this suffering were very closely and intimately connected, as we read "He learnt obedience by the things which he suffered." (Heb. 5:8.) And again, "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:8.) Now in order that our blessed Lord should be qualified to obey and suffer, it was necessary that he should take a nature capable both of obedience and of suffering. His divine nature was incapable of either. Deity cannot obey, as Deity cannot suffer. He, therefore, had to assume a nature that was capable of obedience and of suffering, and that was a human nature; for to the full performance of the work which he undertook, to the complete execution of the will of God, three things were necessary. First, that he should assume a nature capable of obedience and suffering, such as the flesh and blood of the children; secondly, a nature absolutely without spot or blemish, for otherwise the obedience would have been imperfect and the suffering unavailable; and thirdly, that this obedience should be continuous, so that there should be no interruption to it from the beginning to the end. This necessity of continuous obedience and continuous suffering was the reason why our blessed Lord was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" for his sorrows as well as his obedience began from the very first. His Virgin Mother bore him as a sacred burden from Nazareth to Bethlehem, no less than seventy miles, just on the eve of her delivery, and thus he may be said to have suffered with her fatigue. When she arrived in Bethlehem there was no room for her in the inn. In a stable among the beasts, and probably unassisted by any female friend, the Virgin Mother

brought forth her first-born Son. There was no cradle to lay his sacred body in. The common manger where the cattle fed was the place where the holy babe was laid, when, according to the custom of the times, she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, binding, as it were, his infant limbs even then by legal ties. We do not hear much of our Lord's sufferings during his early life, though no doubt he was obedient and suffering both as a child, a youth, and a man, for he was ever obeying the law; and surrounded as he was by sin and misery in every shape and form, his holy, spotless nature must have acutely suffered in proportion to its innate purity and his zeal for the honour and glory of God. But directly that he entered upon his public ministry the sacred record brings before us obedience and suffering. Thus, when he comes to John to be baptised of him, and John forbade him, saying, "I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me?" what was his meek and lowly answer? "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." (Matt. 3:14, 15.) Immediately after his baptism he is "led," or, to use the stronger expression of Mark, "driven" "by the Spirit into the wilderness" amongst the wild beasts, where, after fasting forty days and forty nights, when his body was spent with hunger and thirst, weak and languishing through want of food and rest, he was set as a mark for the horrid temptations of Satan. When these were overcome, and he enters more fully into the discharge of his ministry, going about doing good, he is persecuted to that degree, that he saves his life on two occasions by a special miracle. During the whole course of his ministry, he had not where to lay his head; possessing none of this world's goods, he was maintained out of the substance of his followers. (Luke 7:3.) Not a single step did he take, scarcely a miracle perform, utter a parable, or drop a word without stirring up scorn, enmity, and opposition. Nay, in what we might term his inmost circle, he still had to suffer. One disciple denies him; another betrays him; and all forsake him and flee when "he is led as a lamb to the slaughter." And when we come to the last scenes of his holy, obedient, and suffering life, what agonies our

gracious Lord endured in the gloomy garden, where his anguish of soul, under a sense of the weight of sin and the wrath of God, was so unutterably great as to force the very blood through the pores of his skin and to fall in great drops upon the ground. So intolerable was the anguish of his burdened spirit, that even he, who was sent to suffer, and who came for that express purpose, was as if compelled to cry out, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" though at once obedience added the submissive words, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." When, too, we pursue his suffering, obedient path to the cross, and view him by the eye of faith suffering not only intolerable agony of body, but, what was far heavier to bear, unutterable anguish of spirit as made a curse for us, what a spectacle is presented to our view of obedience unto death when he, the spotless Lamb, endured the wrath of God, poured out without measure, and drank the wine-cup of God's anger to the very dregs. I may sum up the whole with a sentence from Dr. Goodwin, with which, reading it one day, I was much struck as a brief summary of our Lord's death upon the cross: "Of deaths it was the most accursed, at a time most solemn, in a place most infamous, and with company most wretched."

But there was one feature in our blessed Lord's suffering to which I wish to call attention, as it is in some way connected with our text; and that is, the holy meekness and uncomplaining patience with which he endured all the sufferings he experienced from God and man. Truly, "he was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." Now the Lord's people have all to be conformed to the suffering image of their crucified Head; for as they are to be conformed to his glorious image above, so must they be conformed to his suffering image below; for "if we suffer with him, we shall reign with him." "If so be that we suffer with him that we may be also glorified together." (2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 8:17.) But there is one feature in our case which we never find in that of our adorable Lord, that we rarely suffer without complaint. We are not like a

sheep before the shearers—dumb; or a lamb led to the slaughter—open not our mouth. We are always complaining, murmuring, or repining. Now, as an instance of this, look at the language of the church here, for it is the church which speaks in the words of the text, and puts into language the complaints that God's people so often feel in union with her: "Thou hast shewed thy people hard things." You never find our Lord using such language in reference to his own sufferings. "Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment." Are not the words so couched as if in them the church would almost reproach God for dealing hardly with her, and putting into her hand this wine cup? And yet to do her justice, her language is not all complaint, for she seems, so to speak, to recollect herself, to gather up her sleeping graces, and animated by a spirit of faith, and finding the benefit of the hard dealings, to acknowledge the goodness of the Lord, even in the very midst of her trouble. "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth."

Let us see, with God's help and blessing, if we cannot find in these words something that may instruct and, if it be the Lord's will, something also that may cheer and encourage our heart. In the hope of so doing I shall,

I.—First, as the Lord may enable, direct your attention to the Church's mournful complaint: "Thou hast shewed thy people hard things: thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment."

II.—Secondly, the Church's grateful acknowledgment of a distinctive blessing: "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee."

III.—Thirdly, her sense of the peculiar privilege of being a standard bearer of the Lord and his truth: "That it may be displayed because of the truth."

I.—When we are in a state of nature, held down in the chains of ignorance, with the veil of unbelief wrapped in dense folds over our heart, we see God in nothing. Whatever befall us, whether adversity or prosperity, we neither see nor recognize the hand

of God in either. If prosperity attend us, we ascribe it to luck, chance, fortune—as some one has called it "the Devil's trinity;" or to our own skill, industry, energy, and exertion—thus fondly sacrificing to our own net, and burning incense to our own drag. If, on the other hand, matters are against us and our ambitious schemes and projects are overturned, how "unfortunate" we are, how everything is against us, is our immediate cry; and instead of ascribing the adverse stroke or cutting disappointment to the hand of God who holds the reins of government, we look at second causes, and think if we had done so and so, or had not done so and so, if we had taken the advice of this judicious friend, or had not been drawn aside by that foolish counsellor, this mishap, this misfortune, this unhappy circumstance would not have occurred. So blind and so ignorant are we, that whether God smile or whether God frown, (I speak of his providential dealings), we see his hand in neither. But grace opens the eyes, takes away the veil of ignorance and unbelief from off the heart, reveals to us the power and presence of that great and glorious God in whom we live and move and have our being; and thus as the ungodly man sees God in nothing, so the godly man sees God in everything. The one lives without God in the world; and the other lives with God in the world. The one, like an animal grazing upon a mountain, sees nothing and cares for nothing but the grass under his feet; the other, like a man endowed as with a new sight, sees the glorious prospect spread before his eyes, and the hand of an Almighty God in every mountain and vale, in the flowing river, the purling brook, the sky above, and the earth below. If things are adverse with him in providence, he sees the hand of God in taking away; and if things are prosperous, he sees the hand of God in giving. So whether the Lord bless him in providence, or the Lord distress him in providence, grace anointing his eyes as with heavenly eye salve, and giving divine light, enables him to acknowledge the hand of God in both. Is not this the very expression of our text? Does not the church here speak to the

Lord as one to whom he has given light and sight? “Thou hast shewed thy people hard things.” The church does not say, “What hard things are fallen to our lot; what misfortunes are our destined portion; how unlucky we are. O how unfortunate! Why could we have been so thoughtless? What could have possessed us to have made such mistakes, and brought ourselves into such difficulties?” But, though pressed down by affliction and trouble, she still looks beyond second causes and the passing events of the day, and, directing her eyes upwards to the great Arbiter of all events, the Sovereign Disposer of all circumstances, says, in the language of faith, though, as I before remarked, in the language of complaint, “Thou hast shewed thy people hard things.”

i. Having thus attempted to shew you the utterance of faith in the words of our text, and the humble acknowledgment in it of the hand of God, let us now look at some of these “hard things” which God shews his people; and depend upon it if God shew them, he means that they should see them, and that so clearly that they shall make no mistake either as to the thing itself or his intention in bringing it before them.

1. The first thing which the Lord, for the most part, shews his people is his inflexible justice, spotless holiness, and unspeakable purity. This he does that he may convince them of their sins by the application of his holy law to their conscience, and thus bring them to his feet by cutting them off from all creature help or hope. I set this down as the first “hard thing” which the Lord shews his people, because it makes such a wonderful revolution in their feelings and gives them such different ideas about religion, and such different views of its real nature from those which they had entertained before this divine light and life broke up the darkness and death in which they were before immured, as a monk in a cell, or a collier in a mine. Our idea, in a state of nature, about religion is, that it is something very easy and very pleasant; that all we have to do is to repent of our sins some time or other before we die, if we have not been quite so good as we ought to be; to attend with

all due regularity our church or chapel; to do our duty in that station of life to which we are called; be honest and upright, kind and amiable, moral and virtuous, truthful and sincere, and then all will be well at last. It is true, we own, that we are frail and sinful, but God is merciful; and if we only try to do our best, he will accept the will for the deed, will pardon us for Christ's sake, and take us to heaven. This is the religion which is instilled into us for the most part from our very cradle, which we drink in from our religious teachers, governors and governesses, and which is so congenial to our natural feelings and so thoroughly adapted to our reasoning mind, that it grows with our growth, and at last becomes so deeply rooted in our very heart that we would almost sooner part with our life than give it up as false or deceptive. Now this Babel religion, for with all its show and glitter it is but a Babel at best—has to be thrown down; for it is in direct opposition to the truth of God, has neither state nor standing, name nor place, truth nor reality in that word of the Lord which is to endure for ever. It must, therefore, be thrown down, that the temple of mercy and grace may be built up on its ruins. And this the Lord does usually by the discovery of his holiness, purity, majesty, his strict justice and almighty power, so as to convince us not only of our sins, our positive and actual transgressions which he lays upon the conscience, but also of our deep and desperate sinfulness in heart. It is a hard thing—a hard lesson to learn, especially in some cases, where the Lord deals—I was going to say in a very rough manner with a refractory subject; for it seems as if some of God's people needed more rough dealing than others. God indeed giveth no account of any of his matters, so that we cannot always, or indeed often, ascertain the reason why the Lord deals with the conscience of some more severely than with that of others. But it is evident from observation, and what we hear and read of the various experiences of God's people, that some sink deeper under the law than others, and continue longer under the blow of his hand. But in every case it is a “hard thing” to learn by experience

the justice of God, the purity of his nature, the omniscience of his eye, the curse of his holy law, and the condemnation under it of a guilty conscience.

2. But we have another “hard thing” to learn, and that is our inability and helplessness to obey what the law sets before us. The conscience made tender in the fear of God would obey every demand of God’s righteous law, and tries hard at obedience; but is every way baffled. The eyes of the spiritual understanding are opened to see that obedience must be from the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; and that all imperfect obedience is necessarily unacceptable in the eyes of him with whom we have to do. A divine light is cast into the mind that the law requires a perfect obedience, for none other can be accepted as commensurate with its full demands. But the convinced conscience finds itself unable to render this obedience. Sin is so mixed with all we do that it stains and pollutes every word and work, and thus renders it unfit for divine acceptance. But it is a hard thing for a convinced sinner to find that he can do nothing; that all his tears, and all his strivings and exertions are utterly fruitless, and only make him worse than before. Yet it is a lesson needful to learn, that he may know afterwards the fulness of God’s grace, and that salvation is not by the works of the law but by the blood and righteousness of God’s co-equal, co-eternal Son.

3. The next hard thing which the Lord often shews his people is their inability not only to obey, but to repent. The law does not speak of repentance. Its tenor is very simple—awfully and majestically severe—“Do and live;” “disobey and die.” It never says, “If thou repent thou shalt be forgiven.” This is the language of the gospel. We usually know the letter of the gospel before we know the spirit, and hear its word before we feel its power. Now, the gospel says that the way of life is “repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ;” but we soon find, in the light of divine teaching, that we are as unable to repent as to obey, as helpless to believe the gospel as to keep the law. Is not this a “hard thing?” Does not

this seem to mock our woe? Is it not something like a prisoner in a cell hearing a herald proclaim a gaol delivery and he still fast held under bolts and bars? But, besides this, many of the Lord’s people in their early days have to work much in the dark, from the peculiar circumstances under which they are placed. Very few have the benefit of a gospel ministry. The freeness of gospel grace, the fulness of salvation, the benefits and blessings of the sufferings and death of the Son of God, the suitability of the promises and invitations to lost and ruined sinners, are rarely set before them; nor do they hear the gospel experimentally preached, the work of grace traced out, the feelings and exercises of an awakened soul described; and thus for want of a guide they have to “grope for the wall like the blind, and to grope as if they had no eyes.”

4. But as these pilgrims heavenward still go on—for there is no turning back in the heavenly way—they meet with another thing in their path which they find indeed to be “hard,” very hard—God’s sovereignty. This peculiar feature of the divine character does not often flash before their eyes when they first set their faces Zionward; but as they advance onward, and get, as it were, like a man ascending a hill at daybreak, more fully into the blaze of the divine perfections, the sovereignty of God seems to meet them in a very solemn manner, and by its flashing rays upon their path appears as if it would preclude all further advance in the face of him who is a consuming fire. A man may have learnt something of the holiness and justice of God in a broken law, and something also of his own helplessness and inability either to obey, to repent, or to believe, and yet not have the sovereignty of God revealed to his conscience. But sooner or later it is made known to his heart with a divine power, and then it seems to stand in the way almost as the angel stood in the way of Balaam with a drawn sword to slay him. The prophet did not see the angel till the Lord opened his eyes; but immediately that he beheld that awful sight, “he bowed down his head and fell flat on his face.” At once he saw it was of the Lord to save or to destroy. The people of God would not believe

in the sovereignty of God if they could help it; for it is a doctrine that seems at times to chill their very blood with terror, for upon it they see suspended their own eternal state. But in this matter they have no alternative, for the Scripture speaks so plainly, and the Holy Spirit shining upon the Scripture impresses it with such power upon their conscience that, in spite of their unwillingness to believe, in spite of the opposition made to it by reason, self-love, self-pity, and self-righteousness, they are compelled to fall down before the sovereignty of God as a truth that shines all through the sacred page; and they see in it the grand key to that enigma which, stamped upon the works and words of God, “frustrates the tokens of the liars and maketh diviners mad, that turneth wise men backward and maketh their knowledge foolish.” (Isaiah 44:25.) Anointed with this eye salve, they see order where others see only confusion, and trace the hand of God where others view nothing but the hand of man. Thus when they look round upon the world with which they are surrounded—I mean the world of men—they see the sovereignty of God in calling some to a knowledge of the truth, and leaving others to perish in their sins, for they well know that “there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Being also thoroughly instructed into a knowledge of the inability of man to quicken his own soul, they see that if any are brought to believe in the Son of God, it must be by sovereign grace. When too they look at the dealings of God with them in providence, or specially in grace, they cannot help but see sovereignty stamped upon them both; that whatever they have, they have by divine donation; and whatever they are, they are by divine operation. Yet the sovereignty of God, as exercised in all matters great or small, is a “hard thing,” especially when it touches them close; when it takes away idols out of their bosom, blights their schemes, withers their prospects, disappoints their hopes, and stands before them as a mountain of brass and a gate of iron, which they can neither pass over nor pass through. Still, they cannot get away from the verdict of their own conscience

and the testimony of God in his word, that he is a Sovereign, and “doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, “What doest thou?” (Daniel 4:35.)

5. The doctrine of election is another “hard thing” which the Lord shews to his people. Some seem to learn it easily enough; but it is to be feared that those who find it so easy to learn and so easy to believe were never led into it by divine teaching. Election has two aspects—one that frowns, and one that smiles. In its hand are seen two keys—one to open, the other to shut. Now, until we are brought to know something of mercy revealed to the soul, and taste the sweetness of gospel grace, the doctrine of election wears a frowning aspect; for it seems to meet us on the road with a drawn sword and to stand right across the path; and every frown it gives stamps the conviction deep in the sinner’s heart, that if he is not elected he has no interest in the blood of Christ, no admission into the kingdom of God. Sin, Satan, and the reasoning mind take advantage of this conclusion, stirring up the enmity of the carnal heart until every vile lust begins to boil and rage against a doctrine which seems to shut them out of heaven’s gate, and to consign them to a miserable doom. What a “hard thing” it seems to be to wish to be saved, and yet to find and feel the doctrine of election stand in the way as an impenetrable barrier. It is true that they are drawing wrong conclusions against themselves, for their very desires after salvation mark their interest in it; but until they are assured of their own election it is to them a hard doctrine. So, when turning from themselves, they look around and see how few, speaking comparatively, seem to be in the way to heaven, and their bowels of compassion melt over the members of their own family in whom they cannot see marks of divine life, their natural mind will rise against the doctrine, however plainly revealed in the word of truth, or with whatever power it may be sealed upon their conscience.

6. But again, the Lord’s people, besides these hard lessons

which they have to learn in the school of Christ, have to carry a daily cross; and as they are burdened and pressed down under its weight, they are made to say in substance if not in words, “Thou hast shewed thy people hard things.” This daily cross may and does differ in individuals, but every one who has to be conformed to Christ’s suffering image has his own, which laid upon his shoulders by an invincible hand, he has for the most part to carry down to the very grave. Thus, some of God’s people are afflicted in body from the very time the Lord begins his work of grace upon their heart; or if exempt from disease are shattered in nerve, depressed in spirits, and weighed down by lassitude and languor, often harder to bear than disease itself. Some scarcely ever recover the first impressions made upon their conscience by a sense of God’s wrath, for as body and mind are closely allied, the one sympathises with the other. Some are tied to ungodly partners, meeting with opposition and persecution at every step; others have nothing but trouble in their family, either from the invasion of death into their circle, or what sometimes is worse than death—disgrace, shame, and ungodliness. Others have little else but one series of losses and crosses in their circumstances, wave after wave rolling over their heads until they think they shall lose their reason, be shut up in a madhouse, or die in a union. Others are full of doubt and fear, bondage and darkness nearly all their days, can scarcely ever get beyond a dim hope, or if ever favoured with any comfort are tried to the very quick whether it was genuine. O, view the family of God toiling homeward like the wreck of a broken army, some dragging along an afflicted body, others a wounded spirit; others carrying upon their shoulders dying children, or mourning over the slain in battle; others with scarcely a rag to their back or a crust in their hand, footsore, fearful in heart, trembling at a rustling leaf, a deep river to pass and a furious enemy in sight; and see how they all cry out as with uplifted hands, “Thou hast shewed thy people hard things. Lord, what dost thou mean next to do? Is this to be our earthly lot?”

“Are these the toils thy people know,
Whilst in this wilderness below?”

ii. But we have not yet got to the end of their complaint: “Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment.” Let us seek to penetrate into the meaning of this complaint.

Wine in the Scriptures is often used as emblematic, and emblematic of various things which may throw light upon our text. In Palestine the vine grows abundantly, and as in other warm climates where the grape ripens under the hot beams of the sun, wine was, during the time of the prosperity of Israel, not as with us an expensive luxury, but the common drink of the country. Judah therefore, is said to “wash his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes”—as if wine with him were to be as free and common as water. (Gen. 49:11.) So the spouse speaks, “I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk” (Song 5:1); as if honey, milk, and wine were equally common. Wine therefore being so familiarly known, is used through the Scriptures as an emblem of various things. Taking then a general view of it in its emblematic representation, we may say it represents in Scripture three distinct things.

The first idea represented by it is of cheerfulness, strength, exhilaration, that being we know a leading property of the juice of the grape. It is said, therefore, to “make glad the heart of man” (Psalm 104:15), and, by a strong figure, “to cheer God and man.” (Judges 9:13.) We also read of it that “wine maketh merry.” (Eccles. 10:19.) “Amnon’s heart was merry within him” (2 Sam. 13:28); and king Lemuel’s mother bid her son “give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.” (Prov. 31:6.)

But, secondly, it represents emblematically anything which inflames and sets the heart on fire, as we read of those that “rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night till wine inflame them.” (Isai. 5:11.)

But, thirdly, it being the custom in those countries often

to drug the wine with spices or myrrh to make it more potent and intoxicating, as the bride says, "I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of the pomegranate;" and we read of "men of strength to mingle strong drink:" wine in Scripture often represents that which stupefies and intoxicates, overpowering the heart and making the limbs to tremble.

1. In opening up the words of our text, I shall take the last meaning first; for the church, speaking in the language of complaint, in it says, "Thou hast made us to drink of the wine of astonishment," which might be rendered, "the wine of reeling," or "the wine of trembling," the idea being taken from the effect of wine in stupefying the mind and making every limb tremble as unable to sustain itself. In this sense wine in Scripture often signifies the wrath of God, under a sense of which the soul reels and staggers like a drunken man. Thus God bade Jeremiah take "the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it." (Jer. 15:12.) So we read, "For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them." (Ps. 75:8.) Now this wine cup of God's anger he puts sometimes in the hands of his people. So he says to the church, "Behold I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury, thou shalt no more drink it again;" which implies that she had drunk it, as he speaks in the same chapter: "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out." (Isa. 51:17.) It is this cup called here "the wine of astonishment," of which the church complains in the words of our text; for when the Lord puts the wine cup of his anger into the hand of his people, in other words, when he reveals a sense of his anger and indignation against sin, he makes them to drink in this sense of "the wine of astonishment;" for the soul reels and staggers like a drunken man under the sense of God's

wrath. The most dreadful feeling that a man can well be exercised with in this life is to have a sense of God's wrath revealed in his conscience: it is the very foretaste of hell. In this sense, the anger of God, like drugged wine, stupefies a man's mind. Like a drunken man, he hardly knows what he is about; all his clear views are lost and gone; his very judgment is confused upon the things of God; and as in natural drunkenness nothing is felt but the effects of the wine, so in this spiritual drunkenness nothing is felt but a sense of the wrath of the Almighty. The Lord, therefore, says to his Zion, "Therefore hear now this thou afflicted and drunken, but not with wine" (Isa. 51:21); and so Jeremiah, personating the Church, cries out, "He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood." (Lam. 3:15.)

Connected with this meaning, we may take the words in another sense. Wine, especially when drugged, often brings strange sights and visions before the eyes. Like a person under the influence of opium, there are strange thoughts in the mind, strange sounds in the ears, strange sights in the eyes. These strange sights and sounds make it "the wine of astonishment," so that a man is, as it were, a wonder to himself.

Have you not sometimes stood astonished at the evils of your heart? As Hart says,

"Lord, when thy Spirit descends to shew
The evils of our hearts;
Astonished at the dreadful view,
The soul with horror starts,"

And again,

"Shocked at the sight we straight cry out,
Can ever God dwell here?"

Have you not viewed the evils of your heart, the corruptions of your depraved nature, the vile imaginations that work up from the bottom of the yeasty deep, until you have scarcely known what to think, say, or do? Are not these strange sights? And the murmuring and fretfulness of your heart, are not these strange

sounds? Could you have believed that your heart was capable of such unspeakable baseness? Is not this to be “drunken, but not with wine, to stagger, but not with strong drink?” (Isai. 29:9.)

But look at this “wine of astonishment” from another point of view. After the Lord perhaps has manifestly had mercy upon you, and revealed a sense of his goodness and love to your soul, did you not basely wander from the Source of all your mercies? Did you not insensibly fall into a state of coldness, carnality, and death; got entangled, it may be, in some of Satan’s snares, so as to bring great guilt and trouble upon your conscience? Now, when brought out of your backsliding state, did not the Lord make you drink “the wine of astonishment,” by giving you a spiritual view of your baseness in forsaking him, the Fountain of living waters, and hewing out to yourself cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water? And have not you also been astonished at his long suffering in bearing with you, and his wondrous mercy in again restoring your soul?

2. But we will look at the words in another sense. Wine, as I before pointed out, not only stupefies but inflames. There are those whom wine sets on fire, as there are those whom wine stupefies; for it has these two opposite effects on different constitutions. So it is spiritually. When the law of God meets with the corruptions of the human heart, it does not subdue them, bring them into obedience, alter their nature, or transmute them into grace; but rather sets them on fire, as wine inflames the passions: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging.” (Prov. 20:1.) So the apostle says: “When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins which were by the law did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death;” and again, “But sin taking occasion by the commandment wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.” (Rom. 7:5, 8.) The law, then, like wine to the passions, inflames the heart’s corruptions; and, as the eyes of the drunken, “behold strange women, and his heart utters perverse things” (Prov. 23:33); so, under the influence of the law, every lust and corruption are stirred up in the heart, and perverseness is conceived and uttered

by it. This is being made “to drink the wine of astonishment;” for is it not astonishing that a holy law, given by a holy God, should only stir up nature’s corruption; that that which is meant to produce obedience should rather stir up disobedience; and that life put into the commandment should work a sentence of death in the soul?

3. But let me now show you another effect of Gospel wine, which is, as I have already hinted, to gladden, cheer, and exhilarate. In this sense we may explain the passage which I have before quoted from the parable of Jotham, where wine is said “to cheer God and man.” This must be the gospel; for the obedience of his dear Son, which the gospel reveals cheered, so to speak, the very heart of God; and I am sure it cheers the heart of man. In this sense, too, it is still “the wine of astonishment;” for when the Lord by his Spirit and grace makes a wondrous change, and instead of thundering forth the terrors of the law, sounds the silver notes of the gospel; instead of revealing wrath, reveals a sense of mercy; instead of sending the sinner to his justly deserved doom, drops into his heart a sense of his pardoning love and grace; this cheering draught of gospel wine makes him to drink the wine of astonishment. For is it not astonishing that the Lord can thus “give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts,” bidding him “drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more?” (Prov. 31:6, 7.) Is it not astonishing to the soul how the Lord can pardon a sinner so vile; how his grace can superabound over the aboundings of his sin; and how the blood of the Lamb applied to the conscience purges it from all its guilt, filth, and dead works to serve the living God?

Thus, whether we take the wine to represent the wine that stupefies, or the wine that inflames, or the wine that cheers and exhilarates,—take the figure in all or any of these senses,—well may we say, after we have been made to drink it, even but a few drops of it, “Thou hast made us to drink of the wine of astonishment.”

Let this, then, ever be deeply graven upon the tablets of our heart, that all God's doings and all God's dealings are doings and dealings to fill us with holy wonder, so that we may well say, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11); and with the Psalmist, "Thou art the God that doest wonders." (Psa. 77:14.) In the law, he is full of holiness, justice, and majesty; in the gospel, he is full of grace, mercy, and truth: but whether in the law or in the gospel, we may well say of and to him, "Marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." (Psa. 139:14.) So whether you drink the wine of his anger or the wine of his love; whether the wine cup of the law or the wine cup of the gospel is put into your hands, you may say of each, "Thou hast made us to drink of the wine of astonishment." For take this as my closing remark on this part of our subject, that it is the Lord who makes us to drink, and that neither the wine nor the draught is our own.

II.—But it is time to pass on to the distinctive blessing of the Church, as pointed out in the latter clause of our text; and I think we shall find a connection between her complaints and her blessings: "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee."

i. You will observe that the church here speaks of a banner being given to them that fear God. Now, do you not perceive a connection between the "hard things" which God shows his people and "the wine of astonishment" which he gives them to drink, and the fear of his great name? for these points are put into close association with each other. The connection, then, is this, that the "hard things" which the Lord's people are shown, and "the wine of astonishment" which they are given to drink, impress the fear of God very deep on their conscience. The fear of God is written as with the point of a diamond upon a man's heart by the "hard things" which he shews unto them. A stout heart, far from righteousness, needs some severe dealings with it to bring it down. A powerful impression is required upon such a conscience, so as to leave permanent marks there of the hand of God. Thus these "hard things" leave deep

impressions of the majesty and greatness of him with whom we have to do. And is not this a blessing? You may have complained, as the church of old in our text, "Thou hast shewed thy people hard things." O Lord, what hard things thou hast made me to learn. How rough and rugged my path in providence; how strict, how severe my path in grace! In thy holy law; in the discovery of my helplessness and the abounding corruptions of my heart; in the daily cross that so galls my shoulder; in the darkness, guilt, and bondage with which I am so continually exercised, what hard things hast thou shewed me, O Lord, and still continuest to show. Yes; and thou hast made me drink of the wine of astonishment, when I have looked up and had a view of thee, or looked down and had a view of myself. But have I learnt nothing from these hard lessons, from these tastes and sips of thy wondrous wine? Have they made no impression on my spirit? Have they wrought no good in my soul? Yes, I trust they have; for have they not caused the fear of God to take deeper root in my heart? Thus, the Lord's dealings, though they are "hard things" to bear, and the wine which he gives, though it is the wine of astonishment, yet they are both productive of the greatest blessing God can bestow, which is his fear planted deep in a tender conscience. Light things, easy things, smooth things, soft things, would not have made this deep impression. Milk and water would not have sometimes stupefied, sometimes inflamed, sometimes cheered you. Your religion would have been a religion of milk and water. Why are so few possessed of that heavenly treasure, the fear of God? Because religion is with them so light and easy; they can put it off and put it on; take it up and lay it down; have it or have it not, just as they please; therefore it is with them a thing by the bye, a secondary matter; a Sunday's task, an extra garment, an overcoat, sometimes to be worn, sometimes to be laid aside. But where God is pleased to teach the soul with a high hand and a stretched out arm, and shews his people "hard things" and makes them drink of "the wine of astonishment until they reel and stagger under his

powerful stroke, these dealings drive the nail home; they plant the fear of God very deep in a man's conscience. But when the Lord has planted his fear deep in a man's conscience, he brings forth and communicates the distinctive blessing, which is the banner. "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee."

ii. But what is "the banner" spoken of in our text? It is, I believe, in a few words, the banner of truth and love; or, to put it together in one sentence, "the love of the truth." I think we may prove this from two passages: one shall be the words before us, "that it may be displayed because of the truth." Truth, then, heavenly truth, is, according to our text, one constituent part of the banner. But we read also, "He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love." (Song 2:4.) So we will put the two together, so as to make one inscription, which we will trace upon our banner in letters so broad and clear that he who runs may read it. Truth in the love of it. Does not the device of our banner correspond with what we read, "They received not the love of the truth that they might be saved" (2 Thess. 2:10); clearly implying that those who receive the love of the truth shall be saved? My friends, it is not the truth that will save us—naked, bare truth—truth in the letter without the power. It is "the love of the truth," in other words, truth received in love by the application of the blessed Spirit to the heart, making it precious to the soul, in which salvation lies. Never be satisfied with the naked letter of truth; never rest short of the truth applied to your heart in the love and by the power of God. This, then, is our banner—the banner which God gives to those that fear his name.

But what is a banner in its literal, natural signification, for we must clearly understand that to arrive at its spiritual meaning? It is a standard, or ensign, or to use simpler language, a flag. As such it is a frequent Scripture emblem, and we may consider it emblematic of three distinct things, being three purposes for which the banner is usually employed.

1. First, it is a distinctive mark. The first thing that is done

when an army is raised is to have a distinctive flag. When the Confederates, for instance, in America, broke off from the Union, the very first thing was to discard the stars and stripes, the old national banner, and to have a separate and distinctive flag. How could it be known on which side the soldiers were to fight, unless the flags were different? In our service, I believe, every regiment has its distinctive flag. So a banner, as a Scriptural emblem, represents the distinctive mark of the people of God, by which they are distinguished from an ungodly world. When the Lord then makes his truth precious to their heart, he gives them a banner to separate them from all others, to make and manifest them good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and to march under his guidance to certain victory. The distinctive mark of a "disciple indeed" is to know the truth, and to find that the truth maketh free. None know the power of the truth, the preciousness of truth, the liberty of truth, and the love of truth, but the family of God. The Captain of their salvation gives them this banner when he seals them his in the love of it.

2. But a banner has another emblematic signification. In the field of battle, when the trumpets sound the charge the flag has to advance. It is not left wrapped up in the tent, nor thrown into the baggage waggon, nor hidden anywhere out of sight, but has to wave over the heads of the advancing troops, that they may fight valiantly under its glorious folds. How many a gallant youth of England's noble blood has borne onward the British flag in the front of the enemy. So it is in grace. The church, in the Song, is said to be "terrible as an army with banners." (Song 6:12.) But why should an army with banners be terrible? Because it is an advancing foe. Their banners glitter in the sun; they are raised on high; the gallant ensign leads the way; the soldiers move rapidly after. How beautiful their array, how terrible their advance, how serried their ranks, how dreadful their charge! When a city is to be assaulted and the breach to be stormed, the first sign of victory is to plant the flag upon the battlements. The first Roman foot that trod the British shore when Caesar invaded this island was that of the standard-

bearer of the 10th legion. The bold Britons lined the shore with ferocious aspect; the sea was deep and the beach high, so that the troops held back; but the standard-bearer of the 10th-legion leaped into the sea with the Roman eagle in his hand, bidding the soldiers follow him unless they would abandon their banner to the enemy. Animated by his example, they all rushed into the sea and put the enemy to flight. So God gives a banner to them that fear him; not to hide out of sight, not to conceal it in the tent, as Achan hid his Babylonish garment, but to bear it manfully on high in the very face of all their foes. And what so cheering, what so animating, as the love of the truth? If this will not nerve our hand and strengthen our foot, what will? I hope the Lord has put the love of the truth into my heart, and the banner of truth into my hand. When the Lord “sends among the fat ones leanness;” when he “consumes the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field both soul and body;” he adds, to shew the effect of the general distress, “they shall be as when a standard-bearer fainteth.” (Isaiah 10:16, 18.) If, then, the standard-bearer faint, how it discourages the rest of the army. When ministers droop their heads, or turn their backs, how can we expect but that discouragement should spread itself amongst the ranks? O, ye standard-bearers of the banner of truth and love; O, ye officers in the army of the living God, be not discouraged; let not your hands droop, still less turn your back upon the foe; but go boldly on, fighting against sin and Satan even unto the death, under the glorious banner of God’s truth waving over your head.

3. But, if an army receive a temporary check, or if there be fugitives from the ranks, a banner is of great use for a rallying point. The Lord, therefore, says, “Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles.” (Isai. 13:2, 3.) When troops are broken, as they sometimes are by a hostile charge, if there were no banner, no flag, there would be no rallying point. But where they see a banner or flag raised up on high, especially their own regimental flag, there is a rallying point. In our civil wars, wherever

the king was there was his flag, first set up at Nottingham, and then from time to time at his various headquarters. This, then, served as a rallying point for every royalist, as the flag of the Commonwealth for the opposite side. So we poor fugitives, I won’t call ourselves deserters—the Lord has no deserters from his army; but we poor fugitives often driven back, though never really defeated, when we see the glorious standard of God’s truth waved on high, have a rallying point to bring us back once more under the Lord’s own banner; for as Moses, when the children of Israel fought with Amalek, “built an altar and called the name of it Jehovah-Nissi,” that is, “the Lord my banner;” so “in the name of God we set up our banners.” (Psa. 20:5.) Have you not sometimes been sadly scattered by sin and Satan,—thoughts, words, desires, evidences, marks, tokens, all scattered in all directions, as if by a hostile charge? Still you know something of God’s truth, for you have felt the love and power of it in your heart; so that if perplexed you are not in despair; if persecuted, not forsaken; if cast down, not destroyed. Love to the truth forms then a rallying point for your scattered experience. Your desires and affections are towards the Lord and his truth. You look up, you see the banner floating on high; you come back to the camp, and once more find yourself underneath the folds of that glorious gospel flag. I have read in books of travels that nothing is so cheering to an Englishman when travelling in the East as to see England’s flag flying over a Consulate, or from the mast of a man-of-war. He knows whoever assault him he is safe there, for under the folds of that time-honoured banner England’s aegis is thrown over him, yea, England herself, our glorious country is present, wherever her flag flies to protect all her citizens. So it is in grace: where truth is in its love and in its power, there Christ is; there is his honour, there his gospel, there his glory. This view brings us to our next point,

III.—The peculiar privilege of the Church of God that this glorious banner is to be displayed, because of the truth.

i. If, then, the Lord has given a banner to those that fear his name, and this banner is truth and love, it is not to be concealed out of sight, carried in the pocket, folded round the waist, or thrown into the baggage waggons among the women and children of the camp. It is to be “displayed,” that men may read the inscription, whether friend or foe. But this requires both strength and courage. A flag is not easy to carry, especially in the face of the enemy. It requires a stout arm and a bold heart. But unless it be carried on high, who can see its distinctive character or read its inscription—truth in the love of it? May the Lord enable me ever boldly and clearly to display it, and may you and all who sit under the Gospel rejoice in the testimony that the banner over you may be love; and as the Englishman feels protection under England’s glorious flag, fly where it may, so when you sit under the sound of the Gospel may you feel yourselves safe under its ample folds.

But I will tell you when it is displayed the best: when the wind blows upon it. On a calm day, you know, the flag hangs round the flag-post; the folds droop, and there is no reading the inscription. But let the wind blow: then how the folds are raised; the flag floats boldly forth in all its breadth and length, and the inscription can be read by every eye. So in a spiritual sense: when the heavenly gale of the blessed Spirit blows upon the heart and mouth of the standard bearer, helping him to set forth the truth in the love of it with unction and power, then the holy breeze from the everlasting hills displays the inscription to the soldiers of the cross, and every letter of it testifies to them of blood and love.

ii. But there are three things which I hope we never may be allowed to do as regards this glorious flag. You know it would grieve the heart of every true-born Englishman—and I think sometimes I am one to the very back-bone—to see any disgrace befall, or insult poured upon our national flag. I am no politician; I therefore merely quote it as an illustration. But you remember lately how we were almost on the eve of war, on account of an insult shewn to our flag: the whole country rose up as one man

to resent it. If, then, we are loyal subjects to the King of kings and Lord of lords, whose name we bear, we must feel at least as much loyalty to our distinctive flag, truth in the love of it, as ever we do to our national flag. There are, then, three things from which I hope the Lord will ever keep us. 1. First, may we never deny it! If you were an Englishman travelling abroad, in Turkey or any other land, you would not deny your country—the country of your birth—and repudiate her flag. You would not, for the sake of a little gain or for fear of a little contempt, conceal the fact that you were an Englishman, and born under your country’s banner. Would it not, then, be very disgraceful in you, after having professed a love to the truth, for the sake of a little pelf, or for a little fear of man, to deny that precious truth under which you have enlisted, and in which at times you have taken solemn pleasure? Never, then, deny the truth, as no true-hearted Englishman ever would, even were death before him, renounce his country’s flag.

2. Secondly, never desert it; never turn your back upon it, or go from truth to error, or from the love of truth to love a lie. Some cases occurred in the Crimea of our soldiers deserting their flag and going over to the Russians; and one of these wretched deserters, I believe, if not more, met with his just deserts, being shot down by his former comrades before he reached the enemy’s lines. So may we never desert our glorious flag—love of the truth. If we do, we deserve to be shot before we reach the camp of the enemy.

3. And, thirdly, may we never disgrace it. It is a glorious flag, the flag of truth. It is purity itself, for “every word of God is pure.” May we, then, never trail it in the dirt. May none of us who profess to love the truth, by word or deed, ever disgrace that cause which I trust we hold dear, nor dip the glorious flag into the common sewer.

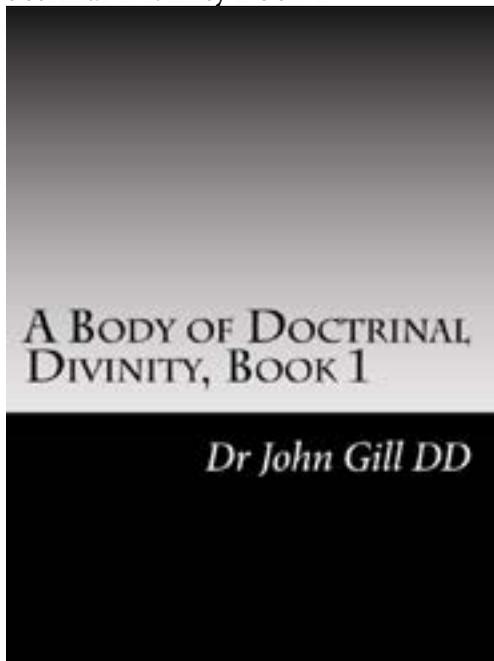
Bear these things in mind. The flag is to be displayed, therefore don’t let it be a dirty flag. It may be honorably shot through; it may even be stained with blood. This is no disgrace; but don’t let it be defiled with the dirt of the street. If you were an ensign in

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the army, you would not like to carry before your regiment a flag which you had let fall into the mud. Then don't you, with God's help and blessing, ever disgrace the glorious banner of God's truth by letting it fall through your misconduct into the mire. The Lord alone can give us grace to adorn it. May it be our desire not only [not] to deny it, not to desert it, and not to disgrace it; but as gallant soldiers love to glorify the flag of their country, and every regiment in the service will gladly shed their blood to cover it with honour and glory, so may we, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ desire to adorn that glorious flag under which we have enlisted, and which the Lord himself has put into our hands, that it may be displayed, because of the truth.

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3 Of The Names Of God

4 Of The Nature Of God

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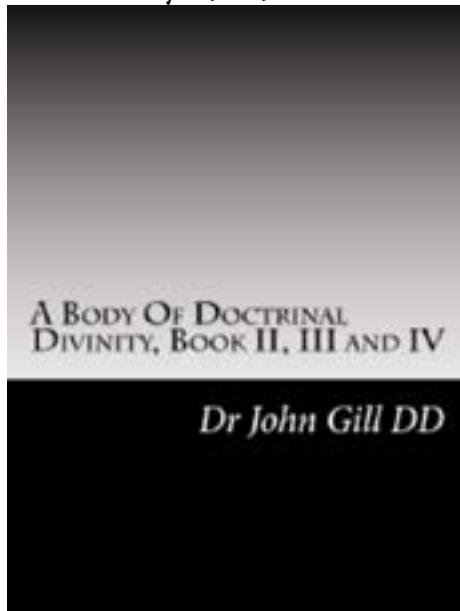
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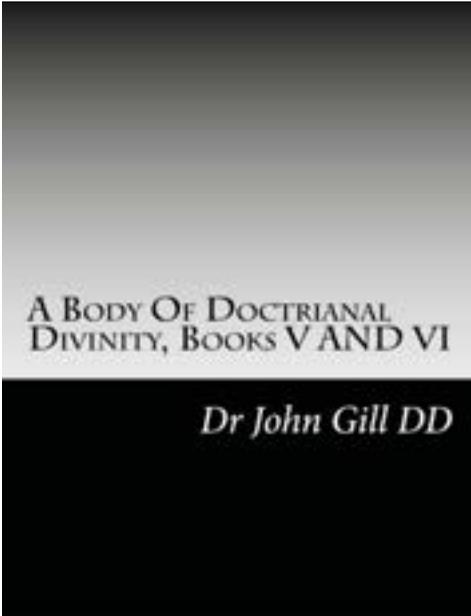
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A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, V, VI



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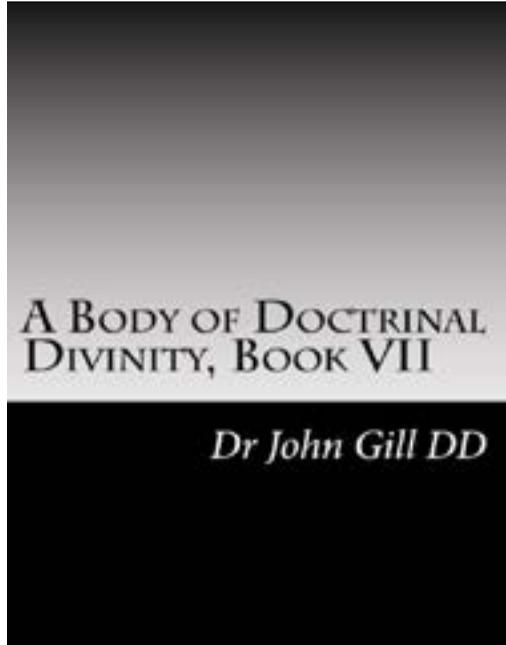
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A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, Book VII



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Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Created by David Clarke CertEd

List Price: \$7.99

8.5" x 11" (21.59 x 27.94 cm)

Black & White on White paper

118 pages

ISBN-13: 978-1544177342 (CreateSpace-Assigned)

ISBN-10: 1544177348

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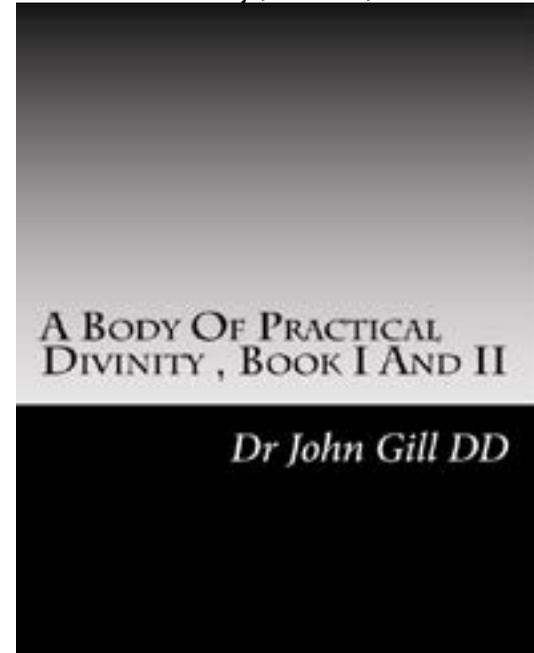
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ISBN-13: 978-1545542088 (CreateSpace-Assigned)

ISBN-10: 1545542082

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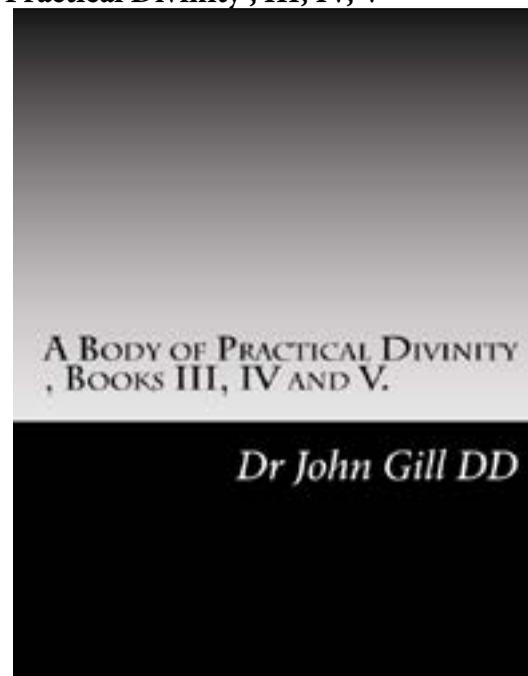
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ISBN-10: 1546846654

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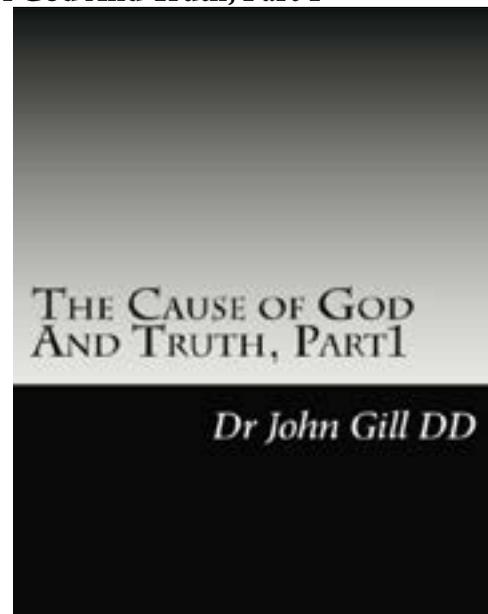
A Dissertation Concerning The Baptism Of Jewish Proselytes.

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The Reasons Why Christian Baptism Is Not Founded On And Taken From, The Pretended Jewish Baptism Of Israelites And Proselytes

The Cause of God And Truth, Part 1



Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Created by David Clarke CertEd

List Price: \$5.90

8.5" x 11" (21.59 x 27.94 cm)

Black & White on White paper

94 pages

ISBN-13: 978-1544094670 (CreateSpace-Assigned)

ISBN-10: 1544094671

BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

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

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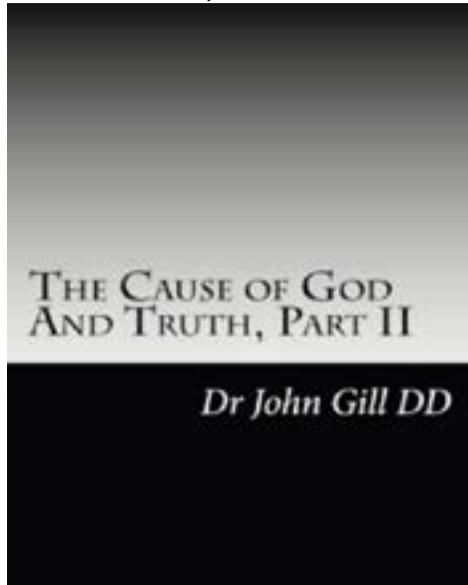
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Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Created by David Clarke CertEd

List Price: \$7.48

8.5" x 11" (21.59 x 27.94 cm)

Black & White on White paper

108 pages

ISBN-13: 978-1544648729 (CreateSpace-Assigned)

ISBN-10: 1544648723

BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

This is volume 2 of this 4 part series and it should be known that the following work was undertaken and begun about the year

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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 Arminian, and particularly from Dr. Whitby, and a reply made to answers and objections to them.

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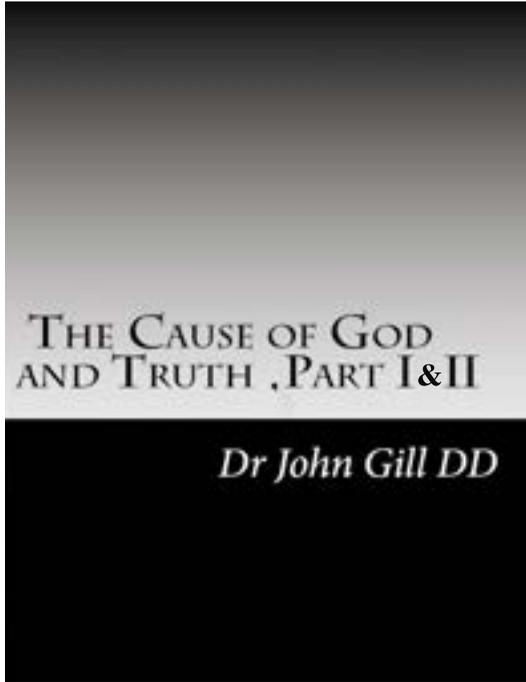
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The Doctrines of Grace

Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Authored by David Clarke

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List Price: \$9.99

8.5" x 11" (21.59 x 27.94 cm)

Black & White on White paper

108 pages

ISBN-13: 978-1544810591 (CreateSpace-Assigned)

ISBN-10: 1544810598

BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

This book contains John Gill's answers to Dr Whitby objections to The Doctrines of Grace under the following heads.

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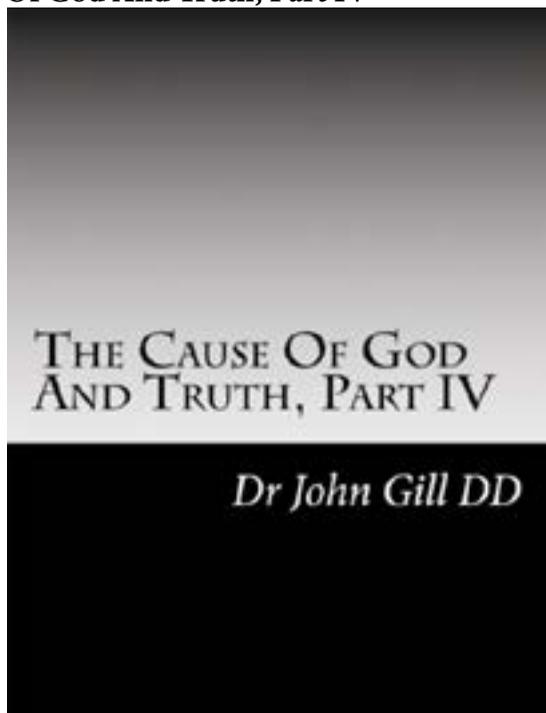
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The Third Part was published in 1737.



Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Created by David Clarke CertEd

8.5" x 11" (21.59 x 27.94 cm)

Black & White on White paper

126 pages

ISBN-13: 978-1544848709 (CreateSpace-Assigned)

ISBN-10: 1544848706

BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

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The Third Part was published in 1737, and is a confutation of the arguments from reason used by the Arminians, and particularly by Dr. Whitby, against the above doctrines ; and a vindication of such as proceed on rational accounts in favour of them, in which it appears that they are no more disagreeable to right reason than to divine revelation ; to the latter of which the greatest deference should be paid, though the Rationalists of our age too much neglect it, and have almost quitted it ; but to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them.

In this part of the work is considered the agreement of the sentiments of Mr. Hobbes and the Stoic philosophers with those of the Calvinists, in which the difference between them is observed, and the calumny removed ; to which is added, a Defence of the Objections to the Universal Scheme, taken from the prescience and the providence of God, and the case of the Heathens.

The Fourth Part was published in 1738, in which the sense of the ancient writers of the Christian Church, before the times of Austin, is given ; the importance and consequence of which is

shown, and that the Arminians have very little reason to triumph on that account.

This work was published at a time when the nation was greatly alarmed with the growth of Popery, and several learned gentlemen were employed in preaching against some particular points of it ; but the author of this work was of opinion, that the increase of Popery was greatly owing to the Pelagianism, Arminianism, and other supposed rational schemes men run into, contrary to divine revelation, This was the sense of our fathers in the last century, and therefore joined these and Popery together in their religious grievances they were desirous of having redressed ; and indeed, instead of lopping off the branches of Popery, the axe should be laid to the root of the tree, Arminianism and Pelagianism, the very life and soul of Popery.

This is Part 4 of 4 parts, and a new edition, with some alterations and improvements, is now published by request.

This work contains:

Chapter 1 Of Predestination

Chapter 2 Of Redemption

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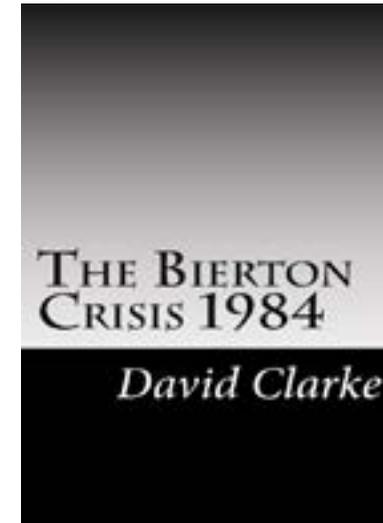
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Chapter 5 Of Perseverance

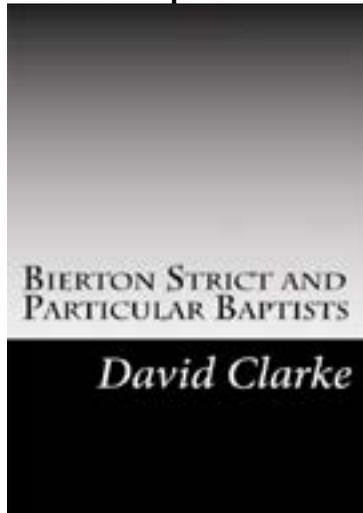
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A Vindication of The Cause of God and Truth

The Bierton Crisis 1984



The following pages contain a collection of recorded events, which seek to explain the reason for my secession from the Bierton Strict and Particular Baptist Church. Bierton is a village near Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire. The Bierton Church was a society, in law, called Strict and Particular Baptists, formed in 1831 and was presided by the son of John Warburton of Trowbridge, Wiltshire. It and became a Gospel Standard listed church in 1983. My succession from this church was not a separation from any other Strict Baptist church just the Bierton Church. I was not the subject of church discipline but rather I withdrew from the communion as a matter of conscience. And according to our church rules practice I am still a member. Conscience Free My voluntary leaving of this society leaves me free in conscience to relate my experiences, being bound only by the Law of Christ and not the rules of that society. The date of my secession was the 26th of June 1984. This is written believing this may help any persons finding themselves in similar situations and to point out the ignorance of some religious people.

Bierton Strict and Particular Baptists

My Testimony Being Set for a defence and confirmation of the Gospel Kindle Edition

by David Clarke (Author)

There are three separate accounts in the New Testament of a man who had been possessed with devils. He had been living among the tombs and the people had attempted to bind him with chains and fetters but he broke them so he would not be bound. People were afraid of him and avoided him. He had no house and wore no cloths and the devil drove him often into the wilderness.

And Jesus had just demonstrated his authority over the wind and the tempest to his disciples and now had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man and gave leave for the legion of devils to go into the swine and as a result the man was found at the feet of Jesus clothed in his right mind. The man wanted to be with Jesus and go with him, but Jesus said no but rather got to his own city and tell of all that the Lord had done for him. And straight way he went and published throughout the whole city of all that Jesus had done for him.

This book is a record of the personal testimony of the author in

which he tells of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for him it was first published on 11th February 2001 under the title *Converted on LSD Trip*. It is not written to glorify his past life but written as a testimony to what the Lord has done for him, despite his past sinful and criminal life. In this he tells of his early life before his sudden conversion from crime to Christ, him learning the doctrines of the grace of God and him joining the Bierton Strict and Particular Baptists church, in 1976. He tells of his succession from the church over matters of conscience, in 1984. These matters are told in detail, in his book *The Bierton Crisis 1984*

Even the apostle Paul told of is past life as a religious man in his own defense when persecuted by the jews. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, circumcised the 8th day, Of the tribe of Benjamin, as toughing the Law blameless, not in a way of boasting but to show his past life, even though he was a religious man he considered it as worthless. He had been a Pharisee and from a religious zealous point of view persecuted the church even unto strange cities. He punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blasphemy, and being exceeding mad against them.

When the Apostle Paul was arrested by the lord on the Damascus Rod he fell to the ground and Jesus instructed him that he was to make him a minister and a witness both of the things he had seen and those things He would appear to him.

The author has written this book for this reason to inform the reader of all the that lord Jesus has done for him and to point out those important truths of the gospel of Christ.