

J.C. Philpot

Sermons

Volume I2

Strict and Particular Baptists Minister

For 26 years

January 1864 September 1866

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
 11 Hayling Close
 Fareham
 Hampshire
 PO14 3AE
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."

195 The Sons of God; Their Blessings and Their Privileges 10

Jan. 31, 1864

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."

1 John 3:1

196 Gracious Attractions and Heavenly Banquetings 35

May 21, 1865

"I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them."

Hosea 11:4

197 What is Truth? or Truth in its Purity and Truth in its Power 59

May 14, 1865

"What is truth?"

John 18:38

198 The Mighty God in the Midst of Zion 87

May 21, 1865

"In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thy hands be slack. The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing."

Zeph. 3:16, 17

199 The Incorruptible Inheritance, with its Heirs and Legatees 114

May 28, 1865

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.”

1 Peter 1:3, 4, 5

200 The Precious Trial of Faith

141

May 28, 1865

“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 1:6, 7

201 Spiritual Blessings in Heavenly Places

166

June 18, 1865

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

Eph. 1:3, 4

202 One God And One Mediator

192

3rd December, 1865

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

1 Tim.2:5

203 The Wisdom of Men and the Power of God

200

June 24, 1866

“And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

1 Cor. 2:3, 4, 5

204 A Suffering Saviour and an Obedient People

223

June 24, 1866

“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”

Hebrews 5:7, 8, 9

205 The Staggarings of Unbelief and the Persuasions of Faith

246

July 1, 1866

“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.”

Rom. 4:20, 21

206 Wilderness Hunger and Heavenly Manna 271

July 1, 1866

“And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.”

Deuteronomy 8:2, 3

207 An Immutable God And A Strong Consolation 294

July 8, 1866

“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.”

Heb 6:18,19

208 The Vine and the Branches, or Union and Communion with the Lord Jesus 319

July 22, 1866

“Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me, ye can do nothing.”

John 15:4, 5

209 The Ordering Of The Cause Before The Mercy-Seat 345

29th July, 1866

“Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.”

Job 23:3, 4

210 The Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation in the Knowledge of Christ 368

September 16, 1866

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.”

Ephesians 1:17, 18

OTHER PUBLICATIONS 395**A Body Of Doctrinal Divinity Book 1 395****A Body of Doctrinal Divinity II, III, IV 397****A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, V, VI 400****A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, Book VII 402****A Body Of Practical Divinity , Book I, II 403****A Body of Practical Divinity , III, IV, V 405****The Cause of God And Truth, Part 1 407****The Cause of God And Truth, Part II 410****The Cause of God and Truth Part III 414****The Cause Of God And Truth, Part IV 418****The Bierton Crisis 1984 421****Bierton Strict and Particular Baptists 422**

195 The Sons of God; Their Blessings and Their Privileges

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

Jan. 31, 1864

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."

1 John 3:1

The life of John, the beloved disciple, was, by the express wisdom and goodness of God, prolonged beyond the space allotted to his fellow apostles. Church history informs us that he lived to be nearly one hundred years old; and Jerome, one of the ancient Church Fathers, as quoted by Milner, records a pleasing incident of him at that advanced period of life, which is so much in harmony with his general character that it seems to deserve our credence better than most of the current traditions concerning him. It is this. When he was too old and infirm to walk, he was carried into the assemblies of the Christians at Ephesus, and there he confined himself to these few simple words of exhortation: "My children, love one another." But I intimated that it was by the express wisdom and goodness of God that his life was so long spared; and now I will tell you my reason for drawing this conclusion. Satan, when he found he could not overthrow the Church of Christ by violence, changed his plan, and sought to subvert it by treachery. He therefore raised up in almost all directions, where there were churches of Christ, a set of vile characters, men erroneous in doctrine and ungodly in life, who sprang up as tares in the fields of wheat. To us it seems scarcely credible that within thirty or forty years after our Lord's death and resurrection there should start up in the churches such characters as Jude and Peter describe with their graphic pens. Hear Jude's description of many members of Christian churches in his day, which, taking the Bible date of the Epistle, A.D. 66, was but

33 years after the ascension of Jesus—a shorter space of time than I have professed to be a servant of Christ. "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." "These," he adds, "are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." (Jude 4, 12, 13.) What strong, what emphatic language! And yet the Church of Christ at that early period was pestered with these infamous characters. You will find equally strong language concerning them in the second epistle of Peter written about the same time. And even Paul, a year or two before the same period, denounces similar characters in terms not much less severe: "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." (Phil. 3:18, 19.) And again: "For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." (Titus 1:10, 11, 16.)

Now what a mercy it was that John should have been spared to witness not only the introduction of these ungodly characters into the professing church but their full development; that he, who had been an eye-witness of the Lord's glory on the mount of transfiguration; who had viewed his agony in the garden; who had stood by him when expiring on the cross, and marked the blood and

water gush from his pierced side; who had seen and handled him after the resurrection, and had beheld his ascension from Bethany, should have been spared to witness all these evils introduced into the primitive churches; for he was thus enabled, towards the close of his life, by the grace of God and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, to testify, with all the greater power and authority as an eye-witness, against these evils and these errors. The “grievous wolves,” for instance, that Paul prophesied should enter in among them at Ephesus (Acts 20:29) were there before his eyes, “not sparing the flock.” And so with other churches, such as Pergamos and Thyatira. The men and their evil ways and works were not shadows in the future, like the beast with seven heads and ten horns, but were then living, moving, and working in the churches with all their craft and hypocrisy, all their errors and heresies, all their wantonness and wickedness. God, therefore, preserved him so long in life that, as his last New Testament witness, he might deliver a standing testimony against those errors and evils which afflicted the early churches. If we had a fuller knowledge of these errors and evils we should see that John’s testimony was particularly directed against them. We should see why he was specially led in his gospel to testify so plainly to the Deity and eternal Sonship of Jesus, truths which these heretics denied; and to preserve so carefully the exact discourses of the blessed Lord, in which he asserted his essential oneness with the Father as the Son of God, and yet the reality of his flesh and blood as the Son of man. So in his Epistles, and especially in the first and longest of them, we should see how in every verse he denounces some vile error or declares some important truth. Well may we say that upon it are inscribed, as with a ray of light, these three conspicuous features: truth, holiness, and love. How, for instance, he testifies for the truth by setting before us the essential Deity, the eternal Sonship, and the propitiation made for sin by our blessed Lord! How he treats of his advocacy with the Father, as Jesus Christ the righteous, and assures us that his

blood cleanseth from all sin! How he denounces error with most trenchant pen, cutting off those who hold it as men devoid of the grace of God, and bidding us take heed of them, and not even receive them into our houses or bid them God speed! And is not holiness the very breath of the epistle? How he tells us that he who is blessed with a good hope through grace of seeing Jesus as he is purifies himself even as He is pure. (1 John 3:3.) How he warns us against loving the world or the things that are in the world. (1 John 2:15.) How he seeks to lead us up to have “fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3); declares that “he who saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked;” and lays it down as a practical test of the new birth: “If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.” (1 John 2:29.) Nor need I say with what a glorious flood of heavenly love this epistle is bathed. The love of God in Christ to us in sending his Son to be the propitiation for our sins; the love of Christ in laying down his life for us; the love which we should have to him and to each other—is not this divine and heavenly love in its mountain and its streams, in its communication and in its claims, in its living fruits and practical effects, the very animating breath of the whole epistle? The love of God, softening and melting his heart, seems to have touched his pen as with a double measure of holy force and fire, so that we may almost say, if truth be the body, and holiness the soul, love is the spirit of this blessed epistle.

Without further introduction, I shall at once approach our text; and I think we may see in it four distinguishing features:

I.—First, the wondrous love of God: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.”

II.—Secondly, the amazing blessings and privileges of God’s people: “that we should be called the sons of God.”

III.—Thirdly, the gross ignorance of the world: “therefore the world knoweth us not.”

IV.—Fourthly, the explanation of the mystery: because it knew him not.”

I.—Our text commences with a “Behold.” Let us not pass by this; for is it not as if John would summon us to behold a wondrous sight? Is it not as if he would call up our sleeping graces and animate every faculty of our renewed mind, to gaze upon the stupendous miracle which he sets before our eyes? “Behold, what manner of love!” This call upon us to come and look seems to remind us of the various appearances of God in the Old Testament, when he suddenly and unexpectedly manifested himself as a God of love or power; as, for instance, when he appeared to Abraham in a vision of the night with those gracious words: “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and exceeding great reward.” (Gen. 15:1.) It may also remind us of the wondrous appearance of the Lord to Moses when he was keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, in the desert, when “the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush;” and as he drew near to behold the marvellous sight, God spake to him out of the burning bush—wondrous type of the ever-blazing Deity of our gracious Lord, and yet of his pure, unconsumed humanity in the most intimate union with it! This call of “Behold” seems to remind us also of Ezekiel, when sitting “amongst the captives by the river of Chebar, on a sudden the heavens were opened and he saw visions of God.” (Ezek. 1:1.) May it not also call to our mind the vision of Isaiah, when he saw “the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple?” (Isai. 6:1), or of Daniel, solitary and mourning by the river Hiddekel, when lifting up his eyes “he looked and beheld a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz?” (Dan. 10:5.) It may also serve to remind us of John himself when in the Isle of Patmos he heard a great voice, and turned and saw one like unto the Son of Man in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. (Rev. 1:10, 13.) As all these appearances were unexpected displays of the Lord in his grace and in his glory,

so when holy John says in our text “Behold,” it is as if he would rouse up our sleeping graces and bid us behold with eyes of faith and affection a stupendous sight not less marvellous than these appearances of God in the days of old.

Now what is this stupendous sight which John bids us here behold? “What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.” It is not merely what love, but what “manner” of love. Thus he would bid us contemplate the love of God under that particular form and in that peculiar manner in which God has revealed and made it known to the sons of men. In pursuance, then, of this godly counsel, I think we may contemplate this love under these three points of view:—1, In its nature; 2, In its manifestation; 3, And in its communication.

i. Look, then, first, at the love of God in its nature—what it is in itself, as a pure Fountain, distinct from its streams and effects; and I think we shall see certain peculiar features stamped upon it as such, enabling us to say, “Behold what manner of love.”

1. First, it was self-originating. Love, if we have any to the Lord and to his people, is God’s gift and grace; it does not dwell naturally in our hearts, but its source and spring are from above; but love in the bosom of God dwells in him as one of his glorious, underived perfections. It gushes, therefore, freely out of his bosom, as a river springs out of a mountain side, without any call from earth, without any invitation from man. Whence come three of our noblest rivers—the Rhine, the Rhone, and the Danube? All spring from the bosom of the same mighty Alps, a few leagues only from each other, whence they flow each in its own direction to gladden and fertilise every land to which they come. So the love of God to his people gushes forth from his own bosom unsought, unasked, undeserved, but carrying a blessing wherever it flows.

2. It was also eternal. No change can take place in the mind of God. No new plans, no fresh purposes, no unthought-of schemes can enter the mind of him who is One eternal NOW—

the great self-existent I AM. His love, therefore, like himself, must be equally eternal. It had no beginning, as he had no beginning; and it will have no end, as he had no end. Well may we pause before so stupendous a sight, as Moses at the burning bush, and gather up every faculty of our soul to listen to the words with solemn admiration which he spoke by his prophet: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." (Jer. 31:3.) If, then, you are asked, Why is God's love eternal? all you can answer is, Because it is the love of God who is eternal. And if you are farther asked, "How do you know that God has from all eternity loved you?" all you can reply is, "Because with loving kindness he has drawn me." This is the solution to the question whether in doctrine or experience; we can give no other.

3. But being eternal it must be infinite, for God is infinite; and as he is love in name and nature, his love must be the same as all his other gracious and glorious perfections, all of which like himself are infinite. But what a wondrous mercy it is for the Church of God that his love is thus infinite. To see this point more plainly, look at two other perfections of God in their infinity—his wisdom and his power. First look at his wisdom, and see how it is displayed on every side in creation. See in what infinite wisdom the Lord has ordained and arranged everything in the visible creation, adapting each part to the other with all the perfection and finish of an exquisite machine. The sun moving in its daily orbit; the moon walking in her midnight brightness; the succession of seasons; the multiplicity of animals upon the face of the earth; each one of them a miracle in its formation, propagation, and provision—what proofs before our eyes do all these daily wonders afford us of the infinite wisdom of God. And do they not also give us equal proofs of his infinite power? If, then, his wisdom and his power are thus shown to be infinite, is it not equally true of his love? Now the peculiar blessedness of this love

as being infinite is that as such it includes all the saints of God in one universal embrace. It is like his wisdom and his power in nature. In creation, there is nothing too great and nothing too small to display the infinite wisdom and power of God. There is as much wisdom and power in the creation of the trunk of a bee as of the trunk of an elephant; in the making of the sting of a wasp as of the claw of a tiger; in the formation of the eye to see the light of the sun as in the formation of the sun to give light to the eye. Now what is true in creation is true in grace; what is true of God's wisdom and power is true of his love. Do but apply this. You may think yourself too insignificant a creature or too sinful a wretch for God's love to embrace. But as his love is infinite, it embraces with equal strength all the elect of Christ; and if you are so blessed and favoured as to be amongst the number of those whom God from all eternity has loved, his love reaches down to you who are less than the least of all saints as much as his wisdom and his power to the smallest of his creatures.

4. But being infinite, this love is also inexhaustible; and this is another blessed object of contemplation in looking at "the manner" of God's love. We should soon have drained it dry were it not an inexhaustible fountain. Look at the millions of God's redeemed family, whether glorified spirits in heaven or still sojourning upon earth, or still to be born in the process of time. How inexhaustibly the love of God has been flowing forth for ages to every one of those countless millions. As an emblem of this inexhaustible love, look at the sun; think of the ages for which it has shone unexhausted and inexhaustible; consider the millions and millions of beams which it has cast upon the earth; the thousands of crops which it has ripened, the millions of fruit it has brought to perfection; and yet it shines still. It shines to day as it shone 6,000 years ago; and it will not cease to shine till he who made it what it is bids it cease to be. So with the love of God: it has shone into the hearts of millions; it has been the spring of all their

happiness and the source of all their fruitfulness; their joy in life, their support in death, their bliss in eternity. Their sins have not worn it out, nor their backslidings exhausted it; for its very nature is to be unexhausted, inexhaustible.

5. It is, therefore, unchangeable. God does not love to day and hate to morrow. His own words are: "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (Mal. 3:6.) It is most contrary to the revelation which God has given of himself in the Scripture as "resting in his love" (Zeph. 3:17); as "being of one mind and none can turn him" (Job. 23:13); as "one with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17): to think that after he has once fixed his love upon any of his people, he should repent of that love and take it away from them as being unworthy of it. "The gifts and calling of God," we are expressly told, "are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29); that is, God never repents of the gifts of his love and grace, and the calling which is the fruit of them. Did not the Lord know from all eternity what his people would be? Did he not know that, as Moses said to the children of Israel, they would be "a stiff-necked people," provoking him continually to his face? And yet he says of them: "If heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord." (Jer. 31:37.) The immutability of his love is the foundation of all our hope; for we well know if our sins and backslidings could turn this love away we soon sink to rise no more. But this is the consolation of the family of God, that his love is as immutable as his own eternal essence. Thus far then have I endeavoured to describe the nature of God's love; but O, how weakly and imperfectly have I set it forth!

ii. I now, then, pass on to consider the two other peculiar features of this love, viz., its manifestation and its communication; and I think I shall do this best by coming at once to the second branch of my subject in which they more conspicuously appear:

II.—The amazing blessings and privileges of God's people in being called the sons of God.

i. God loved his people from all eternity, but he loved them only in Christ. This must ever be borne in mind, or we shall make sad mistakes in this important matter. If God loved you, it is not because he saw anything in you to love. He does not only love you as the mere creature of his hand, for that you share in common with your fellow men; for you must bear in mind that there is a love which God bears to the creatures of his hand distinct from his love in grace. We therefore read: "He loveth the stranger in giving him food and raiment." (Deut. 10:18.) But the love which he has to your soul, whereby he means to make you a partaker of his eternal glory, is not the love which he has to you as the creature of his hand, but the love he has to you as a member of the mystical body of Christ. This is what I mean by the love of God in its manifestation. The apostle therefore says: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." If, therefore, sometimes you stand astonished at the love of God, or have ever been incredulous that the love of God should be fixed upon you, as feeling your utter insignificance as well as miserable sinfulness and vileness, you must consider why it is that God has loved you or any other of the human race: it is in his dear Son. It is in his Son that he chose the Church; in his Son that he blessed her with all spiritual blessings; in his Son that he accepted her as without spot or blemish, for she is "accepted in the Beloved." Is not this the clear, indubitable language of the apostle? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: to the

praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." (Eph. 1:3, 4, 6.) The Church never was separated in the mind of God from her covenant Head, for she is "his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:23.) The love, therefore, which God has to his dear Son reaches and is extended unto all the members of his mystical body. This is blessedly intimated in the intercessory prayer of our Lord: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:23); and again: "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:26.) The apostle, therefore, says, "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, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:4, 5, 6, 7.) Is God "rich in mercy?" It is "in Christ Jesus." Is the love wherewith he loved us great? It is so only in Christ Jesus. When we were dead in sins, did he quicken us? It was "together with Christ." Did he raise us up together and make us sit together in heavenly places? It is "in Christ Jesus." Will he show "in the ages to come the exceeding riches of his grace?" It will be "in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Christ, then, in his Person and work is the manifestation of the love of God—the consecrated channel through which it flows, and by which it is bounded.

Now this brings us to a very important feature in the love of God as thus manifested in the Person and work of his dear Son, which is redemption. This is a point which it deeply concerns us experimentally and savingly to know, for it meets us in our lost ruined condition as sinners; and it is as being in this case that the

love of God is specially manifested. You know that in Adam we all sinned and fell from our native purity and innocency. The image of God in which we were created was utterly defaced; we became alienated from the life of God, and sank down before him dead in trespasses and sins. There was a need, therefore, of redemption from this state of alienation and death, guilt and condemnation, and all the other dreadful consequences of the Adam fall. Here love was so singularly manifested. The fall did not forfeit sonship, but it forfeited the image of God; it did not blot the names of the elect out of the Book of Life, but it blotted them all over with the mud and mire of sin; it did not destroy the union which the people of God had with Christ their covenant Head, but it sank the members of his mystical body into a pit of sin and misery, out of which nothing but the incarnation of the Son of God and the propitiation he made by his bloodshedding and death could lift them out. It did not remove or impair the love of God towards the Church of Christ, for that was antecedent to the fall, but it made redemption necessary for its manifestation. It enhanced it, made it more signal and glorious, and displayed in all its lustre the nature of that love which is as strong as death, which many waters of sin could not quench nor all the floods of evil drown. Whatever God was to man, whatever man was to God, sin had come in and separated between them. Sin is so dreadful an evil; it is so loathsome to the eyes of infinite Purity, such an insult to his divine Majesty, such treason to his authority, such a violation of his justice, that whatever the love of God might be to man it could not flow down to him whilst this barrier stood in the way. It must then be removed, or God and man be ever separate. But none could remove this barrier except God's dear Son, and he only by his mediation and death. Hence the necessity and nature of redemption by the bloodshedding of Jesus. To us, then, as sinners there is no manifestation of the love of God but in the Person and work of his dear Son, for in him there is redemption, and in no other. The apostle therefore says:

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” (Eph. 1:7.) But what is the result of this work of redeeming blood? That by it poor guilty sinners obtain the pardon of all their sins; and their sins being pardoned and put away, they obtain access unto God. They are thus reconciled and brought near to their heavenly Father; for sin being removed by the sacrifice and bloodshedding of Christ, there is now no longer a barrier between God and them. Now to obtain a sense of this pardon in his own soul every child of God is made to sigh and cry mightily with prayers and supplications before the throne of grace. He is thus taught the value and blessedness of atoning blood; and as the sufferings, bloodshedding, and death of the Lord Jesus are more and more revealed to his heart, the more simply and unreservedly does he look to the blood of the Lamb to purge his conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Thus the very weight of sin on his conscience makes him enter all the more feelingly and experimentally into the nature of redemption; and it becomes more opened to his view that by his precious bloodshedding and death Jesus redeemed unto God all who believe in his name, put away their sins, and for ever blotted them out. He sees that he silenced the curse of the law by himself being made a curse for us; that he appeased the anger of God due to our transgressions, and fully satisfied the claims of justice, which otherwise would have dragged us to her awful bar, and hurled us for our offences into a deserved hell. A sight and sense of our danger much open the ear to receive instruction; and thus as the work of redemption is more plainly discovered to our spiritual view, and faith is raised up and drawn forth to believe more personally and experimentally what is thus revealed, we get clearer, more abiding, and soul-transforming views of the love of God in Christ. Despair on the one side and self-righteousness on the other get a deadly wound from a believing sight of the cross; and the soul rejoices in a crucified Christ with trembling. Well

may John then say: “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.” How wondrous in its nature; how gracious in its manifestation; how blessed in its communication. This last is the point to which we are now come, and which I shall attempt to open.

ii. Whatever be the nature of the love of God, in all its self-originating, infinite, inexhaustible, and immutable character; or whatever grace there is in its manifestation in the Person and work of his dear Son, it is only by its communication to our soul that we come to any personal experience of it. It is therefore with this as with all other precious truths of the gospel. Though they are all contained in the Person and work of the Son of God; though they are most blessed realities as unfolded in the word of his grace, there must be a communication of them to our souls that we may believe them, feel their power, and walk in the sweet enjoyment of them.

1. Here, then, we are at once brought to the first work of the Holy Ghost upon the heart in regeneration, to make us sons of God by a new and spiritual birth. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.” This is the love of God in its first communication, for it is bestowed upon us as an act of sovereign grace to make and manifest us to be the sons of God. And do we not see all the three Persons of the Godhead in the manner of this love? In the manner of its nature, we see the Father; in the manner of its manifestation, we see the Son; in the manner of its communication, we see the Holy Ghost; and each and all of these three Persons of the Godhead engaged in the bestowing of this love on the members of the mystical body of Jesus. But the work of the Holy Ghost upon the heart, in regeneration, is to manifest us sons of God by making us partakers of a new birth.

2. But this is not enough. There must be the spirit of adoption, breathed into our soul by the same Holy Spirit, before we can claim the sweet relationship, for we are sons before we know it,

before we feel, or believe, or enjoy it. As the apostle says, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." (Gal. 4:6.) This is the Spirit's witness: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." (Rom. 8:16.) This, therefore, is the greatest and most blessed communication of the love of God, for it is then shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. It is what few enjoy in its full communication, and they only at special seasons; but some measure of it is necessary before we can see our sonship clearly, or believe in our heart that God is our Father.

iii. But the contemplation of this love in its nature, manifestation, and communication may, with the Lord's help and blessing, lead us more clearly to see the amazing blessings and privileges which God has conferred upon his people in bestowing upon them this love. John calls upon us to admire it: "Behold, what manner of love;" as if he would hold it up for our special view and spiritual contemplation, that we might be engaged thereby to meditate more deeply upon it, and seek for a more believing and experimental reception of its beauty and blessedness into our inmost spirit. What, then, are some of these amazing blessings and privileges?

1. The first and the foundation of the whole is to be "called the sons of God." "Called" but by whom? By man? That will little profit us: for many have called themselves and called others sons of God whom the Lord never authorised, whose claim and whose call he never ratified. Some through presumption, and others through ignorance, lay their claim upon God as their Father whom he will never own as his children, but rather say, "Depart from me; I never knew you." But if God call you his son then "all things are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Look then next at some of these blessings and privileges of sonship thus bestowed.

2. If you are a son, you are a pardoned son. Christ has borne your sins in his own body on the tree. He has washed you in the fountain of his precious blood, obeyed the law which you have

broken, wrought out a robe of righteousness which is freely imputed to you, and in which you stand complete before God.

3. As another blessing and privilege of a son of God, he has access to his Father's house. The child, you know, as one of his privileges, enjoys a free entry into his father's house; he does not knock at the door as a stranger, but opens the latch as one of the family. He knows he is welcome there, and that his parents miss him if he does not fill up his place in the house among the other children. So it is with the child of God: he has free access to his Father's house. He does not stand outside as a stranger, or come in as an occasional and not always acceptable visitor, but enters in with the familiarity of a child. But what mean I by his "Father's house?" Do I mean merely what is so commonly called "the house of God"—the place where prayer is wont to be made, the tabernacles below where he sometimes manifests his presence and his power? This is indeed a privilege, and should be a highly valued one; but the house which I mean is the inner sanctuary of the Lord's presence—that sacred spot of which David speaks: "he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psa. 91:1); that habitation of which Moses wrote: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations" (Psa. 90:1); that holy and heavenly abode which the Lord promised by the prophet: "I will be to them a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." (Ezek. 11:16.) Access to God in our troubles, a refuge in his bosom from every storm—this is the special privilege of a child. To such he speaks in those gracious words: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." (Isai. 26:20.)

4. The son has also a seat at the Father's table. Whatever the food be, be it little or much, be it dainty or homely, the child has a place at his father's board. So it is with these sons of God. God has richly supplied his table with every gospel delicacy: there is bread

made from the very finest of the wheat—"the living bread which came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die;" there is honey out of the rock; there is the choicest and sweetest milk to feed the babe; there is strong meat to nourish the man. There is not a single delicacy that can tempt the feeblest appetite, nor the most solid food that can gratify the most insatiable hunger, which God has not spread upon his heavenly table. The sweet promises, the encouraging invitations, the glorious truths, the holy precepts, the solemn ordinances, and, what crowns all, gives life to all, and is the sum and substance of all—the flesh and blood of his dear Son, are the provisions with which God has abundantly blessed Zion. And he who has spread the banquet says, "Come eat of my bread and drink of the wine which I have mingled." (Prov. 9:5.) Nay, Jesus himself proclaims from the head of the table, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." The child comes as a child; he finds the table spread for him without his care or forethought, without his labour or expense. O how sweet it is when in this childlike spirit we can sit down and eat of heavenly food; when without fear, bondage, or unbelief; without darkness, barrenness and death, we can take up the word of life, and, mixing faith with what we read, sometimes drink the milk, sometimes eat the solid meat, sometimes take a sip of gospel wine, or taste of the honey out of the rock. This spiritual appetite for spiritual food; this sitting under the shadow of Jesus with great delight, and finding his fruit sweet to our taste (Song. 2:3), is a sure testimony of our adoption into the family of God.

5. Another privilege of a son is to be an heir. "And if children then heirs—heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Our sonship does not end with this life, but abides for ever and ever. This indeed is the peculiar blessedness of being a child of God, that death, which puts a final extinguisher on all the hopes and happiness of the children of men, gives him the fulfilment of all his hopes and the consummation of all his happiness; for it places

him in possession of "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." (1 Pet. 1:4, 5.) In this life we have sometimes sips and tastes of sonship, feeble indeed and interrupted, so that it is with us as Mr. Hart speaks:

"Though thou here receive but little,
Scarce enough
For the proof
Of thy proper title;"

yet are they so far pledges of an inheritance to come. But this life is only an introduction to a better. In this life we are but children, heirs indeed, but heirs in their minority; but in the life to come, if indeed we are what we profess to be, sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, we shall be put into full possession of the eternal inheritance. And what is this? Nothing less than God himself. "Heirs of God," says the apostle. For as the Lord said to Abraham, "I am thy shield and exceeding great reward;" as he said to the Levites, "I am their inheritance," so God himself is the inheritance of his people; yes, he himself in all his glorious perfections. All the love of God, the goodness of God, the holiness of God, all his happiness, bliss, and blessedness, all his might, majesty, and glory, as shining forth in the Person of his dear Son in all the blaze of one eternal, unclouded day—this is the saint's inheritance. Let us not then be weary in well doing; nor faint and tire in running the race set before us, with this prize in view; but press on by faith and prayer to win this eternal and glorious crown.

6. But I must add one more privilege of sonship, and that is obedience. If we are children of God, sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, it is our privilege to be obedient to the will of our heavenly Father; and that from the heart. It is one of our richest mercies and noblest privileges to render to him, not eye service,

the miserable bondage of the slave, but that free obedience which is due to him as Parent from a child. You know the difference between the cheerful obedience of an affectionate daughter or a dutiful son, and the forced obedience of a wretched drudge. One is spontaneous, hearty, affectionate, free, and is accepted as such; the other is extorted by fear, or given with an eye to the wages. Obedience to the precepts of the gospel, doing the will of God from the heart, living to his honour and glory, walking daily in the fear of the Lord, loving his people and seeking their good, and manifesting the power of vital godliness by a meek, quiet, holy life and conversation, are so many blessed marks and evidences of an adoption into the family of God.

7. A daily cross, a path of trial and tribulation, a chastening rod for going astray, a furnace of affliction, purging away the dross and tin, and its fruits, as producing true humility of mind, brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, and tenderness of conscience, with much self-loathing and self-abhorrence, godly sorrow for sin, and earnest desires for close and holy communion with God—these are other privileges of sonship, not indeed much prized or coveted by the professors of our day, but blessed marks of a heavenly birth.

In looking at these privileges and comparing your experience with them, you will probably find some to encourage and others to discourage you. We would not be deceived; we would be honest to God and to our own consciences; and as we cannot take to ourselves what the Lord does not give, and our evidences are often obscured or out of sight, the seasons are many when we cannot rise up into the sweet enjoyment of our adoption into the living family.

III.—But I pass on to the third point which I proposed for our consideration, the gross ignorance of the world as to who or what these sons of God are: “Therefore the world knoweth us not.”

What is meant by “the world” here? All who are not partakers of the grace of God, all who are in their natural state of unregeneracy

and death. Some of these belong to the openly profane, others to the professing world. But it is true of each of these worlds that the real character and condition, the state and standing, the joys and sorrows, mercies and miseries, trials and deliverances, hopes and fears, afflictions and consolations of the sons of God are entirely hidden from their eyes. But we shall see this more clearly by entering a little more fully into what is thus hidden from the world’s knowledge and observation.

1. It does not know that they are sons of God. It does not know what manner of love God has bestowed on them that they should be called his sons. It believes that God loves all men alike—that any one can be a child of God who will; that God offers himself as a Father to all without any exception, and that those who like to embrace this offer become his children at once. They have no idea that God bestows his love upon any particular persons, and calls them his sons. Nothing more moves their indignation than that a few poor, ignorant, despised people should dare to believe and call themselves the sons of God; as if such a favour peculiarly belonged to them, and to them only. How can therefore the world know them if it begin with denying their heavenly sonship?

2. It does not know their blessings. Being ignorant of spiritual things, having no apprehension or comprehension of divine realities, it cannot and therefore does not know those rich, those peculiar blessings with which God has blessed his people in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 1:3.) It knows not, for instance, what it is to be blessed with a sense of God’s presence, with a manifestation of his love, with a revelation of his mercy, with a discovery of the Person and work, grace and glory of his dear Son. Nor has it any acquaintance with those special favours that the Lord’s people are so earnestly coveting, if they are not in present enjoyment of them. It knows nothing of the breathing of a living soul after God’s presence; of its panting after him as the heart panteth after the water-brooks; of its longings to see his

power and glory, so as it has seen him in the sanctuary. And as it knows nothing of spiritual prayer and supplication, so it knows nothing of gracious answers. It knows nothing therefore of the joys of pardoned sin; of the shedding abroad of the love of God in the heart by the Holy Ghost; of a deliverance from the curse of the law, the guilt and sting of sin, and the fear of death. It knows nothing of the sweet opening up of the Scriptures of truth with power to the soul; of the application of the promises to the wearied spirit; of access to God in secret supplication through his dear Son; or, in a time of special trial and temptation, obtaining a testimony that the request is heard and registered, and will in due time be granted. It knows nothing of any softening, melting, or moving of the heart under the preached word; of any entrance by faith into the glorious mysteries of the gospel, so as to experience their transforming efficacy, and feel their subduing, sanctifying power and influence. These blessings, and many others—in fact, all the spiritual blessings wherewith God has blessed his people, the world knows not; therefore it knows us not.

3. Nor does the world know the motives and feelings which guide and actuate the sons of God. It views them as a set of gloomy, morose, melancholy beings, whose tempers are soured by false and exaggerated views of religion; who have pored over the thoughts of hell and heaven till some have frightened themselves into despair, and others have puffed up their vain minds with an imaginary conceit of their being especial favourites of the Almighty. “They are really,” it says, “no better than other folks, if so good; but they have such contracted minds, are so obstinate and bigoted with their poor, narrow, prejudiced views, that wherever they come they bring disturbance and confusion.” But why this harsh judgment? Because it knows nothing of the spiritual feelings which actuate the child of grace, making him act so differently from the world which thus condemns him; such as the fear of God in his heart, “as a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death;” such

as the holy reverence that he feels towards the name of the Most High, as deeply impressed upon his spirit; such as the dread of offending the Majesty of heaven by indulging in pleasures which the world calls harmless, but which he knows from the testimony of the word and from his own experience to be fraught with peril to the soul. It knows nothing of what it is to worship God in spirit and in truth; and therefore cannot understand why we separate ourselves from all false worship, and will not mingle spiritual service with natural devotion, or join hand in hand with those who serve God with their lips and Satan with their lives. It cannot understand our sight and sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and that is the reason why we will not run riot with them in the same course of ungodliness. It does not know with what a solemn weight eternal things rest upon our minds; and that that is the cause why we cannot join with them in pursuing so eagerly the things of the world, and living for time as they do, instead of living for eternity. Being unable to enter into the spiritual motives and gracious feelings which actuate a living soul and the movements of divine life continually stirring in a Christian breast, they naturally judge us from their own point of view, and condemn what they cannot understand. You may place two men upon a mountain top, with a vast and beautiful view before them. One man, dull and prosaic, without one spark of taste for beauty of scenery, resembles a Frenchman of whom I have read, who, when crossing the Alps, shut his eyes and sat shuddering in the carriage, for he could not bear to look upon those dreadful precipices and horrid icy peaks which rose in their silent majesty all around him. O no; he would sooner have been shut up in a miserable cafe in Paris than have had all this glorious mountain scenery before his eyes. How impossible for him to understand the feelings of his fellow traveller, some romantic Englishman, who is scarcely able to breathe for very delight and ecstasy. In a similar way, worldly men can no more understand why we can take pleasure in hearing

a long sermon, or reading the word of God, or being upon our knees in secret prayer, or feeling holy delight in the service of the Almighty, than this poor Frenchman could understand the beauty of the Alps, or that any one could take a delight in looking at lake and mountain, wild gorge or rushing waterfall, which made him shiver all over. You may place a horse and a man upon the same hill; whilst the man would be looking at the woods and fields and streams, or, if a Christian man, engaged in prayer and supplication to his divine Maker, the horse would be feeding upon the grass at his feet. So if men cannot enter into the divine feelings of the saints of God, need we wonder that they despise and condemn what they know not? The horse, if it could reason, would say, "What a fool my master is! How he is staring and gaping about! Why does he not sit down and open his basket of provisions, for I know he has it with him, for I carried it, and feed as I do?" So the worldling says, "These poor stupid people, how they are spending their time in going to chapel, and reading the Bible in their gloomy, melancholy way. Religion is all very well; and we ought all to be religious before we die; but they make so much of it. Why don't they enjoy more of life? Why don't they amuse themselves more with its innocent, harmless pleasures; be more gay, cheerful, and companionable, and take more interest in those things which so interest us?" The reason why the world thus wonders at us is because it knows us not, and therefore cannot understand that we have sublimer feelings, nobler pleasures, and more substantial delights than ever entered the soul of a worldling.

IV.—But we now come to the explanation of the mystery. We need not wonder at the gross ignorance of the world, and that it knows us not, for our text declares, "it knew him not."

The word "him" evidently points to the Lord Jesus Christ; for when he was in the world, the world knew him not. But we may take the word as applicable also to the Father, for the Father is spoken of in the text: "Behold, what manner of love the Father

hath bestowed upon us." What does the world know of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Has it any fear of his great and glorious name? Has it any faith in him? any love to him? any desire to please him? any dread of displeasing him? Has it any knowledge of the justice of God in condemning, any acquaintance with his mercy in forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin? We know, from the testimony of Scripture and from daily observation, that whilst men are dead in sin, with a veil of unbelief spread over their heart, they do not, indeed cannot, know God; for to know him is a new Covenant blessing: "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them" (Jer. 31:34); and it is also eternal life, for "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God." (John 17:3.) They may indeed "profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." (Titus 1:16.) Need we wonder, then, that it knows us not, if it knows him not?

Neither did the world know the blessed Lord when he sojourned here below as the very image of the Father. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." They despised his word; they rejected his message; and hated both him and the Father who sent him. They crowned his brow with a crown of thorns, they struck him and buffeted him, and did not spare to spit in his face; they took him beyond the precincts of Jerusalem to the common and abhorred place of execution, and there they nailed him as a malefactor to the accursed tree. And why? Because they knew him not. As the apostle says: "Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." (1 Cor. 2:8.) If that, then, was the way in which the world treated God's only begotten Son when he came into it; if the only reception which it gave to the Lord of life and glory was to put him out of the way as an abhorred malefactor, need we wonder if the world that knew him not knows us not? If we are followers of Christ and believers in the Son of God; if we

have his mind and image, walk in his footsteps, and are made like unto him by regenerating grace, need we wonder if the world is as ignorant of us as it was of him? Are we to be known and our Master unknown? Are we to be honoured and our Lord despised? Are we to be applauded and our King contemned? Are we to be loved and our Redeemer abhorred? Is the world to treat us better than it treated Christ? But you will say, "This is taking high ground." It is; but can we take lower if we take any at all? We are either children of God, or we are not. If we are, the world knows us not; if we are not, the world knows us and all about us. Some of you, with all your profession, are in that spot. The world knows you; for you are one with it in walk and spirit. It knows, therefore, all about you. Your inward character is not concealed from its keen, observing eyes. The world knows ungodliness, but it does not know godliness; it knows superstition, but, not worshipping God in the spirit; it knows unbelief, but not faith; despondency, but not a good hope through grace; worldly pleasures, but not rejoicing in Christ Jesus; self-confidence, but not having no confidence in the flesh. It knows the love of sin, but not the love of holiness; the fear which hath torment, but not the love which casts it out; the stings and lashes of a guilty conscience, but not the blood of sprinkling to cleanse and heal it. The world, then, will see all through you if you are imbued with its spirit; but if you have the Spirit of Christ, it knoweth you not because it knew him not. Nay, the more you are conformed to the image of Christ, the more you manifest your sonship by your obedience, the more separated you are from the world, the less will it understand you. If we kept closer to the Lord and walked more in holy obedience to the precepts of the gospel, we should be more misunderstood than even we now are. It is our worldly conformity that makes the world so well to understand many of our movements and actions. But if our movements were more according to the mind of Christ; if we walked more as the Lord walked here below, we

should leave the world in greater ignorance of us than we leave it now; for the hidden springs of our life would be more out of its sight, our testimony against it more decided, and our separation from it more complete.

I have laid before you this morning the wondrous love of God. Have you ever felt it? I have brought before you the peculiar blessings and privileges of the sons of God. Have you ever enjoyed them? I have shown you why the world knows them not. Do you feel that you have in your bosom something the world knows not, but which separates you in heart and spirit from it? And I have brought before you the solution of the mystery, and that it is because the world knows neither the Father nor the Son. Do you feel that you have that knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, which is eternal life? May he, if it be his sacred will, give us to know more of his stupendous love; to feel more our interest therein; may he warm our hearts more with his dissolving beams, and bring our life more under its constraining efficacy!

196 Gracious Attractions and Heavenly Banquetings

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning,
May 21, 1865

"I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them."

Hosea 11:4

Before I enter into the spiritual and experimental meaning of my text, I shall endeavour to show its connection not only with the context, but with the general subject of the prophecies of Hosea. The main business of a servant of Christ is to open up God's word spiritually and experimentally, for by doing this he takes forth the precious from the vile, and thus becomes as God's

mouth (Jer. 15:19); he preaches the gospel, so far as it is attended with divine power, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; he rightly divides the word of truth; and he feeds the flock of slaughter. And to do these four things is the especial office which God has assigned him as a minister of the gospel, as a servant and an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, therefore, thus exhorts Timothy: "Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." (2 Tim. 4:2.) Similarly does the same apostle lay it down as a part of the office of a bishop or overseer of the Church of God: "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." (Titus 1:9.) It is not then the mere letter of the gospel which a servant of God has to preach, but the word of truth in its spiritual and experimental meaning and power. But though this is his honoured and honourable office, he is not at liberty to affix his own fanciful meaning to this and that passage; for there is a vast difference between the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture and any arbitrary or imaginary sense which we may put upon it. Mere words and especially figures often mislead men. And it is surprising what mistakes are made by preachers not adhering to two very simple rules: 1st, to be guided by what the apostle calls "the proportion (or analogy) of faith:" "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith" (Rom. 12:6;) that is, let all our preaching be in perfect accordance with the grand truths of the gospel, and with what we have been taught to receive by faith as the mind and will of God. This is the grand rule to determine the right interpretation of a passage; for divine truth must be harmonious, and therefore every meaning attached to a text which is not in harmony with the great truths of the gospel must be wrong. But, 2ndly, there is another rule, pointed out by Peter: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;" in other words, there must be a connection between the literal

and the spiritual meaning of a text; for the one is based upon the other, and if we depart from the literal meaning to affix to it an imaginary one of our own, we do not speak as the oracles of God but the fancy of man. A minister then is not at liberty to take a text, and tear and rend it from the context and from the literal meaning of the words, that he may affix to it some fanciful, mystical interpretation, distinct from the connection according to which the Holy Ghost has revealed it in the word of truth. This is not to preach the word of God but our own fancy; and though nothing may be said in the sermon contrary to the truth of God, yet it is not a spiritual and experimental interpretation of the text, but a meaning of our own.

Take, for instance, the words which I have just read: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." To understand the spiritual and experimental meaning of these words I must take into consideration their literal meaning, the people of whom and to whom they were spoken, and the circumstances under which they were in the first instance addressed to them. God speaks to them of a particular people for whom he did all this, and of his dealings with them as acts already done. He does not speak, as in prophetic language, of something to be done in times to come, but of something which he had done, and to a people already in existence. We may indeed apply the words to God's dealings and doings now, and it is right that we should do so, for this, as I shall presently show, gives the passage a spiritual and experimental meaning. But to preserve us from error in so doing and thus affixing a wrong interpretation to the words, we must look at the circumstances under which, and to the people to whom they were in the first instance addressed. This is what I mean by the connection between the literal and spiritual meaning of a text.

With this clue then in our hands, let us endeavour to unravel the words before us.

First, we see that there was a people to whom the words were applicable then, or they would have been spoken in vain, and that there is a people to whom the words are applicable now; for the Bible would be of no use to us in our day and generation if it were a mere record of the past, and if we had no share in its declarations or interest in its promises. If then we can but ascertain who the people were to whom the words were addressed then, it will much guide us in our attempts to discover to whom they are addressed now.

Let us see then, if we can, who the people were to whom the Lord originally addressed them. We read in the verse preceding our text, "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them." The words of our text then were in the first instance addressed to a certain people called Ephraim. Who was Ephraim? Let us see whether we can gather up a little of the meaning of the Holy Ghost by ascertaining from the word who Ephraim was. You will recollect that Ephraim was the second son of Joseph, placed by his father before Manasseh, adopted by him as one of the Patriarchs, and eventually formed, according to Jacob's prediction, the head of a large tribe, occupying one of the finest parts of Canaan, and stretching itself across the centre of that glorious land, just above the portions of Benjamin and Judah.

But you will remember also that when Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, succeeded to his father's throne, the ten tribes, who are sometimes called Israel, revolted from his sceptre, and that only two tribes, those of Judah and Benjamin, remained firm in their allegiance to the house of David. Now of these ten tribes Ephraim, as being the largest and most important, became the representative. But the next step taken by the house of Israel when it had broken off its allegiance from the house of David, was to choose a king of its own, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who set up the golden calves in Dan and Bethel, to prevent the people going up to worship at Jerusalem. It was then to this revolting, rebellious

people that Hosea was sent to prophesy for about sixty years; and this is the reason why in this book you find so much mention made of Ephraim and Israel—the one term being of the same import as the other, and representing alike the ten revolted tribes.

But there is a deeper meaning in the prophecies of Hosea than all this; for here we find an excellent illustration of the principle of interpretation which I laid down in the beginning of my discourse, viz., the connection that there ever is between the literal and spiritual meaning. For herein lies so much of the blessedness of the word of truth, that it is not a mere record of the past, but a word from God for the present, levelling itself at us and addressing itself to our hearts and consciences. Ephraim therefore stands as a representative, or typical character; for there are typical characters in the word of God, and Ephraim is one of these typical characters, representing a child of God in certain states.

Now let us put together a few hints that may cast a light upon Ephraim as a representative character, as a standing type of a child of God under these peculiar circumstances.

1. One leading feature—in fact, the leading feature of Ephraim was, that he had backslidden; and; in the case of the literal Ephraim, backslidden almost into utter apostacy. Setting up the golden calves in Dan and Bethel was an act not only of backsliding, but of apostacy from the worship of the true God at Jerusalem; and therefore one feature of Ephraim, as a typical representative, would be having a backsliding heart, or being a backslider from God. The literal Ephraim persevered in his idolatry. God therefore gave him up at last to his apostacy, for in about sixty years from the commencement of Hosea's prophesying, Shalmaneser, after a siege of three years, took Samaria, and carried Israel away captive into Media, whence they never returned. As a people, therefore, Ephraim was irreclaimable; but doubtless among them there were secret vessels of mercy, as the Lord told Elijah, at a previous period, that he had reserved unto himself seven thousand in Israel. To them, therefore, chiefly Hosea spake, and to us through them.

2. But there is another mark of Ephraim as a representative character, bearing however much on the same point: “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.” (Hosea 4:17.) This was true literally of ancient Ephraim in the worship of the calves, and in Ahab’s time of Baal. But it spiritually and experimentally describes that idolatry of the heart whereby, often before we are aware, we become ensnared and entangled with our idols. Against this John warns us, as almost his last words: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” (1 John 5:21.)

3. Another mark of Ephraim, as a typical, representative character, is his ignorance of his own condition: “Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.” (Hosea 7:9.) He did not see how his strength was gone—devoured by the strangers whom he had fed and lodged, and who had well nigh eaten him up out of house and home. He was also becoming weak and infirm, and yet, like some foolish old men, tried to make himself out to be a young man. Every person of spiritual discernment could see the grey hairs sprinkled (as it is in the margin) upon him, and yet he was the last to see or acknowledge it himself.

4. He is said also to be “a cake not turned.” (Hosea 7:8.) This figure is taken from the ancient custom of baking bread, or rather flat cakes, upon hot ashes, in which case sometimes, for want of being properly turned, one part was almost burned to a cinder and the other not baked at all. He thus resembled the Laodiceans, of whom the Lord complained that they were neither hot nor cold,—neither bread nor dough, neither one thing nor the other, not fit for the church or the world, God or the devil.

But it would take up a whole sermon merely to give you even a sketch of Ephraim as a typical character, which is not my intention, though I thought that a few hints might prepare our minds for a clearer understanding of the words before us. I shall therefore now come to my text, and show from it what God says he has done to and for Ephraim in times past, from which we may

gather what God will do to Ephraim in times present. What God has done is what he still does and what he ever will do; for he is of one mind and none can turn him; his purposes will stand and he will fulfil all his good pleasure.

By way then of presenting the subject before your mind in a clear and simple manner, I shall speak,

I.—First, of Ephraim’s gracious attractions: “I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.”

II.—Secondly, of Ephraim’s divine liberation: “And I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws.”

III.—Thirdly, of Ephraim’s heavenly provision: “And I laid meat unto them.”

I.—I have thus given names to my divisions, to fix them more clearly and fully upon your memory; but to speak more simply, God here, recording his dealings with Ephraim, says that he had done these three things for him: had drawn him, had liberated him, and had fed him. And this is what God will do to his Ephraims now, for those whom Ephraim typically and spiritually represents. He will draw them, he will liberate them, and he will feed them. If we can but find and feel, prove and realise our interest in these three heavenly blessings, what is better than being drawn into the bosom of God, being blessed with the sweet liberty of the gospel, and feeding upon the provision that God has spread before us in the gospel of his grace?

i. If you look at the verse preceding our text, you will find the Lord thus speaking: “I taught Ephraim also to go;” showing that Ephraim could not move a step except the Lord taught him to go; and that the very power whereby he moved when he was drawn, the power whereby he spoke when the yoke was taken off his jaws, and the power whereby he fed when the provision was laid before him, was all of God. “I taught also Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms.” Just as a mother takes her child and teaches it to go, taking it by its arms and holding it up as it puts its little feet one before another, so does the Lord teach Ephraim to go. Would not

the child fall immediately that the mother took her arms away? But as held up it can move forward. And how kindly and patiently does the mother teach the child to walk. “Now put forth this foot, now that.” And how the little thing looks up and back to its mother’s face, feeling its dependence, and yet encouraged to step on at her gentle voice. So the Lord teaches Ephraim to go, taking him firmly by his arms, holding him up by his almighty power, and making his strength perfect in his weakness.

ii. But now observe the words: “I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.” The Holy Ghost here describes the gracious drawings whereby the soul is drawn into the very bosom of God; and it corresponds with what we read in Hosea 2:14. “Therefore behold I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.” You will observe that in these gracious attractions, the Lord speaks of two ways in which he puts forth this attractive power, which I shall consider each in its place. “I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.” These are the two instruments, so to speak, whereby God draws into his bosom the objects of his eternal love: “The cords of a man, and the bands of love.” The Scriptures speak elsewhere of this drawing; for instance, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” (Jer. 31:3.) Again, the Lord says, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” (John 12:32.) So we find the spouse in the Canticles breathing forth her prayerful desire: “Draw me, we will run after thee.” (Song Sol. 1:4.) But in the two passages which I just quoted, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee;” and “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me”—we see the foundation, or rather the foundations of this gracious attraction. The first foundation is the everlasting love of God, the love wherewith he loved the Church from all eternity, and gave his dear Son to redeem her by his precious blood. We have the same grand and glorious truth intimated in our text, in the expression “bands of

love;” for these bands of love not only signify the love which God sheds abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, whereby he draws, and, as it were, binds the soul unto himself; but the bands of his own everlasting love, whereby he has bound himself in the bonds of an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. And as this is the foundation we may look at this first.

Now if you or I have ever felt the power of God in our soul; if we have ever experienced any drawings of our heart Godward; if we have ever realised any strength, any ability, any willingness to come to the throne of grace, to pour out our hearts before God, and have had any desires, cries, sighs, longings, petitions drawn up out of our inmost spirit which have entered the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, the whole has sprung from God having loved us with an everlasting love. There never would have been a desire in our soul Godward; there never would have been a spiritual sigh or cry put into our heart; there never would have been any longing for a manifestation of the love of God to our soul, unless he had loved us with an everlasting love; for these are the drawings of his grace. And what is grace but a stream from the eternal fountain of love?

But there is another foundation of being drawn, viz., the cross of Christ. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” These drawings of the soul whereby it is drawn unto God, are “the cords of a man,” spoken of in our text. I think we shall find something very expressive, as very suitable in the words, for the Holy Ghost here seems to point our attention to the manhood of Christ, and direct our views to the man Christ Jesus, the Mediator between God and men.

iii. By “the cords of a man,” I understand, then, first, the attractions of the humanity of the Lord Jesus, as made known to our soul by a divine power. God is too terrible in majesty for us to approach him out of a Mediator. There can be no intercourse between a God of such resplendent majesty, such inflexible justice, and such immaculate purity, and us defiled worms of earth, on

the mere footing of Creator and creature, Sovereign and subject, Judge and criminal. There is no approach unto God, so as to plead our cause before him, or lay any petition at his feet, except through a Mediator of his own providing, and that Mediator God and man in one Person, the daysman of whom Job speaks, that can lay his hand upon us both. When then we have a view by faith of the sacred humanity of Jesus, and venture into the presence of God with a believing view of the God-Man at the right hand of the Father, as drawn to the throne of grace by faith in him as a Mediator, we are drawn with cords of a man.

But now take the words in another sense, which they will well bear: When God draws his people near unto himself, it is not done in a mechanical way. They are drawn not with cords of iron, but with the cords of a man; the idea being of something feeling, human, tender, touching; not as if God laid an iron arm upon his people to drag them to his breast, whether they wished to come or not. This would not be grace nor the work of the Spirit upon the heart. God does not so act in a way of mechanical force. We therefore read, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.” (Psa. 110:3.) He touches their heart with his gracious finger, like the band of men whom he thus inclined to follow Saul (1 Sam.10:26); he communicates to their soul both faith and feeling; he melts, softens, and humbles their heart by a sense of his goodness and mercy; for it his goodness, as experimentally felt and realised, which leads to repentance. (Rom. 2: 4.) These are “cords of a man,” because they address themselves to our tenderest feelings, and entwine round our inmost spirit, so as to draw us near unto God, with all that sacred tenderness, all that sweet affection, all that loving desire, and all those gracious influences, whereby we are attracted, so to speak, unto the very bosom of God, as making himself known to us in the Person and work of his dear Son. If you have ever felt any secret and sacred drawing of your soul upward to heaven, it was not compulsion, not violence, not a mechanical constraint, but an arm of pity and compassion

let down into your very heart, which, touching your inmost spirit, drew it up into the bosom of God. It was some such gracious touch as that spoken of in the Song, “My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him.” (Song Sol. 5:4.) It was some view of his goodness, mercy, and love in the face of a Mediator, with some dropping into your spirit of his pity and compassion towards you, which softened, broke, and melted your heart. And under these gracious attractions, these cords of a man, the heart was drawn away from mount Sinai to mount Zion; from the terror and confusion, the smoke and bondage which the law creates, into the light, life, and liberty of the glorious gospel, so as to feel the warm beams of the Sun of Righteousness with the droppings of the rain and dew from heaven, producing a softness of heart and a melting of spirit. You were not driven onward by being flogged and scourged, but blessedly drawn with the cords of a man, which seemed to touch every tender feeling and enter into the very depths of your spirit. And why is this? Because it is as man that our blessed Lord is the Mediator: it is the man Christ Jesus, the man who groaned and sighed in the garden, the man that hung upon the cross, the man who lay in the sepulchre, who is now the man at the right hand of the Father, and yet God-Man; for it is through his humanity that we draw near unto God. As his blood, which was the blood of humanity; and as his sufferings, which were the sufferings of the humanity; and as his sacrifice, which was the sacrifice of the humanity; and as his death, which was the death of the humanity; as these are opened up with divine power, they form, so to speak, a medium whereby we may draw near unto God, without terror, without alarm, because God in Christ manifests himself as altogether love.

iv. But with the cords of a man there come “the bands of love.”

When the Lord is pleased to let down a sense of his love into the heart, he puts bands round the soul, and by these cords of a man and these bands of love he draws it unto himself. But what does he draw it from? We have shown what he draws it unto—

even to himself; but let us now see what he draws it from. Where then does he find Ephraim, and what is he as drawn by his own pen? A poor, backsliding, idolatrous, grey haired sinner; peevish, fretful, rebellious, prone to everything base and vile. But if he is to be drawn unto and into the very bosom of God through the Mediator, he must be drawn out of the state and place in which the Lord finds him, out of a worldly spirit into which he may have got, out of idolatrous affections in which he may be entangled, out of a sad course of backsliding, if not open, yet secret, in which he may have been walking; out of carnality, pride, covetousness, and self-righteousness, and a host of evils that those best know who best know their hearts. Out of these he draws them with the cords of a man and the bands of love.

But let us look, for it is time to do so, a little more closely at this point, and consider out of what evils they are brought; for the grace of God is not a dead, inoperative principle, but productive of living fruit. The few hints which I threw out at the beginning of my discourse to illustrate the character of Ephraim may serve to show us from what the cords of a man and the bands of love bring him.

1. You will recollect that I pointed out the leading feature of Ephraim to be that he was a backslider. This in fact comprehends the whole of his case; for if we backslide it is sure to be into some evil, if not all evil. Ephraim then is drawn out of his backsliding state by “the cords of a man.” How tenderly, how graciously, how compassionately does the Lord speak to backsliding Israel: “Go and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever.” (Jer. 3:12.) “I am merciful, saith the Lord.” There are the cords of a man; for what mercy is there except through the man Christ Jesus? How the words appeal to our tenderest feelings! And now for the “bands of love:” “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you:

and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.” (Jer. 3:14.) “I am married unto you.” There are the strong bands of eternal espousals. During all his backslidings the tender care of the man and the unchangeable love of the bridegroom had been watching over Ephraim; and the time is now come to draw him out of all his wanderings and departings from the living God.

2. But I also intimated that another feature in Ephraim’s character was that he was joined to idols. This was true in the literal Ephraim, in his worshipping the golden calves, which was Israel’s national sin, and the damning spot which ever cleaved to the name and memory of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, as the guilty author, until the Lord cut it off and destroyed it from the face of the earth. But it is true also of the spiritual Ephraim; for the love and worship of idols is both the cause and consequence of all backsliding. Now nothing but a more spiritual worship can dethrone the worship of an idol; and nothing but a stronger love can overpower the love of an idol; for we must love something; and if we do not love the God and Father of the Lord Jesus, we shall love some idol god of our own. Here then we see how the cords of a man and the bands of love draw the soul out of its idolatry.

3. But Ephraim also was “a cake not turned,” neither hot nor cold, neither bread nor dough. And is not that just the character of a backslider, fit neither for the church nor the world—a burden to himself and a plague to others? But how is he to be brought out of this Laodicean state? By the purging out of the old leaven and being made a new lump—made into a fresh cake, put again upon the coals. (1 Cor. 5:7.) The cords of a man and the bands of love must draw him out of this mongrel state, this half-burned, half-baked, useless condition, in which he brings no glory to God nor good to his people.

4. The last point which I shall touch is the grey hairs that were being sprinkled upon his head and he knew it not. Premature old age, possessing the iniquities of his youth, which overtake and

press him hard with guilt and shame, was a character stamped upon Ephraim. But how is his youth to be renewed like the eagle's? How shall his flesh, as we read in the book of Job, be fresher than a child's, and how shall he return to the days of his youth? Elihu shall answer: "He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him." These are "the cords of a man and the bands of love." "And he shall see his face with joy." There is the fruit. (Job 33:25, 26.)

But having shown how he is drawn, and out of what he is drawn, let us now see in what way he comes. Jeremiah shall tell us: "They shall come weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." (Jer. 31:9.) Then they come with weeping and supplications, self-loathing, self-abhorrence, confession of sin, hating themselves, and hating the evils with which they have been entangled, for their language is—

"I hate the sins which made thee mourn,
And drove thee from my breast."

And yet this kind and most merciful God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ keeps drawing them on with the cords of a man and the bands of love. For now that they are awakened to see what they were and where they have been, a host of fears fills their minds. Unbelief strongly resists, and musters up every argument even against the cords which are drawing and the love which is attracting them. But the Lord still goes on drawing them out of their unbelief, their infidelity, their despondency, their gloomy doubts and fears, and almost at times the very bowels of despair. He has a firm hold of them and will never let them go until he has drawn them, not only to his feet, but fairly and fully into his very bosom. As the riches of his tender mercy thus lovingly and effectually draw them on, am I wrong in calling these cords of a man and bands of love gracious attractions?

II.—But it is time to pass on to our next point: Ephraim's

divine liberation. "I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws."

i. Ephraim had a yoke upon his jaws. What was this yoke and the necessary effects of this muzzle? These two: he could neither speak nor eat. The idea seems taken from the muzzling of the ox at the time of thrashing corn, when they trode the sheaves on the floor, which prevented the animal both from lowing and eating, a practice, by the way, which the Lord especially prohibited: "Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." This precept was sometimes neglected, and thus the figure is used as describing Ephraim's case; for there was that yoke upon his jaws which disabled him both from speech and food.

But what yoke was this?

I. We may view it, first, as representing the yoke of the law—that iron yoke and heavy bondage which is put upon the jaws when the spirituality of God's law is opened in a man's conscience, and he sinks under its condemnation and curse. Whenever this yoke is laid upon a man's jaws, its certain effect will be to close his mouth; to shut it up, so that he has not a word to say why God should not send him to the lowest hell. For if the spirituality of God's law, the inflexible justice of Jehovah, and a sight and sense of our sins in the light of his countenance are once opened up in a sinner's conscience, it will most certainly stop his mouth, so that he will not have a word to say why the law should not take its full execution, and send him to that awful spot where hope never comes, which, true or false, comes in this world to all. The apostle therefore says, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." (Rom. 3:19.) How true this is, so that a poor law-condemned sinner has not a word to say, unless it be to cry night and day, guilty, guilty, guilty before God and man.

But you will perhaps say, "Can a man get a second time under the law?" Surely he can; or why should the apostle thus exhort

BANQUETINGS

the Galatians before whose eyes Jesus Christ had evidently been set forth, and who “had received the Spirit” (Gal. 3:1, 2)? “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage.” (Gal. 5:1.) Backsliding from God, when the guilt of it is charged upon our consciences, will bring us under the old yoke, and shut us up in legal bondage.

2. But the expression yoke will also bear another meaning—the yoke of unbelief. And O how many of God’s dear family who have not perhaps gone very deep under the law, so as to feel its iron pressure upon their neck as sensibly as many do, have had the yoke of unbelief laid upon their jaws. The work of the Spirit is to convince us of unbelief, that is, convict us of its sin, and make us feel not only its guilt but its power. Has not this been the case with some of you here present? You have felt so powerfully convinced of your unbelief; it has been made so manifest in you and unto you as a living reality, as a working principle, that you are fully persuaded you could not, do what you would, raise up a single grain of faith in your own soul. You saw and felt your lost, ruined, and undone state. This was the sentence of the law in your conscience. But how were you to be delivered from it? Perhaps you could not tell; such a veil of ignorance and blindness was upon your heart. But you might have had a little light so as to see that there was salvation for a poor, lost sinner, and that this salvation was all in and through the Son of God and by faith in him. But now came the great difficulty—how you were to believe; for you were well convinced that a mere natural faith was useless here; that there was no power in it; promise for it, or deliverance by it. Now what was the effect of this wretched state of unbelief as thus sensibly felt and realised in your heart? You could not speak. What could you tell about the dealings of God with your soul? What could you say about the mercy of God, his goodness, and your experience of it: the lovingkindness of the Lord, the blood of Christ, and what he is to those who believe on his name, when

BANQUETINGS

you felt yourself so destitute of that grand essential to a knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins—the grace of faith? You were therefore dumb; and when you got amongst the family of God, and one began to speak of some precious promise applied to his soul, another of a striking deliverance into the liberty of the gospel, a third of some very marked and signal answer to prayer, a fourth of his enjoyment of the love of God shed abroad in his heart, you had not a word to say, could not look up, and knew not where to hide your head. You felt cut off; unbelief seemed so tied round your mouth and so to muzzle your jaw, that you could not speak a word of anything in a way of mercy which you had received from God, though there had been times and seasons when you had been a little favoured and blessed. So when you came before the throne of grace and sought the Lord’s face as a poor, vile sinner, you were almost, if not wholly dumb. Guilt had shut you up in its iron cell, and unbelief pressing you down, you had no power to pour out your heart before God. O, how sad is this, that at the very place, the only place where mercy is to be found and relief to be obtained, unbelief is often most pressing and most powerful; stopping prayer in its flow, or defiling it as it seeks to find its course. What inward condemnation this brought when you got off your knees and slunk into bed with a dismal sigh. Yet this worked for good. It cut up your lip religion. You could not talk any longer, as many do, whose religion, it is to be feared, begins and ends with talk, evaporates in words; for it lies not in their heart but upon their tongue. Whilst they talked you were silent; yet your very silence was more expressive than their fluent talk; for it showed that the hand of God was upon you which had never rested upon them. Silence has an eloquence of its own. David said, “I was dumb with silence; I held my peace even from good;” and again, “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.” (Psa. 39:2, 9.) “So Job’s friends spake not a word unto him for seven days and seven nights, for they saw that his grief was very great.” (Job 2:13.)

And as you could not speak, so you could not feed. You heard the gospel preached; the blood of Christ set forth; the sweet promises which are made to the people of God. Minister after minister described your case; sermon after sermon was sounded in your ears; book after book was read and re-read; hymn after hymn pondered over. And yet with all this excellent provision, the finest of the wheat, fat things full of marrow, and wine on the lees well refined, you could neither eat nor drink. And why? Because you had no faith. If your case was described, you had no faith to believe it belonged to you; if the minister entered into the very first and last a soul, and described your experience feelings of your thousand times better than you could have done it yourself, [???] you had no faith to believe that what you felt was wrought by God in your heart. You could not indeed deny that you had experienced such and such things, but you could not believe that it was a word of grace, or anything beyond what was merely notional and natural. Thus nothing that you heard seemed to do you any good; for the power of unbelief was so pressing, that whatever was brought for your encouragement was all rejected. You had no faith to receive anything for your comfort and satisfaction, however suitable it was: the unbelief of your mind rejected all. Now was not that your case, and had you not brought yourself very much into that condition? There might have been a time with you when, as Bunyan speaks, you were “a flourishing professor;” you could talk most volubly, and talk well, it might be, of what you had tasted, felt, and handled for yourself in early days. But you fell into idolatry; your heart was joined to idols; and God said of you, “let him alone.” You left your first love; you got entangled in some snare of Satan; sin became your master; guilt filled your conscience; God hid his face; and the devil muttered, “Where is thy God, and where is all thy religion?” And you had not a word to say before God or man. You could not speak, nor could you feed, for there was a yoke upon your jaws, and this completely muzzled both tongue and teeth. Now

if God does not interfere for the poor soul in this case, he must live and die with the yoke upon his jaws. No man can take it off for him, and as regards himself he is as unable to unmuzzle his mouth as a muzzled ox to work off by his lips the close-fitting gag. But God will not leave his Ephraims to live and die with the yoke upon their jaws. They shall speak, and that believingly too; and they shall feed, and that sweetly too. When then some liberating word comes attended with power from on high; when, according to the promise, the truth makes them free; when the Holy Spirit is pleased to apply some precious promise, and drop in some kind and suitable testimony; when, according to his covenant office, he takes of the things of Christ, reveals and makes him known, holds up Jesus before the eyes, and persuades them to believe in his name, raising up and drawing forth a faith in him, then there is a taking off the yoke on their jaw. This corresponds with that gracious promise in Isaiah: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.” (Isai. 10:27.) How is the yoke destroyed? Because or by means of the anointing. And what is this anointing but that sacred unction of which John speaks as “an unction from the Holy One whereby we know all things?” Under this unction, or anointing, for the word is exactly the same, the yoke is, as it were, melted and dissolved from off the jaws, dropping away under the power and influence of the sacred touch from above. Now no sooner is the yoke taken off the jaws than there is power to speak. It is with the soul almost as with Zacharias of old. For months he was dumb, as an infliction upon him for his unbelief; but when the time came for taking the yoke from off his jaws, “immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.” (Luke 1:20, 64.) This is putting a new song into the mouth. Now there is something to praise and bless God’s holy name for. This is “turning to the people a pure language” (Zeph. 3:9), not the mixed speech of Ashdod (Nehem. 13:24), but the

pure language of Canaan. You could not speak this pure language before; but having been emptied, sifted and winnowed from all your Babel speech and Ashdod jargon, and being instructed into the holy tongue, you can now speak a pure language—the language of free grace, the utterance of a believing heart. You can bless the Lord for having borne with all your crooked ways; you can see how longsuffering, patient, and kind he has been to you—such a rebel, such an ingrate, such a backslider, such an idolater. You now wonder why he did not stretch forth his hand and cut you off as you richly deserved; for you now see, as you never saw before, into what depths of carnality you were sunk, and that out of them nothing but his grace could have delivered you. As a sense, then, of his goodness and mercy begins to drop into your heart and dissolve your soul, there is a sensible loosening of the yoke off the jaws. Unbelief gives way, and infidelity is silenced with its horrid suggestions and cruel, killing objections; despondency, gloom, and despair loose their power and relax their chilling grasp. As, then, the yoke is thus destroyed from off the neck by reason of the anointing, and a dissolving power is put forth by the word of God's grace, loosening the bands of unbelief, there is a corresponding removal of the yoke from off the jaws. Now you find unexpected liberty in prayer. There is an open throne. The way long barred out by guilt and fear seems now clear; for there is an opening made through the veil, the rent flesh of Jesus. Now you find that your prayers are not shut out; that God is not angry with you, but that he is merciful, kind and compassionate, full of tender pity, love, and sympathy. By these things you are encouraged to pray and call upon his holy name more and more earnestly and perseveringly, and find sweet liberty in so doing. By these gracious dealings coming into the heart with some liberating power, enable you to speak to his people, to tell them how good the Lord had been to your soul, how he has borne with you with such infinite longsuffering and mercy, and once more enabled you to bless and praise his holy name.

III.—Now comes our third point, and we shall find some connection in it with the preceding, which I may term heavenly provision: "And I laid meat unto them."

You will remember that I said when the yoke is upon the jaw, there is no speaking and no feeding. Now just look—I want you to look into your inmost heart. I want, if I can, to put my hand into your very soul and lay my finger upon some tender spots there. I want to deal with your soul as the physician does with the body when he examines a patient. As he puts his hand on this or that spot of the chest or back, he says, "Is there any pain there?" How he searches for tender spots before and behind, that he may detect just the very place where the disease lies; and how the poor patient shrinks and winces, and sometimes almost cries out as the sore spot is at last found and touched. So I want to put my hand into your soul to search it all over and find out if I can the tender spots. And have we not all of us tender spots? I know I have a good many; some so tender that I can scarcely bear the least touch upon them. Brother sinner, brother sufferer, are you thoroughly sound? Have you no inward complaint, no tender spot, no little, or it may be large place where disease seems to have fixed itself? Let me then put my hand upon some tender spot. You have been an idolater; you have set up some idols, and perhaps many, in the secret chambers of imagery; you have been caught in some hidden snare set by Satan; you have got into the spirit of the world; your wife, children, business, occupation have been entanglements; these and other household idols have drawn aside your heart from God, and you have fallen into a very cold, barren state. Now be honest with your own conscience and say whether it be so or not. The patient, at least if he has any sense about him, tells the doctor where he feels pain. Why does he call him in or consult him except with the hope of getting good from his advice or prescriptions? To deceive him, therefore, is to injure himself; it is of no use deceiving him. Don't you then deceive yourself, for you cannot deceive the heart-searching God. And if you can but

do so, look up; do not despair. There is a remedy for you: don't think your case incurable; don't view it as hopeless. The very sense and feeling of pain that you have in your heart and conscience shows there is some life there; and does not the Lord say, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" (Jer. 8:22.) Yes, there is balm in Gilead—the balm of a Saviour's precious blood which cleanseth from all sin. Yes, there is a physician there—He of whom David speaks, "who healeth all thy diseases." The most skilful earthly physician may fail, the case being incurable; but not so with the great Physician of souls. Then lay bare your inmost spirit before God. Have you not got into a cold, backsliding state? Has not pride, or covetousness, or worldly-mindedness laid sad hold of you? Have not these kept back your soul from profitable access to the throne? Have they not hindered you in hearing the preached word from laying hold of what might have been for your comfort? Have they not darkened your mind in reading the word, brought bondage upon your spirit before the throne of grace, shut up your mouth in conversation with God's people, and troubled your soul when sickness or death seemed to draw near? Now here is a case for the Lord, just the very case of Ephraim. And surely he will, if sought unto by prayer and supplication, take this yoke from off your jaws, will make his grace to superabound over the abounding of sin, and lay meat unto you.

But this is the point which we have now specially to consider; for the yoke being taken off the jaws, Ephraim can now feed as well as speak. There was no use laying meat before him when he could not feed upon it; but now the Lord brings the meat nigh. And what meat does he bring?

1. The flesh and blood of his dear Son. Did not the gracious Lord say, "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." (John 6:55.) But what an appetite there is for this precious meat and drink, when the yoke is taken off the jaws. How suitable is the blood of Christ to a guilty conscience. How adapted the sacrifice

of God-Man Mediator to a poor sinner justly condemned by law and conscience. And how he feeds upon the flesh of Christ thus offered as a propitiation for sin.

2. But the invitations, the promises, the calls of mercy, the precious truths of the everlasting gospel, what in a word we may call the provisions of God's house, form also a large share in this heavenly banquet, which is freely spread for every hungry soul. The rich mercy is that God spreads the table, invites the guests, and himself lays the meat unto them. What free hospitality; what a cheerful welcome; for Jesus himself sits at the head of the table, saying to the guests, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved." (Song Sol. 5:1.) And lest any should think themselves unworthy, and stand trembling without, he says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3:20.) When then as drawn by these gracious attractions, and loosened from our guilt, sin, and shame by the removal of the yoke, we begin to feed without fear or alarm upon the flesh and blood of the Lamb and the glorious truths of the gospel, what sweet food, what suitable provision.

And yet, though strange it may seem to be, the very persons for whom it is adapted are often the very persons who are most afraid of taking it. "O, it is too good! O, it is too blessed! I believe it is for others. But for me, such a vile, guilty wretch, to believe the blood of Christ has cleansed me from all my sins, and his righteousness has perfectly justified me, and that this blessed Redeemer bore my sins in his own body on the tree, so that I stand before God without spot or wrinkle—O, this seems too good news to be true." Thus like a humble, timorous guest at a rich man's table, who is afraid to presume, though he is told again and again that he is freely welcome, we coyly sometimes and shyly partake of, and almost put away the very meat that God lays before us. This is our infirmity; and yet bashfulness seems better than boldness, and timidity more becoming than presumption.

But it is time to draw to a close. Bear then in mind, that you will always find these three things go together, gracious attractions, divine anointings, and heavenly banquetings. When the Lord draws with the cords of a man and the bands of love, when he takes off the yoke from the jaws, and lays the meat at the feet of his repenting Ephraim, it is the same power which draws, liberates, and feeds: “Draw me, we will run after thee.” But how can Ephraim run with the yoke upon his jaws? “I will run,” says the Psalmist, “the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.” There is the yoke taken off. David could also say, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.” (Psa. 23:5.) Yea, he could look forward and add, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” (Psalm 23:6.) May this be our happy experience!

I have this morning endeavoured to open up both malady and remedy—Ephraim’s case and Ephraim’s cure. Now we may not all have exactly sunk into Ephraim’s state, but we must all know something of both sides of the question, both of sin and salvation. We must know something of our own inability to run, that we may know what it is for the Lord to draw. We must know something of our incapability to break off the yoke, that the Lord may have the honour and the privilege of breaking it off for us. And we must know our own inability to feed upon the provisions of God’s house, before we can taste the sweetness of them, and sit as acceptable guests at the heavenly banquet.

Now who of you in this large congregation this morning can set to your seal that these things are true? But I am well convinced if there be here those who can testify that these things are true, they must be those who have known both sides of the question, the important question of life and death. They must have known creature helplessness and almighty power, bondage under the law and liberty under the gospel, the helplessness of man to

draw, liberate, or feed himself, and the sovereign grace of God in putting round his heart the cords of a man and the bands of love, in liberating him from a galling yoke, and feeding him with the bread of life.

197 What is Truth? or Truth in its Purity and Truth in its Power

Preached at Woodbridge Chapel, Clerkenwell, London, on
Lord’s Day Morning,
May 14, 1865

“What is truth?”

John 18:38

Before I proceed to speak from my text, or unfold the mysteries of divine truth which in connection with it have been suggested to my mind, I wish briefly to mention the reason why I have been induced to take it this morning. After I had engaged myself to preach here, which I certainly should not have done but for the personal and pressing solicitations of two of your deacons, and the peculiar emergency of the case—the severe and continued illness of your esteemed minister, I was considerably exercised in my mind about the engagement which I had thus made. This exercise of mind arose chiefly from two sources. The first was the sudden and unexpected change in the weather from great heat to much cold and wet, raising a fear in my mind lest, in my present delicate state of health, I might take a severe cold, and lay myself up just on the very eve of my engagement to preach at Gower-street. The second was that I was a stranger to the minister, the place, and the people, and they almost as much so to me, though I wish to add that your pastor was well known to me by report as a man sound in truth, and of a consistent, godly life. With these exercises upon my mind I retired to rest. I fell asleep, and towards the morning I dreamed a dream. Now generally I pay very little heed to dreams, as believing that for the most part they are but the loose, unchecked wanderings of our mind when our senses

are locked up in sleep, or, as the wise man speaks, they come “through the multitude of business” (Eccl. 5:3); that is, are as if the reflex images of the multitude of our daily occupations flitting confusedly through our brain. But in this dream, though it was doubtless in some way connected with the exercises of my mind, there seemed to be something peculiar. I seemed in it to be sitting in this pulpit, just as I now am, and the chapel and congregation, though I never was here before, appeared not very unlike what I now see before me. As then in my dream I was sitting in this pulpit, a hymn was given out and sung, the words of which have escaped my memory, but there was in them a striking and peculiar setting forth of the truths of the gospel. The subject of the hymn at once arrested my attention, and it seemed to be immediately suggested to my mind to preach from the words, “What is truth?” As it was not the text from which I had intended to speak, I took the Bible from the cushion to find the place, but could not do so; some confusion thence arising in my mind, soon after I awoke. Whether my dream came from God I could not tell then, and I cannot tell now. I must leave that point therefore undecided; but as the words thus came to my mind in connection with my preaching in this pulpit, and as on my waking thoughts the subject seemed suitable to the people, the place, and the occasion, I at once decided to speak from them. Thus much for the history of my text, and an explanation of the reason which has induced me to take it this morning.

It is now about twenty-eight years ago since I first spoke from it, for the place, time, and circumstances are fixed indelibly in my memory. In the spring of 1837, I assisted at the opening of a little chapel of truth at Calue, Wilts., and taking the words for my text, was I believe specially helped to preach from it the word of life; for not only did much power seem to attend the testimony from my lips, but as a special instance of that power, I may name that the sermon was signally blessed to a young woman in distress of soul

for her comfort and deliverance, who some little time afterwards died of consumption and made a most happy end. Now if the Lord should be but pleased to bless my sermon this morning from the same text as signally as he blessed it then, I shall think there was something in my dream more than a “multitude of business,” and in my discourse from it something more than a multitude of words.

It runs, you will observe, in the form of a personal question, that is, a question asked by one person of another. A question, therefore, of this kind implies two persons: the person who asks the question, and the person of whom the question is asked. Who then was the person who asked this important question, “What is truth?” Was he a good man? No. Was he a bad man? Why, if he was not a good man, he must have been a bad man; and yet was he not the worst of men: at least, he was surrounded with, and hard pressed by worse men than he, for I think you will admit that to sin wilfully is a greater sin than to sin ignorantly, and that the greater the privileges the greater the crime of trampling them under foot. The man, then, who asked the question if not the worst of men, was but a poor, weak, vacillating creature, ground down between fear of his master Tiberius, a very monster of tyranny, cruelty, and cunning, and of the Jews by whom he was surrounded, and that not merely the wayward, impetuous mob, but their leaders, the chief priests and elders, and all the council, who were thirsting after the blood of Jesus. Now God was determined that his dear Son should be pronounced innocent of all charges by the very man in whose hands the administration of the law at that time lay. We read, therefore, that Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, “took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it.” (Matt. 27:24.) Thus the very verdict of his own conscience was for saving Jesus, as an innocent man, from a malefactor’s death by crucifixion, if he could have done so without risking his own popularity and life. But the purposes of God must stand and the

Scriptures be fulfilled. I need not tell you, then, that it was this very Pontius Pilate who asked the question, "What is truth?" And I need not tell you who it was of whom he asked it. Of no one less than the Son of God who stood before his tribunal, that he might, according to the purposes of God, bear our sins in his own body on the tree. And yet though he asked the question, he had no care or desire to hear the answer. It seems to have come out of his mouth in a sort of careless way, as if suggested to his mind by the Lord's words, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." They fell upon his mind as something strange and new, and he therefore hastily asked, with a kind of careless infidelity, "What is truth?" Yet he seems to have been struck either with the majesty or the innocence of the speaker, for we read, "And when he had said this he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all."

But you may say, perhaps, "What! are you going this morning to preach from the words of a bad man?" No, I am not going to preach from the words of a bad man. I am going to give an answer to a question put by a bad man. Is not that scriptural? Is not that legitimate? Had the Lord never a question put to him by a bad man? And did he never answer that question when so put? Did not bad men, men whom the Lord himself called "hypocrites," ask him on one occasion, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?" And did not our Lord give a gracious and wise reply, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's?" (Matt. 22:21.) And was he not asked on the same day by the infidel Sadducees whose wife the woman would be in the resurrection of the seven husbands who successively had had her? (Matt. 22:28.) And did not he give them also a wise and gracious answer? May not I, then, in a similar way, and following his example, take for my text the question of a bad man, "What is truth?" and if I can give a right answer to the question, shall you find fault because my text came from unclean lips? If I do not

rightly and scripturally answer it, I will give you full liberty to find fault with my answer, but do not blame me for taking the question as my text.

The question is "What is truth?" In answering that question, I shall so shape my answer as to bring truth before you under these three points of view:—

I.—First, Truth in its purity.

II.—Secondly, Truth in its power.

III.—Thirdly, Truth in its products, by which I mean its fruits and effects.

I.—We live in a lying world. Nor is the reason far to seek. Satan is its god and prince; and as "he abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44), the present world, being by the permission of God under his lordship and dominion, bears the impress which he has stamped upon it, and whereby he has made it a world of deception and falsehood. We ourselves went astray as soon as we were born, speaking lies. In lies we grew up; in lies we lived; and but for his grace, I speak now to those in whose heart God has wrought by his Spirit, in lies we should have died, either as professors or profane; for there are thousands of both who live and die with a lie in their right hand. Living then in a world of lies, where there is little else to be heard or seen, known or loved but false words and false deeds, false doctrines and false professions; living surrounded by an atmosphere of falsehood, if there be any truth in the world, or any truth in our heart, lips, or lives, that truth must come from God, for he is the God of truth, as Satan is the father of lies.

But to come back to the question which I have undertaken to answer, "What is truth?" When Pilate asked that question of him who was the Truth itself, he had a reference, as I have already explained, to the Lord's preceding words: "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." The Lord's own words, therefore,

afford the only true key to the question, and give a clue to the right answer. By “truth” the Lord meant beyond all doubt divine truth, heavenly truth, religious truth—not natural, or scientific, or even moral truth, though the last would be included, but the special truth which he came from heaven to teach, reveal, and exemplify by his life, death, and resurrection. Now in this sense ask yourself, What is truth? Can you define it in your own mind? Have you ever thought what truth is? Have you any distinct idea, which you can express in a few words, of its peculiar nature, its distinguishing features, or its essential character? Perhaps not; for few persons really think or examine any subject for themselves, even in these important matters. Let me then define it for you. According to my view of it, Truth, that is, divine truth, is a gracious revelation given by God himself of his character, of his mind, and of his will. This is as short and as clear a definition as I can give.

But where has God been pleased to give it? For he has given it that we may know, believe, and enjoy it. He has lodged it in three sacred depositories. He has lodged it primarily in the Person of his dear Son, who is the truth itself. (John 14:6.) He has lodged it, secondly, in the pages of his holy word, which is called “the Scripture of truth.” (Daniel 10:21.) And he has lodged it, thirdly, in the hearts of his believing people, whom he sanctifies by his truth. (John 17:17.) These, then, are the three depositories of divine truth; so that out of the Son of God, out of the Scriptures, and out of the hearts of God’s people, there is no divine truth to be known, believed, or enjoyed. God would not let this world be given up wholly to the dominion of Satan. He was determined from all eternity, that there should be a revelation of his character, mind, and will to a people whom he chose out of the world for the express purpose that he should be glorified in them; and to place this revelation secure above all the storms of time and all the assaults of hell, to lay it up in those three sacred depositories which I have just named to you.

i. Now this brings us to Truth in its purity, which was the first point that I proposed to consider. I want truth in its purity. If I go to fill my glass at a fountain, I want pure water. I do not want water mixed with sewage. The purer and cleaner the water the better. The Lord said to the woman of Samaria, “If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” This is the water I want—“living water”—the Lord’s own gift, and in me too, as he said in the same blessed discourse, “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John 4:14.) Of this living water, of its source and nature, we have a beautiful description in the last chapter of Revelation, where John saw “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” I do not mean to say that this river in its primary signification represents truth, for it rather represents divine life and love—the life of God and the love of God, but we may take it as an emblem of truth in its purity. For as the river of water of life proceeded out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, it may so far exemplify truth as stored up and flowing out of the Person of Christ.

But let us look at this point, Truth in its purity, a little more in detail. There are certain grand foundation truths of our most holy faith, without holding which we cannot hold truth in its purity. Upon two or three of these points I shall briefly touch that I may answer the question, “What is truth?” in harmony with the oracles of God.

1. I commence, therefore, with the Trinity, that grand and glorious fundamental truth of three Persons in one God: a Unity of the divine Essence in a Trinity of three distinct Persons. This is a grand, cardinal, foundation truth, manifested in Christ as “the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of his

Person,” (Heb. 1:3,) revealed in the Scriptures, and more fully in those of the New Testament, and made known to believing hearts by the teaching and testimony of the Holy Ghost. Upon this grand foundation truth the whole revelation of the character, mind, and will of God is based, and therefore every branch of divine truth stands fully and firmly in connection with it. He therefore that is unsound here is unsound everywhere, be it in doctrine, experience, or practice; and as no one can know the mysteries of the kingdom of God unless they are revealed to him from heaven, as the Lord told Peter (Matt. 16:17) and the rest of his disciples (Matt. 11:25; 13:11), we may boldly say that if a man know not the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost by some discovery of these three Persons in the glorious Godhead to his soul, he cannot be said to have a vital acquaintance with any one branch of gospel truth in its purity, or with any one mystery of the kingdom of heaven in its power.

2. The Person of the Son of God—by which I mean his complex Person, uniting essential Deity with a pure, holy, and sacred humanity, having two natures, yet being but one Person—is another foundation truth of our most holy faith, a cardinal branch of truth in its purity. His essential Deity is so closely and intimately connected with that vital, fundamental doctrine of his eternal Sonship, without which, in my judgment, the Trinity itself cannot be rightly or scripturally maintained, that, not wishing to speak controversially, I unite them for the present together as one. When, therefore, I now speak of the Person of Christ, I mean not so much his divine Person, as the Son of God from all eternity, as his complex Person, as the great and glorious God-Man, Immanuel, God with us. In his Person thus constituted as all truth was by the Father eternally lodged, so in him as manifested all truth necessarily centres, and from him as revealed all truth essentially flows. Truth therefore in its purity embraces all the covenant offices and gracious relationships of our most blessed

Lord—everything in fact that Christ is in himself, and everything that he is to the Church of God. It embraces him therefore in his incarnation, as taking into union with his own divine Person in the womb of the virgin the flesh and blood of the children. It embraces him in all his course though life, from the manger at Bethlehem to the cross at Calvary, throughout which he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, with all that obedience which he rendered to God’s law, and whereby he wrought out a perfect righteousness in which the Church of God might stand for ever justified. It embraces and comprehends his dolorous sufferings in the garden, when the weight of sin imputed to him and the hiding of God’s face forced from his surcharged brow that terrible sweat which fell in great drops (or, as the word means literally, “clots”) of blood. It comprehends and embraces more especially that sacrifice and blood-shedding for sin which he accomplished upon the cross, when he offered up his sacred humanity upon the altar of his essential Deity, and thus as the Holy Ghost testifies, “put away sin by the sacrifice of himself;” and “by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” (Heb. 9:26;10:14.) It therefore embraces that sacred and solemn giving up of the ghost, or the voluntary yielding up of his life, which he had taken for that very purpose, whereby he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, and which was an integral part of his sacrifice; for the death of the victim was needful that the sacrifice might be completed. It embraces his lying in the sepulchre, where he was entombed, not only that he might fulfil the Scriptures and especially the type of Jonah, but that he might perfume the grave for us; that we might not only die with him mystically in soul, and thus know what it is experimentally to be buried with him in death spiritually by vital union, but die also with him in body, and be thus buried with him literally and corporeally in the bowels of the earth. It embraces and comprehends his glorious resurrection from the tomb, when he was declared to be the Son of God with

power, God setting his own attesting stamp upon his meritorious sacrifice, blood-shedding, and death by raising him from the dead. It embraces and comprehends his ascension up on high, in the sight of his disciples, when a cloud received him out of their sight. It follows him up as they did in heart and affection into the courts of God, and embraces him where he now is, as the great High Priest over the house of God, the Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Thus truth in its purity, as stored in the Person of Christ, embraces all those sacred transactions which were carried on in the days of his flesh by the Son of God, and are now being carried on upon our behalf by him in the very courts of heaven. It embraces, therefore, and comprehends also all that the risen Son of God is to his Church now. It embraces his priesthood, for he is now a priest, as the Holy Ghost declares: "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a ministry of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." (Heb. 8:1, 2.) Observe the words, "we have such a high priest," that is, have now. And you will bear in mind that this is one part of the peculiar blessedness of the priesthood of the Lord Jesus that he is executing it now, even now, for us who are still here below. The high priest under the Law, you will recollect, performed two special offices for the people. First, he offered the sacrifices, and particularly on the solemn day of atonement, when he killed the goat of the sin offering outside the veil. But secondly, he offered intercession for the people when he took the blood within the veil and sprinkled it upon and before the mercy seat. Christ, as the great anti-type of the high priest under the law, executed one part of his priesthood here below when he offered himself as a sacrifice for sin; but the other part of his priesthood he is executing now, having gone himself within the veil, and, by the virtue and efficacy of his blood once shed upon earth, there ever

liveth to make intercession for us. It embraces him also as our prophet—our prophet for the present, as well as for the past and the future: for our Lord's teaching as a prophet not only embraces the days of his flesh and his gracious words as preserved in the New Testament, but his present teaching when, as our ever-living prophet, he still communicates to us from time to time sweet instruction, by opening our understanding to understand the Scriptures, and especially by sending the Spirit down into our hearts to testify of himself, to reveal himself to our souls, and to make himself near, dear, and exceedingly precious. It embraces also his kingly office, whereby he sits enthroned as Sovereign Lord in the courts of heaven; for "all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18), and "he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." (1 Cor. 15:25.) Truth, therefore, in its purity embraces his kingly sceptre, which he sways from time to time over believing hearts, and his sovereign rule and dominion which he exercises over the Church and the world—over all men, all things, and all circumstances. It looks also into the future, for it embraces his second coming, when he will "appear the second time without sin unto salvation," and "shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." (Heb. 9:28; 2 Thess. 1:10.)

Thus I have endeavoured to show you briefly, yet summarily, how Truth in its purity is stored up in the glorious Person of Christ, and therefore embraces all that he has been, all that he now is, and all that he ever will be to the Church of God. But how little is he known, believed in, resorted unto, and lived upon as the truth, the living, incarnate Truth—not truth as a thing, a doctrine, a creed, but truth as a Person; and O, what a Person! none less than the Son of God, and as such containing in himself all truth as the sun contains in itself all light and heat, and is ever giving them out of its inexhaustible fulness as the very nature and character of its existence. O how few so know, believe, and feel

this, as to live daily unto and upon him, and thus be continually receiving grace out of his fulness, so as to drink truth from the Fountain head in all its divine purity, sweetness, and blessedness. And yet how tenderly he invites us to come to him and drink. “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” (John 7:37.) And again, “Whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely.” (Rev. 22:17.) Even to the poor woman of Samaria, he could say, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink: thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” (John 4:10.) Encouraged by these invitations, may we leave those earthly streams which men have fouled with their feet (Ezekiel 34:19), and by prayer and supplication, with continual reading of the Scriptures and secret meditation, may we ever seek to drink into truth in all its original purity as stored up in the glorious Person of the Son of God.

3. But if Truth in its purity centres in the Person of Christ, it must be in perfect harmony with all that grace which is eternally in him, and which he came to reveal to us; for “the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” It was therefore in him that this grace was manifested to believing eyes and hearts, according to that testimony: “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 1:14.) Truth therefore in its purity embraces all the doctrines, or as I prefer to call them, the truths of grace. It thus comprises election, for the remnant who are saved are chosen according to “the election of grace” (Rom. 11:5); special redemption also, for “in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7); Justification also, for “we are justified freely by his grace” (Rom. 3:24), and to sum up the whole, the fulness and fixedness of salvation, or certainty of perseverance unto the end, for “by grace we are saved.” (Eph. 2:5.)

ii. But I stated that Truth in its purity was lodged and stored not only in the Person of Christ, but in the Scriptures which have been given to us by the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, as a gracious revelation of the character, mind, and will of God, which I gave as a simple definition of truth. It is indeed primarily in Christ that this character, mind, and will of God are revealed to us; for he is not only “the brightness of the Father’s glory,” but “the express image of his Person,” where the word translated, “express image” is literally “character,” or stamped impression. In him, too, is the mind of God seen, for he has made known to us the thoughts of God’s heart, and the will of God also, for he came to do it and reveal it to us. But that this revelation of the character, mind and will of God should be preserved safely for all ages, and be made known to each successive generation of believers, it has pleased the God of all wisdom and grace to write it down for their instruction. O how blessed it is to have the word of God—the inspired Scriptures, free from all intermixture of error, as a special, infallible revelation, that in them truth may shine forth in all its purity, and that we may daily read and search them, understand their meaning by divine teaching, and drink into their spirit by a personal, experimental application of them to our heart.

II.—But this brings me to my second point, which was to lay before you Truth in its power.

i. You may receive all that I have said and much more; you may in a certain sense and to a certain extent believe it; you may stately and regularly hear it preached, and be fully satisfied with thus receiving, thus believing, and thus hearing it. But all this will not prove you to be a child of God. There is a “form of knowledge and of the truth,” as the apostle speaks (Rom. 2:20), as well as a “form of godliness;” and a man may have a form of knowledge without vitally, savingly knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, as he may have a “form of godliness,” whilst he denies the power thereof. Many a man has the form of

truth, its outside shape and body, in his judgment, in his brain, who never felt the power of truth, as a real, vital substance in his heart. It is therefore not sufficient for me, in answering the question, What is truth? merely to unfold truth in its purity. I must unfold truth in its power, if I am to answer it as a servant of Christ, if I am to “study to show myself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,” or if I am in any way by it effectually to reach your consciences.

We thus come to what I intimated as the third depository of the truth of God in which he is pleased to lay up his truth, viz., the hearts of his believing people.

The Scriptures I pointed out as the second sacred depository of God’s truth; for it is through the scriptures, the Holy Ghost enlightening our understanding to apprehend them, touching our conscience to feel them, quickening our hearts to believe them, that we come to know truth in its purity. In this day when the verbal inspiration of the Scripture is disputed or denied, and that not as formerly by avowed infidels only, but by men sitting in high places as leaders and teachers in Church and Dissent, it will be our wisdom and mercy to believe and cleave to what God has himself said of his own word. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” (Tim. 3:16, 17.) If “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” it must be a verbal inspiration, that is, the very words in and by which divine truth is revealed must be as much inspired as the truths themselves. Truths which are certain must be expressed by words which are certain; or else you have certain truths and uncertain words; and if you can explain to me how certainty of truth can be conveyed by uncertainty of expression, you will be able to convince me that a stream of water can flow straight through a

crooked pipe, and that clean water can come out of a dirty pipe. The testimony of God to his own word is, “Every word of God is pure” (Prov. 30:5.); “The words of the Lord are pure words.” (Psa. 12:5.) Indeed it is this purity of the word, this perfect freedom from the least intermixture of error, which makes us love our Bible; for it both enlightens our understanding and warms our heart. “The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” (Psa. 19:8.) “Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it.” (Psa. 119:140.) But take away this purity and this perfection, and the Bible sinks down at once into a common book, of no value and of no authority, for truth in its purity is lodged in the word of God; and if we are to receive it as purely as it is revealed we must receive it from the word of God, as made life and spirit to our souls. If then truth in its purity is in the Person of the Son of God as the Fountain, truth in its purity is in the Scriptures as the stream; for as Christ is the personal, the Scriptures are the written revelation of the character, mind, and will of God.

Now when the Holy Ghost takes the truth as it is personally and primarily in Christ, and makes it known unto us, for it is his sacred and blessed office to take of the things of Christ, and to show them unto the Lord’s own family, and as the Spirit of truth to guide them in to all truth, (John 16:13), then truth in its purity becomes truth in its power. Thus out of the fulness of Christ, through the holy Scriptures, the blessed Spirit lodges and lays up truth in its third sacred depository—the believing heart. But let us look at this a little more in detail. I like to work a subject out—not to leave text and subject, preacher and hearer, all alike in confusion, but to present to the people a clear, distinct, compact representation of the truth, that I may not only be an interpreter of the mind of the Spirit, so as to clear up any dark and doubtful points, but shed a distinct and blessed light upon his teachings and operations in their hearts.

ii. What then is our first experience of truth in its power?

TRUTH IN ITS POWER

Is it not the entrance of truth into the heart? “The entrance of thy words giveth light.” (Psa. 119:130.) “Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power.” (1 Thess. 1:5.) “They themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you.” And what was that entering in? “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” (1 Thess. 2:13.) This is a divine begetting—a new birth: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.” (James 1:18.) “The word of God is quick, (or “living,” and as such giving life,) and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.” (Heb. 4:12.) The entrance of this enlightening, quickening word, is to make truth in its purity become truth in its power. Until God the Spirit was pleased thus to work with a divine power upon your soul, you lived in lies, you loved lies; your religion, if one you had, was a lying religion, for there was no truth in it, no reality, no power. It might look well in the opinion of men, well in your own; for until our eyes are spiritually opened we see neither our nakedness nor our rags, neither know the truth nor care to know it; but as poor, self-deceived creatures you would have lived, and as such you would have died but for the sovereign, distinguishing, superabounding grace of God, which plucked you as a brand from the fire made by the sparks of your own kindling. But when God has purposes of eternal mercy toward one of his chosen people, and to carry out these purposes, deigns to lodge his truth in that vessel of mercy, he commences by shooting a ray of light out of his own divine fulness into the soul. Now as “it hath pleased the Father that in Christ should all fulness dwell” (Col. 1:19), for “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9), this ray of divine light is out of the fulness of Jesus. Divine light and divine truth go together. “O send out thy light and thy truth.” (Psa. 43:3.)

1. But what do we see, what do we feel in this first

TRUTH IN ITS POWER

communication of God’s truth to the heart? That there is a God. Thousands and tens of thousands have risen this day in this vast metropolis who do not know that there is a God. Do you or I know that there is a God? If we do, why and how do we know it? Because God has in some measure shined into our souls, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ; because he has taken the veil of unbelief and ignorance from off our heart, and shown us light in his own most blessed light. Now this beginning, in many cases, may not be very powerful nor very deep, yet there is a reality in it; and there must be a reality in it if it be God’s work, for God’s work is real work. When God said, “Let there be light” there was real light. It tarried not, but burst forth at the creative fiat, and, to use the Lord’s own words of the sea, “it broke forth as if it had issued out of the womb.” (Job 38:8.) As real is the light of God in a sinner’s heart, as really, as truly, as clearly enlightening the soul, as the natural primeval light enlightened the original darkness.

2. But when the light and life of divine truth thus first come into a sinner’s conscience, this quickening ray shows him not only that there is a God, but reveals to him also the true character of God. Did I not define truth as a revelation of the character, mind, and will of God? What is the character of God, or rather that part of his character with which we are first made acquainted? That he is just, that he is holy, that he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins; that he hates sin with a perfect hatred, and will sentence to eternal punishment every transgressor with whom he comes into judgment. This is truth in its purity made truth in its power. For what is the effect? Fear, guilt, trembling, an apprehension of the wrath to come; because now, for the first time in our lives, we have a real apprehension of the truth of God, for the first time in our lives feel the power of God’s truth in our soul. You may have heard the truth of God for years; your fathers may have brought you to this place to hear the word of life from childhood; it may have been a kind of family creed for several generations, as well known as the

family pew or the family Bible. Thus you may have never heard anything else but truth, and you thought perhaps that you knew something about truth, and would have been highly offended had your knowledge of it been questioned. But there was a day never to be forgotten, as long as life has being, when a something came with the word into your conscience, which produced such feelings as you had never known before. An arrow shot from the bow of him who never misses the mark; an arrow of truth came right into your heart. And as that arrow coming from his unerring bow was lodged in your conscience, it brought with it this conviction, that there was a God, and that you were a sinner before him; that there was a holy law by which you were condemned, for an awful curse was attached to it; and that living and dying as you were, there was no hope for your guilty soul. This more or less was the working of your mind as a consequence of the entrance of divine truth into your conscience; and you thought perhaps, and that for weeks, months, or years, there was little or no hope for you. And so you went on doubting and fearing, seeking and crying, begging and praying for mercy, never fighting against but falling under the power of truth—for truth was now your meat and drink, as having got firm possession of your heart and conscience.

ii. But by and by, in some unexpected hour and in some perhaps unexpected way, another ray of light was shot into your soul—a ray of divine truth out of the same fulness, and yet revealing the character of God in a different relationship. It might have been a sweet promise, an encouraging invitation, a gracious word, a loving look, a still small voice, a gentle breaking in of light, a soft whisper, a healing touch, or it might have been a blessed revelation of the Son of God to your soul, shining into your heart like the sun in his strength. Now that was truth in its power; for it was the voice of truth in your soul attended with the firm conviction that God spoke in and by it through his word. Now directly that the truth of God began to be thus opened up

to your soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, now you embraced and laid hold of it as thus divinely presented to the heart. How sweet it was; how it dropped like honey and the honeycomb; how plain it appeared, how clear, and how powerful. I have drawn your case as if you were long a hearer of the truth before you became a believer in it. But I will now assume another. You might have been prejudiced, as many are, against the doctrines of grace, hated the very word “election,” and fought desperately against the sovereignty of God as controlling every minute event. But when the precious truths of the everlasting gospel were let down into your soul as from the Lord himself, and the word of his grace began to open itself in its sweetness, blessedness, and power upon your heart, then what you once loathed you now loved, and what you had despised and rejected was now fed upon as the very truth of God. 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 my heart” (Jer. 15:16); with David: “How sweet are thy words unto my taste; yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Psa. 119:103); and with Job: “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.” (Job 23:12.) You could have gone through fire and water in defence of God’s truth. Husband, wife, children, money, character—all were nothing compared with God’s truth in your estimation, for you had felt its power in your heart. You had openly or secretly despised, it may be, those who preached, and the people that professed God’s truth. But when truth was opened in your soul in both its purity and its power, such was its sweetness and savour, such its influence and effects, that you could say, “This people shall be my people, and their God my God.” Such or similar were the effects of truth on my heart when more than thirty years ago I first felt its power. It called upon me to make great sacrifices—as great, perhaps, if not greater than have been made by any one here present. Could I have been content to hold truth in impurity, in insincerity, in unrighteousness, I might

have held the gospel, or rather half the gospel, in one hand and the world in the other; but when truth in its purity became truth in its power, then, like Moses, I chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.” (Heb. 11:25, 26.)

iii. But we have to learn the power of God’s truth upon the heart in various ways; and there are two particular effects of the power of truth which every living soul is sooner or later taught to know and feel. 1. One is its liberating influence. Our blessed Lord said on one occasion, “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.) There is a liberating power in God’s truth as made vitally and experimentally known to the heart. It unbinds the fetters and shackles in which the soul is bound by the law; it removes slavish dread of man; takes away the apprehension of death and judgment; liberates from a thousand fears and a thousand foes; and breathes a sweet liberty into the soul wherever it comes; for “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” Now if you have experienced any sweet inflowing of the truth of God, and it has come with a liberating power, and a blessed influence which set you free from fears of death and apprehensions of the wrath of God; if it removed a load of guilt from your conscience, and with it a thousand doubts and fears that your mind was exercised with, so that you could bless and praise God for his manifested mercy, you know something not only of truth in its purity but of truth in its power; for it has done for you what nothing else could do but that gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom. 1:16); and you have proved for yourself that “the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.” (1 Cor. 4:20.)

You should bring your heart to a sound and strict examination on this point. Have you then any experience of either bondage or

of liberty; of either law or of gospel? You should compare your experience with the word of God; and as the servants of Christ open up his truth in your ears, and show you from it the various marks and tests of divine life, you should, as it were, hold up your experience to the light. Let the word of truth and your personal experience of its power be like the two scales of a balance. The tests and marks of divine life are the weights which the servant of God puts into one scale; you put your experience in the other, and then you have to look and see whether the whole be good weight. I have put one weight into the scale—the liberating efficacy and influence of God’s truth. Is it good weight? Is it a sound scriptural test? I have already given you scripture proof for it; so that point seems firmly settled. Now can you put into the opposite scale any liberating influence which you have ever felt from the power of God’s truth in your heart? Any sweet liberty which you have ever enjoyed, any blessed deliverance from guilt, wrath, fear, and bondage into the glorious liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free? (Gal. 5:1.)

But take here a cautionary remark. Do not at once conclude that you have never felt the liberating power of truth, because you have not been fully delivered from all doubt and fear, or because your deliverance was not so clear and signal, or so marked and decided as some are favoured with of whom you have read, or with whom you have conversed. Rather examine how the liberty came, and what were its effects than its exact measure; for it is a fact that many of the dear children of God walk habitually in much bondage of spirit who have at times been blessed with the sweetest deliverances, and have often to cry, “Bring my soul out of prison that I may praise thy name” (Psa. 142:7), “I am shut up and cannot come forth,” even when at favoured seasons their feet have been set in a large room, and they have walked at liberty, in real enjoyment of the promise, and in gracious obedience to the precept. (Psa. 31:8; 119:45.) Now, bearing this needful caution in

mind, can you say, as in the sight of a heart-searching God, that it is good weight, and that your experience does not prove light in the scale? If so, you need not fear your soul's being weighed in the balance in the great day, and then found wanting; nor need you tremble now as Belshazzar trembled, when "the joints of his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against another," as the fingers came forth of that mysterious hand which wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of his palace, among other words, that fatal one, "Tekel, Thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting." (Dan. 5:5, 27.)

2. But take another mark, another scriptural test that you know not only truth in its purity but truth in its power. Whenever truth comes into the soul in its vivifying power, it has a sanctifying influence. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth," was a part of that wondrous prayer which our great High Priest offered up when on the eve of his sufferings and death, he sanctified himself to that gracious office that those who should believe in his name might be sanctified through the truth. (John 17:17, 19.) We therefore read that "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the word." (Ephes. 5:25, 26.) This "washing of water by the word" is the cleansing, sanctifying influence of the word of truth upon the heart when received in power; and it is the same thing as "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which is shed upon us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:5-7.) When the gospel comes "not in word only but also in power," it comes "in the Holy Ghost" (1 Thess. 1:5), that is, in and with the teaching and testimony of the Holy Ghost. It is this coming "in the Holy Ghost" which gives truth in its power such a sanctifying influence on the heart. But you will ask perhaps, What is a sanctifying influence? It is the communication of holy

feelings, heavenly desires, and gracious affections; in a word, it is the breathing into the soul of that sweet spirituality of mind which is life and peace. If we are among the people of God, he chose us in Christ "before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." (Eph. 1:4.) If he chasten us in this time-state, it is "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." (Heb. 12:10.) It is this holiness of heart, this heavenly mindedness which I mean when I speak of the sanctifying influence of truth in its power. Now did truth ever come into your soul with any measure of this sanctifying influence? Did you ever long to get away from the chapel, go home to your room, fall upon your knees, and have blessed fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ? And were you ever so favoured when you did get home? Or sometimes when alone, in reading, or meditation, or secret prayer, did the word of God ever come into your soul with that sweet unction, savour, and dew that it seemed to make the very room in which you were holy ground? I remember when God was pleased to reveal his dear Son to my soul in my sick room many years ago, I was afraid almost to go out of my room lest I should lose the sweet, holy feelings and blessed spirituality of mind which I then and there enjoyed. Depend upon it, there is a holiness of heart and affection, an inward holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; and depend upon it, whenever truth comes into a believer's soul, it comes with that sanctifying influence, which not only gives him a meetness for, but is a blessed foretaste of the inheritance of the saints in light. "Saints" are sanctified persons—sanctified by God the Father by his eternal will (Jude 1; Heb. 10:10), sanctified by God the Son with his own blood (Heb. 13:12), and sanctified by God the Holy Ghost, who makes their bodies his temple (1 Cor. 6:19), sheds abroad the love of God (Rom. 5:5), makes them abound in hope (Rom. 15:13), and sets up the kingdom of God in their heart. (Rom. 14:17.)

TRUTH IN ITS POWER

Truth, then, in its power, does not lead, or leave a man to become a lawless, licentious Antinomian. It does not leave him in the mud and mire of sin; it does not leave him, still less lead him to be a carnal, sensual, proud, covetous wretch, with a mere profession of religion, having a name to live when dead. Wherever it comes it sanctifies. And it cannot be the truth of God in its power unless it do this. We judge, and that rightly, of things by their influence and effects. We had, for instance, lately a very cold March, with a long and almost uninterrupted succession of piercing east winds, chilling all early vegetation and shutting up the earth, as it were, in a cold embrace, out of which she durst not look up. By and by a change came, and April was as unusually hot as March was unusually cold. The wind came round to the genial south. The sun broke forth in all the warmth of his beams, and we were almost melted with the heat. What was the consequence? Why, nature put forth a new face; vegetation burst out from its prison; every tree at once clothed itself with leaves, and one scene of beauty almost immediately flushed into view. It is just now the middle of May, and I who am not young never saw a more early or a more beautiful season. There was the effect of a warm April sun. Now if the Sun of righteousness arise upon a soul, with healing on his wings, shall there be no effect? Can the sun shine warm in the sky, call forth sleeping vegetation and clothe every tree with leaf and some as now with flowers; and shall there be a shining in of the Sun of righteousness upon a soul, and leave it locked up in the frozen embrace of death? Again, we have had a very dry season lately, for cold March and hot April were both very dry. But during the last week copious showers have fallen. Do we not already see the effect? How fresh and green everything is; how earth seems to rejoice under the genial showers which have so thoroughly watered it. Now shall there be a pouring out of the Spirit of God upon a men's soul like the showers of the early and latter rain, and he be as dead and dry as the London pavement, with no more fruitfulness in him than the very stones over which

TRUTH IN ITS POWER

we walk or drive! Amidst the trees of righteousness which the Lord has planted that he may be glorified, will you stand as a dead tree in a London square, or be one of these trees of which Jude speaks, "whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots?" (Isa. 61:3; Jude 12.) Surely, if you know truth in its power, and the Spirit of God water your soul with the rains and dews of his grace, there will be some analogy between the natural and the spiritual rain; and there will be in you some spiritual fruitfulness, as in earth there is a fruitfulness under the falling showers.

III.—This brings me to my third point, which is, Truth in its products, or its fruits and effects.

I said that God had lodged his truth in three depositories: the Person of his Son, the Scriptures of truth, and the hearts of his people. Now, was his truth dead or dormant in his dear Son? Or is his truth dead and dormant in the word of his grace? How, then, can it be dead and dormant in believing hearts? If, then, God has lodged his truth in the hearts of his people, it is his will that they should manifest the fruits and effects of his grace in their lips and in their lives. I have no opinion of a loose and careless profession; and I have a worse opinion of a loose and careless life. Depend upon it a loose and careless walk, conduct, and conversation never bore the stamp of God upon it. A man may slip and fall, and be by the grace of God recovered; but if there be anything more than another which has cast discredit upon truth in its purity, upon the doctrines of grace, it has been the loose, licentious, careless, ungodly lives of many of its professors. Therefore look to it. If you hope you know truth in its purity, and if you have felt truth in its power, look to it, and examine well whether there are corresponding fruits and effects manifested in your lips and lives. Time and opportunity will allow me to name only a few of them.

1. What, then, is the first main fruit and effect of receiving truth in its power? Separation from the world. The first precept to

which a promise is attached is this: “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (2 Cor. 6:18.) Where, then, there is no separation from the world, there is no manifested interest in that promise; and if you believe that you are a son or daughter of the Lord Almighty, and have not yet come out from the world, whether dead in sin or dead in profession, you do but hold a lie in your right hand if such a faith be in it. Such a faith and such a profession, if Scripture be true, are not of God; “for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” (1 John 5:4.) But how can we be said to have overcome the world unless we are separate from it? Separated from it, we overcome it; united to it, it overcomes us. Separation, therefore, full, lasting, unqualified separation must ever be a fruit of God’s work upon the soul—the sure effect of receiving truth in its power. I know what God’s grace did for me in separating me more than thirty years ago from the world, and from everything dear to nature and the flesh. I know, too, what sacrifices this separation entailed upon me, and how it compelled me to sacrifice my position in life and all my prospects in life, and abandon the prizes of all my studies and labours for many years at a public school and the university when just within my reach—prizes which were my just due, and on which my eyes had long been fixed. Yet I was compelled so to speak and act as to separate me eventually from all the cherished projects and prospects of my worldly ambition, and to give up everything through feeling the power of the truth of God in my soul. I always therefore contend that separation from the world and everything worldly is one of the first fruits and effects of the grace of God in the heart.

2. The fear of God, as manifested by the possession and actings of a tender conscience, is another fruit and effect of truth

in its power. And O what a blessing it is to have the fear of God in a tender conscience! It is spoken of in the Scriptures as being “a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.” (Prov. 14:27.) If, then, you have the fear of God in your breast, you have a fountain of life; and what is that fountain but the “well of water” of which our Lord spoke as “springing up into everlasting life?” (John 4:14.) Having then that fountain of life you depart from the snares of death; and as this fountain is not a muddy pool but a springing well, it will water your own soul, it will water the souls of others, it will make you fruitful in every good word and work, and will at last issue in all the bliss and blessedness of everlasting life.

3. Cleaving to the truth of God, his people, his cause, his ordinances, his servants, his house, his promises, his precepts, and everything connected with God and godliness, and that in a spirit of love and affection from a deep sense of their value and a warm realisation of their preciousness, is a mark also and fruit of knowing the truth of God in its power. Wherever the Lord by his own secret work upon the heart makes his truth precious, the very first effect is love—love to the Lord and to his people. “Whom not having seen ye love.” “We know we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.” There is such a love to the Lord and his people in that spring-time of the soul when Jesus first makes himself known and precious. O there is a spring-tide of the soul like our present May month. How beautiful the country looked yesterday as I came up by the train from Croydon. Nature, like a young blooming bride, shone and glittered in all the greenery and bravery of her new apparel. So is there a spring in the soul when every grace of the Spirit shines and glitters with an unspeakable beauty and freshness—the day of its espousals, when the first embrace seals the happiness of its virgin love. And in that spring-tide of the soul, what love there is to God’s dear people, what love to God’s truth, what love to everything connected with

God and his word!

4. Uprightness of conduct, integrity before God and man, honorable actions and transactions in our business (if in business), obedience to God's revealed perceptive will, in all the various relations of life, are fruits also of receiving the truth of God in its power. Where grace lays hold of a man's heart and comes into his conscience in purity and power, it must make him an upright, consistent man. He must be an honest man, or he is nothing. And if an honest man, he will carry his honesty into his business; he will carry his integrity into all the walks of life; he will make it manifest day by day by his conduct and conversation that uprightness and integrity are stamped upon him by a divine hand; and even the world itself will acknowledge it. This recalls to my mind a good man, a deacon of a church in the country, though but a farm labourer, who was called under my ministry when I was in the Church of England. The farmer, and he was in a large way of business, came to him one day with tears in his eyes and said, "O, you are the only man I can trust upon my farm. They are robbing me in all directions. Will you take the oversight of the men?" He hated the man's religion, but the only one he could trust of all those by whom he was surrounded was this godly deacon now gone home. Was not that a testimony to a despised religion that its possessor was alone worthy of trust? So if grace has laid hold of our heart, it will make us upright in our conduct, in the church and in the world, and influence our movements at home and abroad. And though in these days perhaps a man who truly fears God can scarcely live, or at least much thrive, when all around are engaged in dishonest or dishonourable practices, yet to part with his integrity is to part with both his conscience and his hope; he will therefore and must be an upright man, come what will. And so in the various relationships of life—as a father, as a husband, as a friend—he will be an affectionate father, a loving husband, and a faithful friend. Thus you may follow him through the walks of

life and say, "Here is grace; see one who fears God above many; it is stamped upon the man. You can see he is what he professes to be, and that the grace of God is in him of a truth."

Thus I have endeavoured in a feeble way to give you an answer to the question—"What is truth?" I have endeavoured to show you truth in its purity, truth in its power, and truth in its products, or its fruits and effects. Can you set to your seal that these things are true? Are they things, the life, reality, and power of which you have felt in your own breast, so that you can say, "Yes, I do know these things or some good measure of them by vital experience; for blessed be God I have felt them in my soul, and I am glad to have heard this morning the answer to "What is truth?" so as not only to receive it from your lips, but to be able to bear witness that it is a right answer from God's own attestation to the power of his truth in my heart."

198 The Mighty God in the Midst of Zion

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day
Evening,

May 21, 1865

"In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thy hands be slack. The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing."

Zeph. 3:16, 17

Of the Old Testament Scriptures, taking of them a general view, I do not know a more difficult part to understand than that which is contained in what are commonly called "the minor prophets;" that is, the series of prophecies commencing with Hosea and terminating with Malachi. They are called, as you probably know, the minor prophets, not because of any inferiority in inspiration, in authority, or in subject matter to the

greater prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, but on account of the comparative brevity or smallness in bulk of their compositions; rarely extending, except Hosea and Zechariah, beyond the compass of two or three chapters.

Now if these minor prophets are so difficult to understand, at least I have found them so, there must be some reason for this difficulty. But perhaps you see no difficulty; perhaps you are a thorough master of the whole subject, and have penetrated with an eagle eye into the whole series, so as clearly to see both their literal and spiritual meaning. But will you allow me to gauge by a few questions the depth of this knowledge? Can you understand Obadiah? What meaning would you affix to such a passage as this? “And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the Lord hath spoken it.” (Obadiah 18.) Are you fully master of Amos? And can you explain the meaning of this verse? “I saw the Lord standing upon the altar: and he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered.” (Amos 9:1.) Do you understand the meaning of Nahum, where he says, “Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feeding-place of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion’s whelp, and none made them afraid? The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin.” (Nahum 2:11, 12.) And do you think you have sounded all the depths of Joel? “O,” you say, “I have not thought about the meaning of such passages as those.” Then don’t think you understand it until you have considered the subject a little more closely, and sounded some of these hidden depths; for you may depend upon it that these minor prophets, though we may gather up much of their general meaning, are very

difficult to understand in their minuter details, and especially when we desire to invest them with a spiritual interpretation. For this difficulty there seem to be several reasons.

1. First, we are but imperfectly acquainted with the kingdoms, states, and persons generally against whom they were uttered, and the events of the period in which the prophets themselves lived; so that many things which they wrote, though perfectly intelligible at the time when they were written, are very obscure to us now. Thus Obadiah prophesies of the destruction of Edom, which was a country to the south of Canaan, and chiefly remarkable for its rock-hewn city, situated in a narrow, inaccessible defile, formerly called Selah, but now Petra. The prophet therefore says, “The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord.” (Obadiah 3, 4.) But how little is now known of the ancient state of Edom? So Nahum prophesies the destruction of Nineveh. At the time of their prophecies both of these were flourishing cities, but now neither of them has an inhabitant; and till a few years ago the very site of Nineveh was unknown.

2. Another reason to my mind is, that some of the events which are prophesied are still unfulfilled: as for instance, “And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and they of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead.” (Obadiah 19.) The full meaning, therefore, of the minor prophets may not be understood until the events to which they refer are accomplished.

3. There is also a third reason for this difficulty, viz. the harmonising of the literal and spiritual meaning which cannot well be done whilst the former is obscure.

But the question may perhaps arise in your mind, If these

prophecies are so difficult to understand, why do you preach from them? This morning you took your text out of Hosea, one of the minor prophets; and this evening you are taking your text out of Zephaniah, another of the minor prophets. Are you come this evening with some of these difficulties—to raise up giants that you may kill them, and set us enigmas that you may solve them?” God forbid! I would rather clear up difficulties than make or state them. But you will please to observe that though there may be great difficulties in fully understanding these minor prophets, yet there are many very blessed passages in them; sweet openings up of experimental truth; most gracious and suitable promises given for the consolation of the church of God in all ages. We must ever bear in mind this feature in all the prophets, that as regards the people of God, all their prophecies are promises; and therefore prophecies being promises, they are all in a state of continual fulfilment. God’s dealings with his Church are the same in all ages; for he himself is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;” and thus if many of these prophecies look forward into the dim and distant future, when they will have their full completion, yet there is a continual fulfilment of them as containing in their bosom every promised blessing to the saints of God. It is, I may add, this peculiar feature of divine revelation which makes the reading of the Scripture of the Old Testament profitable, and furnishes us, both as ministers and hearers, with food for instruction, consolation, and edification in righteousness.

Bearing then these observations in mind, now look at our text. But take it first as it stands before us in its naked simplicity: “In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack.” Have you any idea of the meaning of these words? Do you think you understand what the Lord intends when he says, “In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thy hand be slack?” What is Jerusalem? what is Zion? and what is the exhortation given to each about not fearing and the hands not being slack? And what is meant by

“that day?” Is the meaning of all this as plain as the sun shining in the mid-day sky? Is there no difficulty here? If you see and feel this, may I be instrumental in God’s hand to clear up any such difficulty, and bring out of it some truth to feed your souls. And then look again at the second verse of our text. Is that all easy and plain? “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.” Is it all so easy that a child may understand it? I do not claim to myself any great knowledge or wisdom; but I hope God has given me some understanding of the word of his grace. At least if he has not done so, I am not fit to stand here this evening to preach to you, and had better come down from the pulpit and take my seat in the pew. But with the hope that, with God’s help and blessing, I may be enabled to bring out of these words some things that may be for your instruction, edification, consolation, and encouragement, I shall approach the passage which I have undertaken now to speak from; and in so doing I shall, as the Lord may enable,

I.—First, take up what the Lord says in a way of promise, or rather, to speak more correctly, of exhortation, to Jerusalem and to Zion: “In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thy hands be slack.”

II.—Secondly, consider the basis on which God grounds the reasons why Jerusalem should not fear, and why the hands of Zion should not be slack.

When we come to examine this a little more closely, we shall see that, in laying down this firm basis, the Lord presents himself to the church in a beautiful and blessed light: “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty.” How full of truth and beauty is every word. “The Lord thy God”—there is personal possession; “in the midst of thee”—there is his immediate presence; “is mighty”—there we have his omnipotent power. Now out of the presence of the mighty God in the midst of the church there flows these three encouraging considerations:—1, his determination to

save: "he will save;" 2, the fulness of his joy: "he will rejoice over thee with joy;" "he will joy over thee with singing;" 3, the rest which he has in his eternal love: "he will rest in his love." And he holds these blessed considerations up before her eyes, that they may be so many encouragements why Jerusalem should not fear and why the hands of Zion should not be slack.

I.—Every reader, at least every intelligent, spiritual reader of the Scriptures, for many read the Bible who have neither intelligence nor spirituality, must observe the frequent recurrence of the expression, "In that day." There is scarcely a page of prophecy in which you will not find some mention of "that day," or of an expression of the same import, "The day of the Lord." But if you examine the passage in which "that day" or "the day of the Lord" is spoken of, you will find them for the most part of a twofold, nay, of an opposite character and meaning; indeed so opposite to each other, that at first sight it may seem difficult to reconcile them. Thus, "that day" sometimes is spoken of as a day of trouble: "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." (Jer. 30:7.) Again, "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:18, 20.) In Isaiah too we have a description of what shall be done in "the day of the Lord," of which the sum is: "And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." (Isa. 2:17.) How strong also is the language of Zephaniah, the prophet from whom I am speaking this morning. "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness." (Zeph. 1:14, 15.) Nor does the prophet Isaiah speak less strongly:

"Howl ye; for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt: and they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrow shall take hold of them; and they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames." (Isa. 13:6, 7, 8.) From these and other passages we gather that "the day of the Lord," or "that day," is a day of trouble, distress, affliction, and sorrow; of breaking down the pride of man, and the manifestation of the terrible wrath of a justly offended God. But if you examine the prophetic Scriptures a little more closely, you will find quite another feature often stamped upon the expression, "In that day." Again and again it is spoken of, loudly heralded and joyfully proclaimed as a day of deliverance, of surpassing mercy, of boundless grace, and, in its effects, of praise and thanksgiving. You must well remember the words of that short but sweet chapter, Isaiah 12, which thus commences: "And in that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." (Isa. 12:1, 2.) And again: "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah." (Isa 26:1.) And who that fears and loves God has not felt the sweetness of those words? "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isa. 25:9.)

But now comes the question, "How can these two opposite things be reconciled? How can we have in the same day deep distress and blessed joy, heavy trouble and sweet consolation?" The answer is easy, I think, and admits of a twofold solution. First, view the day as regards God's dealings with his out-stretched arm in a way of judgment. He has to deal with foes as well as friends; and his foes are his Church's foes. The same day, therefore, shall be a day of woe and sorrow to the one, and a day of deliverance

and joy to the other. Was it not so in that signal day when the Lord delivered Israel out of the hand of Pharaoh? That day was a day of trouble and destruction to Egypt, but a day of deliverance and joy to Israel. Thus, the same day is a day of trouble and of joy—of trouble to the defeated and destroyed oppressor, of deliverance and rejoicing to the oppressed who are delivered.

But there is also another solution of this apparent contradiction, when the words are viewed in connection with the experience of God's people. Do not these two things go together in the experience of the living soul? Is not the same day often, if not usually, a day of darkness and light, of oppression and deliverance, of sorrow and of joy? It was so with Hezekiah, David, the publican, and the prodigal. What is a day of deliverance but a day of deliverance out of trouble? What is a day of joy but a day that brings us out of sorrow? And what is a day of singing but a day in which a new song is put into the mourner's mouth after a night of mourning? Does not David thus speak? "For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Psa. 30:5.) Thus the first part of the day may be a day of darkness, and the second part of the day be a day of light; the first part of the day be a day of trouble, and the second part a day of joy, and yet all be but one day.

But observe, also, that whether it be of trouble or of joy, its distinctive feature is that it is "the day of the Lord." If it be a day of trouble it comes from the Lord. It is his day. Whence comes all real soul trouble? From the Lord; does it not? No man can bring trouble upon his own soul, distress his own conscience, or break himself down into repentance. It is the Lord's word and the Lord's work to do this; and the day in which it is done is that day of days which may well be called "the day of the Lord." How many go on for years with a shilly-shally religion—a poor, worldly, lukewarm, Laodicean profession, and too often a very inconsistent life, for want of this day of the Lord—this day of distress and trouble to break them to pieces, shake them out of their false standing, and

cast them down into the dust of death. But how this day of the Lord prepares them for the other day of the Lord, such as that of which our text speaks,—a day of salvation and deliverance.

It appears, then, that there is a day in which it shall be said to Jerusalem, "Fear thou not;" clearly implying that there is a day when Jerusalem fears, and one in which God speaks with power to her heart, and says, "Fear thou not."

What is intended here by "Jerusalem?" I shall omit all mention of any literal fulfilment of the words as referring to the dim future, though I have no doubt myself of some such literal fulfilment, and shall confine myself to the spiritual interpretation as that in which we have the nearer and more personal interest. Spiritually viewed, then, you may take "Jerusalem" as a symbolic representation of the Church of God, for we find the word so applied in the New Testament. Thus Paul speaks: "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." (Gal. 4:26.) So also we read: "But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels." (Heb. 12:22.) We have thus ample warrant for our spiritual interpretation of Jerusalem, as mystically representing that glorious Church of which holy John speaks, and which he saw in vision in its last phase as coming down from God: "And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Rev. 21:2.) Viewing, then, the text in its spiritual meaning, we may apply the exhortation, "Fear thou not" to the Church of the living God; and the day spoken of as that day when she is in trouble and sorrow, and beset with many fears on account of the number and strength of her adversaries. But as the members of the mystical body of Christ are all partakers of the same afflictions, though each in its different measure, we may consider the words as addressed personally to each individual believer who is beset with doubt and fear. By so doing we seem to make the words more distinct and more personal, and to speak more pointedly to the heart and

conscience of each sufferer in and with Christ.

When we look around at the suffering Church of Christ, how many of the dear family of God do we see in circumstances under which they are greatly afraid and much distressed. Let us look at some of these circumstances to give our subject greater point and distinctness.

1. Take, for instance, when God, in the language of the prophet, “lays judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet;” that day when he brings the soul to book, when he searches Jerusalem with candles, when the light and life of the Holy Spirit visit the heart, rend asunder the veil of ignorance and unbelief spread over it, and discover the sin that lurks and works there, which has been the fruitful source of that long stream of iniquity which has defiled lip and life, and now distresses the awakened conscience. However God may for a time have seemed to take no notice of the sins of his people, sooner or later a day surely comes when he arrests them by his word, brings them before his holy bar, searches every inmost thought of their heart; and not only recalls to their mind and memory actual transgressions, many perhaps till then buried and forgotten, but sets their secret sins in the light of his countenance, manifests his inflexible justice, immaculate purity, and eternal displeasure against all iniquity; and by these dealings and doings brings them down before him into the dust. Now this day is a day of great fear, because in that day a holy God and a guilty sinner meet together. In that day a righteous law and a guilty conscience come together face to face. In that day the inflexible justice of God and hosts of sins open and secret are brought to look upon each other without shield, shelter, or refuge. How the soul now hangs as it were trembling in the balance lest the sentence go forth of eternal destruction from his presence. Have you never had such a day as that—the day of your soul trouble—when God brought you to book, laid the weight of sin upon your conscience, and made you see what you were in his sight as a justly condemned transgressor? I do not wish to

lay down a rigid, unbending standard, and decide how deep or how long this trouble may be; but I cannot see that we can even breathe out our soul for a sense of mercy unless we have in some measure been thus convinced of sin and brought down before the Almighty. It may have been a gradual work, but it must have been a sure one to make it a day of the Lord.

2. But the words, “In that day,” will also apply to a day of trial. Have you not from time to time had days of trial? Perhaps you are under some very heavy trial now. There may be a heavy load of temporal trouble even now pressing upon your shoulders, and a heavier load of spiritual trouble pressing upon your conscience. The two often go together, as with Job and Hezekiah; and it is this meeting together of the two waters that makes the trial so heavy. This made the wise man say, “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?” (Prov. 18:14.) It is then perhaps a day with you of deep trial, both of temporal difficulties and much exercise of mind in spiritual matters. Wave upon wave, billow upon billow are rolling over your soul. But are you not one of the citizens of the new Jerusalem? Have you not in times past felt something of the liberating power of God’s truth, and are thus a son and daughter of that free Jerusalem above which is the mother of us all? If so, you are one of the children of promise. (Gal. 4:28.) Unto you then God speaks in our text, “Fear thou not.”

3. But with another it may be a day of great temptation. You seem under the influence of the Prince of darkness; Satan plies hard at you with his fiery darts, and shoots the very artillery of hell thick and fast even now into your carnal mind, scarcely allowing you breathing time, or, as Job speaks, “to swallow down your spittle.” In prayer, in reading, in hearing, in your daily employment, at home and abroad, wherever you are, Satan is pressing you hard with his temptations, so that you often fear where the scene will end. Still God says to you, “Fear thou not.” “Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.” (1 John 4:4.) Our gracious Lord “has

spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them in his cross.” (Col. 2:15.) “Through death he has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14); and his promise is, “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” Therefore fear thou not. Satan knoweth that he hath but a short time, and is therefore come down upon you having great wrath. (Rev. 12:12.) But fear thou not, for the Lord has said, “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” (Luke 10:19.)

4. But with others it may be a day when you are looking forward to the future with great apprehension. Some dark cloud in providence is gathering in the distance, and as it approaches gradually nearer and nearer you fear lest, instead of breaking in showers upon your head, it should burst forth in a thunderstorm and you be exposed to its fury. Still the Lord says, “Fear thou not.” Does he not hold all creation in his grasp? Are not the gold and silver his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills? Has he not always appeared for you in your past troubles; and can he not, yea, will he not appear in that which now fills you with dread in its dim and distant apprehension? How true are the words, “He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.” (Job 5:19.) You have had the six, and found deliverance; now in the seventh, your present one, there shall no evil touch thee.

5. Or it may be a day,—for I wish to take in as many of these days of the Lord as I can, to throw the net wide to catch as many as I can of the fish now swimming about the ship,—it may be a day of great darkness with you, of much soul desertion. Many difficulties and perplexities may try your mind, and many doubts and fears as to the goodness of your state teem all in arms against you. You are terribly afraid lest all your profession prove a delusion, lest all which you know should be in the flesh; that you never felt or believed anything aright, and that no work of grace has been wrought in you. Now these exercises are not marks of death but

rather of life, and are often made very useful and profitable to the soul. God puts you into these spots, not only to try and prove you, but that he may have a word to say to your heart. These sharp and severe exercises are not meant for your destruction, as you may fear. They are not intended as intimations from God that he may clear himself of having any hand in your deception, but he brings you into these spots that you may listen to his voice, attend to what he says in the word of grace, that there may be a place in your heart for his word to come into. To you who are passing through that day, the day of Jacob’s trouble, God speaks in our text, and says, “Fear thou not.” You are beset by many fears; you have fears in Providence and fears in grace; you fear that your spot is not the spot of God’s children; that there is no reality in what you have hoped was a work of grace upon your heart; that what you tasted, felt, and handled of the things of God may prove a delusion; that you have not been led in the right way; that you began wrong, have gone on wrong, and will end wrong; that there is something peculiar in your case, something in your experience, that if it were thoroughly searched into would prove you to be unsound to the very core. Circumstances, too, have come upon you which have made the stroke keener and the blow heavier. A day of affliction, temptation, and trial has come upon you; a weakly body, a sickly frame, and an apprehension whether some stroke has not come for your end. With all this a whole host of fears has sprung up like so many armed men, and you do not know what to do with them, or what to do with yourself. Distressed, cast down, and exercised, you know not how to deal with them, get rid of them, or put them away. Thus you are in a strait where none can help you and where you cannot help yourself. Now God says to you, “Fear thou not.” I shall by and by show the ground of his admonition to you and blessed counsel; but for the present I will content myself with God’s own language. I repeat, then, art thou passing through that day? God says—listen, O, listen to his words—“Fear thou not.”

ii. But he speaks to Zion also, and says to her, “Let not thy

hands be slack," or "faint," as we read in the margin.

By "Zion" here we may understand the same thing as Jerusalem, for Zion was a part of Jerusalem, a lofty eminence on which David built his palace, and is therefore combined with it by the apostle: "But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem;" and what is this but "the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven?" (Heb. 12:22, 23.) I shall, therefore, assume that the people of God are here spoken to in the day of their fear, and that to them is addressed the exhortation, "Let not thy hands be slack." How suitable, how appropriate is this word to their case. For is there anything which makes our hands so slack as this day which I have already described as the day of temptation, or the day of affliction, or the day of trial, or the day of searching Jerusalem with candles? Now in this "day of the Lord," instead of proving ourselves good soldiers of Jesus Christ, putting on the whole armour of God, and going out manfully to battle, we tremble and fear; and thus our hands are slack, or, as the word means, droop and hang uselessly by our side. At the very moment, in the very circumstances when we need all our armour and all our strength against our enemies, what with inward guilt, strong unbelief, killing doubts, cutting fears, dismal apprehensions, weighty trials, and urgent temptations,—in the very day and hour when we should be most strong to meet our enemy, we are most weak. Instead of boldly and manfully taking the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, and the weapon of all prayer, which we are bidden to do, through guilt and fear and dismal apprehension, the hands droop: the girdle gets slack, the shield falls, the sword slips out of the hand, the breastplate gets loose, and the helmet drops off the head. Thus our hands are slack in the use of this armour of God, which we are to take that we "may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." (Eph. 6:10-18.) How do you meet

a trial, a temptation, a perplexity, a chilling doubt, a cutting fear? Can you rise above it? Are you like an active swimmer in the sea, who, when a towering wave comes, breasts it with skill and vigour and mounts over it? Or are you rather like a poor half-drowned wretch who is dashed by the wave upon the rock, or carried out by its reflux into the sea? Take the generality of God's people. Are they not more like a poor half-drowned sailor, under a heavy wave, who is just saved and only just saved at the last gasp, than a bold and active swimmer who can breast the wave and rise above it? God speaks then to his Zion under these circumstances when heart and hands alike droop, and says, "Let not thy hands be slack." O faint-hearted soul! O tossed with tempest and not comforted! O poor afflicted one, why dost thou give way to thy doubts and fears and dismal apprehensions? Fear not; let not thy hands be slack; play the man; look at thine enemies boldly in the face; stand to thy colours; take up thy shield and sword, and once more front thy cruel foe. But Zion says, "Alas! I cannot. My heart is full of fear, my hands are slack, and they drop the weapon as soon as I take hold of it." Are there not those here whose experience finds an echo to my words? Are not your hands too often slack to fight and slack to pray? Are you not such as the apostle exhorts? "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees." (Heb. 12:12.) As I speak not thus to blame you, for I am too often myself in the same spot of weakness and fear, I do not stand here to scold but to sympathise, to help not to hinder, to lead on not to drive back, to strengthen not to weaken, to take burdens off not lay them on. Is not this a part of the minister's office? Does not the Lord himself bid his servants strengthen the weak hands and to confirm the feeble knees? "Say to them that are of feeble heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you." (Isaiah 35:4.) The Lord never gives us an exhortation without confirming it by a suitable promise.

But this brings us to the second part of our text: "The Lord

102 THE VALLEY EXALTED, AND THE MOUNTAIN LAID LOW

thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.” (Zeph. 3:17.)

II.—We see then here how the Lord comes and gives his Zion blessed reasons why she should not fear and her hands should not be slack. What is the first encouraging word that he speaks to her, and by her to our hearts that we should not fear, and that our hands should not be slack?

i. “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty.”

How he presents himself here as being in the midst of his Church. How he represents himself as standing in the very centre of Zion, that he himself may fight her battles and bring her off more than conqueror. But before I enter into the meaning of these words, let me ask you one question, and do you put it home to your heart and conscience, that you may be enabled to gather up some balm to your wounded spirit out of these words of the Lord. Did you ever feel God to be in your midst? When you have been cast down sometimes with soul trouble, hard pressed by doubt, guilt, and fear, was your soul ever blessed with the presence of God? In your room, upon your bed, in the house of prayer, was there ever a solemn visitation of the power and presence of God to your heart? Then he was in your midst. The way to prove that God is in our midst is to feel him there. True religion is a religion of feeling. The true way to realise that God is in our midst is to feel him in our heart, and to know that he is with us by the manifestation of his presence and of his power.

But let us see in what way God is “in our midst.” It is good to see the foundation on which this rests—how firm, how stable; how independent of all change, all mutability of events, all vicissitude of circumstances, it is that the God of heaven is in our midst. It is in the Person of his dear Son. When our gracious Lord took part of the flesh and blood of the children, he came into our midst as one of us. He said, therefore, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto thee.”

(Heb. 2:12.) His name is “Immanuel,” that is, God with us—God in our midst. As our Mediator he is in our midst; for the word Mediator means a middle person—one who can stand in our midst between God and us. John saw him in vision in the midst of the seven candlesticks, representing how he stands in the midst of the churches. (Rev. 1:13.) But for this Mediator and for his divine mediation God could not be in our midst. Sin must have eternally separated between us and him; but now God in Christ can come and dwell with us, according to those words: “I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (2 Cor. 6:16.) This was the distinguishing glory of the children of Israel that God was among them. No other people could say this, and no other people knew this, as the Lord said of old: “And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God.” (Exodus 29:45, 46.) This made the Psalmist sing in the triumph of expectant faith: “God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.” (Psa. 46:5.)

As we then, poor Gentile sinners, have succeeded to Israel’s place, being grafted into the good olive tree from which they were broken off, so as to partake of its root and fatness, the promises made to Zion belong to us who believe. If God then is in your midst, to you I speak who believe in his dear Son, whom need you fear and what need you fear? Your sins, it is true are great, mountains high, oceans deep; your crimes, for so I may well call them, are of the blackest dye; your iniquities of the deepest hue. What can you do with them? Can you put them away, speak pardon to your own conscience, bring a sense of forgiveness into your own soul, and view all these sins rolling away from off your burdened mind like a summer cloud dispersed from the firmament of heaven by the rays of the sun shining bright and clear? You cannot do it. But if God is in the midst of you, he has done it already. Your sins are

pardoned, blotted out, forgiven, and cancelled: they were all laid upon the head of Jesus your Surety on the great day of atonement; he has satisfied the justice of God on your behalf, and all your sins are cast behind God's back. What you never could do God has done for you, by laying your sins upon the head of his dear Son, that by the efficacy of his atoning blood, sacrifice, and death, the sins of the Church might be for ever blotted out. Now if God is in the midst of you, you need not fear his wrath, or be under dismal apprehensions of judgment to come. You stand before God without spot or blemish, accepted in the Beloved. "Ah," but you say, "this is the very thing which I want to prove." But have you never realised the sensible presence of God, if not to bring peace and joy, yet to awe your mind, fill you with reverence of his glorious Majesty, make sin truly hateful, yourself loathed, and holiness presented to your view as something blessed and desirable? Have you never longed to be holy, hated sin with perfect hatred, mourned and sighed over your sinful self, and felt cut to the very quick that your iniquities so often, like the wind, have taken you away? God was in the midst of these prayers and desires; and the Holy Spirit was helping your infirmities, and interceding in and for you with groanings which cannot be uttered. These movements of godly fear and holy reverence show that God is in your midst. So Jacob felt when God first appeared to him: "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (Gen. 28:16, 17.) You may have had similar feelings in your bedroom, or in the house of prayer; if so, God is in your midst.

2. But take another view of the case. You have heavy trials, deep family afflictions, painful bereavements, dark providences, gloomy apprehensions of what may soon burst forth; and you are much tried and exercised what the issue and event of all these things may be. Fear them not, believing child of God: if God is

in the midst of thee, is he not able to deliver? Who has enabled you to stand to the present hour? Who has been your kind friend and bounteous Benefactor through life? Who has again and again made crooked things straight and rough places plain, and held you up to the present moment? What! Cannot you look back and see the handwriting of God's providence from a very child, and how circumstance after circumstance and event after event have all denoted the special care which he has displayed over you? These are so many pledges that the same God who has appeared for you in time past will appear again. Your faith is so weak and your fear so strong, that you can scarcely believe it. But is he not in the midst of you? Have you not at various times realised his presence and his power? Does not this clearly prove that he is in your midst? Is he not even now in the midst of your heart, in the midst of your conscience, in the midst of your thoughts, in the midst of your desires, in the midst of your affections? Through the long hours of the day, through the still hours of the night, how eternal things occupy our thoughts and exercise our minds. How they bubble up as from a deep well, and like springing water burst through the stones, the clay, the mud, the thick grass, moistening and softening the heart, sometimes to make it tender and contrite, and sometimes to rejoice and the bones to flourish like an herb. (Isai. 66:14.) It is thus we are kept alive from day to day, that our leaf should not wither, or we cease from yielding fruit. (Psa. 1:3; Jer. 17:8.) Now if this be your experience, be assured that your sympathising High Priest Jesus is in your midst; for if he be in the midst of your affections, he is in the midst of your afflictions. Was not the Son of God in the midst of the furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, so that they took no hurt? (Dan. 3:25.) And do we not read? "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the Angel of his presence saved them." (Isaiah 63:9.) Surely then he will come in his own time and way to deliver and save you out of all your troubles; for "many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all."

3. But perhaps your temptations are very great; Satan presses very hard; his fiery darts come so thick and fast; there are such storms of infidelity, blasphemy, and obscenity raised up against you, and as if beating upon your poor defenceless head, that you hardly know how to stand against them. Let me ask you, which is stronger, God or Satan? Is God truly and really in your midst? Can he not, will he not bruise Satan under your feet shortly? Has not Jesus “destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage?” Does not the promise still stand good? “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor. 10:13.) James bids us even “count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations” (James 1:2); and Peter says in almost similar language, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” (1 Pet. 4:12, 13.) But you complain that your trials and afflictions press you down so, that you cannot rise above them. You would believe if you could; but you are so overborne with the weight of your troubles that you can scarcely look up. But so have been other saints of God before you. Hezekiah said, “Mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me.” (Isaiah 38:14) And what a mournful note Heman uttered, “Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves.” (Psalm 88:6, 7.) Still I will ask, Is not God in your midst? Is there no secret support? Do you not find his strength made perfect in your weakness? Does no timely word come in? Is there no breaking of the dark cloud, no access to the throne, no word of his grace that drops in to suit your circumstances? Do no so belie

your God; be not such a wretched unbeliever when your God is in the midst. Do not provoke and grieve his holy Spirit by denying his work upon your heart: for as I said before, you have found God in your midst, and if so, it is nothing but giving way to Satan and unbelief to deny it. How encouraging it is to believe that God is in our midst; in our midst this evening to help me to preach, to help you to hear, and to bless the word from my lips to your heart. If God is in our midst, what need we fear? whom need we fear? and why need we fear? Let not our hands be slack: God is in our midst: he will help us right early.

ii. But is this all that God says of himself? He goes on adding word to word, and truth to truth, and promise to promise, to strengthen Zion’s faith, to calm her doubts and fears, and raise up her drooping hands. He says he is “mighty.”

What a mighty God we have to deal with. And what would suit our case but a mighty God? Have we not mighty sins? Have we not mighty trials? Have we not mighty temptations? Have we not mighty foes and mighty fears? And who is to deliver us from all this mighty host except the mighty God? It is not a little God (if I may use the expression) that will do for God’s people. They need a mighty God, because they are in circumstances where none but a mighty God can interfere in their behalf. And it is well worth our notice that the Lord puts his people purposely into circumstances where they may avail themselves, so to speak, of his omnipotent power, and thus know from living personal experience, that he is a mighty God, not in mere doctrine and theory, but a mighty God in their special and particular behalf. Why, if you did not know feelingly and experimentally your mighty sins, your mighty trials, your mighty temptations, and your mighty fears you would not want a mighty God. O how this brings together the strength of God and the weakness of man; how it unites poor helpless creatures with the Majesty of heaven; how it communicates to feeble, worthless worms the very might of the Omnipotent Jehovah; and what a blessed realization it gives in faith and feeling of the power of God

put forth in our defence and salvation. This sense of our weakness and his power, of our misery and his mercy, of our ruin and his recovery, of the aboundings of our sin and the superaboundings of his grace—a feeling sense, I say, of these opposite yet harmonious things brings us to have personal, experimental dealings with God; and it is in these personal dealings with God that the life of all religion consists. O what a poor, dead, useless religion is that in which there are no personal dealings with God—no calling upon his holy name out of a sincere heart; no seeking of his face or imploring of his favour; no lying at his feet and begging of him to appear; no pitiable, lamentable case for him to have compassion upon; no wounds or sores for him to heal, no leprosy to cleanse, no enemies to put to the rout, no fears to dispel, and I may almost say no soul to save. And yet such is the religion of thousands. They draw near to God with their lips, but their hearts are far from him: they serve God with their bodies, but they serve sin with their souls; they attend his house whilst their mind is a den of thieves; and whilst they outwardly say, “Lord, Lord,” they inwardly say, “This man shall not have dominion over us.” If you differ from them, and want a God near at hand and not afar off, a mighty God in the very midst of your soul, of your thoughts, desires, and affections, you may well bless him for the grace which has made you to differ, and thankfully bow your neck to sufferings and trials, as means in his hand to bring you and him together.

iii. But the Lord gives another reason why Jerusalem should not fear, and why Zion’s hands should not be slack. “He will save.”

How firm the word! how certain the promise! “He will save.” Not “he may,” or “he can,” or “he would if he could;” or “you must do your part to help him;” or “he has put you into a salvable state, so that if you are lost after all that he has done, it will be all your own fault.” God in his holy word does not speak in such a halting, faltering, indecisive, deceptive tone. Such hesitating language would be as unworthy of the divine Majesty as unsuitable to us. Can we think that the great, immutable Jehovah suspends his

eternal plans upon the fickle will and mutable mind of man? What security could there be for poor fearful Jerusalem if salvation depended upon her doings and duties? Whom then will he save? Fearing Jerusalem and slack-handed Zion. If any think they can save themselves, let them put their eternal all upon that bottom. Let them go to sea and sail to the shores of eternity in that crazy bark—in that leaky ship. The Lord keep us from sailing with that crew in their desperate voyage, for in good truth, besides its leaky state, it sails under a rebellious flag, and will go down in the first storm. I would stand upon the pier-head with the gospel trumpet in my hand, and blow so loud a blast as would warn all within hearing against putting out to sea in any ship which is not owned, chartered, equipped, officered, and manned by the Captain of our salvation, and of which he himself is not both Commander and Pilot. Salvation, then, does not depend upon peradventures and maybes. It stands upon God’s fixed purposes, firm decrees, eternal oaths, covenant engagements, and the finished work of his dear Son. Salvation is not made up of peradventures, and contingencies, and creature circumstances, as if the breath of man could create it, and the breath of man disannul it. It stands as immutable as Jehovah’s eternal throne, as firm as the very being of God himself, for it rests upon “two immutable things,” his word and his oath. Therefore, he will, he must, he shall save all who believe in his dear Son. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:16.) And how sure are the words of Jesus, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” (John 10:27, 28.) But you may say “Am I one of his sheep?” Have you heard his voice, and are you following him? Or take the evidence in our text. Is he in your midst? If you have felt his presence and known his power, he will save. He has saved you already in the Person and work of his dear Son, for salvation is a past act, “Who hath saved us and called us.” (2 Tim. 1:9.) But

our interest in this we only know as God saves us manifestly by bringing that salvation into our heart. The great difficulty is to realise what God has already done for us. To do this is the grand province of faith: to believe and realise what has been done; not so much what remains to be done, but what has been done already. Does not the apostle declare that “God hath blessed us,” already blessed us, “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus?” (Eph. 1:3.) Faith then has to receive these blessings which are stored up in Christ Jesus in heavenly places, where he sits at the right hand of God. “It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.” (Col. 1:19.) Out of this fulness, then, we receive by faith (John 1:16); and so far as we do this, the life which we live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God. (Gal. 2:20.) Now “in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” (Eph. 1:7.) Thus all is done, already done; and salvation is a perfect and accomplished act to which nothing can be added, as from it nothing can be taken away. He has saved you already who believe. Faith’s work, then, the grand exploit which faith has to perform, is to believe what is already done, and to believe it was done for me; when he shed his precious blood, he shed his precious blood for me; when he said “It is finished,” it was finished for me; and when he rose from the dead, triumphed over death and hell, he rose triumphant for me. This is the work of faith with power—realise that what has been done has been done for me. This, therefore, brings matters to a close issue, takes salvation out of the region of peradventures, perhaps, and uncertainties, and makes it a firm, irreversible reality, which faith fixes as her own.

But you say, “This is what I want to realise.” If you have never realised it and don’t want to realise it, I should like to know what you think about your religion; I should like to know what sort of evidences you have of divine life, or what marks of grace you bear. I am very sure of this, if you have not realised it, and are not longing to realise it, you bear very few marks of having a work of grace

upon your heart. But have you—for I want to bring your religion into a small but true compass—have you ever realised anything of the grace of God in your own soul? Have you ever realised that God was in your midst? Was Christ ever revealed to your soul by the power of God, and were you ever blessed with the presence of God? Then all the rest follows. Make that point sure; get your feet upon that rock; all the rest is as certain as that to-morrow’s sun will rise. For “he will save.” He has saved you already; all that remains to be done is to bring that salvation into your soul. To do this is the special work of the Holy Ghost, who takes of the things of Christ and reveals them to the heart. Salvation is like a river, ever flowing in streams of crystal purity, such as John saw when he was shown a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. What then is wanted? A sip and a taste of that stream, a bringing of the fulness of it into your heart. You never can be saved more than you are saved already. You may have, and I hope will have, greater openings up, sweeter enjoyments, more blessed discoveries, till your peace flows like a river. But you never can be saved more than you are saved already by the finished work of the Son of God. What you want is to realise it, enjoy it, feast upon it, and live and die under the sweet testimonies of your interest in it. But as to any other salvation than that which is already accomplished there is none. This was Peter’s testimony when he spake, “filled with the Holy Ghost:” “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12.) But this salvation is a past act: “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor. 1:18.) Observe the expression, “unto us which are saved,” that is, already saved. Bear this then firmly in mind, that we are already saved in time if we are to be saved in eternity; and stand before God without spot or wrinkle now as much as we shall stand at the last day faultless before the presence of his glory.

iv. But the Lord adds another word, for he is very kind, very gracious, as if he would still every doubt and fear. “He will rejoice over thee with joy.”

God rejoices as much in saving your soul as you can rejoice in your soul being saved. Say I “as much?” His joy is infinite and yours is finite, his the joy of God and yours but the joy of man. Do you believe that God rejoices to save, delights in saving? Why else should he have given his dear Son? Do the angels rejoice over repenting sinners? Is there no joy then in the bosom of God to save a sinner too? How this takes us up, as it were, into the very realms of bliss, and reveals to us the wondrous character of God in his Trinity of persons and Unity of essence, that there is a rejoicing in the salvation of the Church, so that God himself, so to speak, is filled with eternal joy in the salvation of his people. When his dear Son offered himself as a sacrifice for sin, and thus put away the transgressions and iniquities of the Church by his own bloodshedding and death, overcame death and hell, and washed us in his blood from all our filth and guilt and shame, God, so to speak, rejoiced with infinite joy in the completion of the work of his dear Son. It was the fulfilment of his eternal purposes of wisdom and grace. It was the manifestation of his glory to men and angels. It was the triumph of good over evil, of holiness over sin, of mercy over judgment, of love over enmity, of wisdom over craft, of the counsels of God over the devices of man, and, above all, of the Son of God in his weakness over Satan in his might. It was peopling heaven with an innumerable multitude of saints by whom eternal anthems of praise should be sung to God and the Lamb. Thus we may see how the God of heaven even now rejoices with holy joy over every one whom he brings to the enjoyment of a salvation so free, so great, so glorious.

v. But we have not even yet done with what the Holy Ghost reveals to us, if I may use such an expression, of the very heart of God: “He will rest in his love.”

“God is love.” When, then, he rests in his love, he rests in

himself. The words imply also a holy, settled determination of God. To punish is, as it were, a going out of himself. It is, therefore, called “a strange act.” “For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act.” (Isa. 28:21.) Though infinitely just, and though his justice demands the punishment of transgressors, for “he will by no means clear the guilty,” yet it is not his delight: His delight is in revealing his love, in manifesting mercy, as the prophet beautifully declares: “He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.” (Micah 7:18.) When the Lord showed Moses his glory, he passed by before him and proclaimed, as if that heaven and earth might hear, “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” (Exodus 34:6, 7.) Thus, there is in God a solemn approbation of, a blessed resting in, the perfection of his love. It is beautifully unfolded by Moses under the parable of an eagle and her young: “As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.” (Deut. 32:11.) The eagle is represented as “fluttering over her young,” with a kind of warm, tremulous motion; brooding over them (as the word means), and as if delighting in the nearness of her eaglets to her breast, in the warmth she communicates, and the protection that she gives. May she not be said to rest in her love when she has all her callow brood safely folded under her outspread pinions? So God is said to “rest in his love.” And will he not eminently do so when all his saints are gathered home into their heavenly mansions, and all are one, even as God and his dear Son are one? (John 17:22.) And may I not add, if God thus rest in his love, he cannot, he will not, so to speak, have any rest till he brings each and all into his own rest—that rest which he promised of old? “If they shall enter into my rest.” How, too, he bids his servant put him in mind of this: “I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall

never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” (Isaiah 62:6, 7.) O that we might be enabled to give him no rest till he bring us into that rest which remaineth to the people of God, and into which we enter by a living faith in his dear Son.

vi. One more word before I conclude, on which I must be brief: “He will joy over thee with singing.”

Singing in the word of God, is always put forth as the emblem and expression of joy and exultation. How, again and again, in the Psalms we read, “Sing ye to the Lord a new song.” Now this expression of thankful joy in the mouths of men is put by a strong figure into the mouth of God. It is as if the Holy Spirit would represent the joy of God in the salvation of his people to be so great that he gives it forth in the very voice of song. Of course this is a figure, but it is meant to show us the exceeding joy of God, that he rejoices over Zion with a joy so holy, so full, so intense, that it gives itself forth in such an utterance.

The thought itself is sufficient to overwhelm us with wonder and astonishment. God, in his infinite mercy, grant that we may taste a little of that wondrous love here, so as to be eternally satisfied with its fulness hereafter, when we shall see him as he is, and know even as we are known.

199 The Incorruptible Inheritance, with its Heirs and Legatees

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning,

May 28, 1865

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.”

1 Peter 1:3, 4, 5

When a rich man dies, almost as soon as the breath is out of his body, two questions are often asked: “What did he die worth?” “Whom has he left his money to?” Few care about his body; fewer care about his soul; but a good many care about his money. Even the weeping widow and the mourning sons and daughters, before the corpse of the husband and father is lodged in the ground, will indulge their minds, if not relieve their grief, by some anxious thoughts or inward speculations as to the amount of property left, and what will be the share of each. Nor should we altogether condemn them as showing thereby want of affection for the deceased, or of right and proper feeling under such a painful bereavement. It may colour the whole of their future life, whether the departed died in poverty or affluence, and if possessed of any large amount of property, what the share of each individual may be. But the mystery is soon unravelled. The day of interment comes. The cemetery provides for the body; a charitable hope provides for the soul; and the last will and testament provides for the property. When the interment is over, the family and friends assemble. Were we there and could read hearts, what emotions we should see agitating well nigh every bosom, as the will was slowly read by the family lawyer. How some would be elated and others depressed, for money, like the fabled magician's wand, can both raise spirits and lay them. And yet disappointment might weigh upon every heart, and a cloud rest upon every face. The eldest son who takes the estates might murmur at finding them so heavily burdened to make a provision for his sisters; the widow at having so small a jointure; and the younger branches that the property was not equally divided amongst all the children. Thus those who got much might think they might have got more; those who got little might complain how hardly they were dealt with; and those,

such as distant relatives and second cousins, who got nothing, would with difficulty suppress their vexation and disappointment that their names were not even mentioned in the will, or the small bequest left them of a mourning ring. Let a few years roll on; let us watch the issue; and then it might be found that what had been carefully accumulated was carelessly squandered; that the estates had become heavily mortgaged, the daughters' money lost by profligate or speculating husbands, and the younger sons, having spent all their property, had emigrated with the last few pounds to Australia. Thus that Scripture might be verified with this rich man's money and possessions, "An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed." (Prov. 20:21.) It might therefore be found that honest industry, integrity, and ability given by God might be a better property, and possess more abiding substance than land and houses, stocks and shares, aye, than thousands of pounds given by man.

But why do I speak thus? Why do I drop any remarks of this kind upon such a subject as lands and houses, or any such worldly topic as an earthly inheritance? That I may direct your thoughts and draw your attention to an inheritance of a far different character—to an inheritance which cannot be accumulated by man, whether by bad means or good; which can not be left by will, nor mortgaged for half its worth, nor spent and squandered by an elder son, nor presenting to the world after the lapse of a few years the miserable spectacle of a whole family broken to pieces by extravagant habits or ruinous speculations. It is the inheritance spoken of in our text, which is declared to be "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; reserved in heaven," and therefore out of the reach of earthly hearts and human fingers, for a people who are described as "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

Without further introduction, then, I shall this morning endeavour to direct your thoughts and to draw your attention to three points connected with my text.

I.—First, the inheritance itself, comprising both its character and its security: its character as "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away;" its security, as "reserved in heaven."

II.—Secondly, the heirs and legatees to this incorruptible inheritance: those "who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time."

III.—Thirdly, the earnest and foretastes of this incorruptible inheritance, as set forth in the words, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

I.—It is observable how the apostle immediately after the usual salutation to the saints, here designated as "strangers, elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," begins with blessing and praising God, and how he blesses him as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I would have you notice two things here. 1. First, what touched the secret string of praise in the apostle's heart? That very truth which has called forth so many discordant cries, so many almost shouts of horror from all quarters—that God has a people "elect, according to his own foreknowledge," whom he sanctifies by the Spirit "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Instead of denouncing the doctrine of election as "horrid" and the people who believed it and knew their interest in it as "narrow-minded bigots, wild fanatics, or mad enthusiasts," he prays for them that "grace and peace might be multiplied," or granted them in larger and richer abundance; and instead of being angry with God for electing a people, or declaring, as so many teachers and preachers have done, that such a God was worse than Moloch, he falls to blessing and praising his holy name for the manifestation of such mercy and grace to a chosen people. 2. But observe, secondly, under what title he blessed him: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In fact he cannot be blessed by us under any other relationship. It is because, and only because, he is the God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that he is to be blessed and praised by us with every faculty of our soul. And why? Because as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ he has blessed us, already blessed us, with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Is not this Paul's testimony? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3.) And is not this in connection also with election? "According as he hath 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.) How well do Peter and Paul agree in this matter. How consistent their views: how harmonious their words. Having, therefore, blessed us with all spiritual blessings, he is worthy of all the blessing and praise that we can bestow upon his holy name.

But let us seek for a few moments to open and enter into the meaning of that peculiar title which God claims and bears under the New Testament. As under the old covenant he was "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," so under the new he is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Both of them are covenant titles, for as in the old dispensation he made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so in the new he has made a covenant with his dear Son. But how is he "the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ?" He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ primarily and essentially as his own proper and eternal Father. Jesus Christ is God's own Son, his true and proper and peculiar Son, "the Son of the Father in truth and love." His Sonship is the grand foundation of the covenant, as it is of all redemption and salvation. When then God "sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin," that is, as a sacrifice for sin, he was not less his Son in his humiliation than he was before his incarnation; and though by taking the flesh and blood of the children he became the Son of man he did not remain the less the Son of God. As the Son of God he came, as the Son of God he suffered, as the Son of God he died; for though Deity did not and could not suffer or die, he

suffered and died who as the Son of God was God. As our Lord, though he has two natures has but one Person, so though he was the Son of man he is not two Sons but one Son—the lower title coalescing in the higher. Therefore in his complex Person as God-Man he is still the Son of God, and God is still his Father, for he could as soon cease to be God as to be the Son of God. But why is he called "our Lord?" In the covenant of grace he is "our Lord," first, as having bought us with a price, thus establishing a right and claim to us as being purchased by his blood: "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20); and, secondly, he is "our Lord," as being our Head and Husband: "And gave him to be the head over all thing to the church." (Eph. 1:22.) "Thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of Hosts is his name." (Isai. 54:5.) This counsel, therefore, was given to the church: "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him." (Psa. 45:10, 11.) "My lord" was the title given by godly women of old to their husbands. Sarah, therefore, said of Abraham: "My lord being old also," to which Peter refers: "Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord." (Gen. 18:12; 1 Pet. 3:6.) The title therefore which Jesus bears in the mouths of his people in the New Testament is ever "the Lord," or "our Lord." Thomas, when faith sprang up in his heart, called him "My Lord, and my God." (John 20:28.) When, then, God is called "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," it implies two things; first, that he is his "Father" in eternal relationship, and, secondly, his "God," as having chosen, sent, and sustained him, and raised him again from the dead, and set him at his own right hand to be a Mediator between himself and us. Thus God the Father is "the Father of Christ," and "the God of Christ"—his Father prior to, irrespective of, and yet now connected with his Mediation; and "his God," as being our Mediator. By this he becomes our Father and God also, our Father by adoption, our God by covenant. "I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and

to my God and your God.” (John 20:17.)

But I would have you observe also how fixed and firm these men of God, these prophets and apostles of old, were in the solemn realities and heavenly truths which they proclaim unto us. There was no uncertainty in their mind as to the inheritance or its nature. No dubious, hesitating language ever fell from their lips. They spoke what they knew; they declare to us what had been revealed to them. And they knew also not only what the inheritance was in itself, but their own abiding interest in it. Peter therefore speaks of himself as “an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.” (1 Pet. 5:1.) Only, therefore, so far as we are possessed of a measure of the same faith which was in them, can we stand upon the same spot, bless the same God, and feel a gracious, experimental persuasion of our interest in the same spiritual blessings.

i. But now let me come to the two points which I proposed to bring before you; first, the inheritance, with those characteristic marks which so distinguish it from every earthly portion. These mark its peculiar nature. Let me, however, before I enter upon any description of its nature by opening what the apostle has here laid down as peculiar marks of this inheritance, tell you what the inheritance is in itself. If a man leave an estate by will, it is usually a well marked, clearly defined property, having its title deeds, its boundaries, its distinguishing features to determine what it is, and where situated. So when God has given and appropriated an inheritance for the possession and eternal enjoyment of his people, he has not left us in any measure of uncertainty as to what that inheritance is. What then is it? Let us look at and examine it, that we may see each for ourselves whether it is ours. This inheritance, then, is himself. This was beautifully typified in the case of the Levites. God gave them no inheritance among their brethren. We find him, therefore, thus speaking to Aaron: “Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children

of Israel.” (Num. 18:20.) Now Aaron and his descendants, as ministering in the sanctuary and alone possessing the priesthood and the service of the tabernacle, typified the people of God, and this under two relationships. First, the Levites were taken in the place of the first-born. When God in Egypt passed over the first-born males of the house of Israel, he claimed the first-born whether of man or beast as his, as we find him speaking: “And I behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the first-born that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; because all the first-born are mine; for on the day that I smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the Lord.” (Num. 3:12, 13.) Now, as thus passed over, all the first-born had to be redeemed whether of man or beast: “All the first-born of thy sons thou shalt redeem” (Exodus 34:20); and the redemption price was fixed for man at five shekels: “And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thy estimation, for the money of five shekels.” (Num. 18:16.) When, therefore, the people were numbered, the first-born were numbered also, and amounted to twenty and two thousand two hundred and three score and thirteen. Now it happened that when the Levites were numbered also, all the males from a month old and upward were just twenty-two thousand. As, then, there was a number of the first-born beyond the number of the Levites, amounting to “two hundred and three score and thirteen,” redemption money to that amount was required to be paid for them, in order that the Levites might exactly occupy man by man the place of the first-born. I mention this singular circumstance to show you what I may call God’s accuracy in redemption, and that it is not a general and universal but a special and particular act, and the place in consequence which the Levites took as representing both the first-born and the redeemed. They thus stood before God and man as representing “the general assembly and church of the first-born

which are written in heaven.” (Heb. 12:23.) But, secondly, as the people of God are “a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ,” the tribe of Levi, to which was confined the office of priesthood, typically represented the people of God under their character as priests. The four living creatures, therefore, in the Revelation sang, as a part of their new song, “And hast made us unto our God kings and priests.” (Rev. 5:10.)

God, therefore, spiritually, as in the case of the Levites typically, is the inheritance of his people—God in his Trinity of Persons and Unity of Essence: God in all his eternal, gracious, and glorious attributes. Whatever the great I AM is in himself, the perfection of blessedness, he is that as the inheritance of his saints. We therefore read of them that they are heirs of God. (Rom. 8:17.) And what an inheritance!—not so much heaven as he who dwelleth in the highest heavens!

But there are two particular attributes of God which form what I may perhaps call the chief and enduring substance of this inheritance. These are his love and his holiness. There are attributes of God specially adapted to a time-state, which, so to speak, will not be needed in the state to come. His long-suffering, his forbearance, his mercy, his tender pity, his guiding eye, his delivering hand, his providential care—these attributes of Jehovah are needed for a time-state, but will not be needed when all the saints will see Jesus as he is. But love and holiness, or rather God in his love and in his holiness, will ever be the inheritance of his saints. His name, his nature is love, for “God is love” (1 John 4:8); and holiness is so peculiarly his that he is emphatically called the “Holy one of Israel.” The song at the Red Sea was, “Who is like thee, glorious in holiness?” (Exod. 15:11.) And what was the seraphim’s cry in the temple one to another but “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts?” (Isai. 6:3.) These two essential attributes of God are the blessedness of heaven, and will be the bliss of the saints in glory. His love will ever flow forth as rivers of pleasure into their happy, glorified spirits through the humanity of Jesus,

and his holiness will ever be reflected upon them and delighted in by them, for they will be made perfect in holiness, both in body and soul. Thus will they ever bask in his love, and swim in the sea of his holiness; holiness and love being the eternal happiness of heaven, as sin and enmity will be the eternal misery of hell. I shall show you by and by what bearing this has upon the experience of God’s saints upon earth; but just take at present this from my lips, that God is the inheritance of his saints, and especially in his two attributes of holiness and love.

ii. But we now come to the distinctive marks of this inheritance. It is spoken of in our text as “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” We will look at these three distinctive marks separately.

1. First, it is incorruptible. Earthly inheritances are essentially corruptible; and they are corruptible in three points of view. Many large inheritances have had their foundations laid in corruption. Immense fortunes in this metropolis have been gained by grinding the faces of the poor. Many a poor stitch girl has been sacrificed to the demon of fashion. Some of these victims of overwork, underfood, and crowded rooms have died in their sleeping dens; others have gone home to die of consumption in their widowed mothers’ arms; and all to swell the purses of men milliners and women milliners, who so profusely and so expensively supply “the changeable suits of apparel, the mantles, the wimples, and the criping pins” of the fashionable ladies of the day. Nor have the victims of cheapness been less numerous than the victims of fashion; for money can be coined out of blood and bone as much at the East end where ragged stitch-women make slop-shirts for the poor, as at the West where well dressed stitch-ladies make court dresses for the rich. But this is only one instance of misery and corruption. Oppression, exaction, and covetousness, fraud, gambling, and speculation have heaped up many a splendid fortune. And that surely must needs be a corruptible inheritance which is gained by corruption. How often do we see money thus

badly gained as badly spent, and the curse of the Lord in the house of the wicked? Earthly inheritances are therefore, secondly, corruptible, inasmuch as they may soon disappear by fraud or force, by profligacy or robbery, or vanish away as a dream in the night. Lock up your gold and silver in your strong box, deposit your notes, your securities, your bonds in your iron safe. A telegram may come before you rise in the morning to inform you that whilst you were locked up in sleep some burglars have broken your iron safe, or that a fire has taken place on your premises, which melted your gold and silver into a shapeless mass, and burnt your notes and securities to tinder. Is not that essentially corruptible which rust and moth may corrupt, and where thieves can break through and steal? Take it in a third sense: do not riches often minister to corruption? They are not evil in themselves. We often hear ignorant men wrongly quote a Scripture text. According to their version, "money is the root of all evil." Not so: Scripture never spoke so foolishly. Money means house and clothing, food and fuel, the home and education of our children, and necessary provision for the wants of life. Scripture never spoke so foolishly as to say that money which supplies our daily necessities is the root of all evil. What the Scripture says is, "The love of money is the root of all evil;" not the money itself, but the love of it. And how true is this. We see from daily experience that where men are not restrained by parsimony or by the fear of God, money ministers to their corruption. They will have their lusts gratified; and as money affords the means of this gratification, the more money they have the more corrupt does it make them. You may have inherited property legitimately, and yet lose it as Job lost his by the providence of God. In that sense, therefore, your inheritance is corruptible. Your right hand neighbour may have gained his by corruption, and that is corruptible in origin; and your left hand neighbour be squandering his in sin, and that is corruptible in its end. You may have gained yours honestly by industry or bequest, and yet it may be corruptible in result as taken from you by the

providence of God.

But not so with the inheritance above: that is essentially incorruptible: for it is God himself, as seen, known, and enjoyed in his dear Son. He gives even here below some taste of its incorruptible nature, as admitting of no loss or diminution in itself from outward violence or natural decay; and as received into a believing heart allowing of no abuse to ungodly purposes; for the more we know of what that inheritance is in anticipation by the sweet foretastes of it, the more it will lead to godliness and holiness. No burglars can break into that blissful abode; no fire can consume that heavenly treasure. It cannot decay with age, like a house; or become barren, like a worn out field; be mortgaged like an estate, or lost from spending it too freely; for these earthly contingencies can never touch the inheritance of the sanctified. Nay, more, we must die fully to enter into possession of it; for our corrupt bodies could not bear the exceeding and eternal weight of glory to be enjoyed when put into full possession of the incorruptible inheritance.

2. But it is also "undefiled." Earthly inheritances are often defiled. Even if clean in themselves we may defile them. Dirty fingers may defile the cleanest object. I should not like for a chimney sweep to have handed to me my cravat this morning, or to have laid his black hands upon the bosom of my shirt, if I had met him in the street. So it is not the thing itself which is naturally or necessarily defiled; it is touching it with dirty fingers that defiles it. You might go to the bank tomorrow, and receive your April dividend in sovereigns fresh from the Mint, or in bank notes all crisp and new. But suppose before you got home you were to spend one of your bright sovereigns in gluttony and drunkenness; or bought some expensive jewellery for your wife with your bank notes when you were in debt to your butcher and baker: would not that drunkenness or extravagance stain the brightest sovereign, and defile the cleanest, crispest notes ever issued by the Bank of England? It is then our dirty fingers that defile what in itself may

be clean. There is no sin in inheriting land, houses, money, left to you by your father's will. To the pure all things are pure. The Lord said, "Give alms of such things as ye have, and behold all things are clean unto you." (Luke 11:41.) Nay, the Apostle speaks to the rich, charging them to be "ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." (1 Tim. 6:18, 19.) People often speak against money, especially other people's money, as if it were something inherently bad. Money must be in itself the same whether it be little or much, yours or theirs. I dare say if you have none of your own you are very glad to have some of other people's—eagerly accepting from them what you condemn in them. It is not the use, then, it is the abuse which is to be condemned. The money is not defiled in itself; for it often comes to us in such a way of providence that we are compelled to see the hand of God expressly giving it. It is therefore only when we abuse God's good gift that we defile it. But we cannot defile the inheritance of which Peter speaks. That is out of the reach of dirty fingers, whether our own or others. Nay, it is in itself so pure and holy that the very foretastes of it in the soul cannot be really defiled by any base imaginations of our vile heart, or by the corruptions of our depraved nature, though they are surrounded by them. Our blessed Lord, who is gone up to the right hand of the Father, and there sits enthroned in glory, ever was and ever is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. Even now to see him by the eye of faith conforms the soul to his image, as the apostle beautifully expresses it: "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 purity and holiness of Christ, as made known to the soul, make him "the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely." And O what a wonder that he should even say to his church when he knocks at the door of her heart, "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled." (Song. 5:2.)

Undefiled, therefore, not only is the inheritance, but as washed in his blood, undefiled are the heirs.

3. "And which fadeth not away." All earthly things fade, either in themselves or in their enjoyment. You may think what a happy man you would be if somebody would leave you a handsome legacy, or if you came into sudden possession of a large sum of money. I saw the other day the suicide of a well-known London banker, who was worth at least a quarter of a million of money, according to the probate of his will. It is not for me to make any comment upon the sad circumstance, but I will just tell you what occurred to my mind when I saw the account. The thought struck me in a moment, what a poor thing money must be when the possession of a quarter of a million could not keep its owner from suicide. How little happiness must he have had from all his property thus to throw it, and body and soul with it, away. Now you might think a very small part of that large amount would make you happy; and yet you might have so much bodily or mental misery accompanying the very gift, that your present tried circumstances would be almost a paradise in comparison. A cancer in your mouth, a paralytic stroke, a dying wife or husband, or what would be more intolerable, the sense of God's wrath in your soul, would be a heavy counterpoise to all the money. Or even without this ballast, your anticipated happiness would prove a shadow and not a substance. The enjoyment of it would fade away like a gathered flower, or like a butterfly caught by a child in the fields: all its bloom would fade away, and its painted wings be crushed as soon as it was caught. And should it not fade away in reality, it would fade away in the very act of enjoyment. Your cherished prospects, your fostered schemes, and all the airy dreams in which you have revelled, by which you have created sometimes, in imagination, an earthly paradise should you succeed in gaining them all, you would find that you had embraced a cloud or grasped a shadow. Perhaps you have obtained what was once the utmost height of your ambition. Were you satisfied? Was there not disappointment

attending it which you had never expected, which marred all your expected happiness in it? If the cup was sweet as it touched your lips, was there not a bitter, bitter drop at the bottom which marred all the sweetness, and turned the whole draught into gall and wormwood? But the inheritance reserved in heaven for the saints is incorruptible, and undefiled, and fadeth not away. Even on earth it does not fade, for it is ever fresh, ever blooming, ever new. There is in it a sweetness which never cloy, a satisfaction which leaves behind no bitter reflections. The sweetest and best of earthly blessings perish in the using, if they do not leave behind a sting of guilt and shame. And if this inheritance fade not on earth how will it be in heaven? There will be there no fading flowers, no withered prospects, no disappointed dreams; but ever new and renewed pleasures; for “he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.” (Rev. 21:5.) Nay, “the Lamb himself which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters”—ever fresh, ever flowing, and therefore ever new.

iii. And now a word on the security of this inheritance. It is “reserved in heaven.” The word “reserved” here means preserved, or kept secure. Thus the inheritance is made sure to the heirs—secured to them by an everlasting covenant, and kept safely for them until they are put into possession of it. As they are waiting for the inheritance, so the inheritance is waiting for them. But it is reserved for them “in heaven,” and they must go there to possess and enjoy it. The sealing of the Spirit gives the earnest here; but the full possession will come hereafter.

II.—And this leads us to our next point, which was to consider the heirs and legatees of this heavenly inheritance. This is a very important matter. If you were present at the reading of the will of which I spoke in the beginning of my discourse, the most anxious moment with you would be to hear whether your name was in it, and if so, what was the amount of money left you. I have described the inheritance. I have spoken a little of its nature, and security. I

am now going to read the will, and recite aloud the names of the heirs and legatees. Listen whether I read out your name as put down in this last will and testament of the divine Testator. But mark this; if you can find your character in it, it will be the same thing as if I read aloud your name. There are, I may say, two copies of the will, one in heaven, called the Book of Life: that contains the names. The other copy is on earth, called the Word of Truth: that contains the characters. The one, so to speak, is God’s private will; the other God’s public will; and the names in the one correspond with the characters in the other. Listen, then, to the character of the heirs and legatees as given in our text: “Reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”

i. There is a people, then, who are “kept by the power of God:” and kept by him for a particular purpose and end. These are the heirs and legatees of the great Testator, for the inheritance, as I have shown, is reserved for them; in other words, as they are kept for the inheritance, so the inheritance is kept for them. The expression in the original is very striking. The word rendered “kept” signifies kept as in a garrison. It might, therefore, be rendered “garrisoned” by the power of God. The word is well worth examination, for there is much divine truth couched in it. How then are they thus garrisoned?

1. They were garrisoned, in the first place, in the mind of God from all eternity; for they were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and given to the Son of God that they might be preserved in him. Does not Jude thus speak? “Sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called” (Jude 1), evidently referring their preservation in Jesus Christ to a period prior to their calling. Thus they were, if I may use the expression, stored up and safely laid in the bosom of Christ, united to his Person as the bride to the Bridegroom, made his spouse, inheritance, property, and possession by divine decree. Thus as the inheritance was appointed for them, so were they appointed

for the inheritance; both the inheritance and the heirs being absolutely fixed, the one as much so as the other in the purpose and by the decree of God. They are as sure therefore eventually of enjoying the inheritance as the inheritance is reserved for them by the will and power of God. And thus being preserved in Jesus Christ before they are called by grace and manifested as heirs, they are kept by the power of God from perishing in their unregeneracy. Have not you been almost miraculously preserved in the midst of dangers, and escaped when others perished by your side, or been raised up as it were from the very brink of destruction and the very borders of the grave? Besides some striking escapes from what are called accidents, three times in my life, once in infancy, once in boyhood, and once in manhood, I have been raised up from the borders of the grave, when almost every one who surrounded my bed thought I should not survive the violence of the attack. Were not these instances of being kept by the power of God? I could not die until God had manifested his purposes of electing grace and mercy to my soul. And so now, I am immortal till my work is done. Some, if not many, who saw me last year might have thought I should not live to see this. But though I look and am weak and feeble from having had at various times much bodily affliction, I shall live as long as God purposes; and if he has a work for me to do in his church, I shall live until I have done it, as kept by the power of God so long as he may have need of me.

2. But they are kept also by the mighty power of God after they are called by grace; for they are in the hollow of his hand, and are kept as the apple of his eye. I will not say are kept from all sin, for were I so to speak, the cases of David and Peter would stare me in the face; yet I will say this, they are kept from damning sins. They are kept I may add especially from three things; from the dominion of sin, from daring presumption, and damnable error. I do not say that they are not tempted to these things; but temptation is one thing and transgression is another; neither is all

presumption damning, nor all error damnable. It is from daring and final presumption, from lasting and damnable error that God keeps as in a garrison all the heirs and legatees of his inheritance. They are never suffered to embark on the wide sea of error, and there wander and get lost, or concerning faith to make awful shipwreck; they are never drowned in the sins and evils of the present life so as to be swallowed up in them, for they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation; and if so, it is impossible that they can ever be lost.

ii. But observe how they are kept. They are not kept mechanically; they are not preserved as persons are preserved from falling over a bridge by a rail, or as children are kept from tumbling into the fire by a tall iron fender. They are not kept mechanically, though often providentially, but spiritually—kept through faith. God gives them faith; that faith he draws out; through that faith Christ reveals himself, makes himself precious, dwells in their heart, conveys his promises, his presence, his precepts, and everything connected with his Person and work. Thus, as through faith they embrace Christ, lean upon Christ, and receive out of Christ's fulness, which faith is not a dead, motionless, inert notion, but a vital active principle, as being a grace of the Spirit, they are kept by the mysterious, invisible power of God through faith in his dear Son. So that though they are kept absolutely by the power of God, they are so kept by his power through faith that they are kept spiritually and experimentally; not visibly but invisibly, not forcibly and against the strugglings of love and liberty, but in harmony with both; not against their will and inclination, but with their will and inclination; not against their solemn, deliberate approval of what is right, but with the full consent of an enlightened mind and a believing heart.

And do observe how the power of God by which they are kept acts in harmony with faith. Thus sometimes it is the power of the word upon their heart. "By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer." (Psa. 17:4.) Sometimes it is the

power of godly fear in their conscience. "So did not I, because of the fear of God." (Nehem. 5:15.) "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9.) "By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." (Prov. 16:6.) Sometimes it is by the power of his love. "The love of Christ constraineth us." (2 Cor. 5:14.) Sometimes it is by the power of his promises. "Having therefore these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor. 7:1.) And sometimes it is by the power of his precepts. "Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way." (Psa. 119:104.) In all these cases the power of God acts through faith, and therefore does no violence to our will; for he says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." (Psa. 32:8.) "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." (Psa. 110:3.)

iii. And they are kept unto salvation ready to be revealed. They are therefore preserved in hours of temptation, in seasons of great danger and extremity; for they are guarded by all the power of Omnipotence, shielded by the unceasing care and watchfulness of him who can neither slumber nor sleep. He therefore says, "In that day sing ye unto her, a vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." (Isa. 27:2, 3.) It is said of Israel of old, "For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." (Deut. 32:9, 10.) The heirs of God are kept unto salvation. Nothing short of this would do. They are never left till they are landed. If you were carrying your wife or child through a stream deep enough to drown them, or rapid enough to sweep them away, would you leave them half in the river, or carry them right through? They might be lost in the few last yards. If God did not carry us right through Jordan's swelling stream, we should sink when close to the bank.

And this salvation is "ready to be revealed"—now in grace to your heart, soon in glory to your soul. It is even now at the door, for Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20); and the time draws on when it shall be revealed from heaven at the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Look back and see whether you can find anything of being thus kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Can you not sometimes see how the hand of God has been with you for many years, how it has held you up and brought you through many a storm, preserved you under powerful temptations to commit sin or suicide, fall into presumption or despair; how kindly yet firmly it restrained you from falling a prey to the destroyer; how gently sometimes it drew you on, sometimes kept you back; how from time to time faith was given you to embrace the Son of God, to receive him as revealed in the word and as made known to your heart; how he inclined your mind to listen to his word, to obey his precepts, to seek to know his will and do it? Do you not see how the fear of God was planted deep in your soul, your conscience made alive and tender, and you kept from evil that it might not grieve you? And now looking back through a long vista of years, you can see the kind hand of God stretched out again and again on your behalf, and can set to your seal that you have been kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. Then you are an heir and a legatee of this incorruptible, undefiled inheritance. You are in the will, and all its provisions and all its possessions are yours. Does not the apostle say, "All things are yours?" And why? Because "Ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." (1 Cor. 3:22, 23.) In this will all share alike, and yet each has all. In this last will and testament there is no widow cut down to a miserable jointure; no heir cut off with a shilling; no collapse of a once splendid property; no late discovery of mortgaged estates and ruinous liabilities, swallowing up not only the reputed wealth but the good name

and fame of the testator. Your inheritance is no such delusion and deception, but a solid reality and an affluence beyond calculation, for it is God himself in all his divine and glorious perfections.

But I have not yet done with the heirs and legatees. I have something more to speak to and of them. I have to draw their character over again; to point out their names more clearly still as inscribed in the last will and testament of the heavenly Testator. And this I now unfold, according to my third division, which is,

III.—The earnest and foretastes of this heavenly inheritance. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

This lively hope to which we are begotten by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the main earnest and foretaste of this glorious inheritance. We find the apostle thus speaking in the Epistle to the Ephesians: “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” This inheritance is the same as that which Peter speaks of in our text as “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” And observe that it is “in Christ” that we have obtained it; for only as in him and one with him have we any share or portion in it. But now see what Paul says about the earnest and foretaste of this inheritance: “In whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.” There is the earnest: the seal of the Spirit, according to Paul; “the lively hope,” according to Peter. There is no want of harmony between the two apostles. It is the same thing unfolded under a different view. A lively hope, or, as the word might be rendered, a living hope, is the gift and work of the Spirit and is the seal of salvation, for “we are saved by hope” (Rom. 8:24); and this living or lively hope being unto eternal life, an inward earnest of immortality unto which we are begotten by the resurrection of

Jesus Christ from the dead, it stands in union with faith and love and the sealing witness of the Holy Ghost unto present grace and future glory. There are several points which need to be unfolded here, to cast a clearer light upon the subject.

i. First, the connection of a lively hope with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the grand foundation on which our holy faith rests. I would not use any unbecoming, irreverent expression in speaking of our adorable Saviour, and yet I would say if our most blessed Lord had not risen from the dead he would have been plainly manifested as not being the Son of God, but an impostor. But his resurrection from the dead was the crowning attestation to the truth of his mission. It was God’s own seal, not only unto his divine and eternal Sonship, but that he was the Christ of God, the promised Messiah, the child that was to be born, the Son who was to be given. (Isa. 9:6.) He was, therefore, “declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.” (Rom. 1:4.) Our Lord, so to speak, staked the whole truth of his mission upon this fact, whether he should rise from the dead or not. His resurrection from the dead was the grand attesting miracle whereby God himself set to his visible seal that he who lay in the sepulchre was his only begotten Son; that the crucified and buried Jesus was the Son of God whom he had sent to save those that believe. This, therefore, was the grand doctrine which the apostles preached, as we read:—”And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.” (Acts 4:33.) No one, therefore, could be an apostle who was not a personal witness of his resurrection in having seen him alive after his passion by many infallible proofs (Acts 1:3, 22), or by special revelation, as in the case of Paul: “Am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1.)

ii. But the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not only the grand attestation which God set to the truth of his mission, but it involved in itself other consequences, and was the productive parent of other

fruits. When he rose from the dead, the Church of God virtually rose with him; for as he is the Head, and the Church the members, when the Head rose from the dead, triumphant over death and hell, the Church mystically and virtually rose together with him, for Head and members could not be separated. The apostle, therefore, speaks of our “being quickened together with Christ, and raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 2:5, 6.) So close and intimate is the union between the Head and members that the resurrection of Christ was virtually the resurrection of the Church, her resurrection from the curse of the law, from her state of condemnation, and from the miserable consequences of the Adam fall. When then our blessed Lord rose from the dead, the Church rose with him out of all the depths of the fall, and he thus secured for her two inestimable blessings. 1. A certain pledge of her resurrection at the great day, that is, the resurrection of all the glorified bodies of the saints, he being the first fruits, as the apostle argues in that glorious chapter 1 Cor. 15. “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death by man came also the resurrection of the dead.” As surely then as Christ rose will the Church rise; for “as we have borne the image of the earthy we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” (1 Cor. 15:21, 22, 49.) But, 2, secondly, it was also a pledge of regeneration, for the Church can only enter into Christ’s kingdoms by regeneration. “Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” If there is an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, and we are to enter into the possession and enjoyment of that glorious inheritance, to be for ever partakers of its bliss and blessedness, we must have a capacity for that enjoyment. I showed you that the two attributes of God which would form the bliss of this inheritance were love and holiness. We then must have love, and we must have holiness, or we can have no knowledge of, no communion with, no delight in, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When, then, the blessed Lord rose from the

dead, we not only virtually rose with him, as regards resurrection future, but rose also with him as regards resurrection present: the resurrection of the soul in grace, as well as the resurrection of the body in glory. I have said that it was the pledge of both, but it was something more than a pledge; it was the efficient cause. The apostle speaks of God as “quickening the dead, and calling those things which be not as though they were;” that is, the future is so certain when God has promised it, that it is as if already accomplished. “As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations.” “I have made thee”—already made thee, not “I will make thee;” and this many years before the birth of Isaac. So God speaks of the church as already risen in Christ; his resurrection being the efficient cause of her regeneration. Now this shows the connection between Christ’s resurrection and a lively hope: “Hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” There is then, a begetting again: this is regeneration. This begetting again is “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” and this begetting again by the resurrection as the cause, and regeneration as the effect, is unto a lively or living hope. Why is there a living hope in your bosom, and what is the foundation of that lively hope but the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? Could there be any hope in your soul of mercy, pardon, peace, and eventually of a heavenly inheritance, if Jesus had not risen from the dead? Where would have been the blood of atonement; where would have been the robe of righteousness; where would have been the blotting out of all sin, and the acceptance of the persons of the saints before God? All would have been sunk in the tomb of Jesus, and never risen from that tomb unless he had risen out of it. But when he rose from the dead, it was made manifest that atonement had been offered and accepted for transgression, sin blotted out, righteousness brought in, and the Church of God saved with an everlasting salvation. So we see what momentous consequences hang upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that it is not only a proof but a pledge; and not only a

pledge but an efficient cause; and not only an efficient cause but a triumphant end and issue.

iii. But carry on your view a little further. I love to make my points clear. Let us have no confusion of thought, and, if we can help it, of expression in these important matters. What does our lively hope spring from? Its foundation is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But the apostle speaks of being “begotten unto this lively hope;” in other words, he testifies of this lively or living hope as a fruit of quickening, regenerating grace. Having already quickened us together with Christ by and in his resurrection, he begets us with the word of truth, regenerates our souls by a divine influence, breathes into our hearts the breath of life, communicates the life of God, and by the power and influence of the Holy Ghost makes us new creatures in Christ. Now the fruit and effect of this regenerating grace is to create a living or lively hope in our souls. If then you cannot read regeneration in your breast; if you cannot find that the Holy Ghost has ever breathed into you the breath of life, you have no hope, no lively hope. You may have a hope—that kind of charitable hope that I spoke of in the case of the rich man which the relations indulge in, as a kind of soothing cordial, when the poor creature never manifested one mark of vital godliness either in life or death. That is a dead hope; but our text speaks of a living hope. Now if there be a living hope, and that hope is in our breast, it will manifest its life. Does not a mother know the distinction between a still-born babe and a living child? No creeping to the bosom in the still-born child, no laying hold of nature’s bland nutriment; all cold and dead, and thrust away as soon as possible into its little coffin. So in grace: where there is a living hope, it will be like the living child in the mother’s warm bosom—it will nestle and breathe, and exert all those tender movements that the mother knows and loves so well when she presses her new-born babe to her fond breast. Have you that living babe in your bosom, nestling, clinging, breathing, and manifesting that there is life in it by its inward movements

in your soul? This is a living hope and a lively one too. It is the lively child as well as the living; for there may be a living child which is, so to speak, only just living; only just breathing. But a lively child is a step beyond a living child, as having more active movements, more energetic drawings, nestling more strongly in, and cleaving more closely to the mother’s warm embrace. Have you then a lively hope as well as a living, a strong, active, vigorous child pulling at your breast, and not a puny, sickly, half-dying, diminutive cripple, a wizened-face doll, as if born before its time in a London alley? When a servant of God has unfolded the truth spiritually and experimentally, described the work of grace upon the heart, brought forward the various signs and marks that are in a living soul, have you not felt that there was a springing up of a lively hope in your bosom, a waking of the child out of the cradle, a crying for food, the pure milk of the word, and a feeding upon the food given? As the food came warm, bland, and fresh, every member of the new man was strengthened, and the hope was not merely living, but lively too, leaping for joy, like the babe in the womb of Elizabeth. To know and experience this is a fruit of being begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

iv. And this “according to his abundant mercy.” O the riches of his abundant mercy! It was mercy that gave us to Christ; it was mercy that preserved us in Christ; it was mercy that called us to Christ; it was mercy that gave us to believe in Christ; it was mercy that enabled us to love Christ. And O how “abundant!” What sinners we have been; what base rebels; what wretched wanderers from the living God! And yet again and again he has begotten a lively hope or renewed it; and all according to the abundance of his mercy. A little mercy would not suit you or me: like a few drops of rain, it would soon be lost in the dust in a dry season like this. What we want is a copious shower that shall go down to the very roots of our soul, and water our faith and hope and love. When this abundant shower falls down from the windows

of heaven, how it nurtures every grace; how it waters the soul as with the river of God, and brings forth the lively hope into blessed exercise upon his goodness and mercy.

v. And when so blessed, is not this a becoming word from our lips? “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” Blessed be his holy name! “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” What a tender relationship! In what a blessed character does he manifest himself unto us as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! How it seems to drop into our heart with such tenderness, and kindles in the bosom such an affectionate response; for because he is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, if indeed we believe in his dear Son, he is our God and our Father too. Then we can say, amidst all the din and confusion of hostile tongues, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I have opened the will; I have read some part of its contents, for who can read the whole? and I have pointed out the heirs and legatees. Have I mentioned your name? Have I described your character? Have I pointed out that you are one of the heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ? In this heavenly inheritance there is no partiality or favouritism; no vexation and no disappointment; no jealousy and no rivalry. The whole belongs to each, and each has not only a portion but the fulness of the whole; for each has God, who is the whole of the inheritance. Thus each of the heirs and legatees has the inheritance whole and undivided, without jealousy, without favouritism, and without rivalry.

But if you cannot read your name and title in this heavenly inheritance, have you any reasonable ground of hope of eternal life? Is it not fearful to go on for many years making perhaps a profession of religion, and not to have any well-grounded hope in the mercy of God—not to be able in any measure to read your name in the Book of Life? Would that do for an earthly inheritance? How careful men are to make their title good; how careful the testator that every name is rightly spelled in the will! How anxious

the legatee to know that his name is there! Uncertainties will not do in an earthly inheritance; and will they do in an heavenly one?

O to be able to make our calling and election sure; and then we shall be able to lie down each night in peace, as believing we have an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us even should death arrest our breath before morning.

200 The Precious Trial of Faith

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord’s Day
Evening,

May 28, 1865

“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 1:6, 7

I intend, with God’s help and blessing, that my discourse this evening shall form a sequel to my sermon this morning; and I shall therefore endeavour to establish a connection between them, both as regards the text and the subject. You will recollect that this morning I was endeavouring to bring before you “the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” In that discourse I attempted to describe, according to the ability which God gave me, the character of the heirs and legatees of that glorious inheritance. This evening, before I proceed to connect the two subjects, I shall throw in a few additional lines to fill up my sketch; for there is no part of the ministry more important than to describe clearly and correctly the features of living souls, both as a test for them to

measure themselves by, and as a means, in preaching to a mixed congregation, of taking forth the precious from the vile. Nor do I think I can adopt a better plan in executing this intention than simply to take up the characters of the persons to whom the apostle addressed the epistle, as described by his own hand, for they, we know, were among the heirs and legatees of this noble inheritance. This will surely be more safe and satisfactory than drawing any picture of my own, which might be right or might be wrong. Let us keep close to the word, and then we shall not err in doctrine, experience, or practice.

Cast your eye, then, back on the beginning of the epistle, and read for yourself the characters to whom the apostle addresses it.

1. Their first mark is “strangers, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” Scattered strangers, then, is one of the lineaments of the heirs and legatees of this incorruptible, undefiled inheritance. The apostle probably, in using the expression, had especial reference to the believing Jews who were locally scattered among the Gentile nations in these countries, for it is evident, not only from history but from an expression in the Gospel of John, that there were many Jews dispersed among the Gentiles: “The Jews said among themselves, Whither will he go that we shall not find him? Will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?” (John 7:35.) James, therefore, writing to the believing Jews, addresses his epistle “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” (James 1:1.) Of these dispersed Jews many had been converted to the faith of the gospel, and to them, therefore, Peter specially writes. But the Holy Ghost had doubtless in the expression a spiritual reference to the saints of God at all times and in all places, so as to make the words applicable to the people of God to the end of time. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” (Rom. 15:4.) Scattered strangers is then a feature of the heirs of God, not merely locally, but spiritually and

experimentally. For you will observe that both words carry with them a spiritual meaning. First, they are “strangers.” What makes them so? The grace of God which calls them out of this wretched world. Every man who carries the grace of God in his bosom is necessarily, as regards the world, a stranger in heart as well as in profession and life. As Abraham was a stranger in the land of Canaan; as Joseph was a stranger in the palace of Pharaoh; as Moses was a stranger in the land of Egypt; as Daniel was a stranger in the court of Babylon: so every child of God is separated by grace to be a stranger in this ungodly world. The character given us in the word of Abraham and Sarah, in whose steps we are to walk and to whom we are to look (Rom. 4:12; Isai. 51:2), was this: “They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” (Heb. 11:13.) And if indeed we are to come out from it and to be separate, the world must be as much a strange place to us as we be strangers in it. In views, in thoughts, in desires, in prospects, in anticipations; in our daily walk and conversation; in mind, in spirit, in judgment, in affection; from its company, its maxims, its fashions, its spirit; in all things, inwardly and outwardly, there must be a thorough separation from the world; and it is this separation which makes us strangers in it. But observe also the word “scattered.” Do we not see this as a daily fact? Two or three of these strangers in this village; half a score in that town; a larger number perhaps in this vast metropolis; but all scattered here and there; and scattered, too, not merely locally, bodily, but spiritually and experimentally, as having no union or communion with the world in which they dwell; and scattered, too, as having had so much of their old formal religion scattered and torn to pieces; besides their scattered hopes, scattered joys, scattered prospects, and scattered homes.

2. But take another feature, another lineament of the heir of God, as described by Peter’s pen. He is “elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit.” Let us not be afraid of Bible language: Bible language best

describes Bible truths. However harshly the word “elect” may sound in the ears of the Pharisee and the self-righteous, it is God’s own word to convey God’s own truth. May I never be ashamed of God’s word! The scattered strangers are then “elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” But unto what? To live, as men would libel them, as they list? to walk in all manner of ungodliness and disobedience? God forbid. They are elect unto two things, which are ever closely connected both in doctrine and practice. They are elect, first, unto “obedience.” The obedience of what? The obedience of the gospel; obedience to the faith of the gospel; obedience to the precepts of the gospel; obedience to every good word and every good work enjoined by the gospel; obedience to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake. God’s people are not a lawless race who set at defiance the laws of God and man. They are loyal subjects, peaceful citizens; and, though dear lovers of civil and religious liberty, they are averse to party strife and political contentions; their chief desire being “to lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” (1 Tim. 2:2.) They are obedient children, because they carry the yoke of a meek Redeemer upon their neck, and it is this obedience which particularly distinguishes them as the people of God; for others say and do not; or if they practise what they profess it is from wrong principles, wrong motives, or wrong ends. “They are children in whom there is no faith” (Deut. 32:20); and they cannot therefore render “the obedience of faith,” for which the gospel is made known. (Rom. 16:26.) This “obedience,” therefore, includes obeying the gospel, as the apostle speaks: “But they have not all obeyed the gospel.” (Rom. 10:16.) To obey the gospel is to believe the gospel, and thus obey the call of the gospel to faith and repentance. God may have refractory children amongst his family, but it will be found in the end that he has no disobedient ones; for he will teach them all sooner or later to render to him the obedience of faith, and from this fertile root every gracious root will spring.

But they are chosen also “to the blood of sprinkling.” They cannot, therefore, and will not die in their sins as unpardoned sinners, but will receive in and upon their conscience “the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel,” that they may join in that glorious song, “Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.” When, then, we preach the doctrine of election, we point out at the same time the two privileges to which the people of God are elect: to obedience and the blood of sprinkling. Are you obedient to the faith of the gospel and to the precepts of the gospel; and what do you know of the blood of sprinkling purging your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Having thus thrown in a few lines to complete my sketch of the heirs and legatees of this noble inheritance, I shall now proceed to connect my two discourses of this morning and evening. Let me once more read the words of our text, that you may join with me in understanding and establishing the connection: “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet. 1:6, 7.)

Observe with me four prominent features in the words that I have read.

I.—First, the joy, or, to use the apostolic expression, the great rejoicing which the heirs and legatees of this inheritance have in the salvation ready to be revealed.

II.—Secondly, the heaviness of their spirit “for a season, if need be, through manifold temptations.”

III.—Thirdly, the reason why this heaviness is made to come upon their spirit through their manifold temptations. It is for the trial of their faith, “which is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire.”

IV.—Fourthly, the eventual issue of all their trials, “praise and

honour,” and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

I.—Now for the connection of our two subjects, morning and evening. The connection is between joy and sorrow: joy in the inheritance, and yet sorrow through the heaviness of spirit whereby their faith is tried before they possess it.

i. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice.” “Wherein:” there is in the original a little ambiguity here, and doubtless an intentional ambiguity which is well preserved in our translation. “Wherein” may refer to the salvation, or to the Saviour from and through whom the salvation comes. We will take both meanings.

1. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice.” Take the word “wherein” first as referring to the Saviour, for he in all things must have the pre-eminence, and the Saviour surely must be greater than the salvation. We have three marks given to us in the word of the true circumcision, of which one is that they “Rejoice in Christ Jesus.” “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” (Phil. 3:3.) The apostle urges upon his believing brethren: “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord” (Phil. 3:1); and repeats it, “Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice.” (Phil. 4:4.) It is, therefore, an especial mark of the saints of God, that as they are blessed with a living faith in the Lord of life and glory, they rejoice in him. How strong and decided is the language of Peter in the verse following our text: “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” (1 Pet. 1:8.) Observe the connection of faith and joy. It is when we believe in him that we rejoice; and if this faith be strong and clear, it is with joy unspeakable and full of glory. But why do they rejoice in him? Because he is the divine Author of all their salvation, for this is “the end of their faith,” both in present enjoyment and in future fruition: “Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” (1 Pet. 1:9.) When I say, however, that the saints of God rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, I will so far qualify my expression as to say that they will sooner or later

do so, if they do not so now. The reason of their present want of joy is their want of faith: but as Christ is revealed unto them and is received by faith, and as their faith thus grows and is enlarged they will find that joy will come in proportion to their faith—a holy, heavenly joy, calm and peaceable, if it do not rise to any great height of ecstasy. But I must qualify my expression a little further still: I must say that if they cannot rejoice in Christ, they can rejoice in no one else and in nothing else. You are brought to this point: you have not perhaps the joy, and still less the great joy of which our text speaks. But can you not lay your hand upon your breast, and say you cannot rejoice in anything short of Jesus? that you cannot deliberately take your pleasure make your joy in anything, in any one but Jesus? Has not earth, have not the things of time and sense either become so embittered by sin and sorrow, or have so lost their former charm, that you cannot rejoice in them; or if for a little time you so far forget yourself as to be lost in some joyous dream, when you awake there is bitterness and remorse? How often it is with the child of grace as the prophet describes: “It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty; or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh, but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite.” (Isai. 29:3.) There is, therefore, a measure of joy, a grain of joy, a seed of joy planted in your soul, even if you cannot rejoice in the Lord as you could wish. If you can look up to God who searches the heart, and can appeal to his penetrating eye that if you cannot rejoice, and still less rejoice greatly in Christ, there is none else and nothing else in whom or in which you wish to joy, be not dismayed as if you were totally destitute of one mark of the true circumcision. You may feel perhaps more able to lay hold of the other two marks that you “worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh;” but the third is not even now wanting in you, though it be but small, a very grain of mustard seed, that you “rejoice in Christ Jesus.”

ii. But now take the other meaning of the expression “wherein.” Understand it as referring to the salvation. Literally, naturally the heir of a large property looks forward with joyous anticipation to the day when it will be his by possession. As he stands upon some lofty hill which commands a view of his father’s wide-spread lands, a feeling, perhaps not a very innocent feeling, springs up in his breast, anticipating the day when he will be able to call them all his own. But how much more innocently, how much more happily can the heir of God look forward to the possession of his inheritance beyond the skies. Such was the longing desire of the saints of old. Nor does God reject their desire: “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.” (Heb. 11:16.) This, then, is one peculiar feature of the heir of heaven, that he has an eye to his inheritance; a longing for the enjoyment of it. Have you not tasted and felt a sweetness at times in the contemplation of this inheritance; at least of the salvation revealed in and by it, which has dropped a holy joy into your bosom to inflame your desires after it; so that you can truly say, if ever you have felt the movements of joy in your breast, it has been from a sense of your interest in it? There is, therefore, a joy in the salvation as well as in the Saviour. And there are certain blessings in this salvation which make it a well-spring of joy, if we are but privileged to drink at this river of pleasures.

1. First, its suitability. Has that never caused any springing up of joy in your soul? Have you never rejoiced in a sense or sight of this glorious truth, that there has been provided a salvation so suitable to your case—so suitable to you, a poor condemned sinner; you, a guilty criminal at God’s bar; you, whose conscience has registered and still registers a long, black list of sins and crimes that fill your heart with shame and confusion? The suitability of a salvation flowing through the love and blood of the Lord the Lamb—a salvation all of free grace, a salvation blotting out all sin and reaching down to every want and desire of the soul—as

the fulness and greatness and exceeding glory of such a salvation have been opened from time to time to your view and dropped with some measure of life and power into your spirit, has not the thorough suitability of so full and complete a salvation stimulated every desire of your heart, and drawn out your faith upon it and in it as so adapted in every way to your deplorable case?

2. But now take another feature of this salvation which make the hearts of God’s people so greatly to rejoice in it: its fulness. See how this salvation takes in all your sins; how it embraces you just as you are in all your nakedness, filth, and shame, and gives you a plunge in the fountain opened for all sin and for all uncleanness. See how it is not half a salvation which you are called upon to complete, but a salvation full, yea, full to overflowing with a fulness inconceivable by human heart, unutterable by human tongue: a salvation from all sin, from all the consequences which we have brought upon ourselves through sin open or secret, past or present, from everything we have reason to dread, and everything for which we have reason to blush. Do we not read that “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?” What fulness is here? What glorious high tides of grace rising above and drowning every sin!

3. But now take another feature of this salvation: its freeness. Without money and without price, it comes to us as free as the light of the sun, as the rain of heaven, as the rain of the sky, unbought, unpurchased, unearned, undeserved by any words or works of ours; freely given out of the fulness of Christ to the objects of his redeeming blood and love. Do you doubt this? Does not the apostle say, “Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus?” The word “freely” means literally as a gift or gratuitously, “all free, gratis.” So also runs the invitation, “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (Rev. 22:17.) Let us never think

that God gives his grace grudgingly. Our Lord said to his disciples, “Freely ye have received, freely give.” (Matt. 10:8.) The ancient promise still stands, “I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely” (Hosea 14:4); and so testifies Jesus now from heaven: “I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely.” Let us not measure the Lord by ourselves; nor shall we do so if we are rightly taught, for “we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” (1 Cor. 2:12.)

4. But take another feature of this salvation: its certainty; that in it there is no “if,” nor “but,” nor “perhaps,” nor “peradventure.” It is a salvation as certain as God’s own eternal throne; for the work is finished, salvation accomplished, sin put away, every attribute of God harmonised and reconciled; and in the bloodshedding, sacrifice, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation stands upon a basis that never can be moved. It is, therefore, called “an everlasting salvation:” “Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation;” and similarly Jesus is said to have “become the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” (Heb. 5:9.)

5. But now take another feature, the last that I shall name, the glorious issue: that this salvation not only takes you as you are, with all your sins and all your aggravated enormities, plunges you into the fountain opened in the Redeemer’s hands and feet and side, and thus washes you from all your iniquity in his atoning blood, and clothes you with a robe of righteousness, but it takes you safe to glory. I showed you this morning from my text how the inheritance was “reserved in heaven” for the heirs of salvation; and that therefore nothing could keep them out of it. When Christ’s glory shall be revealed, what amends it will make for all suffering.

Now has your soul never been lifted up with holy the contemplation of a salvation like this? Did your poor tempest-tossed soul ever anchor here? Did any word ever drop as it were from God’s own mouth into your heart, and raise up a blessed

hope in your bosom, if it went no further than a hope, that you are interested in this great and glorious salvation? Then, there is reason that you should greatly rejoice—“leap for joy,” as it means in the original—bless and praise God with heart and tongue, that there is such a salvation, and that you have some testimony of a manifested interest in it.

II.—But I pass on to my second point, which is, the heaviness which rests upon the spirit of the heirs of salvation for a season, “if need be, through manifold temptations.”

In every gracious bosom there is a mixture of joy and sorrow; and usually, the greater the joy the greater the sorrow; the stronger the faith, the heavier the affliction; the deeper the work, the more painful and the more powerful the manifold temptations which assail it. But there is “a needs be” for these things. They would not have been appointed except through the infinite wisdom and love of God. We could not do without them: they are needful to ballast the vessel that it may sail safely over the sea of time. It is needful that holy joy should be tempered, softened, and balanced with much heaviness, and occasionally many deep sorrows, that it may be solid and steady. But before I show this more fully in detail, I will drop a few words upon “the manifold temptations” which the saints of God are called upon to pass through, and which often bring them under such heaviness.

i. The word “temptations” embraces trials also; and the word “manifold” implies not only that these trials and temptations are varied in nature, but abundant in number. Take, then, the expression of the apostle to the full stretch of its meaning; it signifies many trials and many temptations, and these of a very varied and multiform character. The word “manifold” is a very good rendering as signifying the multiplicity of these trials and temptations, comparing them, as it were, to a long piece of cloth or a bale of goods packed up in many folds, which become gradually drawn out one after another to their whole length. But the word perhaps signifies not so much numerous folds as a variety of

colours, like those of a rainbow, or Joseph's coat, or the varying hues of a pigeon's breast. Thus it embraces all the multiplied and various trials and temptations which at different points, from different quarters, and by different means assail and press upon the heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ. I have thought it best to explain the word; for such is the fulness and significance of the word of God, that one expression will sometimes hold in its bosom a depth and copiousness of meaning in order to adapt it to the comfort and instruction of the church of God for all time. The expression, therefore, embraces every providential trial that you may be called upon to pass through; for God has so linked things together in the dispensation of the kingdom of heaven, that providential trials often open a way for the display, not only of the mighty power of Jesus as holding the reins of government below, but for a manifestation of the riches of his grace above. Our Lord, therefore, said to his disciples after his resurrection, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth"—not only in heaven thence to display the power of his grace, but in earth there to manifest the rule of his providence. "All things are put under his feet;" and "he must reign, until he hath put all enemies under his feet." (1 Cor. 15:25-27.) It may be that at this moment you are under some very heavy providential trials, and these trials may assail you from such various quarters, and open such doors for present difficulties and future perplexities, that, in the language of our text, you are in heaviness through them. Body, mind, and circumstances; custom, business, trade, and prospects, are all alike depressed either really or apparently so, that like Pharaoh's chariot wheels, you travel heavily through the sands of Providence; and it seems at times as if fairly or foully you would stick fast in these sands, and there live and die without hope or prospect of any deliverance more than Pharaoh and his host. This is your peculiar trial, and one of which you have had a long and deep experience.

2. But now take a trial of a different kind, such as many of the dear saints of God have to drink very deeply of—affliction of

body. How depressing to the mind, how saddening to the spirit, what heavy loads and burdens, ill health, with all its long train of pain, weakness, weariness, and various expenses lays upon our shoulders. How many of God's choicest saints drag their life heavily on through long days and sleepless nights, crying out with Job, "Wearisome nights are appointed unto me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? And I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day." (Job 7:3, 4.) What an inlet, too, does bodily weakness often afford to temptation, Satan taking cruel occasion through the weakness of the body and shattered state of the nerves to harass and depress the mind.

3. Or take family afflictions, for as the trials in the words of our text are "manifold," the word embraces these quite as much as those which may be of a very different character. Heavy family trials! How saddening to the mind, how depressing to the spirit when death enters the house and calls away a beloved member. And are there not family trials which may be said to be worse than death when things transpire in the family, such as misconduct or criminality, against which no precautions can guard, which cover it with inward grief and open shame? But enough of trials so termed.

ii. Take then another view of the subject: look at "temptations," properly so called, by which we usually understand those peculiar snares laid for our feet by sin or Satan, the object of which is to entangle the unwary feet. Our Lord bade his disciples pray, "Lead us not into temptation" (Matt. 6:13); and especially charged his three disciples in the garden: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt. 26:41.) By these temptations, as distinct from trials, Job, Jeremiah, Jonah, Heman, Asaph, Peter, and many other saints of God, as recorded in the word, were beset. Nor must we expect to be exempt from them. "Ye are they," said the Lord to his disciples, "which have continued with me in my temptations." (Luke 22:28.) Unbelief, infidelity, suggestions from our cruel, inveterate foe

to suicide, blasphemy, or despair, how many are and have been tempted by Satan to these things! Nor have we less powerful temptations from within. The sudden breakings forth of temper; the ebullitions of our carnal mind in peevishness, fretfulness, discontent, and rebellion; the workings of the deep corruption of our fallen nature in its grosser and more sensual lusts and propensities; the unlooked for starting up of dreadful thoughts and imaginations: all these in the hands of Satan, and as usually managed by him to entangle our feet, form a part of the “manifold temptations” of our text, their effect being to produce heaviness of spirit, and by grieving and distressing the mind to press it down into the very dust, as a load and burden upon the shoulders, so as to prevent us moving cheerily and happily forward in the things of God. It will not be denied, I think, by any who have painfully experienced them, that the effects of trials and temptations is to sadden the spirit, depress the mind, and fill the heart with grief and sorrow. And though people, hard, unfeeling, unexercised people for the most part, may tell us that we ought not to give way to trouble, but manfully resist or patiently bear it; those who are in the furnace of affliction will say to such advisers: “I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are ye all.” (Job 16:2.)

iii. And yet there is a needs be for these trials and temptations, or God would not have appointed you to walk in such a path. If there was nothing before your eyes but the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, and you were looking forward to be put into the peaceable possession of it at death, without any intermediate trouble or sorrow, you would not be walking in the path of tribulation through which, and through which alone, it is declared that we must enter the kingdom of heaven. You would not be a partaker of the sufferings of Christ, which you must be, if you are to be a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. You would have, therefore, no “fellowship of his sufferings;” no being “made conformable unto his death;” “no bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus,” nor

“being delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in your mortal flesh.” (Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:10, 11.) Besides which, you would be no companion for the poor afflicted family of God; you would have few errands to the throne of grace; few openings up of the Scripture to your mind, few applications of the promises to your heart; few discoveries of the pity and compassion of him who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and little sympathy with the Man of sorrows. Your smooth, even, easy path would set you far away from the choicest saints of God, and from the best part of living experience. You would stand, as many think they stand, upon some lofty mountain top—far away from all the clouds of the valley, the smoke and mist that darken the lower grounds of the earth. But to stand there is to stand not upon Mount Hermon, but upon Mount Gilboa; not upon the mountain in which is “made a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined” (Isa. 25:6); but a dark mountain on which your feet would stumble. (Jer. 13:16.) God deals differently with the heirs of promise, and brings them down from this mountain of pride, if ever they get upon it, into the vale of humility. He sees it needful for them to be in heaviness through manifold temptations. They travel thereby more slowly, but they travel more safely: for if the vale has fewer heights, it has fewer precipices; and mud and mire is more safe walking than amidst rolling stones and beetling rocks. Their path is more dark, and yet gives more occasion for light to be cast upon it. Many crooked things beset them, and yet these crooked things make a way for God’s power to set them straight. Many temptations distress them, but they open a path for God’s gracious deliverances. Many foes and fears harass their mind, but they make a way for clearer manifestations of the love, blood, and power of Christ. Thus there is a needs be for these manifold trials and temptations. We pray to be humble, teachable, dependent, to know more of the grace, spirit, and presence of Christ; to have more fellowship and communion with him; to be more

conformed to his image and example, walk more in his footsteps, and more to know and do those things which are pleasing in his sight. But we cannot have these desires granted except through trial and affliction; for it is in these trials and afflictions that Christ manifests and makes himself known and precious. If then in the divine wisdom there is a needs be for a path of tribulation, happy are we if we are, through God's teaching, in this path; and highly favoured, indeed, we are, if his grace has put us in it, if his grace is keeping us in it, if his grace is supporting us in it. Be assured also that you have that very trial which is most adapted to your particular case and state; for the "needs be" extends not only to trials generally, but to trials particularly and personally. You think sometimes that you could bear any trial but that which is laid upon you. But depend upon it, God has selected out of the variety of manifold trials and temptations that very trial which shall most suit your state and circumstances. He has, as it were, a boundless treasury of trials, all ready for use; and he has taken out of it that peculiar trial which shall most suit your case. He has selected that yoke which shall fit most closely upon your neck, and fastened that burden upon your shoulders which is most for your good and his glory that you shall carry, even though you bear it down to the gates of death.

iv. But take another word of the apostle to encourage you under your trials and temptations and every depressing weight upon your mind caused by them. They are but "for a season." God in mercy every now and then takes our trials away, or supports us under them. Life is not one continuous scene of trial and affliction. There are merciful intermissions. If our path in providence is sometimes dark, it is at others so lighted up with blessed gleams of the goodness of God, that we can bless and praise his holy name for the way by which he has led us. If fears heavily prevail, and unbelief be strong, relief comes at various times and in various ways from the pressure of those fears, and faith is strengthened to fight against unbelief, and even gain a victory over it. It is not

all sorrow, all depression, all complaint, all sadness and heaviness with the saints of God. Like an April day, there is sun and shower. There are changes and alterations: for those who have no changes fear not God. (Psa. 55:19.) By these things men live; and in all these things is the life of their spirit. But we could not live under constant trials, especially if they were very severe. They would break our spirit; they might even, so to speak, break our brain, shatter our faculties, crush our nerves, drive us into a madhouse. God, therefore, has mercifully arranged, as regards many of the severe trials with which he visits his family, that they should be but for a season. You will bear in mind that there is a distinction between heavy trials and a daily cross. Heavy trials are but for a season; a daily cross is for life. Severe temptations are usually not lasting; tribulation is more or less enduring. But even assume that your heavy trials should last the whole of your life; let you go out of one furnace into another, out of one trial into a second, out of one temptation into a third, and each hotter and heavier than the others. It is, after all, even then, but for a season; there will come an end. There is an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven; and when taken up into the enjoyment of it, there will be an end of all this gloomy scene. Stretch then the cord through the length of life; be like the Lord, a man of affliction all your days; drink the cup of Job; sit with Jeremiah in his low dungeon; say with Heman, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps; thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves" (Psa. 88:6, 7); and let them last through the whole extent of your life, the end will come, and a joyous end for the heirs of promise. Look your trials then firmly and manfully in the face; and as you look them in the face, raise your eyes a little higher, look at the inscription which the hand of God has traced over them, and read it as written for you, "If need be." Now say, "If, then, there is a needs be, my soul acknowledges the truth of it. I feel the necessity of these manifold temptations; I bow to the sovereignty of God in sending them; I

acknowledge his wisdom in the choice of the trial, and I admire his grace in supporting me under it." But now look at the other part of the inscription which stands side by side with it, written as if in letters of light: "For a season." It will not last long; the cloud will soon be over, the thunderstorm soon pass away. Lightnings may flash, thunders may peal; it is but the harbinger of copious rain. The clouds will clear, the thunders disperse, the lightnings cease to play, the sun will once more shine, and a glorious sunset follow.

III.—Now for our third point, the reason why these manifold temptations are sent, with their attendant heaviness: "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory." Have you a grain of faith in your breast? Look and see; for it is well worth searching after. Can you find any movement of faith in your bosom? If it be a faith worth having, it will be a tried faith. God gives no other. "Buy of me," said the Lord to the Laodicean church, "gold tried in the fire;" that is, a tried faith. And thus these manifold temptations which cast down the souls of God's people into such heaviness are for the trial of their faith.

i. But how do they try faith?

1. First, they try its very existence. Faith sometimes in your breast, at least in mine, sinks to a very low ebb. It hides its face and cannot be seen. We almost doubt and fear whether we ever had a grain of faith of God's gift; for we know well that no other is of any avail. All other has been tried and found wanting; and the only faith we value, the only faith we want, is that faith which is a grace of the Spirit and the gift of God. Now this "faith of God's elect"—therefore, peculiar to them—this living faith is not at every man's beck and call. As it is not given by human power, so it is not drawn out by human exertion, nor does it listen to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. When it withdraws itself, it is like its divine Author: it cannot be seen. "When he hideth his face,

who can behold him?" (Job 34:29.) It was a sense of this which made David cry: "Why hidest thou thy face in time of trouble?" (Psa. 10:1) and made the prophet declare: "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." (Isa. 45:15.) Now the effect of trials and temptations in the hand of God is to manifest the existence of this living faith; for there is nothing but faith which can support the soul under powerful trials and temptations. Everything else gives way. You see how some through temptations plunge into sin, and others into suicide. They have no faith to keep them either from evil or desperation. But the saint of God, who is blessed with a living faith, has a principle in him of which the existence is manifested by trials and temptations; for they, not indeed in themselves, but instrumentally by the overruling power of God, draw out that faith which God has planted in his breast. Take the case of Abraham. Abraham, like ourselves, was not always strong in faith; we know that, on more than one occasion, he manifested great weakness of faith, both in denying Sarah to be his wife in Egypt and at the court of Abimelech, and in the case of taking Hagar to wife. But when God "tempted" Abraham, that is, brought upon him a severe trial, for God did not otherwise tempt him, then faith at once sprang up in his breast; for no sooner did God say to him, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Gen. 22:2), than Abraham's faith sprang up to hear God's word, and what God bade, he did. You neither know your faith nor the strength of your faith until the trial comes. But the inward support that you feel under your trial; the cries of God that come out of your heart through your trial, and the shining in of God's face upon your soul through faith to bless you in your trial; these manifest and prove its existence in your bosom. And they draw it forth. As the sun draws up the vapours from the ground, so the Sun of righteousness draws up the faith in our soul which he has given us to hang upon him, to

look to him, to trust his word, to cleave to him with purpose of heart, and embrace him as our only hope and help.

2. Trials also sometimes prove that there is a depth and a strength in our faith of which we were not before aware. A trial comes: it would blow us down unless there were something deeply planted by the hand of God in our soul which stands the storm. There is a springing up of the life of God; a hanging upon the promises of God; a reliance upon the word of God; a going forth of the grace of faith, which throws its believing arms round the Lord, and will not let him go until he bless us. Here we prove not only that our faith is God's gift and work, but that there is a root to it, and a strong root too.

3. But again, these temptations and trials are so many furnaces which burn up false faith. What a deal of false faith we have had, it may be in days past, how much false zeal, false confidence, vain boasting, and setting that down for living faith which God never really raised up in our heart. The furnace has burnt it up. The trials, the temptations, the difficulties, the perplexities, the doubts, the fears, the suggestions of Satan, have all been so many hot furnaces which have burnt up our dead faith, and left nothing behind but that living faith which is the gift and work of God.

ii. Here, then, is "the trial of faith;" and this trial is more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, for it is not so much the faith itself as the trial of it which is precious. Gold perisheth; the flame of the furnace can melt it; and like all other mere instruments of earthly maintenance, it perishes in the using. The gold you have in your pocket today will be gone tomorrow to pay some bill, or meet some expense: it perishes as you spend it; or if hoarded, perishes as to any practical use and enjoyment. Or say that you invest your gold and thus put it out to profitable use, it will perish, as far as you are concerned, when death snaps the thread of life. But the faith of which I have been speaking never perishes like gold. The hottest flame cannot destroy it; nor does it perish by use, for the more it is used the stronger it is; nor does it perish

at death, though then it is turned into sight. It is an imperishable grace; for it is lodged by a divine hand in the new man, and lives because Jesus lives at the right hand of God, as its Author and Finisher: "Because I live ye shall live also." The Lord therefore said to Peter, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:31, 32). If faith could fail, then all must fail: for the life which we now live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God (Gal. 2:20); so could the faith fail the life would fail also; and the loss of life would be the loss of the soul. By faith we come to God, by faith we believe his promises, receive his truth, embrace his salvation in and by the Son of his love. By faith we stand, by faith we walk, by faith we fight, by faith we overcome; so that if faith could fail, there would be no standing in the truth, no walking with God, no fighting the good fight, and in the end no victory. We see then how needful it is firmly to maintain and contend for the unfailing, imperishable nature of faith, for so much depends upon it.

The trial, therefore, of faith is "precious," because it stands the hottest furnace, without loss or injury. But it is "precious" in two senses. First, it is precious in the sight of God as being his own especial gift. As a grace of the Holy Spirit, it is of exceeding value in the eyes of its divine Giver. It is precious in its origin, precious in its nature, and precious in its end. As making Christ precious, as giving a manifest interest in his Person and work, as cementing a spiritual union with him, and leading into fellowship and communion with him, it is precious as a means. And when it endures the fiery trial which is sent to try it, it is precious as a proof, for it is then clearly proved to be the work of God, and thus brings more glory to him. But, secondly, it is precious in the eyes of its favoured possessor. Would you part with the faith which God has bestowed upon you for any earthly consideration, especially if it has been well tried, and passed through the trial without loss or injury? Would house or land or any offer that men might make induce you to part with that little grain of faith which God has

deposited in your breast? Would you not reject the whole, as our Lord rejected Satan's offer when he said, "All this will I give unto thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me?" "Get thee behind me, Satan," would be your reply; "I would not part with my faith, small though it be, tried though it be, assaulted though it be, for a thousand worlds; for could I part with my faith, I should part with my hope of eternal life, as well as of all the comfort of my present life, and thus spend the remnant of my days a poor, miserable, despairing outcast from God and man." We rarely know the value of a thing till we have lost it, or are called upon to part with it. You may seem at times to have but little faith, and to hold it with but a slack hand; but put you upon your trial as to losing it, or parting with it, and you soon find how precious it is, and with what a firm, tenacious grasp you hold it. Nay, your very trials are made precious by it; for you can look back upon them and see how through faith they have been made blessings. But it is chiefly when we look to the glorious inheritance to which a living faith will bring us, that we may call it precious by the testimony of God and man.

IV.—This brings us to our last point, the glorious issue of the whole. Will not that make ample amends for all? The trial of this faith is to be "found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

What a glorious day for the saints of God will be the appearing of Jesus Christ, when he shall come and all his saints with him (Zech. 14:5); "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." (2 Thess. 1:10.) But what a solemn day for all others when "he shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." To this second coming of the Lord the Scriptures of the New Testament are continually pointing. It was a truth preached by the apostles almost as much as his first coming; and God's people are represented in the epistles as "loving his appearing" (2 Tim.

4:8), as "waiting for him from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:10), as "looking for him" (Heb. 9:29), and as solacing and comforting themselves in the prospect. (1 Thess. 4:18.) Nor was this dry, barren, unprofitable doctrine, for the apostle, pointing out its practical influence on the heart, says, "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 3:20.) Now at this glorious appearing of the Son of God a second time without sin unto salvation, our faith, if indeed it be the gift and grace of God, and is a faith which has stood every storm, borne every trial, and passed uninjured through every furnace, "will be found unto praise and honour and glory."

And it will be so in two senses. 1. First, it will be found unto the praise of God. You will bless and praise, adore and thank his holy name, that ever he should have had mercy upon your soul; that ever he should have planted his fear in your heart; that ever he should have made you a partaker of the faith of God's elect. O what "praise" will burst from your lips when "Christ, who is our life, shall appear," and ye shall appear with him in glory. Then it is that the heirs of God will be put into possession of the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, which is now reserved in heaven for them. O what praise and blessing will then fall from the lips of the redeemed! And what "honour" will they give unto their God. The honour of salvation will be wholly his. Upon his brow they will gladly fix their crown, and to him will they ascribe all the honour of saving their souls from the depths of hell. God has already crowned his dear Son "with glory and honour." (Heb. 2:9.) The psalmist therefore says, "His glory is great in thy salvation; honour and majesty has thou laid upon him." (Psa. 21:5.) And what is the song of the redeemed but, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power?" (Rev. 4:11.) For glory and honour go together. Our text therefore adds, and "glory." What heavenly glory will surround his Person when he descends from heaven in the full blaze and majesty of his Deity shining through his glorified humanity! What glorious angels will

go before him; what glorious saints will follow in his train; and how, in the twinkling of an eye, he will change the living and raise the dead; and, as he conforms them in a moment unto his own glorious body, what glory will shine forth in the souls and bodies of all. O what an issue to the trials, the temptations, the heaviness, and the sorrows of God's saints here below, when "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." Well then may we bear all the afflictions of the present life, and, with the apostle, "reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18.)

2. Take another sense of the word. God himself shall praise, honour, and glorify his own work upon the soul. Praise shall be given by him to it, honour conferred by him on it, and glory set by him upon it; so that there will be not only praise and honour and glory given unto God by the heirs when they succeed to their glorious inheritance, but praise and honour and glory will be accorded to them by their heavenly Donor. This could not be if they gained the inheritance by their own merits or exertions; but God will praise the accomplishment of his own eternal counsels, Christ will honour his own work on the cross by casting upon it the lustre of his own glory, and the Holy Spirit will glorify that grace in the heart by which he made the heirs meet for their eternal inheritance. And thus the trial of their faith, which is more precious than of gold that perisheth, will be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

What can we want more if we have any testimony of being heirs and legatees of this noble inheritance? What more can we desire; I may well add, what more can God give? He has given himself: "I am their inheritance." He has given himself in all his glorious perfections, in all his heavenly blessedness, to be their portion for evermore. The great, and glorious self-existent I AM, in his Trinity of persons and Unity of essence, the very God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has made himself over to them. How beautifully is this unfolded in the prayer of our great High Priest: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us;" and again, "That they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they maybe made perfect in one." (John 17:21-23.) O what a oneness is here set forth between the Father, the Son, and the Church. In this oneness will consist the blessedness and enjoyment of this inheritance. For as such it must exist to all eternity: no end, loss, or diminution of this union or of this happiness can be sustained through countless ages of endless bliss.

Is not all this fully set forth or implied in the words, "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away?" If it be incorruptible, and undefiled, and unfading, it must be so for ever and ever, or corruption, defilement, and decay could invade and be found in the courts of heaven. Surely it must be for ever and ever, for it is even now reserved in heaven for them, that they may be put into full and eternal possession of all that ever was in the mind of God to conceive, or in the power of the hand of God to accomplish.

If then, this inheritance be reserved for us, shall we not struggle on until put into possession of it? Is there not a glorious crown in view, and shall we not press towards the mark for this prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Is it not far better for you to be a poor, despised, afflicted, tempted saint of God, with the faith of God's elect in your heart, and the kingdom of God in your breast, pressing and struggling on through a sea of difficulties to reach the heavenly shore and to take possession of this glorious inheritance, than enjoy all that the world could lay at your feet? O how far richer does such a faith make us than if worlds were ours! Broad lands, ample fields, beautiful gardens, noble houses, and a splendid income, all that money can give or that heart can desire, what are they all compared with this glorious inheritance, and any testimony however feeble, if it be but real, of a manifest

interest in it?

201 Spiritual Blessings in Heavenly Places

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning,

June 18, 1865

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

Eph. 1:3, 4

As the Person, work, and glory of Christ are the main object, so the grand distinctive truths of the gospel are or should be the main subject of the Christian ministry; for, as He, who is the Bread of life, is their sum and substance, they only are the real, solid, substantial food of every believing heart. You will observe my expression, “are or should be;” for what the Christian ministry is, and what the Christian ministry should be is not exactly the same thing. It is not for me, who am less than the least of all saints and the chief of sinners, to cast any reflection upon my brethren in the ministry; and yet I cannot help making this observation, that the grand discriminating truths of the glorious gospel of the grace of God are not brought forward so prominently as they should be by some gracious men of God of whose spirituality, ability, and usefulness we cannot doubt. Many good men, in the exercise of their ministry, confine themselves almost wholly to the tracing out of the first work of grace upon the heart, and to confirm and strengthen it by bringing forward the chief scriptural evidences of divine life in the soul, so as to encourage those who are full of doubt and fear as to the reality of what they would gladly hope has been wrought in them by the mighty power of God. This is good. It is an important part of the work of the ministry to comfort those

who are cast down, to strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, and to say to those who are of feeble heart, Be strong, fear not. (Isaiah 35:4.) Nor can there be any doubt that one gracious means of doing this is by tracing out every mark of divine life, even the feeblest and smallest that is in harmony with the word of truth, and will bear strict scrutiny as given by God himself for the comfort of his doubting, fearing family. But it is a great mistake to think that this is the whole, or even the most important part of the ministry of the gospel. We certainly find something beyond this in the sermons recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, and still more so in the Epistles of the New Testament, which, though not sermons, we may well consider to be the fullest and completest instruction which could be furnished by the Holy Ghost for the Church of God. May we not also well ask whether, in furnishing the gospel table, meat should not be provided for men as well as milk for babes? Are there in the congregation this morning before me none but little children? Surely there are or should be in it fathers who know him that is from the beginning, and young men who are strong, in whom the word of God abides, and who have overcome the wicked one. Are these to be passed by, and none spoken unto but the little children, the babes in grace, the youngest and weakest of the family? Our gracious Lord, in his farewell charge to Peter, said, “Feed my lambs;” but he also twice said to him, “Feed, my sheep.” He would not be thought to be a good shepherd naturally who devoted all his care and attention to the lambs, and neglected the ewes and the wethers. So should the gospel shepherd feed the whole of the flock, whether young or old, for much of his business lies among the lost, the driven away, the broken, and the sick. (Ezek. 34:4, 16.) It is therefore a great mistake, and what the apostle strongly condemns, to be always “laying the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.” We should leave these principles or first elements of the doctrine of Christ, and go on unto perfection, that is, to some maturity in the divine life; for otherwise that reproof is suitable

to us: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong drink.” (Heb. 5:12.) The Christian ministry, therefore, must go beyond describing the first work of grace and tracing out the signs and evidences of divine life; for this part of the ministry should be considered merely as the elements, its lowest and weakest portion, and that there is something far beyond this to make the preaching of the gospel what the Holy Ghost declares it was intended to be, “for the perfecting of the saints, and the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:12, 13.) A good foundation is necessary; but we want the building to be reared as well as the good foundation to be laid. Now this can only be done by holding forth to the Church the Person and work of Christ in all their various bearings and relationships, and by bringing before the people the grand distinguishing truths of our most holy faith. Nay, in my judgment, such preaching, if it spring out of a sweet and gracious experience of the truth of God, and drop from the lips of the preacher with that unction and savour which the Lord only can bestow, is much more likely to bring doubting souls out of fear and bondage than the tracing out of evidences of the life of God within; for often, in looking for those evidences, the more they look the less they find; and thus instead of looking out of themselves to the Lord of life and glory, to receive of his fulness grace for grace, they are ever occupied with self-examination—good in its way, but which often leads only to self-condemnation.

There is also another disadvantage, not to say evil, in so continually dwelling upon the first work, that it leads people to rest upon evidences instead of blessings. Now these two things are widely distinct, and should be ever kept separate. Evidences I compare to milestones or direction posts, or, if you like the figure

better, to stiles or gates, all which are very good, and needful to point out the road and securely fence it; to show how far we have come; and a stile or gate by the wayside is useful and convenient sometimes to sit down upon and rest when we are tired; but one would not like to sleep all night under a milestone or by the side of a gate, or think, gipsy-like, that even a tent by the roadside with a little broken victuals was all that was necessary to give us food and lodging for the night. It certainly would not be the same thing as a warm, comfortable resting-place, were it but a roadside inn, where we might get food, warmth, and shelter, and go on our way next morning with recruited strength. Evidences, then, as evidences, be it ever borne in mind, are not and were not intended to be rest, food, and shelter. They are excellent waymarks; but try to feed upon or rest for any time in them, and you will soon find them crying out, “No food, no rest here. You must go further on for food and lodging. These are only to be had in the house of blessing where Jesus himself makes the bed, spreads the table, and entertains the guests.” Whilst then we do not despise or overlook evidences, for they are most useful in their place, let it ever be our main object and desire to obtain blessings, such as some application of the word of truth with power to our heart, some manifestation of Jesus to our soul.

These thoughts you may perhaps find to have some connection with the subject which this morning I hope to bring before you, which will be chiefly to open and establish this grand point, as so beautifully brought forward in our text, that God hath blessed us, already blessed us, with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that these blessings, therefore, are not for the first time given when we believe, but that even before we believe, if we are amongst the chosen in Christ, we were blessed beforehand with every blessing which we shall enjoy for time or eternity. I can say for myself that I have seen and felt great beauty and blessedness in the truths laid down so clearly in the word before us, and have been desirous, from what I have seen and felt in

them, to bring them before you, for there is everything in them for the encouragement and consolation of you who are looking and longing for the visitations of the mercy and love of God. And if indeed, as being amongst those who believe in his dear Son, God himself has already blessed us with all spiritual blessings, and stored them up in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, how we are encouraged thereby to come to him in faith and prayer, to receive out of his fulness such communications of heavenly grace as shall bring us into a heartfelt enjoyment and sweet experience of the blessings themselves.

Bear then in mind three things: 1, that we are blessed, already blessed, with every spiritual blessing in Christ; 2, that there must be a manifestation and a communication of those blessings to our soul; 3, that it is through faith those blessings are laid hold of and realised as our own.

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

I.—First, direct your minds to that most blessed fact, which I have already named, that God “hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

II.—Secondly, the end, aim, and object of God in thus blessing us: it is “that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

III.—Thirdly, according to what fixed purpose God has done this: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.”

I.—But before I dive into the bosom of my text, to bring out of it, if the Lord enable, some of its choice treasures, it will be desirable to gain some clear conception of the meaning of various expressions in it as used by the apostle. Unless we start with some clear conception of the meaning of the words which he has employed to set forth the grand truths which he brings before us, we shall hardly be able to get into the mind of the Spirit in the text. Nor is this a word of counsel only for the present

occasion. Whenever we read the Scriptures we should always seek to understand the exact meaning of the words employed by the blessed Spirit in his revelation of heavenly truth. It is sad to see how many even of the dear family of God go on reading the Scriptures from year to year, and yet, with all their reading, seem at the end to know as little of the mind of the Spirit in them as at the beginning. This may partly arise from natural dulness of intellect, but may much more frequently be traced to indolence and carelessness. The word of God is not to be read, at least to any profit, in this indolent, careless manner. In order to yield up its treasures, it must be sought and searched into, prayed over, and meditated upon, as the wise man speaks: “Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.” (Prov. 2:3-6.) I shall, therefore before I dive into the depths of the text to bring out what the Lord may enable me to lay before you, just draw your attention to a few words or terms which the Holy Ghost has here made use of by the pen of Paul, which I shall endeavour to explain as simply and as clearly as I can.

i. First, then, what is the meaning of the word “blessing,” which forms so prominent a feature in our text? “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.” (Eph. 1:3.) You will observe that the apostle blesses the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as having blessed us with spiritual blessings. Does he not use the word “bless” here in more than one sense? for we cannot say that we can bless God in the same way as God blesses us. Ours is a mere ascription of praise to God; for how can we, by any words or deeds of ours, add anything to his bliss who is blessed for evermore? But his blessing us puts us into the possession and enjoyment of what will make us happy for evermore. He would

still be the same, whether we blessed him or not; but not so with us. Nothing is added to the light, heat, and splendour of the sun by the millions of acres of waving corn which it ripens; but where would be the food of a nation but for his glorious rays? So all our praise and thanksgiving cannot add anything to the bliss and blessedness of God; for he would still be what he is had we all perished under his curse. And yet he condescends to listen to our feeble lisplings of thankful praise, and to glorify himself by blessing us.

But to return; what are we to understand by the term “blessing?” It is a word often in our mouth, but how many words we make use of as found in the Scriptures, and hear others use too, of which we form no adequate conception, and even will not give ourselves the trouble of enquiring into; satisfying ourselves with some vague, loose idea, which after all is but the shallow refuge of our willing ignorance. What then are “blessings” in the Scriptural sense of the term? The word literally means things to be well spoken of, things worthy of excellent mention; and, as applied to divine realities, things well spoken of by God himself, who sees the end from the beginning, and knows all things with the utmost perfection of knowledge. We may therefore consider that the word “blessing” means those things of which God himself speaks well. Whether therefore the word “blessings” refers to the view that God takes of them or to the view that we take of them, as enlightened by his grace, the simplest meaning of the term is things to be well spoken of, things worthy of adoration and praise. God speaks well of them; for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with these blessings, knows their value, perfectly understands the surpassing excellence of his own gifts; and we may be well assured that when he gave his only begotten Son, and blessed us with all spiritual blessings in him, he well knew the depth of his own love, the fulness of his own wisdom, the riches of his own grace, and that eternal state of glory into which he had determined to bring us. We may also observe that he is said to have “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ.” The blessings in the mind of

God were worthy of, and corresponding to the Son of his love in whom all these blessings centre. We cannot raise our thoughts too high upon this point; for whatever we may think or even desire, God’s purposes of love outrun them all; for it is as the apostle has declared, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him.” (1 Cor. 2:9.)

But take the word “blessings” as applicable to our thoughts and expression of them. They are things to be well spoken of by man, that is, regenerated man, and form a subject of grateful adoration and praise, not only for time but for eternity. These divine realities are indeed far out of the sight and out of the reach of the earthly mind of man. So far from speaking well of them, men for the most part rather speak ill of them; and instead of pronouncing sovereign grace, discriminating favour, electing love, atoning blood, justifying righteousness to be blessings, would rather denounce them as pernicious notions, licentious opinions, and dangerous doctrines.

ii. But having given this glance at the meaning of the word “blessings,” let us now look at the expression “spiritual.” The apostle speaks of God having blessed us with all spiritual blessings. Fix your eye and heart therefore on that one word “spiritual.” There are natural blessings, and these also are the gift of him in whom we live and move and have our being. Thus we find a distinction between the blessings which Isaac gave to Jacob and to Esau. To Jacob he gave spiritual blessings: “See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed.” But he gave him also temporal blessings: “God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine.” But you will observe that when Esau came, and cried out, “Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father;” there was no blessing to give; for all his answer was, “Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth and of the dew of heaven from above,” and a promise of deliverance at some future time from Jacob’s dominion.

It is frequently said, and I said so myself a few minutes ago, that Isaac blessed Esau; but if you carefully examine the passage you will not find a word of blessing in it. (Gen. 27:27, 28, 38, 39.) Esau thus had favours without blessings—a part of the portion of Jacob, his earthly portion; for the dominion given to Jacob over peoples and nations, and the lordship over his brethren, with the attaching of a curse to all who cursed him and of a blessing to all who blessed him, put him, as heir, into possession of the spiritual blessings of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. (Gen. 12:3.) But Esau had his portion without the blessing of God upon it. Thus, in a sense, the very “fatness of the earth and the dew of heaven” are only blessings to God’s people. Others may have health and strength, worldly prosperity, and success in life; but they are not blessings in the true sense of the word, because God’s hand is not seen or acknowledged in them. Nay, rather, the more they have of them, according to Job’s description, the more they become mighty in power, the more their houses are safe from fear, the more they take the timbrel and harp and rejoice at the sound of the organ, and they spend their days in wealth, the more do they say unto God, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” (Job. 21:7-14.)

And yet temporal blessings, though ever to be received by us with a thankful heart, are not those spoken of in our text. These are “spiritual blessings.” What then may we understand by “spiritual blessings,” as distinct from temporal? We may view them such, either as regards God the Giver or ourselves the receivers. Viewing him as the Giver, they are such as he who is a Spirit gives; blessings consistent with the character of God as a pure and holy Spirit, and therefore in themselves pure, holy and heavenly, suitable to our spiritual mind; and thus distinct from any sensations of the body, or any thoughts, desires, and feelings of our natural intellect. They are also spiritual in this sense, as being blessings which the Holy Ghost reveals to the soul and gives us a meetness to enjoy. But when we view them as regards us, the receivers, we may say that

they embrace all the blessings and sure mercies of the everlasting covenant, all things that pertain to life and godliness; nor is there a single blessing stored up in the fulness of Christ not comprehended in them. Life eternal, pardon of sin, adoption into the family of God, sanctification, peace in its foundation and effects, and justification in all its blessedness, are folded in the bosom of these “spiritual blessings.” O how short of all these heavenly and abiding blessings are the greatest mercies and favours which we can receive in providence. What are health and strength, houses and lands, riches and honour, and all that earth can give of good or great—what are all compared with a good hope of eternal life, when our poor, vile body shall drop into its native dust?

iii. A word or two more to bring you into our text, though I shall have occasion to open it more fully as I go on: “In heavenly places.” We are said to be “Blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.” It is in the margin, “or things,” the reason being, because, in the original, the substantive is absent, and we have simply the adjective “heavenly,” leaving us at liberty to supply “places,” or “things,” according to the context or analogy of faith. I believe our translators have well and wisely put “places,” and I will show you briefly why. Our blessed Lord is in the heavenly places; he is gone up on high to sit at the right hand of God in the highest heaven; and as all our blessings are in him and he is in the heavenly places, and will be there till he comes a second time without sin unto salvation, all our spiritual blessings are in heavenly places, because they centre in him who is seated there in the fulness of his glory as the High Priest over the house of God.

Having thus taken you by the hand and led you to the brink of our text, let us now, with God’s help and blessing, attempt to descend into these waters of Shiloah, which go softly, and drink of them as flowing full of sweetness and blessedness before our eyes in it.

Its main beauty and blessedness is, as I before pointed out, that God hath blessed us, already blessed us, with all spiritual

blessings. Whatever spiritual blessing therefore there is in the hand of God to give or for the heart of man to receive, with that spiritual blessing you have been already blessed if you are a saint and one of the faithful in Christ Jesus; for it is to such the epistle is written, and of such the apostle speaks in using the word “us.” Now these spiritual blessings we may divide into two different classes. There are some blessings which are antecedent to the fall of man, and others which follow upon it.

iv. We must not suppose that God began to bless the church first when Adam fell, because we read in our text of his choosing us in Christ before the foundation of the world. The spiritual blessings therefore with which God has blessed his people in heavenly places he gave to them in Christ before the foundation of the world; and therefore were evidently antecedent to the fall. Let me endeavour to explain this a little more fully, as the distinction which I have made may not at first sight be sufficiently plain. God the Father for ever loved the Church. Is not this evident not only from his own immutable character and the eternity of his Being, but from those wonderful words of our most gracious Lord in his intercessory prayer, “And hast loved them, as thou hast loved me?” (John 17:23.) The word “as” implies not only measure but duration, whether before time or after. When did the Father begin to love his dear Son? To that love there was, there could be, no beginning, for he was his eternal Son, and eternity knows neither beginning nor end. If God then loved the Church with the same love wherewith he loved his dear Son, it must have been a love from the same eternity. This love therefore was quite irrespective of what the Church might be or should be in a time state, unless you think that time alters, I might almost say, the very Being of God, for as “love,” he is one pure Essence of love which knows neither variation, nor decline, for “with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (James 1:17.)

1. Love, therefore, the love of God, irrespective of all issues and consequences, was the first spiritual blessing wherewith he blessed

the Church in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

2. But love, whether in God or man, is operative, that is, it goes forth and displays itself in fruits and effects. What then was the first effect and fruit of this love of God? Was it not this that he gave the Church to his dear Son, to be his bride and spouse? for God in loving the Church determined to make her a partaker of his own glory, to bring her to the enjoyment of himself; and the way that he chose to do so (and how faith approves of and embraces the way), was by making her a partaker of the glory of Christ as his only begotten Son. Is not this gospel doctrine, and in the fullest harmony with the words of our blessed Lord, “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me?” “I pray for them: 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 17:9, 10.) Must we not then say that this love of God to the Church in his dear Son was a gift or blessing, antecedent to the fall and irrespective of it?

3. But there flows from this another consequence, if not altogether another blessing. When the Father had given the Church to his dear Son, and he had accepted her at his hands and loved her with the same love, for the Father and the Son are one in mind as much as they are one in essence, claiming her as his spouse and bride, the favour and approbation of the Father flowed forth to her, not only as he viewed her before he gave her to his dear Son, but as his bride and spouse. Let me illustrate this by a figure—a scriptural figure too, for our Lord speaks of “a certain king who made a marriage for his son.” (Matt. 22:2.) A man of noble descent and large property wishes that his son and heir should marry for the continuation of the peerage and the maintenance of the estates. Now there is a noble damsel in his eye, whom he would wish his son to have as the partner of his life; and as such, he loves her with the prospective view of her union with him. But it so happens, you will perceive that I am still continuing my figure, that the affections of the son fall upon the same object.

He loves the very damsel whom his father had in his mind chosen for him. They meet, they love; a wedding takes place; she becomes his spouse. But now the love of the father flows out to her, not only as before from viewing her to be a suitable companion for his son before the marriage, but he loves her with an additional love as now brought into a more tender relationship to him as the wife and spouse of his own son. Is there not some analogy between this illustration and the love of God to the Church? He loves her because she is Christ's. She has become a daughter, as he addresses her in Psalm 45: "Hearken, O daughter." (Psa. 45:10.) We therefore read of God's making us "accepted in the Beloved." (Eph. 1:6.)

Putting therefore these things together, you may see that there were three spiritual blessings antecedent to the fall and irrespective of it. The first is the love of God to the Church; the second is the gift of her to his dear Son; and the third is his love and approbation of her as his accepted spouse and bride.

v. But now let me point out some of those "spiritual blessings" which cannot be said to be altogether dependent upon, and yet are most blessedly suitable to, the reparation of the breach which the fall made between God and us; for we must ever bear in mind, that the fall of Adam broke asunder, so to speak, all intercourse and communion between man and his Maker. None who know the holiness of God and the evil of sin, can doubt that the Adam fall brought an awful bar between God and the Church; which had to be repaired, made up, and the breach entirely and thoroughly healed, or the God of holiness and truth could never have received us into his own loving bosom, that we should spend in his presence a glorious eternity. God, therefore, not only blessed us with the spiritual blessings which I have described as antecedent to, and irrespective of the fall, but with those which are intimately connected with redemption—redemption, I need not intimate, being not required but by the fall. These blessings, therefore, are based upon the incarnation of his dear Son, and on the sacrifice which was to be offered on the cross by his precious bloodshedding

Now as the work of grace upon the heart begins with a conviction of sin, these, though not the first in order, are the first spiritual blessings which are apprehended and embraced by faith. We come in by necessity. "God be merciful to me a sinner." "What shall I do to be saved?" "How shall I escape the wrath to come?"—these are the first feelings, these are the first anxious enquiries of an awakened sinner.

1. But what is the first blessing which we want to know? Is it not the full and free forgiveness of sin? Now see how kindly and graciously the Lord meets us with the very spiritual blessing so adapted to our mournful case, so suitable to our misery and woe, as justly condemned sinners before him: "In whom," that is in Christ, "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace." (Eph. 1:7.) So then if we belong to that happy number who are "saints and faithful in Christ Jesus," they being the "we" to whom the apostle speaks, God hath blessed us, already blessed us with the forgiveness of our sins. All our sins were laid upon the head of our Surety: he bore them all in his body on the tree. He suffered here, that we might not suffer hereafter; he endured the pains of hell, that he might give us the pleasures of heaven; he died in time, that we might not die to all eternity; and he rose again from the dead, that we might rise with him and sit down together with him in heavenly places. All this we have if we have union with Christ; for it is "in him," that is, by virtue of union with him, that we have "redemption through his blood." And observe how it all is, "according to the riches of his grace." O how rich that grace, how full even to overflowing with a tide of superabounding favour, that redemption, through the blood of Christ, should be as full and as complete as the fulness of the favour of God! If his grace be rich, how rich the redemption; if the redemption be rich, how rich the forgiveness which comes through that redemption; and O how suitable are these three rich blessings, grace, redemption, and forgiveness to hearts robbed,

spoiled, and plundered by sin and Satan of everything that is good. But O how many of the dear family of God are deeply tried and sorely exercised upon this point, to believe in the remission of sin, that is, so to believe it as to have a sweet personal, experimental assurance that all their sins are pardoned. They seem able to receive and believe smaller favours, if I may use the expression, a less gift of grace; but they cannot rise up into the sweet persuasion that the great grace of forgiveness is theirs; nor can they, nor will they ever believe it till the Holy Ghost assures them of it, by bringing the testimony of pardoned sin into their heart. And yet could they but see, believe, and enjoy it, they are blessed, already blessed, with this best and greatest of personal favours, as one of those spiritual blessings with which God has blessed them in Christ. God has already forgiven them their sins, already put them away, already cast them behind his back, and will remember them no more. I know the weakness of our faith, and the miserable unbelief and despondency of our heart under the guilt of sin; nor would I lead any one a step further than God has led him, or say a word to tempt any to presume; but this I may say to every one of you who has any spiritual mark of being a saint and a believer in Christ Jesus, that God has already blessed you with the forgiveness of sin, by giving you an interest in the redemption of his dear Son.

2. But now look at another spiritual blessing with which God has blessed his dear people in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He has freely justified them. Our blessed Lord wrought out for them a robe of righteousness. He obeyed the law on their behalf, bearing its penalty and enduring its curse, and has thus redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. (Gal. 3:10.) Yea, God himself “hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2. Cor. 5:21.) They are thus freely justified by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 3:24.) His name is “The Lord our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6); and “in him shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.” (Isa. 45:25.) It was a sense of

this which made the Church of old rejoice and sing: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.” (Isa. 61:10.)

3. But what is the fruit and effect of these two spiritual blessings? The pardon of our sin and the justification of our persons, is to give us peace with God. There is no peace with God except so far as there is some sense of forgiven sin, and some gracious persuasion of being in a justified state. But these two blessings we cannot experimentally realise until God is pleased to reveal Christ to our soul, and to set him, so to speak, before our eyes as the Object of our faith. Then, according to the measure of that faith, there is a reception of his precious blood into a living conscience, a taking hold of his righteousness, and thus having peace with God in believing. Does not the Lord say “Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me?” To take hold of God’s strength is to take hold of the strength of his grace in the work of redemption; to see and feel that the love displayed in it was, as the bride speaks, “strong as death”—so strong that “many waters could not quench it, neither the floods drown it.” (Song Sol. 8:7.) Peace, then, as the fruit and effect of justifying righteousness, is also a spiritual blessing which God has blessed us with in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The apostle, therefore, in all his epistles prays for “grace and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is a part of that kingdom of God which, as set up in the heart, is “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” (Rom. 14:17.) It is called “the peace of God which passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4:7); and the apostle prays that “God would fill his saints with all joy and peace in believing;” for “he has called us to peace.” (1 Cor. 7:15.) He is “himself the author of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33), and “would have it reign and rule in our hearts.” (Col. 3:15.) It is indeed a

most precious blessing, the dying legacy of our gracious Lord, of which he himself is the sum and substance, and which “he came and preached to us who were afar off” (Eph. 2:14, 17.) It is also the choicest fruit of justification: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:1.) In some respects it seems almost the crown of all blessings; for if there be more in love to enjoy, there is more in peace to possess, a more tranquil happiness, which in its calm passiveness is almost sweeter than love in its warm activity.

4. Another spiritual blessing with which God has blessed us in heavenly places in Christ Jesus is reconciliation unto himself. How strongly, how clearly, how blessedly does the apostle declare this vital truth: “And you that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight.” (Col. 1:21, 22.) And again: “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” (2 Cor. 5:18.) How rich the grace, how wondrous the mercy, that God should have devised and accomplished the reconciliation to himself of enemies and aliens. And O in what a way! By the cross; thus slaying the enmity which had been introduced by sin: “And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.” (Eph. 2:16.)

5. Now from this flows another blessing, a being brought nigh unto God by the blood of his dear Son: “But now in Christ Jesus ye who were afar off”—and O how far off! could any be farther than we?—“are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” (Eph. 2:13.) We thus obtain access unto God; “for through him, that is, Christ, we both (that is, Jew and Gentile), have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” (Eph. 3:18.) The word “access” means liberty to approach him with all holy boldness, and come into his presence with acceptance. The word properly and literally signifies “introduction;” as if we were taken by the hand and led into the court to see the king face to

face, and this without chilling fear: “In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.” (Eph. 3:12.) What an unspeakable blessing it is to have access to God, so as to come into his presence with some measure of sweet freedom, holy liberty, and some intimation of his gracious favour; for without some degree of this, all is darkness, condemnation, and death. But our blessed Lord having gone up on high, through the rent veil of his own flesh gives access to God, that we may venture into the holiest through the blood of Jesus; and thus find liberty of speech and power of utterance before the throne of grace. How blessed it is to have some measure of gracious 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.)

But may I not well adopt the apostle’s words? “And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell” of all the spiritual blessings with which God has blessed his people in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

6. Yet must I mention one more: the sum and crown of all, eternal life. This God “promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2); and by the gospel he brings the hope of it into the heart. And may we not well say this is a spiritual blessing in heavenly places? for that is the very ground in which hope anchors, as entering into that within the veil. (Heb. 6:19.)

vi. But I now come to those striking and most expressive words, “heavenly places.” You will not fail to have observed that we are blessed with all these spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and that therefore they are all safely stored up in Christ, far above the reach of all earthly vicissitudes. No storms ever reach that celestial atmosphere; no waves of time ever beat upon that glorious shore. Many are the storms which assail the saints of God here below; and the worst are from within. But these blessings are placed out of the reach of all these storms. The world with all its combined force, persecution in all its forms, Satan with all his assaults and all

his temptations cannot touch these blessings.

But observe also that they are all stored up in the Person of Christ, and therefore are where he is—at the right hand of God. What an effect, what an influence have these things upon the heart when they are received by faith. What a fixing there is of the eye of faith upon the grand Object of faith at the right hand of the Father. What a looking to, what a believing in, what a laying hold of the Son of God in the highest heavens as the great High Priest over the House of God. What a daily, sometimes hourly, Object for faith is this risen, this glorified, this exalted Christ; and how at various times our faith is enabled to enter through the veil of earthly things, to pass through the clouds and mists that hover over this world, and to reach upward to that blessed spot where our great High Priest sits in his Deity and in his humanity, Immanuel, God with us. What a tendency this has also to raise up our affections to things above. This is the very spirit of the apostle's exhortation: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of the Father." (Col. 3:1.) If we look up to this risen, exalted, glorified Jesus, we see that God has blessed us already with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in him. How, as favoured with a living faith, we see them stored up in the Person of the risen Son of God far beyond all the attacks of sin and Satan, all the malice and hatred of the world, and all the darkness and confusion of our miserable selves. As thus we view these things by the eye of faith, the heart goes forth in affection towards him in whom all these blessings centre; for they derive all their blessedness from being in him. What is love without the lover? What the marriage without the man? Thus, as if instinctively, as if intuitively, we know, we feel that as being in him they must come down from him. They are all stored up in him; they all centre in him; he is their giver; from him they must all be bestowed upon his poor, needy recipients; and there is, as it were, a double sweetness in them as being in him and coming from him. There is thus established a blessed link of communication between

the Lord and our souls, a spiritual intercourse, a holy communion, like Jacob's ladder, a going up and a coming down; an ascent of prayer and affection, of faith, hope, and love, up to the throne of God, and a coming down of his gracious presence and favour into the breast. We cannot look too much or too frequently, too prayerfully, too believingly, too affectionately to the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of God; for he is there as our Advocate, as our Priest, as our Representative, as our King. Faith, in order to act, wants an Object to whom it may look, in whom it may believe, on whom it may hang, to whom it may cleave. Without this Object on which to fix its eyes, faith seems to wander about without purpose, end, or object; and all its labours and toil bring nothing into the heart but darkness, barrenness, and death. But when it fixes its eyes upon the Lord of life and glory in the highest heavens, and goes forth in living actings upon him, it has that upon which it can feed, embrace, and enjoy. And as all spiritual blessings are stored up in him in these heavenly places, out of his fulness we receive them through this medium—the medium of faith. We have not then to muddle and grope here below to seek after and look for blessings in ourselves or others, but we have to look up by the eye of faith; see every spiritual blessing which our souls can desire stored up in the fulness of the risen Son of God, and by faith and prayer draw them down into our breast.

But the margin reads, "things," "heavenly things;" and I have already intimated that both "things" and "places" are admissible, though I prefer the textual rendering "places." Yet we may devote a few words to the expression "heavenly things." The word implies that every spiritual blessing is of a heavenly nature, redolent of the very breath of heaven. From heaven is their origin; for like the beams of the sun and the showers of the air, from heaven they come down. "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness." (Isa. 45:8.) "As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven." (Isa. 55:10.) And as they come down from heaven, so they rise up to heaven. The apostle puts them

both in one verse—lodges both in the bosom of one exhortation: “If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” (Col. 3:1.) What are “things above” but “heavenly things?” What is “Christ, at the right hand of God” but Christ in the “heavenly places?” Is not all heavenly where he is, and with which he has to do? Through them also, as brought into the heart by a divine power, there is communicated a meetness for heaven; and as heavenly things are only in heavenly places, whether we adopt the rendering “things” or “places,” either word has heaven for its substance, its element, and its eternal home.

II. But let me now pass on to show what was God’s aim, end, and object in blessing us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. It was “that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”

i. God means to make us partakers of his holiness, for “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” It is impossible for an unholy soul to enter the courts of heavenly bliss. There dwell in the light which no man can approach unto a holy Father, a holy Son, and a holy Ghost, Israel’s Triune God. There dwells holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. Holy is heaven’s air, holy are heaven’s employments: all there is one eternal, unmixed atmosphere of holiness. Unless therefore we are made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light by being made partakers of God’s holiness, we never can enter that celestial atmosphere: we shall never dwell in the presence of God for evermore. Into that celestial city “there shall in no wise enter anything which defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.” John tells us what he saw in vision concerning this holy city: “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.) The Church is here represented, as “a bride adorned for her husband;” and that she may be adorned for such a bridegroom she must shine forth not only in all the splendour of his glorious

righteousness, but, according to the promise, in all “the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning.” (Psa. 110:3.) Our own holiness is not sufficient. The holiness which God requires and the holiness which he gives is one “without blame.” Now who can say of any man, whatever his life and conduct be, whatever be his spiritual aspirations, godly walk, consistent conversation, affectionate desires, living faith, or tender love, that he stands holy and without blame before God? Can you say so of yourself? And if this be true of you, as you know it is, so is it of all the people of God. In order, therefore, to give them that holiness in which they might stand without blame before him, God did three things for them.

1. First, he sanctified them by separating them unto himself from all eternity and giving them to his dear Son that he might be their holiness. Thus the Lord, speaking of Israel of old, says, “Thy beauty was perfect through my comeliness which I had put upon thee.” (Ezek. 16:14.) We are, therefore, said to be sanctified by the will of the Father: “By which will we are sanctified” (Heb. 10:10); and Christ is declared to be “of God made unto us sanctification” as well as “wisdom, righteousness, and redemption.” (1 Cor. 1:30.) This runs in accordance with Paul’s word: “For if the firstfruits be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.” (Rom. 11:16.) Christ is the firstfruit, for he is become “the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20); and Christ is the root, for he is “the root of Jesse, which is to stand for an ensign of the people.” (Isa. 11:10.) God’s will determined everything. God willed that we should be holy, and by that will he made us holy. Just as when God willed earth into being, earth came into being; so when God willed his people to be holy, he made them holy by the power of that will; and thus, by being separated unto himself to be a holy people, they were sanctified by the will of the Father.

2. But, secondly, they are sanctified also by the blood of the Son: “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.” (Heb. 13:12.) Thus

Jesus sanctified his people by his own blood, that is, effectually cleansed them from all their pollutions, freed them from all their guilty stains, and presented them before God spotless and without blame, as being perfectly washed in the atoning fountain opened in him for all sin and uncleanness.

3. But this does not give them personal holiness, holiness of heart. There is, therefore, a holiness which the Holy Ghost gives at regeneration, by renewing them in the spirit of their mind, communicating a new nature, and sanctifying them inwardly by the communication of divine life. This is “the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” (1 Cor. 3:10.)

We thus see that they are holy by the will of the Father by election, holy by the blood of the Son by redemption, holy by the work of the Holy Ghost by regeneration.

ii. And as they are thus holy, so are they “without blame before him.” As the work of a Triune God, each and every part of this holiness is perfect, and therefore without blame before God. Perfect in his own eternal will; perfect in the work of redemption; perfect, as far as it goes, the work of regeneration. God views his people in Christ. Though he sees our sins and chastises us for them, yet he views our persons as we stand “accepted in the beloved;” and viewing us as we stand not in ourselves, but in Christ, he views us without blame before him.

iii. And that, “in love,” his own love, wherewith he hath loved us; and in that love which he himself sheds abroad in the heart; for love is the fulfilling of the law, and therefore an eminent branch of Christian holiness. And in that great and glorious day when Christ who is our life shall appear, and all his saints shall appear with him in glory, then will the love of the Church be fully perfected, and she will stand before the throne holy and without blame before him in love.

Have you ever considered these things? Were you ever led into them, into their meaning, their spirituality, their power, their

personal effect and influence? What does your religion consist in? Is it merely in finding in yourself a few shallow evidences, or does it spring out of any manifestation of the Son of God to your soul, any application of his blood and love and grace to your heart? Do you ever rise up out of the refuse of self into the goodness, mercy, and grace of God as manifested in the Person and work of Jesus? Do you never find a solemn taking up of your soul into the arms of mercy and a laying of it upon the bosom of a risen Christ? a breathing into your heart of the very Spirit and presence and grace of Christ, so as to give you a measure of sweet enjoyment of the things of God in your own bosom? Now you may look and look again at your evidences; you may try to take the very best of them, such as loving the brethren, receiving the truth, walking consistently, being a member of a church, the opinion that good people form of you; and you may keep looking and looking at, and into these evidences, some of which are true and Scriptural, such as loving the brethren, receiving the love of the truth, and leading a godly life, but others shallow or even deceptive, till your very eyes fail. With all your looking you will never rise much beyond doubt or fear. Have you not then something beyond evidences, some living faith in the Son of God, some love to his dear name, some anchoring within the veil, some love of God shed abroad in your heart, some manifestation of Christ, some union and communion with the Son of God? Evidences are good in their way: they are, according to my figure, like milestones upon the road; we are glad to see and count the milestones, especially when we are weary. It is good to see that the road we are travelling on is the right road, and how far we are advanced in it. But a man would be sadly deceived if he mistook a milestone for his own home, or lay down to sleep under it. Press on, press on; don't be satisfied with a few evidences. Let nothing satisfy you but the blood of Christ sprinkled upon your conscience, the love of God shed abroad in your heart, peace and joy in believing, with blessed views of the Son of God as of God made unto you wisdom and righteousness and sanctification

and redemption. And see the blessedness of our subject; God hath blessed you, if indeed you believe in his dear Son, with all spiritual blessings already in Christ Jesus. If you are a saint and a faithful one, he has only to open his hand to satisfy the desire of you as of every other living thing. The blessings are all in Christ: they are in him already. They have to be received out of him; and we receive them by the hand of faith. Instead then of sitting down contented with your evidences, and making a Christ out of them, worshipping them as if they were your God, is it not more consistent with the experience of living souls, with the directions of God's word, with the preaching of the apostles and of all godly men of all ages, nay, I might add, even with the secret, inmost convictions of your own conscience to go to the fountain-head to receive of his fulness and to drink pure streams out of him, who hath said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink? He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

III.—But to pass on to our third and last point. All this is in sweet accordance with God's eternal choice of his people to the enjoyment of these heavenly blessings: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."

This firm, immutable purpose of God gives a fixedness to the tenure. Fixity of tenure gives value to an estate. Who would buy an estate upon an uncertain tenure or an unsound title? Fixedness of tenure, soundness of title, give that stability which constitutes worth. So it is in these divine realities: they are eternal fixtures, not depending upon the changeable concerns of time, but fixed by the absolute decree of God. In this consists their main blessedness. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." Observe, it is "in him." All is in Christ. If you are blessed with all spiritual blessings, it is only "in Christ" you are so blessed. If you were chosen before the foundation of the world, it was only "in Christ" that you were chosen. He is our covenant Head. What we are we are only in him. There is nothing in self: no fixedness

there. All is fluctuating here below; all is uncertain as regards man. Certainty is with God; and the fixedness of God's purposes is our grand, our only support. Thus the doctrine of election received into the heart diffuses a sacred blessedness over the whole truth of God, for it gives stability to it. It is not a dry doctrine which men may toss about from hand to hand like a tennis ball; it is not an article of a creed written down in church articles, or a theory to be argued by divines. Nor is it a mere loose, floating idea gathered from a few dim and doubtful passages of God's word. It is no ignis fatuus, no meteor light dancing over morasses and swamps. It is a steady light set by the hand of God in the Scriptures, as he set of old lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth. It therefore diffuses its rays over the whole of God's truth. For it is "in Christ" his people were chosen, and therefore election being in Christ, it is reflected with all the beams of the Sun of Righteousness upon every gospel truth. There is not a single gospel truth, or a single spiritual blessing, which does not derive its blessedness from its connection with the Person and work of the Son of God; and what is true of all, is true of this, that the blessedness of election is because it is in Christ.

But some may say "these things are hard to believe." They are very hard to believe, for our unbelieving heart finds it very hard to believe anything that is for our good. We can believe Satan's lies with great readiness; we can give an open, willing ear to anything which our evil heart suggests. But to believe God's truths so as to enter into their beauty and blessedness, to feel their quickening power and live under their cheering, invigorating influence, this is another matter. But where is the life of our religion when these things are taken away from it? Take, if you could take—God be praised it is beyond the reach of human hand!—but take away that solemn fact, that God has blessed the Church with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, where would there be room for any blessing to rest upon our soul? How could I be blessed to you this morning in speaking, how could you be

blessed by a word falling with power in hearing? Why, any sweet promise that comes rolling into your breast, any lifting up of the light of God's countenance in seasons of darkness and adversity, any liberty in prayer, any looking up and receiving out of Christ's fulness,—all hang upon this grand point, the blessings wherewith God hath already blessed us in Christ Jesus. So that all we have to do—and it is a great thing to do—God alone can enable us to do it—is to receive what God has been pleased so mercifully to give; and as he has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, to feel their power, to enjoy their sweetness, and to know for ourselves by the sealing of the Spirit that he has blessed us, even us, and that with life for evermore.

202 One God And One Mediator

Preached at Providence Chapel, Croydon Sunday Morning
3rd December, 1865

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

1 Tim.2:5

We often find in the Scripture, and especially in the New Testament, what I may call concise summaries of divine truth; as, for instance: “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” These are so many short summings-up of divine truth. I have thought sometimes, instead of teaching children long catechisms that they cannot understand, if people would make them learn such summaries of truth, these things

might be brought, if it were the will of God, to the heart. Not only would it be useful in this point of view, but it would be useful to God's children. Sometimes we have to fall back on first principles. Sometimes we are placed in those circumstances, we have to fall back on the simplest truths of the gospel, such as, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” How sometimes we have to fall on the bosom of these simple declarations.

Again, as we get older in the things of God, we get simpler. Divine Truth is a very simple thing. What the soul in earnest seeks is, the simplicity of truth. When I go to hear a minister, it is not to hear fine words; I want food for my soul. When I preach myself, I want to break the bread of life, and give the people something to feed upon. All appeals to natural feelings may for the time seem to please, but it all passes away; but that is solid food, which is communicated by the Spirit to the soul through the Word that abides. So a text like this is a concise summary of divine truth; it lays it down as with a ray of light. God enable me to open it up, and bring before you the truth God has been pleased to deposit in it, that “there is one God, and one mediator between God and men;” and that this one Mediator between God and men is “the man Christ Jesus.”

We may connect our text with that verse I read this morning, in John 17:3, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” Here there is “one God;” that connects it with “the only true God.” “Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent;” this connects it with “the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

“There is one God.” This does not imply that there is one God, to the exclusion of the Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Divine Essence; but it is to direct our minds to the Father, and show us there is no access to the Father but through his dear Son. Until

the Lord is pleased to quicken our souls into divine life, we have no true knowledge that there is one God. I look sometimes on the time when the Lord was pleased to quicken my soul, in the early spring of 1827. I remember as distinctly all the events connected with it as if it were yesterday. I think I can find in the work of God in my soul, these four features. First, a great sense of eternal realities in my mind. I had talked of religion, gone to church, and said my prayers, yet never had any sense of eternal realities. But when the Lord, in the midst of deep affliction, laid the weight of eternal realities on my mind, then I felt there was an eternity. The next thing I felt was a great softness of spirit. I shed more tears in those six months than I have ever shed before or since. With that, thirdly, a communication of a spirit of prayer, resting on me night and day. And the fourth thing, a bending the ear to hear truth. I am convinced, whatever a man may know by hearing, preaching, or reading books, there is no real acquaintance with God, except there be some ray of divine light, when it shines into the mind out of the great and glorious I AM. "In thy light shall we see light." There must be a discovery, by taking away the veil of unbelief, a discovery of his glorious perfections.

"There is one God." We did not know there was one God; we lived, having no hope, and without God in the world, practically atheists. We talked about God, but, as to knowing there was a God in heaven that knew every secret thought, a God glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders, a God that could save and a God that could damn, a God before whom all creation was but a bubble and a breath. As to any saving knowledge of a God, we knew no more of that than the beasts that perish. But when God is pleased to rise in the soul on his own beams, and bring a discovery of his majesty and spotless holiness, and by the communication of divine light and life to the soul to draw forth a godly awe and fear of his great name, this is the beginning of wisdom, this is the implantation of divine life, under the drawing near of the Majesty of heaven. Then we know that there is one God.

"There is one God," and thou art a sinner before him. He searches thy heart. Before him you stand as a guilty criminal; and you must stand, for you cannot get away from him. His eyes follow you wherever you go. Go to the ends of the earth, his eye and hand are there too.

"There is one God," eternal and almighty, whom thou canst not elude, and who will bring thee to stand at his bar. Remember this, it is eternal life. Therefore, not to know the only true God is eternal death. I am not laying down a standard, but there must have come into your mind a discovery of this great God. Paul at Athens found an altar with this inscription, "To the Unknown God." They could not worship an unknown God; so they gave their gods names that they might worship them. How can we love or fear an unknown God? It must be a very uncertain thing to love or fear what is unknown. We know our friends, we know who and what they are, therefore we can love them. So if we are to worship and fear God, and have an acquaintance with him, it must be in knowing him as he only manifests himself to our souls. Now, perhaps, while all this is going on, we have not any right knowledge of the Mediator between God and men. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

Our faith first deals with God as infinite, omniscient, omnipresent. We may go on for a long time, with very dim views of there being a Mediator between God and us, to give us any measure of confidence, or good hope through grace. But when God begins his work he carries it on. He first well drills the soul into a knowledge of himself. I am very fond of what I may call good foundation work. In my time I have been a teacher; my aim was to drill the pupils well into the elements, ground them well into the beginning of things. So in religion. I like a religion in which a man has been well exercised in first principles. To be well exercised about the majesty of God, and the holiness of the God of heaven and earth, that will ballast him. If he is jumping here, and leaping there, before he is led into it by a divine hand, and drilled every step of the way, made to go back sometimes because he has

not learned it properly, drilled well in a holy law, in a knowledge of self, the man does not walk safely. But this being well grounded in him, as the Lord leads, he can follow. Some are in tribulation one half hour, in joy the next; then soon ripe, soon rotten, spring up like mushrooms and like mushrooms perish. As of old in the wilderness he drilled them well, so he drills his people well in the first elements now.

After a time we begin to feel there is no approaching this holy God. Perhaps we backslide; fresh guilt falls on the conscience; we find there is no dealing with this holy God. Like the children of Israel, we say, "Let not God speak, lest we die;" his majesty is too great, his law too strict. As we are exercised on these points, the Lord begins to open to us a little about Jesus, speaks to us of his blood and dying love, and brings in some great discovery of his suitability. Every now and then there will beam forth gleams and glances; clouds, mists and fogs; then the sun breaking in; then clouds again; then a breaking-in. By these breakings-in and glorious visitations we come to see, very dimly at first. I believe the work of grace is very gradual. I have no idea of these things being learned in a day. Doubts and fears, and then sweet teachings, to lead the soul along; then driven back through fear and a storm. But by various ways the suitability and preciousness of Jesus comes. In reading the Scriptures, the line of a hymn, or some good book, there is some breaking-in of divine love. All this seems to endear him, yet perhaps we know very little about him all the time; but he appears so blessed, that all his garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia. The soul leaps up, as it were, directly he comes; yet there is no powerful manifestation. Doubts and fears are still working, and yet good hope springs up. Every mark and testimony of the work is genuine; and yet, measured by some great experience, seems to come very short.

Whether it is so or not, the Lord brings his people to this point, that there must be a Mediator between God and men. Look at the words, "a Mediator." What does that imply? It implies two

parties; the word means a middle man, one that stands between two parties. It also implies two parties at variance, and that the Mediator is seeking to reconcile these two parties. Two friends are at variance, and another friend tries to bring them together again; but, in order to do this, he must have some dignity. Say (may it never happen), say that our Queen and the Prince of Wales were to fall out, to use a common expression, and say their variance raised up among the people a great feeling of discontent. Who is to bring them together? A lawyer's clerk? A member of the House of Commons? No; they would not have dignity enough. But perhaps the Prime Minister, or Earl Russell, might have dignity enough. Now, look at this spiritually. Look at God, holy; and man, sunk in sin. Who is to bring these together? What man? What angel? Now, view the beauty and blessedness, and every grace of our gracious Lord, the Son of the Father in truth and love. Who so suitable as the Son of God to mediate, containing in himself all the attributes of God? Let heaven, let earth, let all the realms of space be searched, where can one be found, except God's Son, to mediate between God and guilty sinners? He must be one whom both parties can trust. Now, God charges his angels with folly; the very heavens are not clean in his sight. He can trust his own Son, for he is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person. He can trust him; with a voice from heaven he proclaimed, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." How the heart springs up in a moment, "I will hear him." God can trust his Son, put all the matter in his hand, and feel certain he can bring it through. God's Son can be trusted with his Father's honour, but how can we trust him? How are we to know him? O the mystery! Well may the apostle say, "Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh."

We see that the Mediator must partake of our nature; that there was a divine necessity for him to become one of us, that he might do the work he had to do. None of God's attributes were to be sacrificed. They talk of God suspending his law. God might as

well suspend himself; ignorant men thus so talk. Heaven and earth must go to rack before that.

But to return to our subject. Who could do this mediatorial work but God's dear Son? How did he do it? By being made flesh, taking the flesh of the children in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Though it was human blood and suffering, and a human body, yet all the value of divinity was stamped on it. Therefore (wonder of wonders!) what blessedness is contained in it, that this Mediator was God and man! So as God-Man Mediator, he stands between us and God. One with man in relationship, and one with God as his Son. So we begin to drink a little at the fountain-head of all happiness, as this is opened up to us. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." You must know him now.

I have been speaking of glimpses and glances, but these will not satisfy, there must be a manifestation of his Person and work. As I lay in my bed one morning in a severe illness, I had a glorious view of the Son of God in his eternal deity, and in his humanity, and his glorious Person, as combining in that Person God and Man. When we get this, then we see the Mediator in all his blessedness. If I have been able to write on his divinity and humanity, it has been from what the Lord showed me on my bed many years ago. Though we often lose the sight of these things, and get into spots where all seems gone, yet the reality abides, there is one God and one Mediator. God could not deal with us except through a Mediator. "For there shall no man see me and live." We cannot deal with a holy God, but in the face of a Mediator. How beautifully has the apostle opened up this! "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This is seeing the Mediator. Here is the beauty and blessedness, that every perfection of God shines forth in the Mediator, the holiness of God, the justice of God, the purity, the majesty, and the glory. "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." View, then, these glorious

attributes, his unspeakable mercy, love, and pity to the sons of men. God could not reveal them till they came forth through the Mediator, and they all shine forth through him into a sinner's heart, compatible with the justice and goodness of God. O the blessedness of a Mediator between God and men! We have not to deal with an abstract God, but a God gracious and merciful, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, in the face of a Mediator. O the blessedness of there being a Mediator through whom every blessing comes and every prayer ascends! O the blessedness of a Mediator always at God's right hand, ever present there, ever living, ever loving, and able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him! Who shall describe what the uttermost of some poor soul is? He is able to save to the uttermost, consistent with every perfection of God. O the blessedness of the Mediator, the man Christ Jesus! It is a beautiful subject; I cannot enter into it this morning. The purity of his humanity, yet the tenderness of it; we can only approach him as God-Man. As man he has gone through all the temptations we are going through. As man he bore all the weight of the cross. He knows our frame, he still bears a human heart:

That human heart he still retains,
Though throned in highest bliss.

J. Hart.

The humanity of Jesus is raised up beyond all description; not infinite, but raised up into glorious union with his deity. So his deity shines through his humanity; the glorious humanity of Jesus illuminated with all the splendour of deity. Here is the man Christ Jesus; we have not to deal with an abstract God. You may think of the perfections of God till you may almost tear the hair off your head, all for the want of seeing God shine forth through the face of a Mediator. The sun itself we cannot see shining in the middle of the day; we can look at it through a cloud. When we come to a throne of grace, we come through the God-Man. When he is pleased to manifest himself to our souls, it forms the joy of

200 THE WISDOM OF MEN AND THE POWER OF GOD
our hearts, the beginning, middle, and end of all vital godliness.

203 The Wisdom of Men and the Power of God

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day
Morning,

June 24, 1866

“And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”

1 Cor. 2:3, 4, 5

What a contrast there is between the experience and language of the apostle Paul, and the experience and language of thousands who profess to be servants of God and preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This may seem to some a harsh, censorious statement, but before it be hastily condemned let us see whether it be founded on truth or not. Take, then, a wide and general survey of those who call themselves and are generally considered to be the ministers of the gospel at the present day. Taking together Church and Dissent, we may safely assume that there are at least twenty thousand men in this country who profess to be servants of God and ministers of Jesus Christ. For bear in mind that they are either this or nothing, nay, worse than nothing, for if a man call himself a minister he necessarily calls himself thereby a minister of Christ, unless he would brand his own name and character as that of an impostor, and thus proclaim himself to his own shame a servant of the world and a minister of Satan. Now of these twenty thousand men, illness, old age, and infirmities, love of ease and sloth or other circumstances may furnish a quota of five thousand idlers, or unemployed, such as sinecurist rectors, silent curates, or unattached ministers of various denominations who sigh for a pulpit but sigh in vain. These, then, we will set aside as willingly or

THE WISDOM OF MEN AND THE POWER OF GOD 201
unwillingly silent, and assume that fifteen thousand are standing up this morning in the name of God to preach what they call the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now out of this numerous host, fifteen thousand men, how many, in the largest exercise of charity, could we find whose experience or whose language correspond with that of the apostle Paul as expressed in the text? And yet I dare say we should highly offend every one of them if we even hinted that they did not preach the same gospel which he preached, or serve the same Lord whom he served. How apt most are to take things upon trust, at least in religion, without search, inquiry, or examination. Let men pass through a certain fixed course of study, let them be ordained by some competent and acknowledged authority, let them claim or assume certain titles, let them wear a certain dress, and at once they are received as ministers of Jesus Christ. The mode may differ, but in this point Church and Dissent fully agree. Hence arise the many thousands of whom I have spoken.

But such a mixed and miscellaneous company may almost remind us of Gideon's army, the thirty-two thousand men who were summoned with the trumpet to make war against the Midianites. They formed to the eye a mighty host—all of them soldiers ready for the battle. But though thus gathered together as soldiers of the Lord's army, God saw them not as men or even as Gideon saw them. The Lord therefore said unto Gideon, “The people that are with thee are too many.” He next bade him proclaim in the ears of the people, “Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead.” This at once made a clean sweep of twenty-two thousand. The conscious cowards availed themselves of this ticket of leave, and hurried off from the camp by morning light. Would not a similar proclamation, in spirit if not in the letter, were there any sufferings to be undergone, any hard fighting to be endured, any sacrifice of money, prosperity, or character to be made, have almost similar consequences with our modern host? How fearful and afraid would a large number of these warriors be of losing their reputation, or their salary, or

their congregations, or of offending the world, their wives, their children, or their relations. We should soon find what a clear sweep such a proclamation would make if carried out. How many would stand the test if persecution were to be undergone, or any sacrifices to be made of property, not to say of life? But even then there were too many left with Gideon after they were departed. The ten thousand, who were more stout-hearted than their fellows, were still too many to do the Lord's work and fight the Lord's battles. There was another sweep to be made by the trial of coming down to the water. Those that bowed down upon their knees to drink and those that lapped putting their hand to their mouth were to be distinguished and separated from one another. The former, typical of the carnal who drink of God's favours in providence recklessly and unthankfully, bury as, it were lips, mouth, and all in the stream of prosperity without the intervention of faith, were sent away every one to his place. Is it not too true that money is the chief aim of thousands who seek after the ministry? And what they thus get they receive as their right, their lawful tithes or their fixed salary, without receiving it in faith and gratitude as the gift of the Lord. Thus are they well represented by those in Gideon's host who drank by dipping their mouths in the water. And how many were left who drank by lapping the water out of their hand—typical of those who receive by the hand of faith God's favours in providence and grace, and live a life of faith on the Son of God? Why, only three hundred. Thus, out of this mighty host, there were only left at last three hundred to fight the Lord's battles. Now if all the ministers in this land who are destitute of a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who receive their salaries and incomes, tithes and offerings as their rightful due without receiving them from the hand of the Lord in faith, love, and gratitude, were similarly set apart, would not this make a mighty sweep? And though I have neither the right nor the wish, nor even the means or opportunity of making any such calculation, I can but express my opinion that it would be happy for England were there three hundred men

THE WISDOM OF MEN AND THE POWER OF GOD 203
out of all the professed ministers of Jesus Christ who could use the language of the apostle Paul as "determined to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified;" and whose "speech and whose preaching was not with enticing words of men's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Yes, I repeat it, it would be a happy day were there as many men to preach the gospel in our beloved country as there were men to fight the battle of the Lord under Gideon amongst the Midianites.

But to leave men and come to things, for I shall neither weary you nor myself with a longer introduction, let us then see whether we can find in our text anything that may be for our instruction, edification, or consolation this morning. The apostle tells us in it both his weakness and his strength, his fears and his hopes, what he renounced and what he held fast, what fruit he desired, and what fruit he found as a minister of Jesus Christ.

I.—See him, then, first, in the weakness of his confession: "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling."

II.—See him, secondly, in the honesty of his renunciation: "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom."

III.—See him, thirdly, in the strength of his preaching: "But in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

IV.—See him, fourthly, in the fruit of his testimony: "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

I.—It may seem at first sight surprising to us that a man of such eminent natural abilities—and I suppose few men who ever lived possessed by nature a larger mind; a man so specially called by divine revelation; a man of such deep and varied experience, as we find him when speaking of himself, Romans 7. and other passages; a man who had been caught up into the third heaven and there seen and heard unspeakable sights and words; a man so gifted with eloquence that there is scarcely his equal to be found even amongst the greatest orators of classical antiquity: that this

man; so richly furnished by nature and so thoroughly qualified by grace should come before a few poor people at Corinth, all of whom were as inferior to himself naturally and spiritually, as one man could be to another, and yet be “with them in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.” How can we explain this? Let us see whether we can get into the mystery; for we do not see much of it in our modern preachers. They are certainly not Pauls in preaching, whether we view their abilities, or their gifts, or their grace. Why then should they not also be “in weakness, fear, and trembling,” when they have so much less to support them in the work of the ministry than he had? It is indeed one of those mysteries which are hidden from the eyes of the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes. Some little personal experience however of the mystery will be the best clue through the labyrinth, the best solution of the enigma.

i. The first thing which this man of God felt in the exercise of his ministry was weakness.

1. It might have been in part bodily weakness. A man could hardly have passed through what he endured without its leaving some marked effects upon the body. “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus,” he says to the Galatians. (Gal. 6:17.) He gives us, in another epistle, a catalogue of his bodily sufferings for Christ’s sake: “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. 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.” (2 Cor. 11:24, 25.) And after enumerating a variety of “perils,” he adds those touching words: “In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” (2 Cor. 11:27, 28.) This long series of bodily sufferings must have told upon his strength and constitution, and made him prematurely old, so that in writing to Philemon, when he could not have been above 56 or 57 years of age, a time of life when many ministers are in the

THE WISDOM OF MEN AND THE POWER OF GOD 205
prime of their strength, he calls himself “Paul the aged.” Knowing so much myself of bodily weakness, and feeling it at the present moment, I have perhaps, invalid-like, dwelt too long on this point, and therefore shall not press it any farther.

2. But whether this bodily weakness were little or much, it was as nothing compared with his spiritual weakness. And was there not good reason why he should deeply and continually feel this? Look at the continual drain upon him by the thorn in the flesh—that running sore, of which the effect would be to drain away all his creature strength. It is true that he was so blessedly supported under his infirmities, and the strength of Christ made so perfect in them, that he could even glory and take pleasure in them; but infirmities still they were, and were felt by him as such. And what does infirmity mean but weakness? Look also at the continual conflict which he had with his corrupt nature, as described so vividly and so graphically in Romans 7. He could not go through that without its bringing down all the strength of his natural heart. Even the very manifestations of Christ and the glorious revelations with which he was so peculiarly and blessedly favoured, though he was strengthened by them to endure all things for the elect’s sake, yet weakened and brought down his natural strength; for we know that any great discoveries of the love and goodness of God have a powerful effect upon the natural frame; for in its present condition, neither body nor mind can bear much excess of sorrow or joy, especially of a spiritual nature. How strikingly was this the case with the prophet Daniel: “As for me, Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me.” So also: “Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.” (Dan. 10:8.) And again, he says, “O my Lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me, and I have retained no strength.” (Dan. 10:16.) Similarly we may well suppose that Paul, in one sense, sank, though in another he rose under the weight of his

glorious manifestations. There were therefore abundant reasons why he should stand before the people in weakness. But consider also the burdens he had to carry, such as the responsibility of his position as an ambassador of Christ, so deeply felt by him; the difficulties he had to contend with from within and from without, all standing in formidable array against him and the gospel which he had to preach; his sense of the value of immortal souls, to whom his ministry was addressed; the pressure of eternal realities ever abiding on his spirit, with many deep and solemn thoughts of that day in which all secrets are to be laid bare. Is there a man who knows anything of spiritual exercises who does not also know what weakness is, from this very circumstance, that all the power of nature fails and falls when it comes into contact with divine and eternal realities? But the very nature of his message, the very subject of his preaching, the very character of his testimony were such as made him stand up in weakness. For what was it? What Mr. Hart well calls in his *Experience*, prefixed to his hymns, “the despised mystery of a crucified man.” Yes; to let him speak in his own language: “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” (1 Cor. 2:1, 2.) He well knew what this preaching would be considered to be, and that Christ crucified would be “unto the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness.” Though he knew that the foolishness of God, as men counted it, was wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men, yet having such a testimony to bear—so strange, so unheard of, so despised by, and so abhorrent alike to Jew and Gentile, he could not but feel the weakness of himself as a preacher of the despised cross. O that we could see more of this felt and acknowledged weakness in the professed servants of God! It would make them and their testimony far more acceptable than it now is to the living family. It is painful for the minister himself to feel. I never felt it more or perhaps so much as I do now, but it

THE WISDOM OF MEN AND THE POWER OF GOD 207
is good for the people that the minister should feel it, that he may seek and find the strength of Christ made perfect in it.

ii. But he had also his fear. What fear was this? Certainly not “the fear of a man that bringeth a snare;” such a carnal fear we cannot find a trace of in the man or his ministry. His fear was of another kind, and arose from quite other causes. It arose, then, partly from a solemn apprehension of the Majesty of God; a dread reverence and holy awe of that great and glorious Lord with whom he had to do. Blended with this, there was a godly fear lest he might in any way by a misplaced word, or by any unwary action, put a stumbling block in the way of any seeker after or lover of truth, or that he might not commend himself as a servant of God to the people’s conscience with such authority, power, and evidence as he would wish. Let us not forget that as a man he had all these infirmities. They cleaved to him as they cleaved to us. What he wrote to the Churches he wrote by divine inspiration, and of his ministry generally, as an apostle of the Lord, he could say, “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” (1 Cor. 2:13.) But that he had his fears is evident from his own words: “Without were fightings, within were fears.” (2 Cor. 7:5.) And that these fears did not arise from cowardice, unwillingness to suffer persecution for Christ’s sake, dread of death or even martyrdom, is equally evident from his boldness under the most trying circumstances, as when he would, but for the disciples preventing him, have entered in unto the people at Ephesus, when they were like wild beasts ready to tear him to pieces in the very theatre. (Acts 19:29-31.) It was not then that he feared the cross, as to his own share of suffering, but lest the preaching of the cross should not meet with the longed-for reception. United with this, was a sense of the powerlessness of man, both in himself to give, and in them to receive any blessing from the preaching of the cross, and lest his testimony should in any way fall to the ground.

III. A sense of all these things, combined with others into which we cannot penetrate, for who can but partially read the heart of an apostle? so deeply affected him as to make him tremble, and that in no small degree. "I was with you in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling." Not that he trembled through any carnal apprehension of his hearers, but under a sense of the greatness of the work, his own inability rightly to perform it, the message he had to carry, and the powers of earth and hell arrayed against it. He had felt the power of God's word upon his heart, and this made him tremble. This is an especial mark of the Lord's saints and servants. "To this man will I look, even to him that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." (Isa. 66:2.) "Fear ye not me, saith the Lord? Will ye not tremble at my presence?" (Jer. 5:22.) Even a sense of God's goodness makes the soul tremble as with holy awe. It was so with Daniel, for though the Lord said, "O Daniel, a man greatly beloved," yet we read, "When he had spoken this word, I stood trembling." (Dan. 10:11.) And this made Jeremiah say, "They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness, and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it." (Jer. 33:9.) Thus Paul stood, as every servant of God will in a measure stand, and just in proportion to his knowledge of divine realities for himself, before these few poor Corinthians, "in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling." What a noble, what an honourable confession! What humility, sincerity, and honesty, what a pattern and example for every servant of God. But I may well add, what a solemn rebuke to the levity manifested in too many a pulpit in the present day. What a keen and cutting reproof, too, of that arrogance, pride, self-conceit, vain confidence, and daring presumption in which so many men stand who profess to preach the gospel of the grace of God. What? that this man, compared with whom they are but pigmies in the presence of a giant; that this man, who had more grace in his little finger, than they in all their body; that this man of such deep experience, unrivalled eloquence, and powerful gifts should be in weakness, fear, and much trembling; and that

THE WISDOM OF MEN AND THE POWER OF GOD 209
they should stand up in such arrogant pretension as if they were warranted to be strong where an apostle was weak, they to presume where a man of God feared, and they to be bold where he who had been in the third heaven trembled!

I hope I can say for myself, that I stand up before you this morning, for the first time of my visit this year, in a little of the same spirit of which the apostle speaks. In weakness of body you all know and can probably see; but in weakness too of soul, which is better felt by preacher and hearer than seen. In fear too, as feeling my own inability to preach the word of life as I would desire to preach it, and my dependence on the Lord for every gracious thought and word. The apostle could say, "in much trembling." I must omit the word "much," for I have not his experience or grace; yet would I wish to tremble at God's word. And if I do not actually tremble before you, it is not from levity, arrogance, or presumption, as I sensibly feel my inability to handle the things of God with that light, life, and liberty which I desire, and feeling in some measure the solemn matters which I have to dispense, and the opposition raised up against them by the power of unbelief in my own heart, and the power of unbelief in yours.

II.—But we pass on to the nature and character of the apostle's renunciation. "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom."

He gives us two sides of his preaching, the negative and the positive, what it was not and what it was, what he renounced and what he held fast by.

Our present point, therefore, is what I have called the honesty of his renunciation.

By "man's wisdom," we may understand, all that wisdom which a man can actually acquire by his own exertions or the exertions of others, and especially that branch of it whereby he addresses himself to the art of persuasion, for the apostle speaks of "enticing words of man's wisdom." The word "enticing" is in the margin "persuasive," or, as we now say, "persuasive." It includes, therefore,

every branch of skilful oratory, whether it be logical reasoning to convince our understanding, or appeals to our feelings to stir up our passions, or new and striking ideas to delight our intellect, or beautiful and eloquent language to please and captivate our imagination. All these “enticing words” of man’s wisdom—the very things which our popular preachers most speak and aim at, this great apostle renounced, discarded, and rejected. He might have used them all if he liked. He possessed, as I have already said, an almost unequalled share of natural ability, great learning according to the learning of the day, a singularly keen, penetrating intellect, a wonderful command of the Greek language, a flow of ideas most varied, striking, and original, and powers of oratory and eloquence such as have been given to few. He might therefore have used enticing words of man’s wisdom, had he wished or thought it right to do so, but he would not: he saw what deceptiveness was in them, and at best they were mere arts of oratory. He saw that these enticing words, though they might touch the natural feelings, work upon the passions, captivate the imagination, convince the understanding, persuade the judgment, and to a certain extent force their way into men’s minds; yet when all was done that could thus be done, it was merely man’s wisdom which had done it; and as I shall presently show, that the faith which stood in that wisdom could rise no higher than its source, and would drop when nature dropped and fell. Earthly wisdom cannot communicate heavenly faith. He would not therefore use enticing words of man’s wisdom, whether it were force of logical argument, or appeal to natural passions, or the charms of vivid eloquence, or the beauty of poetical composition, or the subtle nicety of well arranged sentences. He would not use any of these enticing words of man’s wisdom to draw people into a profession of religion, when their heart was not really touched by God’s grace, or their consciences wrought upon by a divine power. So to work upon their reasoning faculties, so to insinuate the truth into their judgment, so to take captive their natural intellect, so bend their neck to the gospel yoke; without

THE WISDOM OF MEN AND THE POWER OF GOD 211
 their first learning of him who was meek and lowly in heart, he well knew would neither save their souls nor glorify God. He came to win souls for Jesus Christ, not converts to his own powers of oratorical persuasion; to turn men from darkness to light; and from the power of Satan unto God, not to charm their ears by poetry and eloquence; to bring them out of the vilest of sins that they might be washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God, and not entertain or amuse their minds whilst sin and Satan still maintained dominion in their hearts. This was unworthy of the position which he occupied as an ambassador of God, unbecoming the place he stood in as a minister of Jesus Christ. It was having recourse to subtlety, which was not becoming that godly profession which he maintained, that tenderness of conscience which he was possessed of, that reverence of God with which he was deeply imbued, and the way in which he desired to approve himself as God’s own sent and commissioned servant. Those converts, if they were worthy of the name, who were so gained would not have stood out to the end, or eventually proved themselves to be children of God and vessels of mercy. Fish caught in that net would have to be thrown back into the sea. Corn sown, grown, and reaped in that field when put into the mill would never become meal sufficiently fine to make bread to be put upon the Master’s table. A flock brought together by such arts would have to be separated by the keen eye and hand of the great Shepherd from the fold of his own gathering and feeding. All the labour spent in bringing together a church and congregation of professing people by the power of logical argument and appeals to their natural consciences would be utterly lost, as regards fruit for eternity; for a profession so induced by him and so made by them would leave them just as they were, in all the depths of unregeneracy, with their sins unpardoned, their persons unjustified, and their souls unsanctified. He discarded therefore all these ways of winning over converts as unbecoming his position, as unworthy of the office he occupied, as deceitful to the souls of

men, and as dishonouring to God. It required much grace to do this, to throw aside what he might have used, and renounce what most men, as gifted as he, would have gladly used: for he occupied a peculiar position. He spoke at Corinth amongst a people highly cultivated, and to whom such a ministry would have been very acceptable. It was at this period the grand metropolis of Greece, famed for its commerce, as most beautifully and conveniently situated between two seas; and though not equal to Athens as a place of philosophy, poetry, and the higher arts, yet as a great commercial entrepot, it was thronged both with inhabitants and visitors from all parts of Greece, Italy, and Asia; and as wealth increased so did luxury and refinement, not only in vice but in the cultivation of the arts and sciences of that day. It was therefore of all places one of the most difficult to which to come as Paul did, with a simple, unadorned testimony of a crucified Christ; for “the Greeks sought after wisdom,” and prized oratory and eloquence in a degree of which we now have little conception. They possessed a most expressive and beautiful language, adapted above all others to oratory, whether to convince the intellect, sway the passions, or charm the ear. What a temptation therefore to Paul to employ this weapon and to win them over by meeting them on that ground on which he was so well qualified to stand. But no; grace had taught him that it was not by human might or creature power, but by the Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

What a lesson is here for ministers. How anxious are some men to shine as great preachers. How they covet and often aim at some grand display of what they call eloquence to charm their hearers, and win not souls to Christ but praise and honour to self. How others try to argue men into religion, or by appealing to their natural feelings, sometimes to frighten them with pictures of hell, and sometimes to allure them by descriptions of heaven. But all such arts, for they are no better, must be discarded by a true servant of God, and he must be willing and desirous to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

III.—But we will now endeavour to show the affirmative side of the question—what Paul’s ministry was as opposed to what it was not—what I have called the strength of his preaching: “My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” Let me endeavour to unfold the meaning of these words, and show how widely and blessedly they differ from the “enticing words of man’s wisdom.”

1. What, then, first, are we to understand by the expression “demonstration of the Spirit?” By the word demonstration we generally understand a mode of proof so complete that there can remain not a shadow of doubt that the point is proved beyond all possibility of its ever being disputed, much more overthrown. It is a mathematical term; and those who have learnt even the first principles of mathematical reasoning fully understand what demonstration means; for in that science not a single point is advanced, nor a step taken in the argument, which is not fully and clearly demonstrated, that is, proved beyond the shadow of a doubt. The apostle, therefore, in addressing himself to a people who thoroughly knew the meaning of the term, for mathematics were much studied in that day, adopts that word and applies it to spiritual things; in other words, he lays it down as a fundamental truth, that there is such a demonstration by the power of the Spirit of the things of God to a man’s soul, that he is as certain of the truth and reality of those things as a mathematician can be satisfied with the demonstration of a mathematical problem. It is perfectly true that whole mode of proof differs both in its subject, nature, and end. Nothing can more widely differ than nature and grace, reason and revelation, the teaching of man and the teaching of God, the properties of an angle or a circle and the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. But the soul requires proof as well as the mind, the heart as well as the head, the conscience as well as the intellect—different indeed in kind because they so widely differ in nature, but agreeing in this, that neither is fully satisfied unless the point

is so fully settled, so completely and thoroughly determined, that no doubt whatever can rest upon the matter. In human reasoning, demonstration cannot usually be obtained except in mathematics, but not so in divine. There grace outshines and exceeds nature, for the teaching and testimony of the blessed Spirit is always demonstrative, that is, convincing beyond the possibility of doubt. Even in his first work as the conviction of sin his proof is demonstrative. None who have felt the guilt, weight, and burden of sin can doubt that they are sinners, none who have felt the anger of the Almighty can doubt his wrath against transgression and transgressors. Indeed nothing short of the Spirit's illuminating power, his vivifying, renewing, and regenerating grace, and the authority with which he accompanies the word of God to the soul, can ever produce that demonstration of eternal realities, whereby we believe them as beyond the shadow of a doubt.

But if this be true, whence comes it that so many of the family of God, except at favoured moments, are tossed up and down on a sea of doubts and fears, so that what they believe they seem hardly able to realize with such clearness and certainty that it is put beyond the shadow of a doubt? This does not arise from divine teaching. It is not the work of the Spirit to produce doubts and fears, but to overcome them. And yet we are continually subject to them. Infidel thoughts fly across the mind; doubts and questionings suggest themselves; Satan is busy in plying his arguments; a guilty conscience falls too readily under his accusations; painful recollections of past slips, falls, and backslidings strengthen the power of unbelief, so that to come to a spot wherein there is not the least shadow of a doubt of divine realities, and, what is far more, of our own interest in them, is a rare circumstance, and only attainable at those favoured moments when the Lord is pleased to shine into the soul and settle the matter between himself and our conscience. But these very doubts, these very questionings, these cutting, killing fears, these anxious questionings work together for good, and are mercifully overruled for our spiritual

THE WISDOM OF MEN AND THE POWER OF GOD 215
benefit. What else has brought us to this point that nothing short of demonstration will satisfy the soul really born and taught of God? It must have demonstration: nothing else will do. We cannot live and die upon uncertainties. It won't do to be always in a state that we don't know whether we are going to heaven or hell; to be tossed up and down on a sea of uncertainty, scarcely knowing who commands the ship, what is our destination, what our present course, or what will be the end of the voyage. Now all human wisdom leaves us upon this sea of uncertainty. It is useful in nature but useless in grace. It is foolish and absurd to despise all human learning, wisdom, and knowledge. Without them we should be a horde of wild, wandering savages. But it is worse than foolish to make human wisdom our guide to eternity, and make reason the foundation of our faith or hope. What you thus believe to-day, you will disbelieve to-morrow; all the arguments that may convince your reasoning mind, all the appeals to your natural passions, which may seem for the time to soften your heart, and all the thoughts swaying to and fro which may sometimes lead you to hope you are right and sometimes make you fear you are wrong,—all these will be found insufficient when the soul comes into any time of real trial and perplexity. We want, therefore, demonstration to remove and dispel all these anxious questionings, and settle the whole matter firmly in our heart and conscience; and this nothing can give us but the Spirit by revealing Christ, taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto us, applying the word with power to our hearts, and bringing the sweetness, reality, and blessedness of divine things into our soul. It is only in this way that he overcomes all unbelief and infidelity, doubt and fear, and sweetly assures us that all is well between God and the soul. It is therefore not demonstration simply, not demonstration of the word, as if there were some innate proof and power in the word itself to demonstrate its own truth, though doubtless it is so when the Spirit shines upon it, but it is "the demonstration of the Spirit." This is very necessary to observe, for you will often

hear the word of God spoken of, as if the Bible possessed not only demonstrative proof of its own inspiration, but was able to give that demonstration to the souls of men. But the demonstration not of the word but of the Spirit in, through, and by the word, is the thing wanted to convert sinners and satisfy saints. This is proof indeed, not cold and hard like mathematical demonstration, but warm, living, softening, and sanctifying, being the very light, life and power of God himself in the soul. Now Paul's preaching was this demonstration of the Spirit. The Spirit of God speaking in him and by him so demonstrated the truth of what he preached that it came, as he elsewhere speaks, "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.) There are now no Pauls; and yet, unless we have a measure of the same demonstration of the Spirit, all that is said by us in the pulpit drops to the ground; it has no real effect; there is no true or abiding fruit—no fruit unto eternal life. If there be in it some enticing words of man's wisdom, it may please the mind of those who are gratified by such arts; it may stimulate and occupy the attention for the time; but there it ceases, and all that has been heard fades away like a dream of the night; and, as regards the family of God, we may apply to all such preaching the words of the prophet: "It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite." (Isa. 29:8.) But anything which is communicated by the Holy Ghost, which is demonstrated by the Spirit to your soul, which is brought into your heart with light, life, and power, sealed and witnessed by that sacred Teacher and divine Comforter that abides; you take it home with you; it comforts you, not only at the time, but when you look back to it in days to come; it is a bright spot in your soul's experience, when you can believe that then and there God was pleased to bless his word to your soul, and seal it home with a sweet influence upon your conscience. This is "demonstration of

2. And where there is this, there is "power:" for the apostle adds, "and of power." The grand distinguishing mark of the kingdom of God is, that "it is not in word, but in power." Thus power is given to believe in the Son of God—and we cannot believe truly and savingly in him till power is put forth; power to receive the Lord in all his covenant characters and gracious relationships in the gospel of his grace; power to believe that what God has done he does for ever; power to come out of every doubt and fear into the blessed light and liberty of the truth which maketh free. To feel, enjoy, and realise this power is what all the quickened saints of God are really seeking and longing for. And though some of them may not be able exactly to express what their souls are in search of, and without which they feel they are of all men the most miserable, yet they are inwardly sighing, seeking, and longing for power to attend the word of God to their souls, to lift them out of their darkness, doubt, and fear, and give them some sweet assurance that their sins are pardoned, their backslidings healed, and they themselves saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

IV.—But we now come to our fourth and last point—the anticipated fruit of the apostle's testimony. It was that the faith of those to whom he thus preached in demonstration of the Spirit and of power "should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

1. You see from this that there is a faith which "stands in the wisdom of men." Such a faith as this Paul would have nothing to do with. He knew how deceptive it was, and that it was a mere imitation of the faith of God's elect. He perfectly knew that such a faith was wrong in its beginning, wrong in its middle, and would be wrong in its end. If our faith have no other beginning than the wisdom of men, it can no more rise above that wisdom than water can rise above its level. A stream must always resemble its source, and can never be purer or clearer than the fountain whence it springs. Thus, the faith which springs from human wisdom will at

every part of its course be of the same nature as its fountain. And as its beginning and its middle, so will be its end. It will die with us when we die; it will come to an end with all human wisdom; it will perish with all the fruits of human intellect; when poetry, philosophy, eloquence, and oratory perish, then the faith which stands in these arts and artifices will perish with them. We may lay it down as a fixed axiom, that is, a certain and indisputable truth, that whatever is produced by the wisdom of men will die when human wisdom dies. Now what can all the wisdom of man do for us in the solemn concerns of eternity? How helpless, how powerless is man's wisdom when we come to deal with God and conscience. A faith, therefore, which stands in that wisdom can endure no real trial. It vanishes on a bed of sickness. The least display of the anger of the Almighty, the least burden of guilt upon the conscience, the least fear of death burns it all up, and leaves it neither root nor branch. But what a miserable faith this must be to leave us just at the moment when we want it most. How dreadful the thought that we have been nursing a faith which, when we are stretched upon a bed of sickness, affords us no God to believe in as our Father and our Friend; no Christ to look to as a Saviour who has washed us from all our sins in his precious blood; no Holy Ghost to apply that precious blood to our conscience, and bring the promises home with sweetness and savour to our heart. What a state to be in, and have little else but darkness, confusion, fear, and dread shutting us up in distress and bondage.

2. But now look at the other side of the question. Let me assume that you have a faith which stands in the power of God, a faith which he was pleased at the first to breathe into your soul with his own mouth to communicate with his own heavenly breath, and raise up by his own powerful hand. Now this faith, though it may have been weak, and may still be weak, yet has had this peculiar mark attending it from its first implantation, that it has always stood in the power of God. As you were not able to give it yourself, you were never able to draw it forth into any living exercise. When

it was weak, you could not strengthen it; when it was languishing, you could not revive it; and when you wanted to make use of it, it was not in your power to enjoy it to any satisfaction to your own mind, to any peace or rest in your own conscience. But it stood in the power of God. When he was pleased to draw it forth, then it acted; and when he revived it, then he lifted up its head. Such a faith as this stands in the power of God; and as standing in the power of God, it will have another mark of its coming from Him; it is a faith which will always be tried, and that to the utmost. If our faith stood in the wisdom of men, we could always make use of it, and should never be tried about it. It would be like every other fruit of human skill or industry. Anything, for instance, that I may know, any knowledge which I may have acquired, I can always use. Ask me any question on any branch of learning or study, I can give an answer at any time, assuming that I know it. It is always at hand, ready for use, and I can take it out, and give you the time by it, as easily as if it were the watch in my waistcoat pocket. Similarly, you who are professional men, or engaged in business, whatever it be, or skilled artisans and mechanics, can always turn your hand to it; can always make use of the skill you possess or the knowledge you have acquired. Unless indeed you could do this, you would soon be without business, employment, work, or wages. Now a faith which stands in the wisdom of men, is just what your knowledge or skill, ability or dexterity is in natural things. You find, therefore, people who can always believe just in the same way as you can always exercise your skill in business or work, or answer any question put to you which is connected with it, or deal readily and summarily with any matter with which you are acquainted, and which lies within your peculiar province. So these people can always believe, because they believe in the same way as you understand your trade or profession, and can make use of it in the same way. But the children of God cannot do this, because their faith does not stand in the wisdom of men. If their faith stood in the wisdom of men, they could always use it, never

be at a loss about it, and bring it forth into active and profitable employment, as a banker employs his capital to profitable use. That their faith is not thus at their own disposal, is so trying to the partakers of the faith of God's elect; and yet it is a strong proof that their faith stands in the power of God. It is blessed enough when that power is put forth; but where and what are they when that power is suspended? Tried, deeply tried. They feel put into circumstances of great difficulty. They want to use their faith, and they cannot. If it stood in the wisdom of men, they could make use of it; but they find that they cannot make use of it. Why? simply from this circumstance—God has wrought a conviction deeply in their soul from the very first, that no other faith can do them any good but what stands in his power. The blessed Spirit taught them this lesson when he first convinced them of unbelief, and his lessons are for life. They are indelible, ineffaceable. They have tried the other kind of faith, for this they had, and plenty of it, in their days of unregeneracy, and found it wanting. Now those who have not this faith, the faith of which Jesus is the Author and Finisher, have not spiritual discernment to see what true faith is. They think they have faith. “Why should they not,” they say, “have as good a faith as you? Why should they not believe as well and as rightly as you? Is there not the same God for them, and the same Christ, and the same grace as you claim for yourself, as if a privileged person, and if you were a partner in a monopoly of saving religion? Why should they not believe just as acceptably to God, just as savingly to themselves? Who are you to come and judge them, and say they have no faith? Why, they are as good as you, and better too any day, for they live above doubts and fears, in which you are muddling all your days!” Aye, but God has taught you a little secret, which he has not taught them. He has taught you what faith is, and has made you to see that faith stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. And though you are often sadly pressed down with a sense of creature weakness, yet you know there have been times and seasons in your soul when

THE WISDOM OF MEN AND THE POWER OF GOD 221
 you have felt the power; when you could say, “My Lord and my God;” when Jesus was revealed to you and in you; when you could take hold of him by faith, embrace him in the arms of love and affection, and feel him near, dear and precious to your soul. Those seasons taught you that your faith stood in the power of God. But you would like it always to be so. You don't like to come into states and circumstances when you cannot have the full command of your faith. You are like a man who has a large business and a small capital; you cannot get the money when and as you want. You are therefore hedged up here and hedged up there, and cannot do as other people do, because you have not the capital which they have. Here is your neighbour with a large capital and a flourishing, daily increasing business. He carries the day, whilst you with your small capital can hardly get on. But, he after a time may be in difficulties, whilst your sinking head may be held up and you may come off with flying colours when he may have to put up his shutters. So it is in grace. These men with their strong faith are like some of our banks and discount houses in the late panic. Who doubted their stability? The Bank of England was thought no safer than one of them. But a sudden blast came upon them and down they fell like a house of cards. So some of these strong believers may go down some day like the banks lately broke, and for the same reason. They have been financing, trading with borrowed capital, and speculating with the wisdom of men, instead of depending upon the power of God. When such strong believers, as they count themselves and others count them, fall, it sadly stumbles many a child of God, as fearing in this general crash perhaps he may go next. But the Lord is the strength of his heart; and his faith stands in the power of God and not in the wisdom of men. Thus, though it is the most trying place we can be well put into, to have a faith we cannot make use of when we want, yet after all it is turned into a blessing; because the Lord comes in at those times when all our creature faith comes to nought. It is the unspeakable mercy of the saints of God that, at such seasons, the Lord sometimes comes

in with his mighty grace and draws the faith which stands in his power into living exercise, revives it, puts fresh life into it, and smiles upon it with his own smile of approbation. It will be found in the end that the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, but that victory over every foe and every fear is assured to the poor, needy children of God.

The apostle had a large view of these things which I have this morning attempted to bring before you. I can only handle them with stumps; he could handle them with fingers. I can only drop a few fragmentary remarks just to cast a little light upon these two kinds of faith; but he had a large view of these matters, and a deep, spiritual insight into the difference between them both in their nature and origin, their course and their end. He was therefore determined, in the strength of God, to renounce all enticing words of man's wisdom, and seek for the power of God in his preaching and in their faith. Gladly would I walk in his footsteps, and discard all financing operations, come to realities, solid bullion, sterling gold, and deal only with those matters which save the soul. We may think it strange that a man of his abilities, learning, and great acquirements should stand before the people in weakness, fear, and in much trembling, and not use his intellect and employ his eloquence, or, as he might have done, carry all before him by the force of his words. But we see how the grace of God shines in him thereby. He dropped into that place where God should be all in all and he himself be nothing. And what was the fruit of this self-denial and this faith? We see how God honoured his testimony, what a church of living saints was raised up in Corinth, who came behind in no gift of knowledge or utterance, and were called unto the fellowship of the Son of God.

I stand before you this morning in weakness and in fear, but with a sincere and earnest desire that my speech and my preaching may have been in some measure in a like demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith may not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening,
June 24, 1866

“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”

Hebrews 5:7, 8, 9

The high priest under the law was the typical representative of the Lord Jesus as the great High Priest over the house of God. As such he occupied a very distinguished position. The service and ministrations of the sanctuary were limited to his tribe—the tribe of Levi; and the priesthood was confined to his family—the family of Aaron. To him was restricted the supreme administration of all sacred things, and he was the final arbiter of all controversies. In order therefore that his person and office might be invested with a peculiar sanctity, he was inaugurated with great solemnity, being clothed after an ablution of the whole body with the sacred habiliments, and then anointed with a precious oil, prepared and preserved for this exclusive purpose. Besides the usual priestly dress, there were four garments which he wore peculiar to himself. These were, 1, first, the coat or robe of the ephod, on the hem of which were fixed seventy-two golden bells, between which there ran an equal number of golden pomegranates; 2, secondly, the ephod, which was a vest made of fine twisted linen, splendidly wrought with gold and purple; and on each shoulder strap was an onyx stone, on which were engraved, six on each stone, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; thirdly, the breastplate of judgment of the same texture and workmanship as the ephod, in which were

twelve precious stones, bearing, one on each stone, the names of the twelve tribes; and, fourthly, a crown or mitre, having on it a plate of pure gold, on which was inscribed, "Holiness to the Lord." These garments were made "for glory and for beauty" (Exod. 28:2), and were distinct from the "holy garments" (Lev. 16:4) of linen which he wore on the solemn day of atonement. He was thus, as wearing two distinct sets of garments, typical of Christ in his humiliation and his exaltation, of what he was and what he is. Clad in his holy linen garments, he sacrificed the sin-offering and took the blood within the veil; but when he had made an end of reconciling the holy place, the tabernacle, and the altar, had laid the sins of the children of Israel on the head of the goat and sent it into the wilderness, then he put off his linen garments and arrayed himself in his garments of glory and beauty, offered the burnt offering. Thus, in his linen garments he represented Christ in his humiliation when he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; and in his beautiful garments, Christ in his present exaltation and glory.

But his chief office was to offer sacrifice, and especially that peculiar one on the great day of atonement, to which I have already alluded, when he entered within the veil into the most holy place, taking therein, amidst a cloud of incense, the blood of the bullock and of the goat, which he sprinkled upon and before the mercy seat. In all these and various other points, into which I need not now enter, he stood forth as the typical representative of that great High Priest who, having finished the work which the Father gave him to do, is now in the presence of God for us. But his priesthood was necessarily imperfect. It was, at best, but a dim, shadowy representation of what is exceedingly great and glorious, and therefore was in itself necessarily weak and defective; and though full of meaning to an enlightened eye and a spiritual heart, yet to the carnal worshipper was but a mere routine of external performances. But besides the inherent imperfection of the ministration, there was the infirmity of the minister. Though

separated in so solemn a manner to the service of the sanctuary, though called upon by every constraint to manifest the greatest purity of life and conversation, and to conduct himself in all things with such holy wisdom as became the visible representative of him who was to come, yet, as a partaker of our fallen humanity, the high priest was but a frail and fallible man. Aaron himself, though called in so special a manner by God himself to his high and holy office, manifested on more than one occasion great infirmity both of character and conduct. He complied, for instance, with the sinful wishes of the people in the matter of the golden calf, when Moses was in the mount with God, and, so to speak, veiled and cloaked their sin by fashioning the object of their idolatrous worship with a graving tool, building an altar before it, and making a proclamation, "To-morrow is a feast to the Lord." He took part with Miriam against Moses, when they spake against him because of the Ethiopian woman whom Moses had married; and, as it would appear through jealousy, said, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not also spoken by us?" (Num. 12:1, 2.) Ho joined Moses also in that remarkable act which so offended the Lord when Moses said to the people, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" just as if it was they who did it, and not God by them. I do not name these things to cast any reproach upon the name and character of Aaron, but merely to show how full of sin and imperfection the first and greatest of the high priests was. His two sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered strange fire; and though they had been anointed at the same time with Aaron their father, for that act of presumption died at the very altar, for fire went out from the Lord and devoured them. We know what a poor, weak, and fallible man Eli was, and what vile sinners his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, manifested themselves to be. I need not pursue farther the history of the high priests, or speak of what they were when the Lord was upon earth. I have said enough to show from the word of truth that they were not only frail and fallible, but in many cases very sinful

men, and as such utterly unworthy to execute the high and holy office committed to their trust. But no doubt there was a purpose in the mind of God in permitting human imperfection and sin thus to develop themselves, and that these instances should be put upon record, that we might learn from them that man in his very best estate and entrusted with the highest and holiest office is but vanity. Our eyes are therefore taken off the type to look at the Anti-type; to cease from man and fix our eyes wholly and solely upon the Lord. God had determined in his own mind to bring forward and reveal at the appointed time another High Priest—his only begotten Son, in whom should meet every perfection both of Godhead and Manhood. He was determined to raise up a faithful priest, that should do according to that which was in his heart and in his mind (1 Sam. 2:35); even him to whom he had sworn and would not repent: “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek.” (Psa. 110:4.)

But I need not enter at any greater length into these points, as it would not only take up too much time, but would divert us too much from the subject before us. I shall therefore come at once to our text, in which I think we may see these three things, which I shall endeavour, as the Lord may give me ability, to lay open and set before you:—

I.—First, the prayerful and suffering experience of our Redeemer in the flesh: “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death.”

II.—Secondly, the lesson which our gracious Lord learnt in that school of prayer and suffering—Obedience. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.”

III.—Thirdly, the blessed fruit and result of these sufferings of our Lord, and of the victory obtained by them: “He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”

I.—There are two subjects connected with our gracious Lord

on which I always wish to speak with very great caution and in a spirit of holy reverence. To a heavenly mind, to a chastened, humble spirit, to one who desires to have the mind of Christ, and to be cast into the mould of divine teaching they are most blessed subjects of contemplation and meditation; yet they are so mysterious in themselves, and so beyond the scope of our comprehension, that we are only safe as we walk strictly within the limits of the written word, and even there tread with the greatest reverence, caution, and circumspection. Those two subjects are, the sufferings of Christ and the temptations of Christ. As regards myself, I never feel safe in speaking upon either of these two points except so far as I keep as close as I can to the word of truth, for I see how easily I might be betrayed into some error, or, if I escaped that, into some point of doubtful disputation. Unless well instructed in the things of God, and well fenced and guarded by a reverence to his great name, I might easily advance something inconsistent with the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the word of truth. It is so easy to make a little deviation on this side or on that, and so not be kept strictly within the bounds of the inspired word, that I ever wish to speak with great caution; and yet with that firmness of faith and clearness of utterance which become one who professes to be a steward of the mysteries of God, and desires to feed the church with knowledge and understanding. I hope, therefore, this evening to speak with great caution, and keep as closely as possible to the limits of God’s inspired word, that I may say nothing unbecoming God’s sacred truth and nothing unbecoming that reverence which we owe to our great High Priest at the right hand of the Father. And yet if we are favoured with a spirit of heavenly wisdom, and can walk in this field with a spiritual mind and a believing heart, receiving the truth of God with the simplicity, docility, and humility of a little child, what a depth of blessing there is in the subject before us! The suffering experience of the Lord, when “in the days of his flesh, he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto

him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared," is rich food to a spiritual mind.

But the thought may strike your mind, for such reasonings will sometimes occur, "What need was there for the blessed Lord thus to pray with strong crying and tears? Was he not God as well as man? Was he not the Son of the Father in truth and love? Was there, could there be in his mind any apprehension of failure in his undertaking? Was it not a matter of infinite certainty that he must prevail?" All this I admit. But do you consider what a battle our gracious Lord had to fight? What a conflict, which seemed as it were to rend his very heart asunder? Do you bear in mind what a mighty work he had undertaken to perform, and what was involved in bearing the curse of God's righteous law and enduring the penalty due to the sins of his people, when he stood in their place and stead, and thus to blot out as a thick cloud their transgressions, and as a cloud their sins, and by clothing them with a robe of righteousness, his own obedience, to present them spotless before the face of infinite Purity?

Now this being the work which he had to do in the garden and upon the cross, the Holy Ghost in the words before us seems to lead our thoughts and hearts into this deep subject by presenting to our view the suffering Redeemer, as engaged alone with God in the depths of his struggling agony. Let us see, then, if by the help of God we may look as it were within the precincts of this place of suffering, and by viewing the agonies and hearing the cries of our gracious Lord, learn something of what the work was which the Father had given him to do, what is the dreadful evil of sin, and from what depths of eternal woe he has redeemed all who believe in his name.

i. To apprehend even in some faint and feeble measure what this was, we must first take a view of his pure and sacred humanity; and we must bear carefully in mind that though his human nature was altogether perfect, and from its very constitution utterly incapable of the least speck, or spot, or stain

of impurity, yet it was naturally and inherently weak. The apostle therefore says, that "he was crucified through weakness." (2 Cor. 13:4.) Remember, however, that weakness was not imperfection in him, though it is imperfection in us; for when we speak of the weakness of Christ's human nature, we mean its weakness as compared with the strength and power of his divine nature. We therefore carefully remove from it all idea of imperfection when we speak of the weakness of the humanity of Christ; in the same way as when we speak of his being subject to such infirmities as hungering, thirsting, and being tired, we carefully exclude all idea of his being subject to any but sinless infirmities. Rightly viewed then, as received into a reverent and believing heart, there is something very blessed in contemplating the weakness of Christ. Hart, therefore, to whom was given to see and know so much of the sufferings of Jesus, beautifully says,

"The strength of God is owned by all,

But who his weakness knows?"

1. But what are we to understand by the expression "in the days of his flesh?" This leads us to the inquiry, 1, What is meant by "the flesh" of Christ; and, 2, what we are to understand by "the days of his flesh?" By "the flesh" of Christ, then, we may understand chiefly two things: 1, The whole of his pure humanity, as in such passages as, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14); "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16); "Of whom was Christ, according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:5.) But as this humanity the Lord still continues to wear, carrying it with him into heaven, though exalted and glorified beyond all apprehension, we cannot understand by "the flesh" of Christ merely his human nature. It therefore means, as applied to him in the text, the weaknesses and infirmities, of course I mean the sinless infirmities, to which he was subject when here below. And by "the days of his flesh" we may understand, not merely the whole time of his sojourning on earth, but especially those last days when in the garden and upon the cross all his sorrows, trials, and sufferings came, as it

were, to a head, and thickened upon him. It was then in these last days of his abiding in the flesh that he offered up the prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears mentioned in the text. They were a part of his oblation, priestly acts of intercession, and therefore not merely supplications for himself, but necessary adjuncts of his propitiatory sacrifice. He had taken upon himself to stand in our law place and stead, and to endure what but for him his people must have endured to all eternity. O how great a work was this! To expiate transgression, to put away the wrath of God, to appease the ever-burning indignation against sin of Him who is a consuming fire, fully to satisfy the claims of infinite justice and the demands of a devouring law—O what a work was this for the Lord to do! How little do we know, how less do we feel of the holiness of God, of his terrible Majesty, of his inflexible justice, of his fiery wrath against sin and transgression, and the difficulty, so to speak, of so satisfying these claims that mercy might rejoice against judgment, and grace superabound over the aboundings of sin. It is only when we view by faith the struggles, agonies, and sufferings of the incarnate Son of God when he had to grapple with and overcome these difficulties, that we seem for a short period to see and feel a little of the dreadful evil of sin. Our Lord often prayed in the days of his flesh, and on one occasion spent a whole night in prayer unto God; but he never prayed as in the garden, for his prayers then were attended with most vehement, earnest, and intense supplications, as Luke tells us: “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as drops (or rather large clots, as the word means) of blood falling upon the ground.” (Luke 22:44.) And what was the purport of his prayers but that he might be supported in the hour of agony upon the cross, that he might fully do the work committed to him, that the honour of God might be in every point consulted and his glory manifested, that his sacrifice and bloodshedding and obedience might be accepted, and the whole will of God in the redemption and salvation of his people perfectly accomplished? Our Lord

felt the weakness of his humanity, for though in union with his eternal Deity, though most blessedly upheld and supported by the power and strength and consolation of the Holy Ghost, yet it was inherently weak, and an experience of its weakness was a part of the sufferings that he endured. Having then to bear as laid upon this weakness the whole weight of imputed sin, the whole curse of the law, the whole indignation of the Almighty, our Lord was brought to a spot where he needed special support. To be brought through that work safely, honourably, successfully, agreeably to the will of God and in the fullest harmony with the eternal purposes—to this point were the prayers and supplications of our suffering Lord directed; this was the solemn conflict which our gracious Lord had to endure in the garden in its beginning and upon the cross in its finishing. We know what he felt—at least the Holy Ghost has given us an account of that solemn agony in the garden, when he said, as in a moment of weakness, “Let this cup pass from me.” It was so bitter in contemplation; it was so full of unmitigated wrath; the ingredients were so mingled with the anger of the Almighty against sin and the manifestation of his displeasure against every one who was chargeable with it, that as he stood there and then as our substitute, in our place, to endure what we must have endured without him, and to bear the whole weight of eternal wrath and indignation, which must have sunk us and all with us, were we millions, to a deserved hell, that he needed the special interposition of the help of God to hold him up as he drank it to the very dregs. It was to obtain this help that he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears; and it was the vehemency of the conflict which made the blood fall from his brow and tears drop from his eyes, and his whole soul engaged in an agony of mingled grief and horror, fear and supplication, each increasing and stimulating the other, and the whole poured forth with prayers, cries, weeping, and supplications unto him that was able to save him from death: not from the death that he came to die, but to save him from everything connected with the

original sentence of death, as involving in it the wrath of God and its consequences.

The gospels, in the simplicity of their narrative, speak but little of the inward sufferings of Christ. They give us an account of his sufferings in the garden, of his “being sorrowful and very heavy,” or, as the word means, “overwhelmed with anguish,” of “his being sore amazed,” and “exceedingly sorrowful even unto death,” of his being “in an agony and praying more earnestly,” and begging of his heavenly Father that this cup might pass from him; but they do not enter into the cause of his sufferings. And so with respect to his crucifixion; they make little mention of his sufferings of body or soul, though they record his dolorous cry when forsaken of God, and his bodily thirst. Where, then, shall we find recorded the suffering experience of Christ? Clearly in the Psalms, such as the 18th, 22nd, 40th, 69th, 102nd, and others, in which the Holy Ghost has by anticipation recorded the experience and language of the Son of God in the depths of his suffering. There we have his prayers and supplications: “Save me, O God, for the waters are come into my soul. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me.” (Psa. 69:1, 2.) There we have his strong crying: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.” (Psa. 22:1, 2.) There we have his weeping: “For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping, because of thy indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up and cast me down.” (Psa. 102:9, 10.) And there, especially in Psalm 22, we have set before us in the most lively colours what his holy soul endured when he was bearing our sins in his own body on the tree.

ii. But let me now speak a few words on that difficult expression, “Unto him who was able to save him from death.” This of course was God to whom he addressed his prayers. But what is meant here by the ability of God to save? And what is intended by the

1. By the ability of God to save we may understand two things: 1, the actual power of God; 2, the moral power of God. The first is God’s omnipotence, the second is God’s sovereignty. Now to which of these two powers of God did Christ address himself? To both, but especially to the latter. God was able to save him by his omnipotence—by putting forth his absolute power; and upon this almighty power the Lord cast himself in the extremity of his distress and weakness. But he cast himself more particularly upon God’s sovereignty, as displayed in his will, for he came to do his will. To him, therefore, he had recourse in the omnipotence of his power and the sovereignty of his will. His faith embraced the power, his obedience submitted itself to the will of God.

2. But what was the “death” from which he prayed to be saved? It was not natural death, for he came on purpose to die, but moral death. i.e., it was not the dissolution of body and soul, but all that was implied in the sentence, “The soul that sinneth it shall die.” In taking upon him to obey the law, our Lord put himself under the curse of the law; and this curse was death. All, therefore, that was contained in the curse of the law, in the sentence of death, our Lord had as much to sustain as though he had been actually guilty of every sin committed against the law. From this death in the consequences of it, as he reeled under its dreadful weight, he prayed God to save him, that he might come out of it, be delivered from it, and thus, as the surety of his people, might deliver them from it.

iii. But we now come to the acceptance of his prayers and supplications. “And was heard in that he feared.” There is something in my mind so extremely mysterious and yet so divinely blessed in the expression, “in that he feared,” that I must, if the Lord enable me, give it a few moments’ consideration. It is right to mention that there is some little difficulty as to the right rendering of the expression. The word means in the original not so much fear, as indicating dread or apprehension, as a holy reverence and tender

cautiousness. It means literally the great care with which we handle brittle vessels, and, as used in the New Testament, signifies a reverential fear of God. It is used, for instance, of Noah, where he is said to be “moved with fear” (Heb. 11:7), and is translated “godly fear” in those words, “whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” (Heb. 12:28.) It does not, therefore, mean fear in any such sense of the word as would imply a servile dread. It does not mean that our gracious Lord was possessed with that servile dread of the Almighty which reprobates feel and those who never were partakers of the grace of God. But our Lord, as an exemplar of every grace of the Spirit, was possessed of that holy reverence and godly fear in its abundant measure of which we have but a small portion. Now just in proportion to the depth of the grace that was in him, the power of God that rested upon him, and the operations and influence of the Holy Ghost in his soul, so was the measure of holy reverence and godly fear which dwelt in his sacred humanity. Contemplating, therefore, the greatness of the work; having before his eyes not so much the bodily sufferings of the cross as all the mental agonies—the distress of soul, the conflict with the law in its load and curse, the indignation of the Almighty against sin in the person of the Surety, the hidings of his Father’s face, and the withdrawal of the light of his countenance,—foreseeing all these dolorous sufferings of the cross, and tasting the first drops of that shower which was so soon to fall upon his sacred head, it seemed as if his holy soul was filled with the most solemn reverence and deep apprehension of the Majesty of God. This is the fear of which our text speaks. It is in the margin “his piety.” But reverence, godly fear, holy apprehension, and tender awe convey the meaning of the word much better than the expression “piety.” It was prophesied of him that the “Spirit of the Lord should rest upon him, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord, and should make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord.” (Isa. 11:1, 2.) Thus his prayers, his cries, his supplications, and his tears rose up with sweet acceptance into the ears of his Father,

because they came out of a heart filled with reverence and godly fear under the promptings and influences of that eternal Spirit who wrought in him every grace both in its possession and its exercise, and through whom he offered himself without spot to God. The church foreseeing this, prayed in spirit for him: “The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion; remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice.” (Psa. 20:1, 2, 3.) In answer to these petitions, “the Lord saved his anointed, and heard him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand;” for when the sorrows of hell compassed him about and the snares of death prevented him, he could say, “In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.” (Psa. 18:6.) O the power of prayer, and what an example has the Lord set before his praying people; for as God heard and answered and saved him, so will he surely hear, answer and save them.

II.—But I must now pass on to our second point, which was, to consider the lesson which our gracious Lord learnt in the school of prayer and suffering. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.”

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to make the remark but I could wish that our translators had used the word “was” instead of “were.” “Though he were a Son,” conveys a little doubt, of which there is none in the original. If we say of any one, “Though he were a good man,” it almost implies that he might not have been a good man. But if we say, “Though he was a good man,” that stamps it as a certainty that he was such. So I could wish that our good translators had just put “was” instead of “were;” because the Lord Jesus Christ was God’s Son beyond doubt or uncertainty. It was because he was the Son of God, his own true and proper Son, that he was a suitable mediator between God and man. His eternal Sonship and Deity invested with infinite value his work

upon the cross. The tears which he shed, the prayers which he put up, the strong crying which he poured forth, were all stamped with the intrinsic value of his Deity, as well as perfumed by the incense of the Eternal Spirit through whom he offered himself without spot unto God; and therefore rose up before the eyes of his heavenly Father not as the prayers and tears and cries of simply his humanity, but as the tears and prayers and cries of the Son of God, and thus were to him for a sweet smelling savour. (Eph. 5:2.)

i. There are three points connected with the Person and work of our gracious Lord which we can rightly understand only by heavenly teaching, and only truly receive by a divine faith. These are, 1, What he was before all worlds as “the Son of the Father in truth and love;” 2, What he became in his humiliation when he was made flesh and dwelt amongst us; and, 3, What he is as now glorified and exalted to the right hand of the Father. All these three things are in our text; for in it we see, 1, his original and eternal Sonship, “Though he was a Son;” 2, His humiliation and incarnation, “In the days of his flesh when he offered up prayers,” &c.; and, 3, What he is as glorified, as I shall presently show from the words, “And being made perfect.”

But we are now engaged upon what he was in the days of his flesh, and especially, as I have pointed out, his latter days, when he is said to have “learned obedience by the things that he suffered.” Three questions meet us here: What obedience was this? What is meant by Christ’s learning it? And how did he learn it by the things that he suffered? Let us consider the second question first.

ii. Obedience may be learnt in three different ways 1, by our coming to know what we knew not before, and thus learn the obedience that is required of us. So David speaks: “Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.” By his chastisements God taught him to know and keep his commandments. But this was not the way in which Christ learnt obedience; for the whole law of God was in his heart, and no command of God was new to him or forgotten by him. But, 2,

obedience may be learnt by being instructed, guided, and directed by the blessed Spirit, and by receiving gradually supplies of light and grace, partly by the word and partly by afflictions. But this was not the way in which Christ learnt obedience; for there was in him a fulness of grace, wisdom, and truth so that he needed not to be taught what he had to do, or wanted a perfect readiness of will or mind to do it. 3. But there is a third way of learning obedience, which is by an experience of it in its exercise; and in this way our Lord learnt it.

But what was the obedience which he thus learnt? It was chiefly becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; for this commandment was given him of his Father that he should lay down his life; and he therefore laid it down in a way of obedience to the will and word of God. The apostle, therefore, applies to his offering of himself those words of his in the Psalms: “Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.” This obedience was an obedience of suffering; and therefore the Lord Jesus is said to have “learnt obedience by the things which he suffered.” He thus obtained a full experience of that special obedience which is yielded through suffering, and by enduring the wrath of God he learnt what distress and anguish attend it, and what humility, self-denial, meekness, faith, patience, hope, and love, and every grace of the Holy Spirit are needful to sustain the soul under it.

But O what an exemplar for us; for our gracious Lord had to learn obedience to the will of God by a personal experience of suffering, and especially by an implicit submission to his heavenly Father’s will. And what was this will? That he should take upon himself the huge debt which his Bride had incurred by original and actual transgression; that he should offer himself as a ransom price to discharge and put it away; that he should bear our sins in his own body on the tree, with everything which was involved in being made a curse for us; that he should by death overcome Satan who had the power of death, and deliver them who all their life

through fear of death were subject to bondage; and that whatever sorrows or sufferings should be in his path he should bear them all, and learn in and by them implicit submission to the will of God. This was the will of God, for he was determined that his Law should be magnified, his justice glorified, his infinite purity and holiness revealed and established; and yet, amidst all and through all his displeasure against sin, that his infinite wisdom, tender pity, everlasting love, and sovereign grace might shine and reign in the happiness of millions through a glorious eternity. This, too, was the joy that was set before Christ, for which he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God. By these sufferings in the garden and upon the cross the Lord Jesus was made perfect.

iii. But what perfection was this? Let us endeavour to penetrate into the mind of the Holy Ghost in using this remarkable expression. It occurs in a former part of the Epistle: "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb. 2:10.) The question then arises, What perfection is intended thereby? It clearly does not mean that by these sufferings in the garden and upon the cross our Lord was made perfect as the Son of God, nor perfect as the Son of man, for he was perfect before as possessing infinite perfection in his eternal Godhead, and was endued also with every possible perfection of which his sacred humanity was capable. He needed no perfection to be added to his Godhead: it was not susceptible of it; no perfection to be added to his manhood, for it was "a holy thing" in union with eternal Deity. But he needed to be made perfect as a High Priest, and this in two ways. 1. It was through his sufferings that he was consecrated or dedicated in an especial manner to the priesthood, for this corresponds with his own words: "And for their sakes I sanctify myself" (John 17:19); that is, I consecrate or dedicate myself to be their High Priest. I have before observed that the two main offices

of the high priest were to offer sacrifice and make intercession. Sacrifice came first; and the suffering of our Lord in the garden and upon the cross were a part of this sacrifice. He was therefore "made perfect through suffering;" that is, through his sufferings, blood-shedding, and death he was consecrated to perform that other branch of the priestly office which he now executes. Thus as Aaron was consecrated by the sacrifice of a bullock and a ram, of which the blood was not only poured out at the bottom of the altar and sprinkled upon it, but put also on his right ear and hand and foot, so was his great and glorious Anti-type consecrated through his own sacrifice and blood-shedding on the cross; and thus being made perfect, or rather, as the word literally means, being perfected, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

2. But the words admit of another sense, viz., that through sufferings, from the personal experience of it, he became a sympathising High Priest; as the apostle elsewhere speaks: "For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." (Hebrews 4:15.) Thus the Lord, by passing through personal sufferings, experimentally learnt not only obedience, submission, and resignation to the will of God, but to sympathise, feel for, and enter into the trials, sufferings, sorrows, and conflicts of his afflicted people here below. Do they feel the curse of the law? He had felt it before them, and can sympathise with them in their sufferings under it. Do they feel their conflicts with Satan? He had those conflicts with the Prince of darkness in the wilderness, and doubtless in the garden and upon the cross, for, speaking of that hour, he said, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me;" and again, "But this is your hour and the power of darkness." Do they know the wrath of God in their conscience so as to make them tremble and quake with apprehension? He knew that wrath when he drank up the bitter cup of which we do but taste. Do they know the weakness of the flesh under painful dispensations, how it needs to be upheld

by the mighty power of God, how it requires continual supplies of heavenly grace to support them in the hour of trial, to bear them up and bear them through all they may have to suffer? Now it was necessary that our gracious Lord should know these things by a personal experience of them; that he might learn them in the days of his flesh, and carry that lesson with him into the courts of bliss; that thus he might be not only the great exemplar of sufferings, but, having himself been an afflicted Head, might sympathise with his afflicted members in all those troubles and sorrows by which they are conformed to his suffering image. It is sweet to see that he still retains the same heart which beat so tenderly here below, as the hymn says:

“That human heart he still retains,
 Tho’ thron’d in highest bliss;
 And feels each tempted member’s pains;
 For our affliction’s his.”

We know nothing but what we have experienced, whether in nature or in grace, and especially as regards sufferings, trials, and temptations we must have felt them before we can be said to have any real acquaintance with them. Theory, judgment, observation, reading, conversation, and other exercises of our intellect may give us a certain knowledge of things; but they do not communicate any real acquaintance with them. We must pass into them, through them, and out of them, that we may really and truly know them. As possessing indeed all the perfections of Deity, our Lord knew everything within the scope of omniscience, and therefore perfectly knew what trials and sufferings are; but it was necessary, according to the will and purpose of God, that he should have a personal acquaintance with every trial, temptation, and form of suffering which any one of his people might go through, that he might sympathise feelingly with them, through himself having personally experienced them. And thus he sits in

heavenly bliss with a human heart, tender, affectionate, feeling, and sympathising, as having himself passed through every phase of suffering, known every trial, been exposed to every temptation, and having had a personal experience of everything that shall befall any of his living family.

This is a mysterious subject. I do not profess to understand or explain it; but I receive it upon the testimony of God’s word, and as such, I see in it a great blessedness: mines of grace, treasures of encouragement, a rich source of divine consolation. If you and I are in a trial, there is a sympathising High Priest for us at the right hand of the Father. The widow, the orphan, the poor, the needy, the distressed, and the exercised—whatever be their affliction, there is a merciful and faithful High Priest, who can feel for and with them, whose tender, loving, and affectionate heart is melted with a sympathising sense of what they are suffering here below. When Paul of Tarsus was persecuting his saints, the head in heaven felt the blow struck at the body on earth, and said “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” The Head felt what the members suffered. Now to believe this, and in trial, suffering, and exercise to go to a tender, sympathising, affectionate, and loving High Priest, and thus realise his pity toward us, what strength and support it gives. Do we feel the burden of sin? He felt it. Are we crying under a sense of guilt? He felt it. He had indeed no personal guilt; but he felt all the guilt we can feel by imputation. Does the world frown? It frowned upon him. Do men persecute you? They persecuted him. Are you oppressed? He was oppressed also. Are you scoffed at, mocked, jeered, insulted? He had all these things to endure. Does God hide his face? Is your soul in darkness? Are you full of fear? He passed through all these things. This made him sympathising, tender-hearted, loving, kind, and affectionate. We know there is something very sweet and soothing in human sympathy. The widow does not go to the bride to get a word of comfort; she goes to her fellow widow. The man in difficulties can talk best to the man who has passed through the same. A wealthy merchant and

a poor tradesman are unsuitable associates. Hard hearts are poor companions for broken hearts, and unfeeling professors for tender consciences. A man who stands high on the hill of presumption is not a good associate for one who lies low in the vale of humility. Like loves like. If your soul is exercised with temporal or spiritual troubles, and has afflictions, difficulties, trials, and perplexities, you can talk best with those who have some personal experience of them; and as you get together and sometimes unfold to each other your mutual trials, you seem to comfort one another. Thus we find from experience that sympathy has a very comforting effect, and that there is nothing so repulsive when in trouble and difficulty as to meet with a hard heart and an unfeeling conscience. But O what a sympathising High Priest there is in the courts above for poor sinners here below. We may tell him all our cares. The secret sins that you are obliged to keep locked up in your own bosom: the painful temptations you are exercised with; the various things that cut deep into your conscience, which you cannot breath into any one's ear—all are open to this sympathising High Priest, all may be spread before that throne of grace, on which he ever sits as our advocate with the Father.

Thus by suffering, he was made perfect—not only perfect as consecrated thereby to be an ever living intercessor, but perfect in his sympathies, perfect as a High Priest adapted to all our wants and woes, as distinguished from an imperfect high priest, such as were the typical priests under the law. Some were bad men, as Hophni and Phinehas; some were persecutors, as Annas and Caiaphas; when, therefore, the poor Israelite went to the high priest, he might have no sympathy for him, but rather be oppressed by him. Eli could not sympathise with afflicted Hannah; and Ananias commanded them who stood by to smite Paul on the mouth. But all who fear God have now a High Priest who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and so can sympathise with us in our temptations and afflictions.

III.—But let us now advance to our last point, which was

to show, from the words of the text, that being perfected, Jesus “became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”

i. In my explanation of Christ's being perfected through suffering, I pointed out that this perfection embraced two things: 1, his being perfected as fully consecrated to the work and office of the priesthood; and, 2, as being thereby qualified to be a sympathising Head. There were three things by which our Lord consecrated himself; for though he was a man of sorrows from the manger to the last passover, it was only after his partaking of it with his disciples that he was fully consecrated to the office of Priest. These three things were prayer, suffering, and sacrifice. He consecrated himself through prayer, as recorded John 17, through suffering in the garden, and through sacrifice on the cross. He thus became the author of eternal salvation; for salvation was perfectly accomplished by his obedience, sacrifice, bloodshedding, and death. And now he lives, and now he rules, and now he reigns at the right hand of the Father to send down the benefits and blessings of this salvation thus wrought out. Observe that it is an eternal salvation. It was fully accomplished upon the cross in a time-state; but from the dignity of the Person of Christ, and the perfection of his work, it stretches itself into eternity. In it there is no deficiency, shortcoming, or imperfection. He himself declared of it with expiring lips, “It is finished;” and if finished, finished for ever. It embraces the whole election of grace. It has washed away all their sins, blotted out all their iniquities, cast all their transgressions behind God's back, and clothed their persons with a robe of eternal righteousness. Thus it is “eternal salvation;” and Jesus is the Author of it, its sole undivided Beginner, and its sole undivided Finisher.

ii. But how are we to know who these elect are? Do they bear any special marks to distinguish them from their fellow men? They do; and observe what the mark is: “Unto all them that obey him.” This marks the character for whom this eternal salvation is

obtained and provided. But what is this obedience, for it is of great importance to ascertain accurately its true nature?

1. It is, then, first, the obedience of faith; for this is the first act of obedience. To produce this is the grand object of the preached gospel; for it is “made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.” (Rom. 16:26.) The Lord, therefore, in the preached gospel, bids us, invites us, and enables us to believe in him. He presents himself to us in the glass of the gospel; he holds himself forth therein as the author of eternal salvation; and he says, “Look unto me, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else;” “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;” “He that believeth in me hath everlasting life.” These are his words in which he holds himself forth in the gospel as the object of our faith; and when the blessed Spirit is pleased to raise up that faith in our soul whereby we embrace him as the Son of God, take hold of him, bring him into our heart, and give him sweet entertainment there, then we have salvation as a manifested reality. Thus we obey him, because we obey his invitations, believe his word, rest upon his promises, twine round his Person, look to his blood, and hang wholly upon his grace. This is fulfilling his promise: “As soon as they hear of me they shall obey me.”

2. Out of this obedience of faith flows all practical obedience. This is manifested by obeying his precepts, walking in his ordinances, seeking to glorify him by a life, conduct, and conversation becoming the gospel; making his word to be the rule of our life, his will to be our guide, and what he has laid down as the path in which we should walk as the path in which we ever desire our feet to be found. Now there is no rest or peace except in thus obeying him. Get out of the path of obedience, and you get into the path of misery. Cease to believe, I mean in your feelings, and cease to obey him by any temporal deviation, slip, or fall, or by being entangled in the snares of sin and Satan, and you bring guilt into your conscience and distress into your soul. But obey him

by believing in his name, walking in his fear, keeping his word, listening to his voice, doing his will, and desiring to glorify him in your body and spirit which are his, and you will find more or less peace in believing and the approbation of God in your conscience. Sin may be sweet in appearance, the snare be hidden from your view, and Satan may present the poison cup, the edge well smeared with honey. We may even long to have a sip, and sometimes are weak enough to taste some drops of the poisoned cup. But O the guilt, the misery, the darkness, the distress, and the perplexity which you will bring upon your soul if you put to your lips and drink any measure of that poison cup of sin which Satan presents to your imagination as a delicious draught. Thus you see there is a blessedness in obedience. It does not give us, but it manifests our interest in the finished work of the Son of God. There is nothing in the highest acts of faith and obedience that we can take any joy in as accomplished by us, nothing that we can boast of as our own; and yet there is a sacred blessedness in obeying the gospel by believing in the Son of God, by walking in the fear of God, and doing the things as well as professing them which are pleasing in God’s sight. At any rate, I can say this, if I can say no more, if you want to be miserable; if you want to walk in a path of bondage, distress, and perplexity; if you want to plant a thorn in a dying pillow; if you want to have God at a distance when you most need him near, and when you come to a trial to have no support in it nor under it; walk disobediently, walk inconsistently, and you will get your wish to the very full. Walk in carnality, pride, and self-righteousness; live after worldly customs and conform yourself to worldly opinions, and if there be a grain of godly fear, or one spark of the life of God in your heart, you will do the best thing you can to bring your soul into misery and bondage. Therefore, though we can take no merit from and make no boasting of any obedience we may render, yet is the path of godly obedience so safe, so blessed, so honouring to God, and so comforting to the soul thus favoured, that it should be and will be the desire of all

who truly fear God to be ever found walking in it. And O the blessedness, if we are enabled in any measure to obey the will of God by believing in his dear Son and by walking in his fear, to find under every temptation and trial in life, death, health, and sickness. that we have a gracious and sympathising High Priest, “the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him.”

205 The Staggerings of Unbelief and the Persuasions of Faith

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord’s Day Morning,
July 1, 1866

“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.”

Rom. 4:20, 21

A few words upon the connection of our text with the general subject of the epistle may not be altogether out of place, and may serve, with God’s blessing, to cast a fuller, clearer light upon it. I love to make clear work; to act, as far as I can, upon the scripture direction, “Make straight paths for your feet.” (Heb. 12:13.) By so doing, I follow also Paul’s exhortation to Timothy: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth, (2 Tim. 2:15.) But we cannot rightly divide the word of truth unless we first clearly understand it. No minister, therefore, should attempt to take a subject which he does not fully understand: for if he do, his want of clearness of thought will be sure to produce want of clearness of expression; and what is the consequence? Minister and hearer are soon lost in a fog of confusion. The people go away weary and perplexed, the minister, if he has any right and proper feeling, leaves the pulpit ashamed and disappointed; and what might have been a season of edification to both is little else but a season of

weariness, perplexity, and confusion to all. It is, therefore, very necessary, or at least highly desirable, for all ministers are not equally gifted either naturally or spiritually with clearness of thought or expression, that every servant of God should make clear work, and not only understand his subject by the teaching of the Holy Spirit and by some personal experience of it, but be enabled well and fully to clear his ground, and from whatever text he preaches to set forth the truth of God in such a simple, plain, clear, intelligible way that the people may understand his meaning, and derive instruction and edification from his testimony. I would not say a word against the weakest or the least of the sent servants of God but this I must say, if God has sent them he has sent them with a message to his people; that they stand up in the pulpit to instruct, comfort, encourage, and build up the church of God on her most holy faith; and therefore if they cannot do this work clearly and intelligently, they bear but feeble marks of their message or their ministry being given them of God. All ministers indeed are subject to their seasons of darkness, confusion, and embarrassment when they are miserably shut up both for gracious thoughts and a door of utterance. I feel much of it myself at times, and can therefore feelingly sympathise with others in the ministry who are similarly exercised. But with all this, I never attempt to take a text or to preach from a subject which I do not seem in some degree to understand in its spiritual meaning, or of which I do not in some measure feel the power. Many ministers, especially young ministers of an aspiring mind, aim at fine language and flowery expressions. But flowers are not food, and least of all artificial flowers. It would be much better if they would seek first well to understand their subject by an experience of its truth and power, and then to open it to the people in the simplest, plainest, clearest language that they can find.

The main subject of this epistle, as you are doubtless well aware, is the grand doctrine of justification. It is in this beautiful, or as I may well call it, this grand and glorious epistle, that we

find the fullest and clearest solution of that mysterious and tremendous problem, how God can acquit, pardon, and justify a sinner, and yet remain the same pure, righteous, and holy God? None could solve the mystery till God himself solved it in the gift and work of his dear Son; and to open the fruits and effects of this gift and work in the free justification of a sinner is the subject of the Epistle to the Romans, which may, therefore, well stand at the head and front of all Paul's epistles. I have read that more than 2,000 commentaries have been written upon it; and if there were 2,000 more they would still be unable to unfold a thousandth part of the blessed mysteries contained in it.

There always were in the mind of men, from the first promise given after the fall, fleeting hopes and expectations that God might or would pardon sin; but then came this question, Does God pardon all, or does he pardon only some? If God pardon all, where is his righteousness, where the purity and holiness of the divine nature? Is sin so slight a thing that it may be passed by as a matter of small moment with God? Has Justice no claims as well as mercy? Man's natural conscience revolts from the belief of universal pardon; and every day's experience confirms these convictions in the punishment of criminals, condemned to death as much by the verdict of society as by the verdict of the law. Divine justice, therefore, can no more tolerate universal pardon than human justice, which is but a faint reflection of the divine. But if God pardon some and do not pardon all, why does he pardon these and not pardon those? It must either be out of pure mercy, as in the case of an earthly sovereign, or there must be some qualification on the part of the recipient. But what are these qualifications, by whom prescribed, and by whom weighed and decided? How much or how many are required? and in whom are they to be found? Here was the problem. But how to solve it none could tell. Luther lay upon his bed three days and three nights, without eating, drinking, or sleeping, under the weight and pressure of that terrible problem. It has driven some almost to the

pool and to the halter. The conviction of sin from a fiery law shut out all hope of salvation by works, and ignorance of the gospel debarred them from a knowledge of salvation by grace. This was just Luther's case. The words which ground him as between the upper and nether millstone were, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested." (Rom. 3:21.) "What!" said he, "does the gospel demand a righteousness of me as well as the law? Then, I am damned by both; for I can no more obey the gospel than I can obey the law." Now in this glorious epistle, as full of logical argument as it is of doctrinal truth, the grand mystery is solved and a full and satisfactory explanation given how "God can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." It is all contained in the compass of two or three verses, which ought to be written, I will not say in letters of gold, but on diamonds and sapphires, like the breastplate of judgment borne upon the breast of the high priest, in which there were four rows of precious stones, on which were engraved the names of the children of Israel. "But now the righteousness of God." This does not mean God's own intrinsic, eternal righteousness, but the way whereby he justifies a sinner. I mentioned just now Luther's three days' agony from the pressure of these words. I must now tell you his deliverance. As he lay on his bed thus distressed, on a sudden it darted into his mind that the righteousness of God manifested in the gospel, was the way in which God freely justifies a sinner by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. The Holy Ghost bore such a testimony to the truth of this in his soul, that he leaped off his couch in as great a transport of joy as of previous trouble. This made Luther a preacher; to this we owe the Reformation. This, then, is the meaning of the words, "the righteousness of God." "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: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his

grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 3:21-24) These words I have just said should be written not merely in letters of gold but engraved upon diamonds and sapphires for beauty, brilliancy, preciousness, and permanency; but there is a better place still on which they should be written—the tables of the heart, as the apostle speaks: “Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” (2 Cor. 3:3.) And they are written there when the truth comes home with divine power to the soul, and we are able to read the testimony in our own favour that by faith in the Son of God we are justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses.

But now comes the question, “What has all this to do with Abraham’s faith?” It has this to do with it. When the apostle, under divine inspiration, thus solved the mystery, and showed how God could, as he elsewhere speaks, thus justify the ungodly, it must have appeared to be altogether a new religion, a novel, unheard-of doctrine, that there was a full and free justification by faith without the deeds of the law. To show, then, that it was no novelty, no unheard-of doctrine, the apostle comes at once in the next chapter to the case of Abraham, who was not only the acknowledged father of the Jews, all of whom came from him by lineal descent, but was “the friend of God;” and was especially called and blessed by him. Now if the apostle could show that Abraham was justified, not by the deeds of the law but by faith, how triumphantly could he establish his point, that righteousness is through faith and not by works. He therefore asks, “What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?” (Rom. 4:1.) Did he find justification by the law? No, surely, “for if Abraham were justified by works he hath whereof to glory.” If he could have been justified by his own obedience he would naturally have something to boast of. He therefore adds, “but not before God;” that is, God will never allow any one to boast or glory before him, therefore not

even Abraham. But see how he fully proves his point by a direct reference to the word of truth. “For what saith the scripture?” as if that must be decisive; “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” He thus brings forward positive Scripture testimony that Abraham was justified not by works but by faith; and therefore that all who walk in the steps of Abraham are justified in the same way as Abraham was justified.

But this brings us to the words of our text, in which the apostle opens the nature of Abraham’s faith. This is really as necessary to understand as the fact itself, that Abraham was justified by faith; for unless we knew the exact character of Abraham’s faith we could not compare it with our own, or obtain any satisfactory testimony that we possessed the same faith as he. He opens it, therefore, under two distinct phases, which we may call its negative and positive aspects. He first shows the negative side: “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.” He then shows the positive side: “But was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform.”

In taking up these words I shall endeavour, as the Lord may enable, to bring before you four things connected with the statement thus given of Abraham:—

I.—First, the negative side: “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.”

II.—Secondly, the positive side: “But was strong in faith.”

III.—Thirdly, the expansion of this positive side in the fuller description given of the nature of his faith: “That he was fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able also to perform.”

IV.—Fourthly, “How, thereby he gave glory to God.”

I.—Taking the great bulk, the generality of the professing people of God, they know more of the negative than the positive side, not only of faith but of the truth generally. They know and must know both sides, for in all true religion there are two sides,

the dark and the bright, a knowledge of sin and a knowledge of salvation, an acquaintance with the malady and an acquaintance with the remedy. But taking them in the mass, leaving out of consideration the more favoured of the living family, I think we may boldly say that the greater part of those who are quickened into spiritual life are more acquainted with the dark side than the bright, and know more of the negative unbelief than of the positive faith. This leads me, therefore, to devote a part of my discourse to that side of the question, that I may not overlook or pass by the great bulk, perhaps, here present of those who possess divine life and whose souls are continually exercised with the workings of that monster and master sin—unbelief.

I. The apostle, unfolding what I have called the negative side, tells us very clearly what the effect is of this sin of unbelief, and points out two evils connected with it: 1, first, that it causes us to stagger; and 2, secondly, he points out what the sin of unbelief chiefly regards, or rather disregards, viz., the promise of God. These two points I shall now, therefore, take up in my description of unbelief.

When the Spirit of God begins to work with power upon a sinner's conscience, one of the very first things he does for him is to convince him of his unbelief. Thus our Lord speaks: "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me." (John 16:8, 9.) Before this convicting work, whatever was his life as regards actual sin, he was living practically in unbelief; he was nothing else but an unbeliever; there was not a grain of what God calls faith in his soul. But he knew it not, for he was shut up in darkness and death, divine light not having yet shone into his mind, nor divine life having yet visited his soul. Though nothing but an unbeliever in the sight of God and in the sight of his people, he fully presumed that he had faith; and this faith might, as we find in many cases, have risen to a great height, and yet in the sight of God been nothing but vain arrogance and daring presumption,

as not springing from the power of God, nor connected with holy fear and godly reverence of his great name. When, then, through the entrance of the word with power divine light and life enter into a sinner's soul, unbelief is one of the first things which is made manifest among the hidden sins of the heart. I have said "hidden sins," because usually outward sins are first laid upon the conscience and inward afterwards. But as "all things that are reprov'd (or discovered) are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make manifest is light" (Eph. 5:13), so unbelief is sooner or later manifested by the light which shines into the soul.

1. Now there is one peculiar feature in unbelief which seems specially to distinguish it from other sins, and by which it is made distinctly manifest. It is a sin practically and pointedly directed against God's faithfulness; against God's veracity. It is therefore a sin directed against that of his attributes which God holds most justly dear—his veracity and faithfulness. This peculiar feature distinguishes it from other sins. Thus sensuality is directed more against God's infinite purity; rebellion and murmuring more against his goodness; ingratitude more against his outstretched hand in providence; pride more against his majesty; worldly mindedness against his all-sufficiency and blessedness; covetousness and carnality more against his name and character as a God of blended holiness and love. But the sin of unbelief is directed point blank against his veracity, making God to be a liar. We read: "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psa. 138:2); that is, above all thine other revealed attributes. To doubt, therefore, and distrust, or deny God's word, stamps unbelief with the greatness of the sin in proportion to his having so highly magnified it.

2. But unbelief has another feature which stamps upon it a peculiar and detestable character. It is a mother sin, a breeding sin; it is not in the heart alone, but gives birth to thousands of sins, all springing up out of its fruitful womb, like the fabled

sea monsters. We see in the wilderness how all through all their journeyings the grand, the crying sin of the people of Israel was unbelief. It was the parent of all their fretfulness, murmuring, and rebellion; it lay at the root of everything done by them displeasing to God; gave birth to all their idolatry and all their other sins, and eventually shut out all but Caleb and Joshua from the promised land. Their carcasses fell in the wilderness through unbelief.

3. But it has also another marked and peculiar feature. It is a sin of so subtle a nature that, though ever working, it often escapes detection, except from a keen and practised eye. Conscience speaks at once against some sins: they are too flagrant and gross for conscience not at once to raise its voice against them, not to mention the universal testimony of all good or even moral men as loudly condemning them. But there is something in unbelief so subtle; it so intertwines itself round every thought; it so meets us at every turn; it so starts up at the sight of every difficulty, that it will perhaps work most when least perceived. Lurking deep in the recesses of the heart, it escapes the unwatchful eye; as slippery as an eel, when grasped it glides out of the hand. If for a time seemingly dead, it suddenly starts up into fresh life; if for a time weakened, it seems only to rest till it regains renewed strength.

4. But I must not omit that peculiar feature of unbelief of which the apostle here speaks: Abraham's faith did not stagger, or, rather, Abraham did not stagger through unbelief. This is one peculiar characteristic of unbelief, that it staggers, or makes us stagger, at the promise of God. To bring this point more clearly before your mind, let us see how it thus acts in a variety of instances; and observe how it is especially directed against the promises.

For instance, God has given us in his word this gracious and encouraging promise: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9). But now see how unbelief staggers at this promise. Look at that poor, self-condemned, enquiring child of grace, hanging down his sorrowful head, who wants to know the full and

free pardon of all his sins, to receive forgiveness into his breast, and so have a testimony of his acceptance in Christ and for Christ's sake. Now here stands the promise, most sweet and suitable to his case, and as if purposely written for him: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Does not he confess them, and that with many tears, with true penitence and deep sorrow of heart? But unbelief puts that promise aside. He cannot enter into it, receive it, embrace it, or feel the comfort of it, for through the power of unbelief he staggers in it. Now what makes him thus stagger? The greatness of his sins, the holiness of God, the condemnation and curse of a broken law, and a deep sense of his own desperate state and case as a condemned transgressor before the eyes of infinite purity. He feels that his sins are of a most aggravated hue, of a peculiarly deep and desperate character. Had they not been committed under this or that peculiar circumstance; had they not been so much against light and conscience, against conviction, warning, admonition, perhaps against a profession of religion, with all its binding restraints; to sum it all up in one word, had he not been what he has been—for every heart knows its own bitterness, and it is a subject on which I must, for many reasons, touch but lightly—had he not been what he has been, and done what he has done, he thinks that mercy might reach his heart, and pardon might distil its sweets into his breast. But he staggers at the promise as seeing and feeling the greatness of his sins, the majesty of God, the holiness of the law, and how he ever is to receive it into his own bosom in all its fulness and blessedness he knows not.

Look again at another cluster of promises, which I put together as having a certain connection, spoken by the mouth of our gracious Lord: "Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you;" "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out;" "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." Here is promise upon promise. No vine was ever more richly laden with

clusters of grapes than the word of God is here laden with clusters of promises, such as these from the Lord's own lips; and they are all, "Yea, and in him, amen, unto the glory of God by us." They all proceed from the mouth of him who cannot lie; they are all ratified by the oath of the Covenant; all witnessed to and sealed by the blood of the Lamb; and Jesus lives at God's right hand to execute and fulfil every one of them to the utmost. Yet such is the power of unbelief, that there is a staggering in many a gracious heart at the promise, a coyly putting it aside, an inability to avail oneself of it, a hanging back, a shrinking away from it; and though the clusters hang before the eye in all their richness and ripeness, and the mouth waters after them, yet from the shortened hand it is not able to reach one of them and bring it down to the lips.

Now take another promise. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:17, 18.)

Here we have the combination of an invitation and a promise. The invitation is to come out and be separate from the world; the promise is that God will receive such, and be a Father unto them. But how often is the invitation acted upon; and yet, from the power of unbelief, there is a staggering at the promise. But do they not both go together? Why then should we separate them? Why doubt that God has received you and will be a Father unto you if you have come out from among the ungodly, and are separate from every unclean thing, whether person, doctrine, or practice?

I have no doubt that we have some, if not many here, who are daily staggering at the promise of God, and that through unbelief. They cannot but see that the word of God is full of promises; they cannot but feel how suitable those promises are to their state and case; and yet through unbelief they stagger, and as we read in Psa. 107 of "those who do business in great waters," "reel to and fro like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end," unable to receive

these promises through unbelief. Now I would not encourage any one to venture upon these promises except in the strength of that faith which God gives; for I am sure, if we take the promises with a hand which God himself does not strengthen, if we lay hold of them with a faith which is not his gift, we shall be certain to repent of our presumption in so doing, and be driven back from the standing which we have taken. The children of Israel, on one occasion, "presumed to go up unto the hill top," when "the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and Moses his servant, departed not out of the camp." And what was the consequence of their presumption? "Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah." (Num. 14:45.) Therefore, though it is painful, yes, painful in the extreme to the children of God, to be so exercised with the power of unbelief, so to stagger and be at their wits' end, and not be able to avail themselves of the promises which are directed to their case, yet in the end what profitable lessons do they learn in that school; what a sifting there is of the chaff and the dust of unbelief from the pure grains of faith. In that furnace, how their presumption, their vain confidence, their fleshly arrogance, their false faith are burnt up as by fire, and how they learn in themselves and for themselves—there being no other way of attaining to a practical knowledge of it—that faith is the gift of God, and does not lie in the operation of our own hands, or stand in the wisdom of men.

II.—But I now pass on to the positive side of the subject—the strength of Abraham's faith. "But was strong in faith."

We have to know both sides of the question; the negative first, and then the positive, for it is a knowledge of both these sides, unbelief and faith, which manifests us to be the children of God. If you had nothing but unbelief, how would you be distinguished from the positive unbeliever? If there were no principle in your breast, beyond those principles of unbelief which are in the breasts of all; if you are ever putting away God's word from you, through

the power of unbelief, and were to live and die in that state, what is there in you to save your soul, or distinguish you from those who die in their sins? Therefore, though we hold up the negative side in order that we may enter into the secret feelings, and describe the exercises and perplexities of the quickened saints of God, yet we must bring before them faith in its fruits and effects, and thus hold up a glass that they may see also in it the features of the work of God in their soul, and recognise in themselves marks of divine teaching.

Abraham was “strong in faith.” He was to be an exemplar to all believers. He was eminently “the father of the faithful.” It was therefore necessary for his own comfort as well as for that of the church of God in all ages, that he should be strong in faith. But let us not for a moment think that Abraham gave himself the faith which he possessed; let us not believe that Abraham’s faith, strong as it was, was strengthened by any act of his own. Let us not pour such contempt upon the grace of God, as to ascribe to Abraham any of this strength of faith of which God speaks so highly. If he was strong in faith, God gave him every atom of the faith in which he was strong. To hold any other doctrine is to dishonour God by giving honour to man. The apostle has expressly told us, that one reason why Abraham was not justified by works, was that he might not glory before God. But if Abraham’s faith was of his own giving and strengthening, it would be a work of his own in which he could glory. If he was the author of his own faith, he would be the author too of the works performed by that faith; and thus we should come at once to justification by works. But Abraham, as I shall presently show, displayed on more than one occasion, the weakness of his faith, and God has left this upon record to show us that Abraham’s faith was not his own gift, or stood in his own power. It may seem hard to reconcile an apparent contradiction—that unbelief is a sin and a very great one, and yet we cannot give ourselves faith. It might therefore be objected, “Why are we blamed? Why are we punished for unbelief if we

cannot give ourselves faith?” But the same objection may be made against our other sins, and upon similar grounds we might argue: “Why are men lost at all? Why punished for their sins if they cannot help sinning?” But the whole objection arises from an ignorance of the nature and depth of the fall. Because we have lost all our own righteousness, must God sacrifice all his justice and holiness? But I cannot enlarge on this point. Let us rather see in what consisted the peculiar strength of Abraham’s faith. It had to fight with not only an apparently insuperable difficulty, but with, humanly speaking, a practical impossibility. I need not tell you, you are fully aware of the peculiar difficulty which Abraham’s faith had to meet as springing out of his own advanced age and the similar case of Sarah. God gave him three special promises, and every one of these promises was connected with his having a child. One promise was, that the land of Canaan should belong to his seed for an everlasting possession. The second promise was, that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. The third was that God would be a covenant God to him and to his seed after him. Now all these promises depended upon his having a child and as God had promised that Sarah his wife should be “a mother of nations, and that kings of people should be of her,” it was necessary that the promised son should come from her, as well as from him. But, as you well know, two difficulties stood in the way of the fulfilment of the promise, connected with himself and his wife, and that these were not only naturally insuperable, but gathered fresh strength, so as to speak, every day. The strength then of his faith was shown in fighting against those natural difficulties, and in believing that God who had given the promises would in his own time and way overcome them, and perform what he had promised unto the uttermost. But God saw fit for five-and-twenty years to try that faith. The prospect would become naturally darker and darker, and the promise farther from its fulfilment as years rolled on. Yet Abraham’s faith held through all these wearisome years, bearing with Sarah’s fretfulness and

unbelief, sustaining both himself and her, and manfully resisting every difficulty. By this patient endurance, it was manifested that he was strong in faith, and that he was fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able to perform.

III.—But this brings us to our next point—the peculiar nature and character of Abraham’s faith. He was fully persuaded of the power of God to accomplish his own promise.

We are not to suppose that he was altogether free from unbelieving doubts and fears. His faith was subject to changes like our own, and by this it was distinguished from the faith which stands in the wisdom and power of man; the secret of its strength being that it stood in the power of God. When, therefore, that power was suspended, his faith was proportionately weakened. We have several remarkable instances of the weakness of his faith on some trying occasions. When, for instance, he said to the Lord, “Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?” was not his faith weak? Had not God said to him, “I will make of thee a great nation.” (Gen. 12:2.) And again, “And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.” (Gen. 13:16.) Yet, here he laments his childless state, and fears that his steward will be his heir. We see the weakness of his faith more especially manifested in two instances; once at Egypt, and again at Gerar. For in both places he denied that Sarah was his wife, and called her his sister. We see this weakness also in a more marked degree in his listening to Sarah’s carnal advice to take Hagar to wife. It is true that God at that time had not especially promised him a son by Sarah, but he should have known better than to leave his own wife to take another to his bosom. Thus, Abraham with all his faith was not free from the workings of unbelief; nay, they seemed from the instances which I have brought forward to have sometimes risen in him to a high pitch.

And yet, with all the weakness of his faith, which was doubtless

left upon record for our instruction, and that no man, not even Abraham, should glory in the flesh, this was the character of his faith, that he was fully persuaded that what God had promised, he was able also to perform. He therefore, in the strength of that faith, overlooked all creature difficulties. Weighed in nature’s balance, they seemed insuperable. But he looked beyond all difficulties, and hung his faith simply upon this—God has promised it.

But now let me apply this more particularly to our own faith, of which Abraham’s is brought forward as the representative pattern. I have before shown you that faith deals with the promises of God in the word, as Abraham’s faith dealt with the promises made to him by God’s own mouth. Now, the promises with which our faith has to deal are for the most part of a two-fold nature. 1, There are general promises in the word spoken to characters; and, 2, there are special promises spoken by the mouth of God out of the word to individuals. With both these kinds of promises, faith then has to deal, for we have already pointed out that our faith, if genuine, must be of the same nature with the faith of Abraham; for in this sense he is “the father of all them that believe,” and by walking in the steps of his faith we share his blessing, as the apostle says: “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” And observe the conclusion which he draws from this. “So then, they which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham;” and thus, “the blessing of Abraham comes on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” (Gal. 3:7, 9, 14.) I cannot here enlarge; but if you will carefully read and compare together Roman 4 and Gal. 3, you will find the whole subject clearly and beautifully opened by the pen of the Holy Ghost in the hand of Paul. Bear then this in mind, that the simple character of faith is that it consists in being fully persuaded that what God has promised he is able also to perform.

Now for the application of this. I brought forward in the first part of my discourse some premises which are spoken to

characters, such as the promise of pardon to those who confess their sins; that God will receive graciously and be a Father to those who come out of the world, and separate themselves from all evil; that those who shall seek shall find, those who ask shall receive, and to those who knock it shall be opened; that Christ will cast out none who come unto him; and that whatever we ask in Christ's name he will do it unto us. Now these promises are spoken to characters, to those in whom the blessed Spirit has begun, and is carrying on a gracious work, whom he has fitted for the reception of these promises not only by the first giving of them in the word of truth, but by preparing the heart to receive them, in due time applying them, and establishing and confirming them in the believing soul. The first thing, then, we have to do in the acting of our faith, is to be fully persuaded that what God has promised he is able to perform. He has promised to pardon those who confess their sins; he has promised to receive graciously those who come out of the world, and cast themselves simply upon his favour; he has promised to those who ask, pray, and knock that he will hear and accept and bless them. Now unless we firmly believe that God is able to perform, and that to us every one of these promises, we cannot take a single step forward. Here it is that the children of God first begin to learn their weakness. They see the word filled with promises, and all of them most suitable to their state and case. But when they seek to lay hold of those promises, appropriate them, and make them their own, then they find every difficulty arrayed in the way against them. If they could merely look at, and admire them, as seeing them in the word, and did not want to get into them, and to find their accomplishment in their own bosom, all these difficulties would at once vanish. But children of God can never be satisfied short of appropriation, for a view of the promise without its personal, experimental fulfilment would make the kingdom of God to be with them in word only. But they know from the testimony of God and the verdict of their own consciences, that "the kingdom of God is not in word but in

power;" that it is not meat, and drink, or anything natural and carnal, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Thus, though they perfectly know that what God has promised he is able to perform, the knowledge of that as a bare fact does not satisfy them; nor indeed will anything fully satisfy them until they come into the personal, clear, and happy enjoyment of that promise as fulfilled in their own experience. Still in this they manifest that they are partakers of true faith, of the very faith of Abraham, that they are fully persuaded that what God has promised he is able also to perform; and in the strength of this faith they are looking to him, waiting upon him, and expecting from him in due time its performance.

But I will now take up the other class of promises of which I have before spoken. God sometimes very graciously speaks a special and particular promise to the hearts of his people. In a time of trouble, trial, and deep necessity he has a word for them, exactly suitable to their case, which he speaks into their conscience, and gives them power to believe it shall certainly be fulfilled. But no sooner has he done this than he tries them, "for the Lord trieth the righteous;" and it is the "trial of our faith which is much more precious than of gold that perisheth." He tried Abraham's faith, and he will try ours. But the trial of the faith is in proportion to its strength. As Abraham's faith was the strongest upon record, so was his trial the greatest upon record. As the apostle speaks: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son." (Heb. 11:17.) Thus, every promise spoken to the heart will always be tried; and it will be tried by difficulties arising out of the very circumstances to which the promise is adapted. Everything will go point blank against the fulfilment of the promise; and yet such is the nature and character of living faith that it will hang upon the promise, and look forward to its fulfilment. And why? As being fully persuaded that what God has promised he is able also to perform. We cannot see, perhaps, how or when God will do it;

but faith rests simply upon this one firm point, God is able; and as he is able, so also his veracity is implicated in it. If he fail in this, he may fail in the other; if he has given a promise, and fulfil it not, his faithfulness, his veracity are at stake; he is not the God he says he is—a God who cannot lie. If he can break one promise he can break another, and thus he may break all. So that whatever difficulties be in the way, faith keeps hanging upon this one point: he is able, he is able. Now it may seem at first sight that this is not very great faith; but it is. Abraham had little enjoyment during those five-and-twenty years during which the fulfilment of the promise was delayed; but his faith was always hanging upon one point: God is able. Unbelief might say, “Abraham, you are getting older.” But he would answer, “God is able.” “Sarah is getting older, too.” “God is able.” “There is not the least prospect now of a child. More than twenty years have rolled away, and you are further and further from being a father.” But still the same answer: “God is able.” So, with that one simple word in heart and mouth, “God is able,” Abraham met every difficulty. Now our faith, if genuine, will resemble his; for there is but “one faith;” and we have to walk in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham. We read of him: “Who 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.” (Rom. 4:18.) Against hope he believed in hope; and this was the strength of both his faith and his hope, that he was fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able also to perform. It is this ability of God to overcome every difficulty, to remove out of the way every hindrance, to still every rising doubt and fear, and to appear for the soul in “its darkest hour, which stamps upon faith its genuine character. The greater, therefore, the trials which encompass that faith, the more insuperable the difficulties which seem to hem the way, the more this faith stands forth as being the gift and work of God, when in the face of every difficulty it can simply say, “Well, God is able to perform that which he hath promised. He has promised that he will never leave me nor

forsake me: then I believe he will never leave me nor forsake me. He has promised that he will bring me through: then I believe that he will bring me through. He has promised that no weapon formed against me shall prosper: then I believe that no weapon formed against me will prosper. He has promised that, as my day is, so shall my strength be: then I believe that, as my day is, so my strength shall be. He has promised that, when heart and flesh shall fail, he will be the strength of my heart and my portion for ever: then I believe that what he has said will be fulfilled; that when my heart and flesh fail, God will be the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.” Thus, faith having once got hold of a promise of God, and being fully persuaded that that promise is not only in God’s book, but has been spoken by the power of God to the soul, faith embraces and holds on by that promise, on the simple ground that God is able to perform that which he has promised. How simple all this is, and yet how true and scriptural. But this is the very beauty of true religion, as well as of true faith, that it is so simple, when experimentally known, and thus so free from all guile, deceit, craft, and hypocrisy.

But what an encouragement this gives to plead his promises with God in prayer. “Thou hast promised, Lord.” What a prevailing plea is this. You may be burdened with guilt; sin may lie as a heavy load upon your conscience. Are you enabled to confess your sins, to forsake them, to mourn over them; and are you begging of God to manifest to your conscience the forgiveness and pardon of them all? Then there is a promise for you, which I have before quoted and enlarged upon, and God is able to fulfil it to the joy of your soul. Plead it, then, with him on the simple ground of his ability to perform it. Or you may be sadly tried with temptations, and may find them so strong and powerful that you daily fear your feet may be entrapped in some snare, and you may fall a prey to the tempter. But God has declared that all things work together for the good of those that love him; that no temptation shall assail you but what is common to man, and that he “is faithful who will not

suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that you may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor. 10:13.) Then hold on: God has promised deliverance, and he is able to fulfil it. Or your backslidings may lie with great weight and guilt upon your conscience; you may feel them more than ever you felt even the sins of your youth; for we do feel the pain of backsliding more than even the vile and open sins which we committed in the days of unregeneracy; nay, they seem at times so great as to be scarcely capable of being healed. But God has said, “I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely.” He has given this promise, and he is able to fulfil it. Now faith has to hold on, to believe he is able, and to wait upon him for its fulfilment.

Or you may have difficulties in providence; your path may be very dark as regards your present prospects. You look round on every side and cannot see whence deliverance can come, or what friends can be raised up to help you. There may be few openings in the dark and gathering clouds of providence as in times past. The whole prospect may seem exceedingly gloomy, and you scarcely know how the scene will end, and whether wreck and ruin may not burst upon you. But God has said, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” “Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.” “Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” “The silver and the gold are mine and the cattle upon a thousand hills.” Have not you yourself in times past found that God has appeared in extreme moments of difficulty, has raised up friends, and given you unexpected help? He will do it again. Faith’s work is to hold up and to hold on, to believe he is able; and if we can but come with a promise or two in our hand and keep pleading with the Lord, “Lord, thou hast promised this; Lord, thou hast promised that thou art able; if I look at myself, if I view my sins, guilt falls upon my conscience; if I view the difficulties which surround my path, I am in perplexity and full of confusion; but thou art able. When in darkness thou canst give light; when dead thou canst give me life; when all things are against me thou

canst make all things work for me. Thou art able.” If we can thus plead, surely he will appear. O what a struggle there is sometimes going on in the mind when staggering from unbelief. “How can it be? It seems impossible. The difficulties are so great, the trials so severe, the temptations so powerful, my fears and foes so pressing, how can I ever come honourably through? How ever can I bless and praise God for this trial? How ever can my mouth be filled with singing and my tongue with rejoicing? How ever can I thank, praise, and bless his holy name for this trial, for that temptation, for that painful vicissitude, for that severe affliction, for that heavy loss, and, above all, for that peculiar circumstance which so cut me to the very quick?” He is able. Thus faith simply acts upon this ability of God, that what he has promised he is able also to perform.

But now observe how faith is kept secure from presumption and falling asleep under a sense of God’s ability. If we were simply to fall back in our easy chair and say, “Ah, it is all right, it is all right; God is able to perform; I need not trouble myself; God will do it all:” that would not be faith. Did such language ever come out of the mouth of Abraham? Hear Abraham pleading with God for the saving of Sodom. Did any such presumptuous language come out of Abraham’s mouth? Mark his reverence of God. See how earnestly he pleaded with him, and yet bowed down before him as dust and ashes. With this faith, therefore, that believes the power of God and hangs upon it, there is needed that gracious tenderness, that reverence and godly fear, that sense of the majesty of God which prevent all trifling with him, cut the very sinews of arrogance and presumption, and cast the soul at his feet in deep self-abasement. This is one way by which faith is kept in its right place.

But there is also another. Afflictions and chastisements are mercifully sent to keep the soul from resting in a carnal confidence, a dead assurance, a vain presumption, that because God has said he will perform his promises we may fall asleep in the corner of

the carriage, and be sure the train will come to the end of the journey; that we need not get out to stoke the fire or drive the engine. I say, faith is not that easy first-class, passenger in a man's breast sleeping securely in the corner of a well-cushioned carriage. Faith is all alive to difficulties, dangers, trials; is timid, looking out of the window to see what may occur; and is continually in a state of exercise as to the result, hanging upon God as alone able to preserve the soul and body too from a collision or a crash. God takes care to exercise his people well, that their faith may not be rickety nor fall asleep, and, so to speak, snore its life away with all the intoxication of a drunkard. These trials, afflictions, exercises, reverses in providence, smittings of conscience, doubts and fears, infidel suggestions, and the path of tribulation generally which God's people have to tread, instrumentally serve to keep alive the grace of God in their souls. Thus while God by the secret influence of his Spirit and grace through the power of his truth, keeps us on the one hand from sinking into despondency and despair, or giving way wholly to unbelief, so on the other he preserves us from getting into the chair of the slothful, or turning aside into the by-path of ease by exercises, trials, and afflictions. We are thus mercifully preserved from being driven by the storms of life upon the rocks of carking cares and worldly anxieties on which so many make shipwreck of body and soul, from being sucked in and engulfed in the maelstrom of despair, and from being stranded in the dark upon a lee shore through the sailors going to sleep, and no watch kept on deck upon course, sail, land, sea, or helm. It is thus that the ship of the soul is held on by the mighty power of God in that course by which the sea of life is safely crossed, and the harbour of rest, through every storm and calm, reached at last in the bosom of a glorious and endless eternity.

IV.—But Abraham, we read in our text, gave glory to God, which brings us to our last point; for this is what faith, true faith, always does. It gives God the whole glory.

Now if there were anything in us to which we could look, on

which we could hang, and which we were sure would be a friend to us when we wanted it, or a neighbour to whom we could have recourse to borrow all that was demanded by our necessities, and who would lend us a helping hand when we required it, we should naturally turn away from God to seek that creature help. It is strange to say, but no less true than strange, that God is the last from whom we seek help. Everybody, and everything else will be looked to before we look to him; for we never really come to him, to our shame be it said, except when we are absolutely compelled by sheer and hard necessity. When, then, the creature has been resorted to, and proves a broken reed; when natural hope gives up the ghost; and natural faith is unable to maintain its ground; when presumption, arrogance, and vain confidence slink out of the camp and get out of sight, like the children of Ephraim, turning their backs in the day of battle, then poor, despised little faith begins to lift up its humble head, raises itself amid the storm which has filled the whole cowardly crew with terror and confusion, and looks out of the wreck of all creature hopes around. And what does faith, thus left alone, do when there is not a man left even to haul at a rope? It does what Jonah did when he was in the whale's belly: "Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet will I look again toward thy holy temple." (Jonah 2:4.) Nor will it look in vain. It will be with it as with him: "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple." (Jonah 2:7.) And what will be the issue of this prayer and its answer? Giving glory to God. Was it not so with Jonah? "But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord." (Jonah 2:9.) It is when we know that "salvation is of the Lord" that we give the whole glory to him. But Jonah had to learn that salvation was of the Lord in the whale's belly, and even in a worse place still—"the belly of hell."

But how does faith give glory to God? It glorifies him mainly for two things: first, that he should have given in his word promises so

suitable to our state and case, promises to meet us in our extremity; and, secondly, that he should so amply and blessedly fulfil them. Abraham gave glory to God by believing the promises made to him of a son before its fulfilment. Our Lord said to Thomas, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." (John 20:29.) Such was the faith of Abraham. He believed the promise without seeing it fulfilled. But it is chiefly when the promise and its fulfilment meet together that we can give glory to God.

Let us apply this to some of the cases I have already named. Take, for instance, the case of a poor sinner convinced of sin, with a heavy burden of guilt upon his back, unable to see how he can be forgiven consistently with the demands of the law and the justice of God. Now what a relief it is to him to be able to confess his sins, and to find as he confesses them mercy coming into his soul, some breaking in of the light of God's countenance, some healing word, some comforting testimony, some melting sense of the goodness of God in Christ Jesus, some sight of atoning blood and justifying righteousness, some persuasion of an interest in redeeming love which he can lay hold on, feel the sweetness of, and in some measure appropriate. It may not bring full deliverance. Many of God's dear children cannot get much beyond gentle intimations of his mercy, passing touches of his gracious hand, and softenings of heart under a sense of undeserved goodness and love; yet they feel sensibly relieved by what their faith thus lays hold of and brings in, and give glory to God. Sometimes again, as they hear the preached word and get a blessing under it, or some precious promise comes home to their soul with divine power, or they are favoured in secret prayer, and light and life break in upon their mind, they see such a glory in what is thus made known to them that they glorify God for what they see and feel.

But more especially when the way of salvation is opened up to them; when Christ is revealed to their soul by the power of God; when they see that wondrous plan unfolded, how God

WILDERNESS HUNGER AND HEAVENLY MANNA 271
can be just, and yet the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus; then as they view in the greatness of the mystery of the Person of Christ the blessed solution of the problem which has so exercised their mind, they freely and fully give all the glory to God. "Lord," they cry, "who and what am I, that thou shouldest have had pity and compassion upon me, shouldest have touched my heart by thy grace, shouldest have planted thy fear in my breast, led me to pray and seek thy face, and listened to my feeble cries, shouldest thus have given me to hope in thy mercy, and blessed my soul with a manifestation of thy dear Son? O, who and what am I to be thus favoured, when thousands are left to perish in their sins? O, how glorious art thou! what a good God! how thy mercy melts my heart, and thy goodness softens my soul! To thy name, be all the honour and praise, both now and for ever and ever." Here is giving glory to God. Thus, true faith will always give God the glory: will never take an atom of its own praise to itself, but will ascribe the whole glory to God as its sole author and finisher, until blessings here end in blessings hereafter, and streams of grace on earth issue into the boundless ocean of glory in heaven.

206 Wilderness Hunger and Heavenly Manna

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening,

July 1, 1866

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

Deuteronomy 8:2, 3

The book of Deuteronomy has been sometimes called the “Old Testament Gospel;” and with some reason, for it contains, perhaps, more gospel doctrines, at least more clearly expressed and more fully developed than any other book of the Pentateuch. It is true that in the latter part of the book of Exodus and throughout Leviticus we have, under type and figure, much blessed gospel preached; but the whole is deeply veiled by ceremonial rites, of which the spiritual meaning could not be fully understood till they were fulfilled by the sacrifice and bloodshedding of our gracious Lord. The book of Deuteronomy was, so to speak, the legacy which Moses left to the people of Israel before he resigned his commission and his breath, and in this respect it somewhat resembles the last speeches which our Lord made to his disciples, and of which they themselves bore this testimony: “Lo! now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb.” (John 16:29.) It is filled, therefore, with holy instruction; and, whilst it abounds in promises, is replete with most powerful exhortations, mingled and thoroughly seasoned with earnest warnings, expostulations, reproofs, and directions; the whole forming what I may perhaps call a most blessed spiritual compound, precisely adapted to the state and case of the children of Israel, then upon the edge of the wilderness and upon the eve of entering into the promised land. The warm, tender, affectionate, fatherly, and mellow tone which pervades the whole book carries with it its own evidence that it was the voice of the man of God about to yield up his parting breath; and yet the earnestness, vigour, and power shining through the whole show that “his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated.” It is indeed a book which demands and would amply repay our earnest and prayerful study; for it is as full of instruction, encouragement, and warning to us as it was to the children of Israel to whom it was first delivered.

I shall not, however, dilate any further upon the character of the book of Deuteronomy, but come at once to our text, in which Moses seems to sum up the dealings of God with the children of

Israel in the wilderness, and the fruits which it was the intention of God that they should reap from them. He calls upon them, therefore, to look back and remember all the way which the Lord their God had led them forty years in the wilderness; nor would this retrospect be unprofitable if they could understand and bear in mind the reasons why God had thus dealt with them for so many years; that he had a certain object to effect thereby, and that this object was to humble them, to prove them, and to know what was in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments or no. He tells them further that God suffered them to hunger and fed them with manna, a food which they knew not nor their fathers before them, and for this express purpose, that they might know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.

I have thus in a few simple words outlined the subject before us, and now let us see whether, by God’s help and blessing, we may be able to gather up something this evening for our personal instruction, edification, and encouragement; something which may communicate that spiritual, solid, and abiding profit without which all preaching falls to the ground like water spilt. I shall, therefore, view the subject as having a particular and personal bearing upon our own Christian experience; and, to facilitate clearness in treating it both for my own sake and yours, shall divide it mainly into two leading branches.

I.—First, the injunction which our text contains, of remembering all the way which the Lord our God has led us in the wilderness.

II.—Secondly, the benefits and blessings which spring out of the Lord’s thus dealing with us, and which it is his revealed will and intention by means of them to communicate to us.

I.—“Better is the end of a thing,” says the wise man, “than the beginning thereof.” (Eccl. 7:8.) This is often true in natural things, but invariably so in divine. Rarely at first can we foresee what will be the issue of any matter which we take in hand. We may

begin it with much hope, and find in the end those hopes sadly disappointed. We may begin it with much fear, and find from the event those fears utterly groundless. Whatever we take in hand it is very rare that our expectations are fully carried out, for we have again and again to learn that “man’s heart deviseth his way but the Lord directeth his steps;” and that there are many devices in a man’s heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that and that only, shall stand. But so far as we are amongst the family of God, and as such are under especial guidance and divine teaching and leading, whether our first expectations are accomplished or not, the end stamps wisdom and goodness upon all the dealings of God with us both in providence and in grace. However chequered his path has been; however, as Job speaks, his purposes have been broken off, even the thoughts of his heart; however when he looked for good, then evil came unto him, and when he waited for light there came darkness; whatever bitter things God seemed to write against him when he made him to possess the sins of his youth, yet sooner or later every child of God will be able to say, “O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee;” and this will embolden him to add, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me, as they have already followed me, all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” Thus it is good sometimes at the end, it may be, of a long profession; and there are those here who have made a long profession—I myself have professed, and I hope possessed, the fear of God for nearly forty years; it is good, I say, for such sometimes to look back through the long vista of many years, and see how the Lord has dealt with us, both in providence and in grace; yes, it is good to take a solemn review of what marks we can find of his favour, what testimonies of his teaching, what Ebenezers we may set up at various points in this path, as blessed memorials of his gracious and merciful help. We are, therefore, bidden in our text to remember all the way.

1. Now if this be so, the first point to fix our eyes upon is the beginning of the way—the starting point. I have long contended

for a good beginning; for I know well that where there is a good beginning there will be a good ending; and there will often be a satisfactory middle. But what do I mean by “a good beginning?” I mean for God to begin with us, and not for us to begin with God. By a good beginning, then, I mean a marked epoch in our life—what I have called in one of my early sermons “a beginning felt”—looking back upon which we can more or less distinctly trace the hand of God to have been made manifest in a communication of grace to our souls. We may be—I have myself been often—tried as to the reality of the work; and I am sometimes tried to this day whether I have a single grain of grace in my heart. But I have never doubted the time when, nor the circumstances under which it began, nor what my feelings were under the first teachings of the blessed Spirit in my heart; and I have come to this decision in my own mind, if that be wrong then all is wrong; if that be right then all is right. If I began with God then God may leave me to end with myself; but if God began with me independent of any will, inclination, power, or action of my own, in a sovereign way of grace, by the implantation of his fear in my heart and the communication of divine life to my soul—if God himself thus began a good work in me, I have his certain promise that he will perform and complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:6.) Upon this we sometimes hang amidst doubt, fear, and perplexity; we hang, I say, upon God’s work upon our heart as begun by himself. We have then to remember this, and this is not very difficult, for the first work upon our conscience is sometimes as fresh in our minds as if it occurred yesterday. People tell me sometimes that I have a strong memory, but whether our memory be strong or weak, it is astonishing what an impression divine realities make upon our mind in their first communication. Often, too, God’s dealings with us in providence were as marked as his dealings with us in grace. Do you think that Paul ever forgot his journey to Damascus, Matthew his sitting at the receipt of custom, Nathanael his kneeling under the fig tree, Zacchaeus his climbing up into a sycamore tree, or Peter

and Andrew casting their net into the sea? Similarly with us. The providential circumstances under which the work of grace was commenced; the leadings of God to place us in a certain position, bring us into a certain state, and open up a certain path in which he fixed our feet, that he might prepare us for the communication of his grace, are usually so marked that they are fixed indelibly in our mind and memory. And besides such general leadings, I have often observed—it was my own case, and I have seen it in others—some very marked intervention of God in providence, such as a change of abode, a bringing a peculiar affliction on body or mind, an opening up of some unexpected circumstance, which, if not grace, prepared for grace; and though had it been nothing but temporal and natural would have died in the very birth, yet it so worked in the providence of God with his grace that, like links in a chain, the two were bound together. Thus the first link was a link in providence, say, for instance, some very deep and painful trial which seemed to cut the very heart-strings of life. Many perhaps have had deeper trials than we; but they only had with it the sorrow of the world which worketh death; but we had, we hope, with it the grace of life working with the trial, over-ruling it, and turning it into a gracious channel. Grace softened the heart; and though this very softening made the trial more deeply felt, yet it humbled and meekened the soul under it. As then we lay hold of this first link we find it knitted on to a second. Call the first link, if you like, a link of iron, but call the next a link of gold, for if the first were providence, the second was grace. Then as we lay hold of the golden link its thrilling touch, as with an electric power, makes us remember how eternal realities first fell upon our mind, how the conviction of sin first entered our conscience, the guilt of sin, the burden of it, and the exercises connected with it; how the Spirit of grace and of supplications was communicated; the cries, sighs, tears, groans, wrestlings, in which we sought mercy at the Lord's hands; the separation from friends and associates which it entailed; the breaking off of sin and all connections contrary

to God's mind and will, with the coming out of the world and everything worldly and the giving up of ourselves freely unto God, to be his in life, death, time, and eternity. However the Lord may have wrought with different degrees of power in our hearts, yet we may lay it down as a clear and positive truth that the effect of his dealings with our consciences was to separate us from the world and bring us unto himself. Is not this God's testimony concerning his people Israel? "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." (Exod. 19:4.)

2. But we have to remember as another bright waymark and blessed Ebenezer on the road by which we have come, how the Lord was pleased to manifest a sense of his mercy, of his goodness, and of his salvation to our heart. There are two points which it is very desirable, if not absolutely needful, for a child of God to be very clear in: One, is the beginning of the work of God upon his soul—to make clear work there; and the second is, to be able to trace out any application of the blood of Christ to his conscience, any manifestation of mercy to his soul, any revelation of the Son of God to his heart, any knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins. Now, though there may be in many cases doubts, fears, and questionings as to the reality of both these points, and especially the beginning of the work, yet I do believe wherever the Lord has begun a gracious work, there will be times and seasons when a sacred light will shine upon that beginning to make it plain and clear; and similarly, if the Lord the Spirit has ever revealed Christ to our soul, and made him precious to our affections, a blessed light will at times shine upon that also, to make that plain and clear: for "in God's light we see light;" and we thus get a testimony in a good conscience, that we have been made partakers of eternal life by a spiritual, experimental knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. There are times indeed when we can believe nothing, and there are times when, so to speak, we can believe everything. There are times when we have

to say, "We see not our signs;" and there are times when we can see every waymark and every Ebenezer. But our feelings do not alter facts; and as seeing our signs does not make them, so our not seeing them does not unmake them.

3. But we have to remember all the way which he has led us in the wilderness. It is not only then the bright spots which we have to call to mind: there are the dark spots also on which we have to look and remember. The children of Israel were bidden to remember "all the way," and therefore all the temptations of the way, trials of the way, sufferings of the way, and I may add, all their own base, rebellious conduct in the way. If, then, in looking back to the way we see here and there an Ebenezer, a token for good, a bright spot, we see spots here and there on which darkness seems to rest, and from which we would fain turn our eyes. Now this darkness may arise from two causes: 1, first, want of clear light; and, 2, secondly, a painful recollection of our own sinfulness. Thus, as sometimes in nature there is a mixture of light and darkness, producing a dim and hazy twilight, and thus obscuring spots which might be otherwise bright, so it is in grace. Let me explain my meaning a little more clearly. Upon some points of our experience we cannot be altogether clear, and for this reason, there was so much of sin and self mixed with them. Thus we can look back on various spots and places when certain sacrifices were to be made, certain things to be given up which we held very close, and to part with which seemed to cut very deeply into our flesh. It might have been an attachment, or a situation, or a prospect of getting on in life. We could not therefore through the weakness of the flesh make the sacrifice. Now this clinging to sin and self has thrown a degree of darkness upon those spots. And yet all is not dark; for a second look would enable us to view other spots and places where the Lord gave faith to make the sacrifice, come out of the world, give up everything that nature loved and cleaved to, and cast one's lot amongst the family of God. These would be spots in one's experience which one could look back

upon with some degree of satisfaction as the Lord's work. Yet in all our movements there is so much sin, so much of the flesh, and so much of self mixed up, that though what we did was performed under a divine power and contrary to the flesh, yet in looking back upon it we cannot call it to mind with perfect satisfaction. Thus it is partly light and partly dark. But even where this is not the case, unbelief, infidelity, carnal fear, and a spirit of bondage will often so work together that the whole may first and last seem buried in confusion. I cannot myself understand those people who are always ready to talk about their experience at any hour and at every hour of the day; so that if you were to wake them up at twelve o'clock at night, they would only have just to rub their eyes and they could tell you all their experience from first to last, between asleep and awake. I know myself that sometimes I have not a word to say about myself or my experience—good or bad—and am silent before God and man; but these men seem to have it all at their fingers' ends, and can wind it off from them as easily a skein of cotton, and pretty much as harsh and dry. It is, I believe, by ourselves in silence, for the most part, that we can best look back upon all the way by which God has led us in the wilderness; and if he do not shine upon the way and bring it to remembrance, "we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness." And yet when the Lord is pleased to shine, how good it is to look back upon all the way.

4. Sometimes, for instance, we see what a God he has been to us in providence. We trace his outstretched hand again and again, with more or less clearness and distinctness, and as our faith sees this hand, we bless and praise his holy name for having led us so conspicuously by it. I have seen much of it myself, perhaps, as much as most men, and especially during these two last years of my life, and I desire to bless God for it; yet at times it is very hard to trace the hand of God distinctly, for as he works by instruments, we sometimes fix our eyes upon the instrument and not upon the hand which holds it; which is the sin condemned by the prophet,

“as if the axe should boast itself against him that heweth therewith, or the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it.” But another thing which confuses us is what I may call the zigzag of God’s providence. But was not this the case also with the children of Israel? When the pillar of the cloud moved, they moved; by night or by day the camp moved, according to the movement of the cloud, as we read, “And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed.” (Num. 9:21.) But in thus following the cloud, what a zigzag, in and out, backward and forward path they trod. If you were to see it traced out on a map you would wonder at the intricacy of the path and how they were directed from this station to that in a way which they could not comprehend, yet every step arranged by infinite wisdom. Thus we are to remember all the way whereby God hath led us these many years in the wilderness by his wise and unerring providence.

But we have also to remember all his gracious dealings with us as contrasted with our own perverseness, rebelliousness, unbelief, and base requitals of all his goodness and mercy. And thus all our trials, afflictions, sufferings, exercises, snares, temptations, wanderings, backslidings, slips, and falls—we have to remember them all, think upon them, ponder over them, examine them, lament, bewail, and confess our sinfulness in them on our part; and we have to remember also all the patience, forbearance, long-suffering, tender mercy, and rich, superabounding grace on the part of God. We have to look at these things till they enter deeply into our heart, and sink and penetrate into our inmost conscience, that our soul may be like a newly ploughed field, open to sun and rain, and broken down into mellowness and tilth, that we may indeed be “God’s husbandry,” and that the word of eternal life may be in our heart as the good seed which springs up and grows and brings forth fruit to his praise.

II.—But I will now pass on to consider the benefits and

WILDERNESS HUNGER AND HEAVENLY MANNA 281
 blessings which sprang out of their wandering in the wilderness, and which they were to remember as much as the wanderings themselves.

Though their wandering so many years in the wilderness was a punishment for their sins, and especially for that sin of unbelief and rebellion which they manifested on the return of the spies, when they murmured against Moses and Aaron, crying out, “Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt,” and actually proposed to make a captain and return, yet God took advantage, so to speak, of their sins and their rebellion to bring about the purposes of his own good pleasure. He did not create their sins; he was not the author of their rebellion; he did not foster their unbelief, for God cannot be the author of sin; and yet he could take occasion by their very sin to work out his own purposes. We cannot have a more striking instance of this than the crucifixion of our dear Redeemer, in which God worked out his purposes by the hands of ungodly men. How plain is Peter’s testimony: “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.) It was by “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God that Jesus was delivered,” or as the word means, “given up” out of the hands of God into theirs; but it was wicked hands which took him, crucified, and slew him. God’s determinate counsel and foreknowledge did not make their hands wicked; and yet their wicked hands brought about his holy purposes. So it was with the children of Israel. It was their wickedness which was the cause of their long wanderings; and yet these very wanderings carried out God’s purposes, and what is more, were overruled for their good. So it is with us in this wilderness world, of which that “great and terrible wilderness” was a representation. God had a purpose in permitting us to be what we are, to have been what we have been, and to have done what we have done. And what that purpose was is beautifully and blessedly opened in our text. Let us see if we can trace out some of these designs of God, as laid open in the words

before us; and let us bear in mind that they are as applicable to us now as they were to the children of Israel: for “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

1. The first purpose is to humble us. Our heart, at least mine, is desperately proud; and if there be a sin which God hates more than another, and more sets himself against, it is the sin of pride. Though some men are more tempted, perhaps, to that sin than others, and, like a weed upon a dunghill, it may grow ranker in some soils, especially when well manured by rank and riches, praise and flattery, our own ignorance, and the ignorance of others, yet all inherit it alike from their fallen ancestor, who got it from Satan, that “king over all the children of pride.” Those, perhaps, who think they possess the least, and view themselves with wonderful self-complacency amongst the humblest of mortals, may have as much or more than those who feel and confess it, only rather more deeply hid and buried more out of sight in the dark recesses of their carnal mind. As God then sees all hearts, and knows every movement of pride, whether we see it or not, his purpose is to humble us. And if we take a review of all his dealings with us, we shall see that this is the end which he has ever had in view; for until that is done we may well say that nothing is done.

But how did God humble the children of Israel? By placing them in circumstances which manifested their real character. God, as I said before, does not put his hand to wickedness: God forbid! God does not stir up by his Spirit evil in a man’s heart; but he finds it there. If a wasp sting you, if a dog bite you, if you tread upon a serpent, and he turn round and fasten his poison fangs into your ankle, was it any act of yours which put venom into the wasp, sharp teeth into the dog, or poison into the snake? Was it not all there before? It was drawn forth, but there it was; and the occasion only drew it out. So if there be in the heart of man pride, as there is, and circumstances occur to draw it

out; or if there be in men’s hearts rebellion, and circumstances draw forth that rebellion; or if there be in man’s heart unbelief and infidelity, and occasions arise to draw them forth, and those occasions occur in the providence of God, God does not create that pride, that rebellion, that unbelief, that infidelity, nor does he stir it up instrumentally; but he suffers it to manifest itself for this special purpose, to humble the individual in whom the sin thus appears. Mark my words: I am not justifying any kind of sin in thought, word, or deed. Sin, in my eyes, is exceedingly sinful. I would desire never to sin again. I would, if I could, live perfectly holy. I would not have a sinful thought, I would not speak a sinful word, and still less would I commit any sinful action. And yet I find sin working in my mind sometimes all day long. Now what do I learn by this? Humility. But if truly humbled I cannot raise my hand against God; I cannot lift up a rebellious tongue against him and say, “Why hast thou made me thus?” for were I to do so I should have against me the verdict of my own conscience. I must fall down, then, humbly and meekly before him; I must put my mouth in the dust; I must acknowledge I am vile, because I see his greatness, majesty, holiness, purity, and perfections, and see and feel, as contrasted with them, my own exceeding sinfulness before him. This, therefore, teaches me humility; at least if I don’t get humility in this way, I don’t know how it is to be got. Now when I look back upon a long life of profession, how many things do I see—though with all my sins and follies, slips and falls, I hope the Lord has kept me from bringing any open reproach upon his name and cause, and God keep me to the end, for it would be a dreadful thing for me after my long and well-known profession to bring disgrace upon the truth in my last days, yet my conscience testifies of many things I have thought, said, and done, which grieve my soul almost every day in the recollection of them, and make me hang my head before God, put my mouth in the dust, and confess my sins unto him. Nor do I believe that I am singular in this feeling, for I am well persuaded that there is not a single person

in this congregation who possesses the fear of God in a tender conscience who can look back through a life, and especially a long life of profession, without many cutting reflections, many painful reminiscences, and many distressing recollections that humble him in the very dust before God. At least I have no communion, and wish to have none, with any but those whom God humbles. Men of broken hearts, contrite spirits, and tender consciences I would desire to have for my companions, if I have any.

2. But God had other purposes and other ends to accomplish besides humbling. He had “to prove them, to know what was in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments or no.”

Every man has to be proved, and every man’s religion has to be proved; for every man’s work is to be tried with fire; and though the trial may be delayed—though the proof may not yet seem going on, yet if you make a profession of religion, sooner or later the trial will come, and it will be made manifest in the fire of trial and temptation of what sort your religion is. Now the wilderness was meant to prove the children of Israel. They made great boasting at Mount Sinai. All that God bade them observe to do, they said that they would observe and do; and yet, when Moses tarried in the mount a little beyond their expectation, they made a golden calf. So much for the spirit of free will; so much for the resolve of the creature to keep God’s commands. Now God is determined to prove what is in a man’s heart, and whether he will keep his commandments or no. It is not for the purpose of proving it to himself, for he knoweth all things, but of proving it to us. Where, for instance, he plants his fear, he will prove that fear. Circumstances will arise, various things will occur in business, in the family, in a man’s situation, public or private, whereby it will be ascertained whether he is possessed of the fear of God or not. He may for a time carry on his crafty practices; he may wear a mask and may deceive himself and deceive others; but sooner or later, if the fear of God be not in his soul, if he be not a possessor of heavenly grace and God has not wrought anything in his heart

by his own divine power and influence, he will prove reprobate silver; he will not stand the test; his religion will be burnt up in the flame, and he himself be cast out as worthless dross. He may go on for many years, and yet the end will prove sooner or later what the man is, and what his profession is worth. But the same fiery trial will also prove what a man has of the life of God in his soul. For though, through the power of temptation, he may often reel and stagger to and fro, and be at his wits’ end, yet God will deliver him out of all his temptations, and manifest in him the power of his grace. It is a day of great profession, splendid pretensions, loud talking, presumptuous boasting, and, as men think, strong faith. I do not think so myself, but just the contrary, for it seems to me to be a day of small things with the very best, and a day of no things at all with the most. But God best knows what the day really is. He sees all hearts, searches all reins. Nothing that we are or have is hidden before the eyes of him with whom we have to do; and it is to be greatly feared that much of this strong faith will be proved to be presumption, many of these boasting claims to be downright arrogance, and much of this loud talk to be that of “the prating fool,” against whom, twice in one chapter, God has recorded this awful sentence, “that he shall fall.” One grain of godly fear, one sigh and cry of a broken heart, one longing look of living faith, one tender feeling of love to the Lord from a glimpse of his beauty and blessedness, are worth all this loud talk of which the wise man truly says, it “tendeth only to penury.”

3. But God has to prove by the wilderness, not only the truth and reality of his work upon the heart, but whether we will keep his commandments or no. It is not what we talk that God looks to, but what we do. “The tongue,” says James, “is a little member, and boasteth great things.” To talk is easy enough, but to do is another matter. Talking brings with it no sacrifices, no self-denial, no crucifixion of the flesh, no mortification of the whole body of sin, no putting off of the old man, no putting on of the new. A man may talk and drink, talk and cheat, talk and lie, talk and live in

all manner of ungodliness. But it is walking not talking, praying not prating, doing not daring, obeying not saying, which manifest whose we are and whom we serve. But what are we to understand by keeping God's commandments? It does not mean, I believe, as interpreted by the rule and spirit of the gospel, keeping the moral law, that is, the law of Moses in the ten commandments, but the preceptive part of God's word, as revealed and laid down in the New Testament, where everything that God would have us to do, and everything that God would have us not to do, are written as with a ray of divine light. It embraces, therefore, every gospel precept, every New Testament command and direction, in a word, everything which proceeds from the mouth of God as given by him in the last revelation of his own mind and will, as the guiding rule of our Christian obedience. For you will observe that this is the test laid down in our text, "whether we will keep God's commandments or no." And where are those commandments laid down in all their clearness and plenitude but in the New Testament. Is he not our Master, whom we serve in godly fear and love, whose approbation we desire to win, whose favour we count better than life, and in the enjoyment of whose love we wish to live and die? Now with all the perplexity, doubt, or fear which may encompass your mind, through the worrying, distracting power and influence of sin, Satan, and self, if you possess the fear of God, there will be that honesty, integrity, uprightness, and sincerity wrought in your soul by a divine power, whereby you can say before God, "Lord, I desire to know thy will and do it. However I come short, however I fail or fall, my desire is to be found walking in thy ways and doing those things which are pleasing in thy sight."

But how does the wilderness prove how far we are willing to do the things which are pleasing in God's sight, and how far we are willing to keep his commandments or no? Thus. Its trials and temptations, its sorrows and afflictions, its perplexities and the exercises which spring from them, lay bare the real state of our

hearts, and as they discover to us the weakness and wickedness of the flesh, so they also bring to light any good thing which God by his grace may have wrought in our soul. When we are in a smooth and easy path, flesh and spirit are alike hidden from view. Like the sea in a calm, the flesh is smoothed into smiles, and what it can be in a storm is hidden in the still yet deep water. Thus we know not what the flesh really is until worked up into a storm by the winds of temptation. Then its waves roll and it casts up mire and dirt; and then we also know the mighty voice which can say to these winds and waves, "Peace, be still." It is thus that the strength of sin and the strength of grace are brought out, and we learn which is stronger, grace or sin, the power of the flesh or the power of the Spirit, the battlings of self or the victories of Christ.

4. But to pass on. The Holy Ghost by the mouth of Moses goes on to unfold other reasons of these wilderness dealings, setting before us both sides of the question, that we may well ponder the path of our feet. The next point then which we have to consider is God's "suffering us to hunger." This, we know, was highly characteristic of the wilderness. No food naturally grew there. All the food supplied during those forty years was food from heaven miraculously supplied. But before that miraculous supply came, they were sharply hunger-bitten. Scarcely had they got into the wilderness before hunger pangs fell upon them, and they cried out, "Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger." (Exodus 16:3.) They were therefore suffered to hunger that they might have a sharp though not long taste of one of the severest of bodily pangs and human sufferings.

But this was typically instructive, and throws a broad light upon the teachings and dealings of God with the souls of his people in the wilderness now. He suffers us to hunger. We cannot feed upon husks. Worldly things cannot satisfy the immortal

desires of a newborn soul. We must have divine food; we must have heavenly realities. Whatever I am, whatever men may think I am, I feel this one thing, that I must have heavenly realities. I cannot do with shadowy appearances, with make-believes and make-do's in religion. I may have but little, but let that little be real, for all else is a mockery and a delusion. Let it be the pure work of God upon my soul; let it be the breathings of his Spirit into my heart; let it be the communication of his life and the visitations of his favour to preserve my spirit. I don't want much; I don't seek great things; but I seek real things. I want a religion to live and die by; I want something to save and sanctify, bless and comfort my soul for time and eternity. I have to die; I have to face eternity. My conscience registers many sins committed against a holy God. I cannot stand before him under the weight of these sins as thus manifested to my conscience. How, then, under the weight of all my sins, known and unknown, seen and unseen? Nothing, therefore, but the manifested mercy, goodness, and love of God can speak any real comfort to my soul, can bear me up under any trial, support me under any affliction, comfort my heart when cast down, and speak a peace to my inward spirit which the world cannot give nor take away. Therefore I want realities. And this makes me preach them to you, and insist upon them both earnestly and continually. And I believe I have a witness in your consciences who fear God that I am right in so doing, for God teaches all his people, be they strong and well established in the faith or weak and feeble, the same lesson: he makes them all alike want realities. And the way which he teaches them to want realities is by suffering them to hunger. Is not hunger a real thing? You who can always find plenty of food in the cupboard and plenty of money in the purse to go to market with, or who from various causes have but a weak and feeble appetite, perhaps scarcely for a day in your life know what real hunger is. But hunger is a reality, and you might be in circumstances to find it so. Say, for instance, you were on board a ship when provisions ran short, or on a long

journey when food could not be readily obtained, or were so reduced in circumstances that you had no money to buy it, you would find hunger a reality. So it is in spiritual matters. Hunger is a reality. And have you not sometime found it to be a reality? "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." No reality in that panting? We read of the wanderers in the wilderness: "Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them." (Psalm 107:5.) No reality in that hunger and thirst, or the fainting of their soul in the very pangs of famine? "My soul thirsteth after God, after the living God." No reality in that? If you say "No" it is to deny at one and the same moment and in one and the same breath that hunger is a real feeling. Sometimes you can hardly get beyond the sigh, the cry, the longing desire, the hungering and thirsting after righteousness; but it is a reality, and a divine reality too, for it is not nature but grace which produces it. And God suffers you to hunger that you may know hunger to be a reality. If you could feed upon husks, why need you hunger? If you could, as men often bid you, take God at his word, believe the promises, rest upon the doctrines, claim God to be your Father, and walk in all the arrogance of the children of pride why need you hunger? Not you. What do these men know about hunger or thirst either? What do they know of David's feelings or David's cry? "Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?" Why need their eyes fail or their soul faint for God's salvation when they have it all locked up in the cupboard? Locked up, do I say? No; for their cupboard has neither lock nor key, but is open all the day long to all comers. But it is because you cannot take blessings and favours God does not give; it is because your heart cries out, as Berridge says, for heavenly food; it is because you know there is a reality in the things of God, and that if God withhold them you cannot get them, that you cannot do their biddings and steal their stealings. Yes, it is your hunger which teaches you what real food is. Perhaps you have come here this evening hungering. As you walked along there might have been raised up a secret cry in

your soul, “Lord, give me something this evening. I want a word. It is a long time since thou wert pleased to speak to my soul. I am in trouble. My soul is deeply tried. I want something from thyself.” Here is the hunger of which I am speaking and on which I am insisting. Now God teaches you by the wilderness to feel this hunger: it is his work. The emptying us of self is his; the sifting of our souls in the sieve is his; the bringing down of our proud heart is his; the wounding of our consciences is his; the stripping of all our own goodness, wisdom, strength, and righteousness is his; the feeling of hunger then which springs from these dealings of God with our hearts is his. We know that, alike in nature and grace, hunger is not food, but it is next door to it. We know that a sharp appetite is not good meat or a loaf of bread; but what is good meat or the best of bread if there is no appetite for it? It is a blessed preparation for a feast, if it is not the feast itself. For what is a feast to a man who has no appetite for it? What the smell of roast beef is to a sickly invalid—a subject of loathing not of longing, quenching the appetite rather than sharpening it.

5. But what other dealings of God with them in the wilderness does Moses bid them remember? The food with which he supplied their hunger: “He fed them with manna, which they knew not, neither did their fathers know.” Here was a provision. What a miracle, and what an undeniable miracle. How stupid, to say the least, must infidelity be to deny a miracle which was witnessed every day by a million of people. Could you deceive a million of people for forty years? Could manna fall every day except the Sabbath for forty years and feed a people amounting to more than a million, and all those people be deceived in their eyes, in their hands, and in their taste? Why, the very little children would rise up and testify when they saw their mothers bring home the manna which they gathered every morning, that it had fallen during the night from heaven. But as a standing and permanent evidence of the reality of the manna, was not a pot of it laid up before the Lord by the side of the ark to be kept for all generations, not

only to bear witness to the miracle but to show what the manna was in itself as a visible substance? I know that there are great difficulties in belief, but I am sure that there are greater difficulties in unbelief. If to believe God’s word is a difficulty, and to give full credence to the miracle of the manna seems at times to try our faith, what a much greater difficulty there is in disbelieving a circumstance which was evidenced by such undoubted proofs. If it had fallen once or twice, or in a very small quantity, there might have been more room for question; but to fall every day for forty years together and in such a quantity as to feed more than a million of people—this seems to afford a whole army of proof against infidelity and all its host. Besides which, if once we admit a forty years’ wandering in the wilderness, how could that vast multitude have been sustained in it except by a miraculous supply of food from heaven, for earth could not supply it in a waste, howling wilderness? The unbelieving Jews in our Lord’s time believed what our modern infidels dispute and deny: “Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” (John 6:31.)

It was then food not known by any till God sent it. The fathers of those who daily ate it did not know it; but for their descendants God wrought a special miracle, and gave them bread from heaven—typical, as you know, of the true bread which God gives to his family, the flesh of his dear Son, as our Lord opened up the subject in those remarkable words: “Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” (John 6:32, 33.)

6. Now what was God’s object in thus sending them manna from heaven? He could if he had pleased have sent them quails every morning; or created bread, as our Lord created it when he fed the seven thousand. He might have sent them flocks and herds innumerable. But such was not his will. He was determined to

feed them by sending them a daily portion of manna from the skies, that they might learn this lesson, that “man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.”

This, then, is the grand lesson, dear friends, which you and I have to learn in our wilderness journey—that man doth not live by bread only, that is, by those providential supplies which relieve our natural wants. Thanks be to God for any bread that he gives us in his kind and bountiful providence. An honest living is a great mercy. To be enabled by the labour of our hands or by the labour of our brain to maintain our families and bring them up in a degree of comfort, if not abundance, is a great blessing. But God has determined that his people shall not live by bread only. They shall be separated from the mass of men who live in this carnal way only; who have no care beyond earthly possessions, and the sum of whose thoughts and desires is, what they shall eat, and what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed; who never look beyond the purse, the business, the daily occupation, the safe return, the profitable investment, and how to provide for themselves and their families. God has planted in the breast of his people a higher life, a nobler principle, a more blessed appetite than to live upon bread only. We bless him for his providence, but we love him for his grace. We thank him for daily food and raiment, but these mercies are but for time, perishing in their very use, and he has provided us with that which is for eternity. What then does he mean the soul to live upon? “Upon every word that proceedeth out of his mouth.” But where do we find these words that proceed out of the mouth of God? In the Scriptures, which is the food of the Church, and especially in Scripture as applied to the heart, in the words that God is pleased to drop into the soul by a divine power, which we receive from his gracious mouth, and lay hold of with a believing hand. That is the food and nutriment of our soul: the truth of God applied to our heart and made life and spirit to our souls by his own teaching and testimony. And

see how large and ample the supply is. Look through the whole compass of God’s revealed word, and see in it what a store there is of provision laid up for the church of God. How this should both stimulate and encourage us to search the Scriptures as for hid treasure, to read them constantly, to meditate upon them, to seek to enter into the mind of God as revealed in them, and thus to find them to be the food of our soul. If we were fully persuaded that every word of the Scripture came out of God’s mouth, and was meant to feed our soul, how much more we should prize it, read, and study it.

But how does the wilderness teach God’s people this lesson? Do not trials and temptations make God’s word exceedingly precious? Luther used to say, that he did not know the meaning of the word of God before he was afflicted. God’s book is written for God’s people; and they are “an afflicted and poor people.” When we are at ease, there is nothing in the word of God for us except indeed it be sharp rebukes and cutting reproofs. But directly we get into trial and affliction, there is something in the word of God at once sweet and savoury, suitable and encouraging.

Thanks then be to God if we know anything of living upon God’s word. How the prophet knew this: “Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.” But through what scenes of temptation and sorrow did he pass to find the word of God to be the joy of his heart. “Why,” he cried, “is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed?” and this almost in the same breath with eating the word. (Jer. 15:16-18.)

By “the word,” we may understand also his Person, his work, his blood, his righteousness, his dying love, his sweet promises, his holy precepts, his kind invitations, and what he is as the Christ of God. What food there is in all this to the soul. Paul could say, “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.) And how blessedly did the Lord open up the whole mystery of the

manna in the wilderness in those striking words: “As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.” (John 6:57, 58.)

This then is the effect, and these are some of the benefits and blessing of a wilderness pilgrimage. We learn it in the lessons which I have endeavoured to unfold. Can you say, looking up to God with a honest heart, that you have learnt any of these lessons in the days of your pilgrimage?—learnt humility, learnt the trial of faith, learnt the reality of a hungering spirit, and learnt the blessedness of living by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord? Now if you can look back through a pilgrimage, be it long or short, and say, “Ah, if I have learnt but little, I have learnt that which has humbled me before God; if I have learnt but little, I have had my faith tried to the quick; if I have learnt but little, I have learnt to hunger and thirst after a precious Christ; if I have learnt but little, I have now and then tasted the sweetness of heavenly food; and if I do know but little, I still feel that my life hangs upon every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.” Then you can look back and remember all the way that God has led you these years, be they many or few, in the wilderness; and now that you come to look back upon it, you can see that goodness and mercy have hitherto followed you. Why then should you doubt that you shall dwell in the house of God for ever?

207 An Immutable God And A Strong Consolation

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord’s Day Evening,
July 8, 1866

“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have

fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.”

Heb 6:18,19

We live in a mutable world. The revolutions of the seasons; the vicissitudes of day and night; the alternations of weather from heat to cold and from dry to wet; the growth of our own bodies from childhood up to youth and manhood, and in some cases on to advancing old age; the alterations which take place in our own minds, in our thoughts, in our views, in our feelings, and in our varied exercises, both natural and spiritual, all stamp change and mutability upon everything here below. The departure of friends one after the other—how many well-known faces of attached hearers do I miss from the congregation now before me!—tells us also how change is stamped upon the life of men. Family bereavements, vicissitudes in business, change of friends into enemies, separation by distance or local habitation from those with whom we have walked in sweet fellowship, with the forming of new acquaintances and the rising up of fresh friends, these all manifest mutability as a part of the life we live in the flesh, as regards our connection with others.

As regards ourselves, and more especially our inward feelings, the movements of our spirit God-ward, and all that we hope and believe is a part of, or closely connected with, the life of God in our soul; how subject that is to change also. If blessed one day with the right of God’s countenance, we have to walk in another in thick sensible darkness; if brought out for a time into sweet liberty, then are we again shut up, it may be for a long space, in cruel bondage; if relieved for a little while from the weight of afflictions and trials, then again we have to put our neck under the yoke and be exercised as much by them as before; if favoured sometimes with sweet access to a throne of grace, and blessed with holy liberty to pour out our heart before God, then again are we shut up in miserable dryness, deadness, coldness, sloth and indifference, so

as scarcely to feel a movement of real prayer within.

Thus, whether we look at the world without or the world within, whether we fix our eyes upon men and circumstances as they pass before us, or regard the movements of divine life in our own breast, change and mutability we see stamped upon all. But there is a greater change to come than any which we have yet experienced, when the eyelids will droop in death, when the pallor of our last sleep will overspread the face, when life itself will have fled and the warm body be reduced to a heap of cold clay, to be consigned to the silent tomb, there to await the last and greatest change of all in the resurrection morn, when the Lord will 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. (Php. 3:21)

But what an unspeakable mercy it is amidst all these changes to have to do with One who is unchanging and unchangeable; One who says, "I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed;" One "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;" One who is "the same yesterday, today and for ever;" One who rests in His love and whose purposes, like Himself, stand fast for evermore. This is that foundation both of faith and hope, which the apostle brings before our eyes and heart in the words of our text, encouraging us to hold fast our profession upon the ground of God's immutability. "That by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

In opening up these words, I shall, as the Lord may enable, direct your attention,

I.—First, to the characters spoken of: They are those "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them."

II.—Secondly, the strong consolation, which God has provided for them.

III.—Thirdly, the pillars, the two pillars on which this strong

AN IMMUTABLE GOD AND A STRONG CONSOLATION 297
consolation rests; the two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie.

IV.—And, lastly, the nature of the hope which they have laid hold of: That it is "an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and entereth into that within the veil."

I.—The main object of the apostle in this chapter, as very much generally all through the epistle, is to strengthen and confirm the faith and hope of those whom he calls the "heirs of promise." And I may observe here, by the way, that one special feature of the epistles of the New Testament is to comfort and encourage the living family of God. They are not addressed to the world, nor was it the primary intention of the inspired apostle in writing them to call sinners out of darkness into God's marvellous light. It should be fully and clearly understood that they were written to those already called: members of the church of Christ by spiritual regeneration, and members of visible churches by profession. But being in many points imperfectly instructed, they needed to be built up on their most holy faith. They had also to endure what the apostle calls in this epistle "a great fight of afflictions." They had to be made a gazing stock or public spectacle in the reproaches and indignities cast upon them, and even to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, as knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance. They therefore needed in every way to be strengthened and encouraged, that they might not cast away their confidence, which had great recompense of reward.

Now there was no ground of strength and encouragement more suitable for those thus situated than the faithfulness of God. It is for this reason, therefore, that the apostle is continually bringing before the church the promises made to Abraham, and God's faithfulness in fulfilling them. Thus he speaks of "Abraham being the father of all them that believe, whether Jew or Gentile," and of our "walking in the steps of his faith, to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who

is the father of us all.” (Rom. 4:16) Now what was the peculiar character of Abraham’s faith? It was this, that “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 to perform.” (Rom. 4:20, 21) He would therefore encourage the heirs of promise to rest upon the security and stability of God’s everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, and thus manifest that they were blessed with all the blessings which were given to Abraham.

But in order to guard the subject well, to preserve the professing church of Christ from the shoal of presumption, as well as the quicksand of despair; while he would on the one hand strengthen faith and hope, and yet not encourage arrogance, boasting and vain-confidence, he takes care to point out very clearly who the characters are to whom the blessings of the gospel belong. It is this peculiar feature of describing characters, and not restricting promises to persons, which establishes a connection with us and them, and I may add, between us and the Scriptures of truth; for if we find and feel in our own bosom the characters, as I may term them, of spiritual and eternal life stamped there by the hand of God, we may take courage to believe that all the blessings of the gospel are ours, that we are true children of Abraham, and, as such, heirs of promise, and as being heirs of promise, are blessed with all the blessings of our father Abraham.

The character, then, here specially pointed out in our text, as if by the finger of God is of one who has fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before him. Let us seek, as the Lord may enable, to open and elucidate this character, for it is very descriptive as well as very comprehensive. It commences with the very beginning of the work of grace upon the soul, and follows it up almost to its completion. And admire with me the wisdom of the apostle in not setting up a high standard of experience and divine teaching, but with great condescension coming down so low as to embrace all in whom the good work is begun, and who are taught and led

AN IMMUTABLE GOD AND A STRONG CONSOLATION 299
by the blessed Spirit out of sin and self to embrace the Lord of life and glory as set forth and revealed in the gospel.

But there are two points in the characters, which will demand our special notice:

1. their fleeing;
2. their laying hold.

I. The first point is that they have fled for refuge. What is it thus to have fled? and how is it a description of those in whom the Lord the Spirit has begun a gracious work? The expression is evidently metaphorical and figurative. We cannot then do better than to adopt the same mode of explaining it, and by using simple figures and illustrations, which often cast a clear and broad light upon Scriptural subjects, to explain and elucidate what we may understand by the expression, that you who have fled for refuge may find light from the sanctuary streaming upon your path, raising up a sweet confidence in your own bosom that you are amongst these blessed heirs of promise.

1. The first illustration which I shall adopt is taken from the walled or fortified cities of which we read so much in the Old Testament. You will recollect how the spies sent by Moses to explore the land brought back word that “the cities in it were great and walled up to heaven.” To understand the reason for these fortified cities, we should know a little of the peculiarities of the holy land at all periods of its history.

Now Palestine had this peculiar character, that it was not all mountain nor all plain, nor were the mountains very high, or the plains, with one or two exceptions, very wide. This mixture of hill and plain made it available for a vast population, the plains and valleys affording pasture for large flocks of sheep and cattle as well as arable soil for crops of corn, and the hills, which were cultivated to the very top, yielding terraces which in that warm climate produced abundance of oil and wine from the olive trees and vines which occupied every inch of ground.

But the feature to which I wish to call your attention, as

illustrating our text is this. The whole land, except a narrow strip on the sea-coast, was surrounded on almost every side by wandering tribes of predatory habits, known to us under the Scripture names of Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, etc., with whom we find the children of Israel continually at war, besides the more settled and inveterate Philistines. Now it was the habit of these predatory tribes, as is the case at the present time with the Bedouin Arabs, to make sudden raids or incursions into this cultivated territory, sweep away flocks and herds and trample down or carry off the corn, besides slaughtering all the defenceless people, with the women and children, on whom they could lay their violent hands. To guard their persons, then, where they could not secure their property against these wandering tribes, who might burst in at any moment, the people built upon the hills and mountains fortified cities, so that when an alarm was sounded that the land was threatened to be swept over by any of these predatory incursions, they might flee for refuge to these fortified towns, where they with their wives and children were safe for a time until their enemies had dispersed and gone back to the desert. A knowledge of this circumstance will explain many allusions in the Word of truth to hills and fortified places, strong towers and the like. Thus we find David frequently saying, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress;" and again, "Thou hast been a strong tower to me from the enemy." So Isaiah speaks, "There shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of water in the day of the great slaughter when the towers fall." (Isai. 30:25.) Solomon declares that "the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe." This custom, therefore, of fleeing to these hills, forts and strong towers which were built upon the mountainous parts of Palestine may serve as an elucidation of the meaning of the expression in our text—fleeing for refuge to the hope set before us.

We spiritually are much like the children of Israel naturally. On every side are hosts of enemies ever invading our souls,

AN IMMUTABLE GOD AND A STRONG CONSOLATION 301
trampling down every good thing in our hearts, accompanied by a flying troop of temptations, doubts, fears, guilt and bondage sweeping over the plain of our soul like those wandering tribes over the plains of Palestine, carrying off, burning and destroying everything on which they can lay their hands; and we, as regards our own strength, as helpless against them as the children of Israel were at many points of their history against the Philistines, the Ammonites and Moabites, and other such surrounding enemies. But there is a refuge set before us in the gospel of the grace of God. The Lord Jesus Christ, as King in Zion, is there held up before our eyes as the Rock of our Refuge, our strong Tower, our impregnable Fortress; and we are encouraged by every precious promise and every gospel invitation when we are overrun and distressed by these wandering, ravaging, plundering tribes to flee unto and find a safe refuge in Him.

2. Take another idea; for I wish to explain things and make them as clear as I can for your instruction and comfort. It is not so scriptural as the last but as vividly true, and may well serve as an illustration of the same truth. We read sometimes of harbours of refuge, and attempts have been often made in Parliament to obtain a large grant of public money to construct them; for indeed much needed they are.

For instance, all along our eastern coast there stretches a long line where there is no harbour of refuge for the innumerable ships, which sail along it, or no haven but what is difficult of access. Now when, as is often the case in spring, strong easterly winds blow across the German Ocean, for want of harbours of refuge on this lee shore great loss of ships and lives occurs. Here is, for instance, a large fleet of coasters, London bound, colliers, fishing boats, and other craft on a calm day setting their sails in every direction, studding the whole horizon for many leagues. On a sudden there gathers in the east a dark cloud; the heavens become black with storm; the gust blows with increasing violence. Now what is the consequence? They cannot stand out to sea through the violence

of the wind dead against them. But were there harbours of refuge at various points along the coast they could make for them, and by running into them obtain safety.. But for want of these harbours of refuge many every year are driven upon the lee shore where they are wrecked with great loss of life and property.

Now take this as a figure and apply it spiritually. Here is a soul sailing calmly upon the sea of life, bound upon some voyage of business or pleasure; and whilst the wind is fair and the weather calm little danger is apprehended as to the issue. A dark cloud begins to gather in the sky, at first no bigger than a man's hand; but it gradually increases till it seems to cover the heavens, and out of it bursts an unexpected storm. This storm is some manifestation of the anger of the Almighty in a broken law, which beats upon the soul with irresistible violence, and threatens to drive it upon the lee shore amidst the breakers and the rocks, there to make awful shipwreck. O to find in that awful moment a harbour of refuge to which we may run and obtain shelter from every storm! Kent has a beautiful hymn upon the subject, for he had seen with his own eyes, if I remember right, near seventy ships strewn upon the rocks at Plymouth for want of a breakwater at the entrance of the Sound. The hymn, you will recollect, begins:

How welcome to the tempest-tossed
Amidst the storm's career,
While horror spreads from coast to coast;
Is some kind haven near!

But now see how the Christian poet applies the figure:

But far more welcome to the soul
Is that secure abode,
(When terrors o'er the conscience roll,)
The Rock prepared of God.

3. But take now a Scriptural figure: the city of refuge provided for the manslayer. There was no city of refuge provided under the law of Moses for the wilful murderer. For him even the altar was no protection: "If a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour

AN IMMUTABLE GOD AND A STRONG CONSOLATION 303
to slay him with guile, thou shalt take him from mine altar that he may die." (Exod. 21:14.) But if a man were accidentally guilty of what our law calls manslaughter; if for instance, he went into a wood to cut down a tree, and his axe-head came off and struck a man at work with him; or if he shot an arrow at a mark and the wind carried it in a different direction and pierced a bystander, he could not legally be put to death as a wilful murderer.

But there had grown up a custom amongst the people from ancient times which made such casual homicide to carry with it the penalty of death from the nearest relative of the slain man as a species of legitimate revenge, and he was warranted in killing him wherever he could find him. This blood revenge subsists in the east to the present day. This was not, you will observe the law of God but the law of man. It was a cruel and unjust custom, but had become so inveterate that God chose rather to deal with it as it stood than wholly abrogate it. To mitigate, then, the severity of that rigid law and to make it comparatively harmless, God commanded Moses to set apart six cities of refuge—three on one side Jordan and three on the other—to which the manslayer might flee. But in order to guard against these cities becoming an asylum for wilful murderers, the congregation were to judge the cause between the slayer and the avenger of blood, and if they found that it was a case of manslaughter and not of murder, he was to be rescued out of the hand of the avenger and live in peace in the city of refuge.

Several things are mentioned in connection with these cities by Jewish writers into which I need not enter, such as that they were to be of easy access; that once every year the magistrates were to inspect the roads to see that they were kept in good condition and that there were no impediments in the way; that at every division of the road there was to be a direction post on which was written, "Refuge, Refuge;" that the cities were to be well supplied with water and provisions; and that no warlike weapons were allowed to be made there. All these features might be pressed

into the service of the figure, but not being exactly scriptural I shall not enter further into them. One remarkable point I must however mention, that the manslayer was to continue in the city until the death of the high priest. Now our High Priest never dies; and therefore if we have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel, we are safe as long as our great High Priest lives.

But let us now seek to apply this figure. The true, the only refuge of the soul is the Lord Jesus Christ, who receives into His bosom sinners with a load of guilt upon their conscience, as the city of refuge received with open arms the manslayer flying from his avenging foe. And O how suitably does this feature describe the soul that flees for refuge to Jesus. Look at the unhappy manslayer. What danger dogged every step. What fear, alarm and terror would haunt him like his shadow when the axe-head struck with death his fellow workman, or his ill-shot arrow had killed a bystander. Two things would be present in his mind; fear and hope—fear of the avenger, hope of escape to the city of refuge.

But these things must meet in the same person to constitute him one who has fled for refuge. And is not the same remark applicable also to my other figures? Do not two ideas meet in them all? There might be a storm and no harbour of refuge; or there might be a harbour of refuge and you not need it. Without the first there would be no felt danger; without the second no fleeing for safety. The weather is fair, the wind calm, you go boldly along your voyage; were there twenty harbours of refuge along the coast you would not need one of them, but would go sailing on. Or take my first figure. Your crops are not spoiled by wandering tribes; you lose neither ox nor sheep; you are in no peril of your own life or of those near and dear to you; you therefore want no hill-fort to shelter you from the incursions of these predatory bands, who, after robbing and spoiling you of all you had, would next turn their sword against your bosom. So with my third figure, if you have no guilt upon your conscience; if no avenger of blood is

AN IMMUTABLE GOD AND A STRONG CONSOLATION 305
pursuing your steps, you need no city of refuge. Thus, to make a complete whole you must put two features together: first, alarm, fear, terror, urging and prompting speedy flight for security; then a refuge already provided, seen by the eye far or near, but in either case fully suitable to the case, resorted unto with all the strength given, reached before perishing, entered into as a last hope, and then full safety found and enjoyed.

But to make these two points a little more clear as well as a little more personal, cast a retrospective glance upon the dealings of God with your soul, and without dwelling upon needless minutiae, see if you can find these two features in any way impressed upon them. If ever there was in your experience a season never to be forgotten of alarm, of fear, of terror, of guilt, of apprehension; and then when you scarcely knew what to do, think, or say, there was a view opened up to you of a refuge in the Person and work, blood and righteousness of the Lord the Lamb; if as driven or drawn you fled to it, were kindly received, and found safe harbourage from guilt and doubt and fear, then you surely know what it is to have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you. It is these, and these only, who are heirs of promise; and therefore how important it is to have had some personal experience of these things.

How are we to know whether we possess the life of God in our soul, the grace of God in our heart, unless there has been some such fleeing and some such laying hold? Do see, then, if you can trace these two things in your breast: first, if there ever was a season with you when you feared and trembled at the wrath to come, and were compelled to flee for refuge from it. But, secondly, finding no refuge in self, and that all your own righteousness was a bed too short and a covering too narrow, you fled to Jesus as your only hope; and as there was a sweet opening up to the eye of your faith of a refuge provided in the Lord the Lamb, you were enabled to take hold of Him in His covenant characters and blessed relationships, and found in Him rest and peace. If, then,

you can find these two features of divine life in your soul, you are one of the characters of whom our text speaks: you have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you; which leads me to show you what laying hold is.

II. I much admire the wisdom and condescension of the apostle, or, to speak more correctly, the wisdom and condescension of the Holy Ghost by him, in not taking very high ground in describing the features of the heirs of promise. There were indeed special reasons for His thus dealing with them. It is very evident from the internal evidence of this epistle that the Hebrew converts, to whom it was written, were not very far advanced in the faith of God's elect. Their old Jewish views and inveterate prejudices, imbibed from their former Rabbinical teachers, stuck very closely to them; and these were sad hindrances both to their spiritual knowledge of, and their experimental profession in the truth of the gospel. They were also exposed to great and grievous persecutions, arising chiefly from their brethren after the flesh, who then, as now, loathed with the deepest abhorrence all who renounced Judaism for Christianity; and, viewing them as the worst and vilest of apostates, did not spare any degree of violence or insult.

Being, then, very weak in faith, they were much borne down by the violence of the storm, and were almost ready to turn their backs upon the gospel. The apostle, therefore, though he deals with them very earnestly and faithfully, yet mixes with his powerful warnings and urgent exhortations much tenderness and affection, however much their wavering, vacillating ways might try and grieve his spirit. They were also very weak and childish as regards an inward knowledge and experience of the blessed truths of the gospel. He therefore gently chides them that, "when for the time they ought to be teachers, they had need that one should teach them again the first principles of the oracles of God, and were become such as had need of milk and not of strong meat."

I have named these things to explain why the apostle so deals

AN IMMUTABLE GOD AND A STRONG CONSOLATION 307
with them as with children in understanding and experience, and why he takes, speaking comparatively, such low ground—ground so different from the way in which he addresses the Ephesians, Colossians, Thessalonians and other members of the New Testament churches. Thus, in the words before us to suit their case, he comes down to a hope; but keeping strictly upon Scriptural ground, such a hope only as is set before us in the everlasting gospel. Well he knew that all other hope was delusive and vain, and would prove in the day of trial a broken reed and a spider's web.

But as what he said to them may also suit us, I will now endeavour to show you what this hope is, that each may see for himself how far he has laid hold of it.

Now a little difficulty meets us here at the very outset; for it is not at first sight very clear whether he means the object of hope, or the grace of hope. It would seem, however, that his words comprehend both these significations, but that the primary meaning is the object of hope, and the secondary meaning the grace of hope, the two being so closely connected that what he says first of the one he transfers to the other—the former being true in doctrine, the latter true in experience. Let me explain this, and, first, as to the object of hope.

1. Every grace of the Spirit must have an object, that is, something to which it may look and with which it may deal. Christ Himself in His Person and work is the object of every grace, but more especially of faith, hope and love. He is therefore called "the hope of Israel" (Jer. 17:13); and "our hope." (1 Tim. 1:1.) But as faith and love deal more specially with the Person of Christ, hope deals more particularly with the word of Christ. "My soul fainteth for thy salvation; but I hope in Thy word." "Remember Thy word unto Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused me to hope." The hope, then, here spoken of is the word of promise; for this is that unto which the soul flees, and on which it hangs.

But this hope, in order to be firm, must have a foundation; and

this is nothing less than the faithfulness of God in the fulfilment of His promises. “Sarah judged Him faithful that had promised.” (Heb. 11:11.) This sustained her hope; and when she held in her arms the new-born Isaac, her hope made her not ashamed. When then the apostle would encourage us to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, he adds, “For He is faithful that promised.” (Heb. 10:23.)

Now where are these promises but in the gospel of Jesus Christ? All of them are made sure in Him; for “all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” (2 Cor. 1:20.) The word of promise then in Christ is “the hope set before us;” for when we flee for refuge from the wrath to come, we flee to the promises as opening their arms to receive us. They are thus like the elders of the city of refuge, who take us within its walls all trembling at the avenger of blood, loaded with guilt, and soiled with dust, and give us safe harbourage, so that he cannot slay us.

2. But having shown you that the hope is as an object, I shall now show you what hope lays hold of as a grace.

The main thing embraced by hope is eternal life, according to those words of the apostle: “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.” (Tit. 1:2.) But as Christ is “the life,” and as He alone gives eternal life, He, as held forth in the word of promise, is the chief object of hope, and, therefore, when experimentally made known to the soul, is said to be formed in us “the hope of glory.” As long, therefore, as guilt, doubt and fear press upon the conscience, our hope must be very faint, if it exist at all. But when we flee for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel, which is the promise of eternal life in Christ, there is a springing up of spiritual and therefore eternal life in the heart. The Lord says, “I give unto them” (that is, “My sheep”) “eternal life” (John 10:28); not “I will give them in the life to come;” but I will give it unto them now. We therefore read, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life”—has it now, as

AN IMMUTABLE GOD AND A STRONG CONSOLATION 309
a present, felt and enjoyed possession. This life is given manifestly when Christ reveals Himself to the soul; for eternal life is then received out of His fulness as an enjoyed possession.

All, then, who have truly fled for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before them, embrace in so doing eternal life. They live, as being manifestly in Christ, for He is “our life;” and as they embrace it in Him they feel its sweet movements in their breast, in the joy it communicates, in the peace it imparts, in the prospects it opens, in the doubts it removes, in the fears it disperses.

Thus, in real religion, there is something, if I may so speak, tangible—something to be laid hold of; and this distinguishes a good hope through grace from every other hope which is delusive, enthusiastic, or visionary. Depend upon it, there is a reality in vital godliness—a possession for eternity, which, therefore, kills and deadens the living child of God to a perishing world, and the fading things of time and sense. Whenever we get a view of Christ, there is a view of eternal life in Him; for He is the eternal Son of God, and when He makes Himself known to the soul as such, He shows us that all our life is in Him. The work that He accomplished is for eternity; He lives Himself for ever and ever; and those whom He has redeemed by His blood, justified by His righteousness and sanctified by His grace, will live for ever and ever in His glorious presence. It is the eternity of His love which stamps it with its main value and blessedness; for this life being eternal, secures not only perpetuity, but immutability—prevents it from any change in time as well as from any change in eternity, and secures it firm and stable to all the heirs of promise. As then they lay hold of eternal life in laying hold of Him who is the life, and as the sweet movements of hope spring up in their breast, it opens before their eyes a vista of immortal joy.

II.—But to pass on to our next point, “strong consolation” which God has provided for these heirs of promise, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them.

As God does nothing in vain, so He provides nothing in vain.

These heirs of promise fully need all the consolation, which God can give, and strong consolation too. The fleeing for refuge is but the first act of their spiritual life. They are not yet safe at home or landed in their eternal rest. Under the violence of their first storm, they have fled to the harbour of refuge. This is however but the beginning, not the end of the voyage. The harbour was provided to give them a temporary shelter; but they have again to put out to sea, to encounter fresh storms, and be exposed to fresh perils. He that fled to the hill fort from the Moabites and Ammonites had to come down again to the plain there to plant and sow, and there to expect fresh attacks from the same robber bands. The manslayer who fled to the city of refuge was again exposed to the fatal stroke of the avenger of blood, if he ever left the city to which he had fled.

Thus, to have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us does not insure to us security against future foes or fears; indeed only prepares us the better to meet them. This is why the heirs of promise need strong consolation. Their afflictions are great, their trials heavy, their temptations numerous, their foes strong, and their fears often stronger than their foes. They have also, for the most part many painful vicissitudes and changes: reverses in providence, bereavements in family, afflictions in circumstances, trials of body, trials in the church and trials in the world. God often hides His face from them; Satan harasses them with his fiery darts; fears of death often bring them into bondage, besides all the guilt, which they bring upon their own consciences through their backslidings, and all the chastening strokes, which they procure for their own backs through their folly.

Thus they need consolation, and strong consolation too, that there may be balm for their wounds, cordials to cheer their fainting spirits, wine to strengthen their heart and oil to make them of a cheerful countenance. God not only knows best what we are, but knows best also what we want, for His wisdom and His goodness are alike infinite. He has, therefore, beforehand provided strong consolation for all who need it, for weak consolation would not

AN IMMUTABLE GOD AND A STRONG CONSOLATION 311
do for strong trials, feeble deliverances for powerful temptations, and little drops and sips for sharp exercises. It may do for those who have not to wade through perplexing circumstances, or who in grace have no powerful discoveries of the holiness of God, no clear apprehension of His dread Majesty, no strong sense of the evil of sin, and no deep acquaintance with the strength of human corruption and the weakness of our nature to withstand temptation. But where a man is let into the mysterious secrets of a body of sin and death, the strength of internal corruptions, the overwhelming power of lust, pride and covetousness, when he is not upheld by the special grace of God; the snares of Satan spread for the unwary feet; and his assaults as the prince of darkness, as well as his temptations as an angel of light; when, I say, a man is led into these internal mysteries whereby he learns the depth of the fall, he will find his need not only of consolation, from the mouth of God, but strong consolation too.

When, too, he comes, as we all must come, to the closing scene, and has to look back, it may be, upon many things in his past life which may sadly grieve his spirit, if not painfully wound his conscience in the bitter recollection, and if in that trying hour the Lord should suspend the light of His countenance and withdraw His gracious presence—though we hope it may not be so with us, and that He who has borne us up through every trial will bear us up through our last, and He who has never forsaken us will not forsake us then—yet should these things come upon him or come upon us, we shall surely need strong consolation to face the gaunt king of terrors and grapple with our last enemy. Die we must; but who can say when, and who can say how? Every year snatches from us one or another of our dearest friends. As death has come to them, so surely will it come to us; and though we know not how any of us shall die, yet I am sure of this, that if our senses are preserved unto us and we look with open eyes into eternity, we shall then need all the support and consolation which God can give.

Now God has provided, already provided strong consolation for these heirs of promise, for all who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them. I shall now, therefore, endeavour to show you what is the foundation of this strong consolation.

III.—It rests, then, upon two immutable pillars, as the apostle beautifully speaks. “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” (Heb. 6:17, 18.)

You will observe that it is the immutability, that is, the unchanging character of His counsel, viz., His eternal purpose, which God was willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise. The counsel or purpose of God is immutable in itself; but God wished to show its immutability to the heirs of promise, that out of it might flow strong consolation to their troubled hearts. He, therefore, gave them two immutable things in which it was impossible for Him to lie. What, then, are these two immutable things, these unremovable pillars on which it rests? God’s word in the promise, and God’s oath in its confirmation. These are the two immutable things, which I shall now, therefore, more fully open.

1. The word of God’s promise is essentially immutable. Whatever God promises stands as firm as the very being of God himself. His own eternal throne is not firmer than the word of His mouth, as expressed in the promise. But what the apostle chiefly refers to is the word of promise made to Abraham. Now if you will observe, when God first made a promise to Abraham, there was no oath given with it. God simply said to him, “I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 12:2, 3.) I need not enter into all the promises made to Abraham, but this is the chief one

AN IMMUTABLE GOD AND A STRONG CONSOLATION 313
as regards us: “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed,” for this promise takes us poor Gentiles in. As the apostle argues, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” (Gal. 3:8, 9) The promise thus given flowed out of and ratified the everlasting covenant, for when God gave it He said to Abraham, “As for Me, behold My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations:” that is, their spiritual father, for they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. I need not tell you, that this seed in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, is Christ. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.” (Gal. 3:16.)

This, then, is the word of promise made to Abraham; and if we by faith in Christ Jesus are children of Abraham, then are we blessed with faithful Abraham, and the word of promise secures us in the possession and enjoyment of every blessing of the new covenant. This made the apostle cry out, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” (Eph. 1:3.) And observe how he adds as the richest and primest blessing: “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” (Eph. 1:7.) Now is not this calculated to give strong consolation to the heirs of promise who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them, that they are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus?

2. The other immutable thing, is God’s oath which He gave to Abraham after He had tried his faith by bidding him offer up his only son Isaac. Then it was that the Angel of the Lord (Jehovah-Jesus), “called out of heaven the second time and said, By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord.” (Gen. 22:15, 16.) God, so to speak, was not satisfied with merely speaking to Abraham in the word

of promise. That, indeed, would have been enough for Abraham's faith; he did not require the oath: he gave obedience to God's word, without asking anything more when He bade him offer up his son. But to confirm his faith and give ground for the strong consolation which was to be afforded throughout all time to the heirs of promise, He confirmed it by an oath, or, as it is in the margin, "interposed Himself;" that is, put Himself between the promise and faith. Now God could swear by no greater, and therefore swore by Himself; and these were the words of the oath: "Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee." The blessing was that in his seed, that is, Christ, all the families of the earth should be blessed, and that his seed, spiritual and natural, should be multiplied as the stars of heaven.

Thus the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, made fast with our Lord in eternity, and in due time with Abraham, from whose loins the promised seed should come, rests upon these two immutable pillars, the promise of God and the oath of God. These two immutable things, then, in which it was impossible for God to lie, form the foundation of the strong consolation which God pours into the breast of the heirs of promise. Whatever change they may endure, whatever mutability in self or in others, God changeth not; His promise and His oath stand fast for evermore.

But how does this give them strong consolation? In this way. Am I an heir of promise? Do I believe in the Son of God? Do I walk in the steps of the faith of Abraham? Have I the same faith, the same hope? Then I have the same ground for confidence. On what did his faith rest? Was it not upon God's promise and God's oath? But how shall I know that my faith rests upon these two immutable pillars? I have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before me in the gospel of Jesus Christ; I have embraced the promise of eternal life made in Christ; I have rolled my guilty soul upon the blood of the atonement in the promised Seed; I have found and felt refuge in Him; I have come out of all false hopes,

AN IMMUTABLE GOD AND A STRONG CONSOLATION 315
vain confidences and creature expectations, and built all my hope and all my confidence on the finished work of the Son of God. He has more or less made Himself known to my soul by some manifestation of His glorious Person, atoning blood and dying love. This stamps me as one of the characters to whom the promise is made, for have I not "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before me?" Have I any other refuge, help, or hope? Do I want any other Saviour or any other salvation? It is an experience of these things, which marks me as an heir of promise. Then I am blessed with the faith of Abraham; then the covenant made with Abraham was made with me as a son of Abraham; I, having Abraham's faith, have Abraham's blessing, and Abraham's God is my God, because I believe in the same God that Abraham believed in.

This is the way in which faith is enabled sometimes to argue, yea, to fill its mouth with arguments against the accusations of law, conscience, sin and Satan. And may I not apply these arguments to your case? Have you as a poor, self-condemned, guilty sinner fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you in the gospel? Have you embraced in the arms of a living faith the Son of God, and felt and found Him precious to your soul? Then you are one of the heirs of promise, and God has secured your inheritance by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for Him to lie. Men may lie, for all are liars from the womb. We carry in our bosom a lying heart and live in a lying world; but it is impossible for God to lie; and whatever men may say, think, or do, He remains the same, immutable in His glorious perfections; unchanging, unchangeable; for with Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Here we rest our hope.

IV.—And now let me endeavour to show what this hope is as a grace of the Spirit, its nature, and its character, how it works and operates, and the blessings which attend it: "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."

I intimated that by hope in our text we were to understand two

things:

1. the object of hope;
2. the grace of hope.

The first is, as I have explained, the word of promise; the second is that peculiar grace of the Spirit, which acts upon it. And the reason why both are thus comprehended is because they are so closely connected.

When those who flee for refuge embrace the promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus, this raises up a good hope through grace. They may not have very strong consolation or be blessed with a very great deliverance; but they find peace, acceptance and a sweet sense of tranquillity stealing over their breast so far as they are favoured with a living faith in the Son of God, and He makes Himself in any measure precious to their soul.

Now this hope is their anchor, which holds them fast amid every storm. Many are the storms, which beat upon these vessels of mercy. Storms without and storms within; storms in providence and storms in grace; storms in the world, storms in the church, storms from friends and storms from foes. But they have that which enables them to outride every storm, and that is the good hope through grace which God Himself has dropped into their breast from His own heavenly throne, that it may keep them fast and firm to covenant settlements and hold them up in every trying hour.

But of what use is an anchor except against the dangers of a lee shore? Were there no lee shore, no breakers, no rolling surf, no strong wind and no apprehension of shipwreck, the anchor would hang at the bow merely an ornament, if not a dead weight to the ship. But when a lee shore is in sight and the white surf shows the breakers ahead, and as the sounding line is dropped, and fathom after fathom is called out as decreasing in depth, and danger is at hand, the command is given, "Let the anchor go." The word is obeyed. The anchor sinks into the sea; it takes firm hold of the sand; it brings up the ship; and as long as it holds there is

AN IMMUTABLE GOD AND A STRONG CONSOLATION 317
no danger of the vessel being driven upon a lee shore, however the surf may roll over the rocks. It is both "sure and stedfast." First it is "sure," that is, it will never break; and, secondly, it is "stedfast," that is, no violence of wind or wave can make it lose its hold. Now these are the very two things required in an anchor. It might break from badness of material, or it might not hold fast the ship through badness of the ground. But this anchor of the soul is so strong that it cannot break, and the ground is so good that it must ever hold fast.

For where is this anchor fixed? "Within the veil." Who is there? Jesus at the right hand of God. The anchor of a ship will sometimes what is called "come home;" the sand or gravel does not hold the fluke firm, and the anchor drags along the ground and thus becomes practically useless. Or the wind might be so strong as to break the cable. The hawser might part, or, if a chain cable, one of the links might break, and all the precautions taken by the most skilful seamen prove ineffectual. But not so with our anchor: that is "sure." The stock can never break, the chain never part. And it is "stedfast," so that it can never move. Why? Because it is within the veil, takes fast hold of heavenly ground, and, I hardly like to use the expression lest I should drop anything derogatory to His divine Person, it takes hold of the Lord Himself, so that He Himself must be dragged from His eternal throne before the anchor can fail to hold the ship.

But this anchor may still be there and yet not always be seen. The anchor of a ship when down in the sea is never seen; even the cable itself is hidden by the waves. But ever and anon the sun breaks forth and shines upon it; and though it be dripping with the brine, yet how the bright ray manifests when it shines upon the links that there the anchor still is and holds the ship firm. So our anchor is in heaven and cannot be seen, and the cable that holds on to the anchor is sometimes so deep in the brine of a storm-tossed heart as to be scarcely visible. But let the Sun of righteousness shine upon it; then how one ray out of His glorious fulness lights

up the chain that holds the anchor firm; and then we not only feel the goodness of the ground and the goodness of the anchor, but we see also that which connects the anchor and the ship, even the grace that God shines upon as being His own gift and work. Now this anchor will never fail you in any difficulties. Whatever storms may beat upon your heart or threaten your destruction, if you have this good hope through grace, this anchor of your soul both sure and steadfast, it will certainly hold out to the end.

How careful therefore we should be to see whether we have this anchor; whether it is in the right place; whether it was made by heavenly hands; whether it was let down by the hand of God into our soul, and whether the whole of it, every part of the anchor and every part of the cable were all manufactured in the court of heaven. No earthly anchor will ever stand the storm that will one day blow. Earthly manufacture will not endure divine storms. Cables wrought by human hands will part when the winds blow and the waves rise, and the anchor itself will be sure to come home when we want it most. Ships never go to sea with unproved anchors. They are all proved in the strongest way before the safety of the ship and crew is entrusted to them. How foolish then for any one to embark upon a profession if he has not proved his anchor. What can he expect but shipwreck? But if he has an anchor that God Himself has, so to speak, welded by His divine hand, let down into his soul by His own heavenly power, and fastened at both ends, the ship and the anchorage, he will stand every storm and live at last. Well I am persuaded that no other anchor will ever hold up the vessel as it rides over the sea of life and preserve it safe from every storm, till at last it enters with swelling sail into the haven of endless rest, where storms blow no more.

God grant me this evening to have spoken a word to the heirs of promise, to those here present who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them, and in whose breast there is any divine testimony that God has wrought a work upon their souls. Look to that, dear friends. Cast away, as God enables, all

COMMUNION WITH THE LORD JESUS

creature hopes; they will never profit you in the day of need. Vain expectations and ill-grounded hopes will be as spiders' webs in the day of trial. Prove your anchor; look at it with both your eyes, and see the true seal of God upon it, marked in heaven's armoury, and given out of God's word into your soul; and if you can trace anything real, spiritual, gracious, experimental in your heart, bless God for it. It is not the size of the anchor. A boat has not the same anchor as a three-decker. Your anchor may be a small anchor, and yours a little boat, yet still chartered by the great Owner of souls; and your anchor may be as good, if not as large; as efficient, if not as strong, as the anchor of the most experienced believer in this assembly. It is the reality of a thing we want; and if there be reality, though the work be feeble, the hope faint, and the faith small—if the reality be there, there is eternal life.

208 The Vine and the Branches, or Union and Communion with the Lord Jesus

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning,

July 22, 1866

“Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me, ye can do nothing.”

John 15:4, 5

Union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ are the source and fountain of all our salvation and of all our sanctification; the very spring-head of all our holiness and all our happiness for time and eternity. You will observe that I have put together salvation and sanctification, holiness and happiness; for as these are inseparable in their nature and in their end, so do they flow out of the same fountain and run in the same channel. As, then, union

and communion with the Lord of life embrace and imply blessings so great and ends so glorious, the Holy Ghost has set forth this grand truth very largely and blessedly in the Scriptures of the New Testament. Figures, I need not inform you, are much used in the word of truth, as indeed they were by the Lord himself in the days of his flesh, to set forth and illustrate heavenly doctrines; and they have this great advantage attending them, that they lie level with the capacity of most minds. Many can understand and remember a figure who can neither comprehend nor retain an argument; and as divine truths are rather to be believed than reasoned about, a comparison may help faith when an argument might but hinder it. The Holy Spirit, therefore, has in this instance, as in so many others, made use of several very striking figures, which no doubt you are familiar with, but which, as conveying the nature of this union and communion more vividly than any other way that could have been employed, I will briefly touch upon before I proceed to my text.

1. One figure then which the Holy Ghost has made choice of to show us the nature of the union which exists between Christ and his people is that of a building. The main force of this figure lies in the connection between the foundation or the corner stone and the superstructure; the Lord Jesus being the foundation or corner stone and his people the stones built up upon him. "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." By the foundation of the apostles and prophets is meant not that they are the foundation, but that it was instrumentally laid by them, as Paul speaks: "As a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation." (1 Cor. 3:10.) But it is God himself who really and truly lays it, as we read: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." (Isa. 28:16.) As

Christ is here spoken of as both "the foundation" and "the corner stone," the question perhaps may rise in your mind, What is the difference between the two? There is no real difference between them, they being one and the same; but the expression, "corner stone," implies that the foundation stone laid is so broad and wide that every corner of the whole building rests upon it, and thus each side wall has the same strength and the same security, Jew and Gentile equally resting upon Christ as the only true foundation. Is not this a beautiful representation of the union which subsists between Christ and his people? Take away the foundation, the whole building falls into ruin. Let the foundation stand, every stone built upon the foundation remains firm in its place. Every child of God is taught and brought by grace to rest upon the Lord Jesus Christ, his Person and work, his blood and righteousness, as the only foundation of his hope; for well he knows the truth of those words: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Whilst then he stands upon that foundation, he stands secure; for upon that rock the church is built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

2. But the Holy Ghost has chosen another figure also to set forth the union and communion which subsist between Christ and his saints—the figure of the human body, as consisting of head and members. You will recollect that passage in the Colossians where the apostle says, "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." And so in the Ephesians: "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ. From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. 4:15, 16.) In these almost similar passages, the blessed Lord is represented as the Head of

his body, the church, and all his saints in personal and immediate union and communion with him as his members. As, then, the members of our natural body are in union with our natural head, and receive from it those supplies of strength and direction which are needful for the being and well being of the whole frame, so the members of Christ's mystical body live, act, and move by virtue of their union with him.

3. Another figure is that of man and wife—that most intimate, close, and affectionate of all possible unions. Strong is the union of father and daughter; strong the union of mother and son; strong the union of brother and sister; strong the union of friend and friend. But what are these bonds of union compared with the union which binds together as one flesh man and wife? So in the mystical body, Christ is represented as the husband, and the Church as his bride. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it." "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and he is the Saviour of the body."

But there is no part of Scripture in which this union in its nature and effects is more blessedly set forth than by our gracious Lord himself in those solemn discourses which he held with his disciples previous to his sufferings, bloodshedding, and death. It was then that he who taught so much by figure, chose that now before us to represent, first to his disciples and then to us through them, in the clearest and most beautiful way, the union and communion which subsists between him and his people—I mean that of the vine and the branches.

But the meaning, force, and beauty of this figure will, I trust, be more evident, if the Lord enable me to open up the language of our text with any degree of clearness. We may observe, I think, in it these three distinguishing features:—

I.—First, the Lord's positive testimony to man's inability and helplessness: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it

abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." "Without me ye can do nothing."

II.—Secondly, the Lord's gracious charge, "Abide in me, and I in you."

III.—Thirdly, the Lord's unerring test of abiding union, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."

These three points I shall, as the Lord may enable, endeavour to bring before you this morning. The Lord the Spirit open my heart and mouth to speak and your ears to hear, and crown both with the blessing which maketh rich.

I.—The Lord's people in some points widely differ, in other points closely agree. In external circumstances, such as rank, station, property, ability, circumstances in life they widely differ. How varied, for instance, are the cases, states, and circumstances of those now before me, as regards outward conditions of life. Nor do they differ only in these merely external points: even in their inward experience of the power of the word they widely differ. They are not all cast in the same exact mould of divine teaching, are not all led in the same precise path of exercise and temptation, do not sink equally deep in soul trouble, nor rise equally high in sweet enjoyment. And yet with all this evident disagreement, there is a solid body of real agreement, so close and strong, as if not actually to nullify, yet to render insignificant all minor differences. It is in grace as in nature. The features of our face may widely differ to the spectator's eye, and yet there is a unity stamped upon them all, which makes their resemblance far closer than their difference. As a proof of this, if we ever meet with a person, any one of whose features is distorted or exaggerated, different in form or size, or out of proportion to the rest of the countenance, how sensible we are in a moment of it, as if it were a caricature of the human face. So in grace. In many features of their experience the Lord's people widely differ; but if any one be wanting, or distorted from the

right shape, or exaggerated so as to be out of proportion, we are at once struck with it, as if it were a caricature of a true and living experience; and almost the first glance seems to arouse some suspicion of its truth and reality. Admitting, then, that in minor points the people of God may differ as regards their Christian experience, yet there is one in which all of them will agree, from the least to the greatest, from the babe in grace, just beginning to lisp his first broken accents in the language of Canaan to the most advanced saint, who, after many years of painful struggles in the wilderness, is listening to hear the call, "Come up higher." This, then, is the feature so universally stamped upon them all: a sense of creature helplessness. And does not this voice of conscience in them all within re-echo the Lord's words in our text? "Without me ye can do nothing." No Pharisee or legalist, no formalist or Ritualist, no advocate for faith as a natural duty and for repentance as a moral obligation, no wholehearted, unhumbled, unwounded, unexercised professor of religion will ever truly and sincerely use that language as the expression of his inmost experience, though it may issue from his lips as a formal confession. And why? Because a thorough sense and deep feeling of his miserable helplessness and inability to all that is good has never been wrought in his conscience by a divine power. Now, until this is the case, there is always a latent persuasion in his mind that he can do something toward his own salvation; and whatever failures, aye, repeated failures, he may be conscious of; whatever amount of sin his conscience may testify against; whatever dislike he may feel to the strictness of religion and the separation it calls for from everything which his heart most fondly loves, he still cleaves with all the strength of a drowning man to this point as his last hope, that he both must and can do something whereby to please God, and avert destruction from his guilty head. It is true that he never has begun, seriously begun, even to satisfy himself that he is in a right way, or if he has made an attempt to do so, he has never persevered even according to his own knowledge

of right and wrong. And yet with desperate strength he will ever continue to hold a lie in his right hand, even to, and often on his dying bed; for he thinks if he part with that one only hope he is lost without remedy. But now take as a contrast to all such as he, alike deceiving and deceived, the quickened family of God—aye, begin at the lowest state or stage in the work of the Holy Ghost upon the soul—and you will not find any one amongst the partakers of grace but who will fully agree with our Lord's testimony that he can do nothing. Now why is this? Because a ray of divine light has shone into his soul, by which he sees not only that which is to be done but that he has no power of doing it.

What then is intended by the expression of our gracious Lord? "Without me ye can do nothing." Does the Lord mean to exclude thereby such things as natural conscience may recognise as right and wrong, or that a man may be induced to do by the effect of moral persuasion? Does he exclude thereby all the duties which we owe to society, to our friends and relatives, or those acts of kindness and affection which we owe to all, as far as lies in our power? No, surely; though I ought to add that even these things cannot be done as God would have them done except by the power of his grace. But what the Lord means is, nothing to satisfy God, nothing to put away sin, nothing to draw down the approbation of heaven, and I may well add, nothing to satisfy a man's own enlightened and living conscience. For you will observe that I am speaking now not of one dead in a profession, and therefore satisfied with mere formal lip service, but of one who is enlightened by the light of the living. Such a one sees light in God's light; is taught of God to know the length and breadth of his holy law, and is thus made to see and feel what alone will satisfy God; and as his conscience moves in strict accordance with the word of God, the light he has from it and the life he feels in it, he is fully and clearly brought to this point, that nothing can or will satisfy his enlightened and quickened conscience but that which satisfies God. I want you well

and thoroughly to understand this point; and you will do so if God be your teacher, for it is a grand turning point between a dead profession and a living faith, between knowledge in the head and the life of God in the soul, betwixt the teaching of men and the teaching which cometh from God only, betwixt a religion which leaves a man under the power of sin and Satan and a religion which saves the soul from sin in its guilt, its dominion, and its consequences. In the case, then, of which I am speaking, there is light in the understanding, life in the conscience, faith in the heart, and feeling in the soul; and as all these things spring from the inward teaching of God and the express work of the Spirit, they accurately and intimately correspond with God's written testimony in the word. When therefore our Lord says, "Without me ye can do nothing," he means "nothing to put away sin; nothing to reconcile yourself to God; nothing to fulfil the demands of his righteous law; nothing to atone for your aggravated crimes; nothing to deliver you from curse and condemnation; nothing to shut the gate of hell or open the door of heaven; nothing to allay your doubts and fears, or remove the guilt of sin from off your conscience; nothing to take away the sting of death, or fit and qualify your soul for the inheritance of the saints in light."

Now, there is nothing more easy to learn as a doctrine than that of man's helplessness, and yet nothing more dreadful to feel as a matter of soul experience. It is one thing to look on a deathbed and there to lie oneself. It is one thing to stand in a court of justice and hear a man condemned to death, and another to stand oneself a guilty criminal in the dock. It is one thing to read of a shipwreck, and another to be a storm-tossed mariner on a rocky shore; it is one thing to hear about a holy, just, and righteous God, and another to stand trembling and guilty at his bar. In fact, there are few feelings more terrible than of helplessness, when we know that unless help come we must perish. Picture one man standing under a tall precipitous cliff, or upon a rock on which the tide of the sea is gradually gaining, and who knows he must be drowned

unless a boat come to save him. Fancy a titan about to fall into the hands of a banditti all watching for him, unless timely aid rescue him. Picture one left on a desert island, or wandering in an Australian wilderness, with neither food nor water, and ready to perish of hunger and thirst. This is to be able to do nothing, when life itself depends on doing something ourselves, or another doing it for us. Now, until a man is in some degree brought here as one ready to perish, he does not know the meaning of the words, able to do nothing. A real knowledge and a living feeling of it is, I repeat, a most terrible experience—one of the sorest, sharpest, most cutting, and slaughtering which the soul passes through under the strong hand of God. And yet, how you will hear ministers telling people one minute in word how helpless they are, and then the next exhorting or bidding them in deed come to Jesus and take hold of his promises. How contradictory is all this; for if they can do nothing, how can they come to Jesus, or how can they lay hold of a promise given by him?

But you have probably observed that our Lord here is speaking not so much of men generally—that is, of men dead in sin, and therefore emphatically, as the apostle speaks, "without strength" (Rom. 5:6), as of his own disciples, who were possessed of divine life and in union with himself. What do we gather from this fact? This grand truth, that God's people are in themselves as helpless in divine things after they are called by grace as they were before. It is a very common idea among both preachers and professors that those who are possessed of faith can always make use of it. But our Lord's words effectually dispose of a doctrine so contrary to Scripture and experience: "Without me ye"—ye my disciples, ye who are members of my mystical body, ye who are branches in me the true vine, even ye without me can do nothing; that is, as I have explained it, nothing spiritual, nothing to satisfy either God or conscience, nothing worthy of the name of gospel fruit. If you will refer to the margin, you will find it rendered "severed from

me,” the idea being that of a branch cut off from the main stock, and thus practically incapable of bringing forth fruit. A branch severed from the stem necessarily withers and dies, because the supply of sap is cut off which, flowing through stem and branch, has clothed it with leaves, flowers, and fruit. The word means, literally, “apart from me,” in a state of separation from me, and, as it were, outside me. Our Lord does not mean thereby to say that a branch once in living union with him can be severed and cut off, but that assuming it could be, such would be the case. He purposely uses this strong language to show them, not only the source of all their fruitfulness, but that separation from him would bring with it an immediate drying up of every grace. In fact, it is a fuller opening up as well as a more condensed declaration of what he had said in the preceding verse: “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” There is a natural impossibility for the branch to bear fruit of itself under such circumstances. Did you ever see a vine branch bearing fruit which did not issue out of the stem? If it do bear fruit—and all its beauty as well as all its usefulness consists in it, it only bears fruit by virtue of its union with the stem. We may not be able to explain how this fruitfulness is effected; nor need we be botanists and naturalists to penetrate into the hidden mysteries of vegetable life; but we see with our unlearned eyes certain natural facts, and from them we can gather certain undeniable truths. A branch must be in union with the stem, to produce, under the influence of light and heat, anything worthy of the name of fruit. So it is in grace. Without Christ, without union and communion with Christ, without the flowing in of his influence into the soul, without the communication of his Spirit and grace to the heart, without the light, without the warmth of the Sun of righteousness, there is no bearing fruit to the honour and praise of God. There is no real faith, no true hope, no heavenly love, no genuine repentance, no godly sorrow for

sin, no effectual prayer, no spiritual praise. Without Christ and a union with him, all our religion is but a name to live, and all our service of God is but a round of legal duties and vain ceremonies, beginning and ending in death.

II.—But we will now pass on to the Lord’s gracious charge: “Abide in me, and I in you.” He speaks to his disciples as possessing, already possessing, union with him; for this union was to be maintained. He does not say, “Get into union with me; procure by your repeated exertions of faith and repentance union with myself, and then secure that union which you have thus procured by a steady course of unwavering obedience.” But he assumes it as a possession which they already enjoyed. “I am the vine, ye are the branches.” This language is clear and positive, not hesitating or doubtful. No contingency is expressed or implied; but the whole stands forth in the clear light of positive assertion as a blessing present, not future, then and there enjoyed, not to be attained unto by and by. It is as if the Lord had said, “Ye are as much now the branches as I am now the stem.” Actually, at the moment when he spake to them, with all their weakness—and we know how weak they were—they were as much in him as ever they would be. They might expand and grow into larger measures of strength and fruitfulness, but they never could be more in the vine than they were then; for it is in grace as in nature. The young bud does not insert itself into the vine, having previously had an independent self-existence apart from it; but is developed out of the stem by the innate power and energy of the tree. It does not raise itself from the ground by an act of voluntary exertion, and fixing itself upon or in the vine by a self-emanating, self-sustaining life and power, become a branch by its own activity and energy; but issues by a natural, living process out of the body of the vine. So it is spiritually. If we are branches of the living Vine, we are so by virtue of an eternal and internal union with Christ. We did not make ourselves either buds or branches, but were developed out of the

stem by the power and energy of the Vine itself. As then a bud is developed out of the stem of the natural vine from a previous in-being in it, so it is in a higher and spiritual sense. There is an in-being in Christ by original union before there is a coming out of Christ by visible manifestation. And as there is an analogy between the natural and the spiritual vine as regards the original in-being of the bud, so there is a similarity in the formation of the bud into a branch. As then in spring, under the united influence of light and heat, the hitherto dormant bud becomes as if awakened into a new and active life by the flowing in of sap out of the stem, so the dormant buds in the mystical Vine, those who till this time were without any visible manifestation or evidence of union with Christ, are roused into divine life by the inflow of his grace at the appointed season. Feeling then the movements of the living sap flowing into them out of the fulness of a covenant Head, they burst through the old coat of darkness and ignorance which has bound them up in its folding leaves, and push forth into a new and surprising activity. They can no longer tarry as before, shut up as in a prison-house of unbelief, but called forth by the light and warmth of the Sun break out into open manifestation as living branches of the only true Vine. I want you to look at this in the light of your own experience, that you may have some confirming testimony to the truth of my words. Look back then for a few moments to the time, the memorable time, when your soul was quickened from its death in sin. Was there not a free flowing in of the grace of God, communicating to it a new and hidden life? You may not be able exactly to trace the how and the why, the when and the where. The work, though genuine, might have been feeble in its first movements; the process, though real, might have been but gradual. It is so in nature. The bud usually does not make at first any sudden or extraordinary start. It begins to swell, as if there were some secret movement of life going on within. In this state it may continue for some little time; and if the weather be

cold and the skies dark and gloomy, it may continue for a season swelling without bursting. But on some warm and bright day the sun shines directly upon it, and all at once, under the influence of this light and heat, it bursts forth. It was a bud; now it is a shoot; it will soon be a branch. But whether bud, shoot, or branch, it is still in union with the vine, and only moves and grows as sap flows into it; nay, the very sap itself moves only under the influence of the light and warmth of the sun. Now was there not, I will not say an exact, but still some kind of similarity to all this in the first movements of divine life in your soul? Was there not, for instance, a sensible movement of divine life in your heart analogous to the movement of sap in the spring in the natural vine; and as a fruit of those internal sensations and movements, was there not as if a swelling of soul, a sense of oppression under the closely folded leaves of darkness and bondage, out of which you longed to find, but could not realise any sensible deliverance? But one blessed day, when the light of the Sun of righteousness shone into your soul, it enabled you to burst forth out of the prison-house of unbelief, symbolised, according to my figure, by the leaves closed over the bud. Then you who were once a bud became a shoot; and though for a long time you might remain very weak and tender, yet were thus manifested to yourself and others as a living branch.

It is in this way that we come into some experimental knowledge of our union with Christ; for wherever there is this union there will be more or less a measure of communion. Now it is to such living branches in union and communion with himself that our Lord speaks. If then we have any inward testimony of our union with Christ, and have been brought to that vital point of all true godliness that we know something experimentally of communion with him, we shall see and feel the need and importance as well as the blessedness of his gracious charge: "Abide in me." This point, then, I shall now endeavour to examine in the light of the word of truth and the experience of God's people.

You will observe that our Lord's charge runs in a preceptive form. We must not infer from this that we possess any natural power to fulfil this or any other similar injunction; but we should view it as a gracious charge laid before us by the Lord himself, presented to us by his own lips, and enforced upon our willing mind by every constraining motive of his bleeding, dying love. And we should also carefully bear in mind that if, under the teachings and operations of the blessed Spirit, we attend to and act upon our Lord's gracious injunction, we shall most certainly find the benefit and blessedness of so doing. When then he says, "Abide in me," we are bound by every godly motive to listen to his voice, to seek to know his mind and will therein, to attend to and obey it to the utmost of our power, and feeling our own inability, to beg of him to give us grace to do so.

i. But to make this point clear, let me endeavour to show you how we abide in him; for if I am enabled to show this gracious mystery aright, it may be not only to you a word of instruction but of direction and encouragement; and you may be able to see from it not merely what and where you are in the divine life, but may be warned from attempting a wrong course and strengthened to walk in a right one. Let me then show you how we abide in Christ, and thus fulfil his charge.

1. We abide in him first by faith. It is only as we believe in the Son of God that we can sensibly trace out the union which our soul possesses with him. If I am in a state of unbelief, or even, though a believer, under its power and influence, there is no receiving out of Christ's fulness; there is no spiritual dealing or heavenly trading on my part with him. There is no movement of my soul in such a way towards him as my Head of influence, as my life and my all, that he honours it and manifests himself to me in answer to it. But if the Lord, by the power of his grace, be pleased to raise up and draw forth a measure of faith in my soul upon himself; if he enable me, by the teaching and influence of the blessed Spirit, to come unto

him as he invites, to look to him as he bids, to hang upon him and trust in him as he draws, then there is a sensible, or if not a sensible, there is a real communication of light, life, power, and influence out of his blessed fulness, which revives, strengthens, cheers, and encourages my heart. This is abiding in him. Directly we cease to believe—and when I say cease to believe, I mean in the actings of faith—we seem to get, if I may use the expression, out of him, not virtually, not actually, but feelingly. Ministers often speak as if we were first united to Christ by faith, and maintain that union in the same way. I do not hold this doctrine. I believe that the union of the church, and consequently of every member of the church, with Christ is an eternal union, as the apostle speaks: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." (Eph. 1:4.) As then chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, the elect of God have an eternal union in and with him as their covenant Head. It is true that this union is not made manifest until they believe in him, or rather until they are quickened into divine life, and like the bud of which I have spoken, come forth in visible manifestation. But when they believe in him by a living faith, then they know and realise their union with him; and as this sensible union is only maintained by faith, it is by faith we also sensibly abide in him.

2. Again, we abide in him by hope. Do we not read that "we are saved by hope?" (Rom. 8:24.) What is the meaning of being saved by hope? It does not mean saved actually, but instrumentally; not saved as regards our eternal security, but as regards our experience of salvation. By hope we are instrumentally saved from despair, saved from turning our backs upon Christ and the gospel, saved from looking to any other Saviour, or any other salvation; and especially saved from making this world and this life our happiness and home, as "waiting patiently for what we see not," even "the redemption of our body." Now it is by hope that we hang upon and cleave to the Lord Jesus, and thus by this grace we abide in him.

It is therefore spoken of as an “anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that which is within the veil.” What holds the ship firm in the storm and prevents it falling upon the rocks? The anchor. The ship abides firm as long as the anchor holds. So by hope the soul abides in Christ. He is within the veil; we are without, and it may be tossed up and down on a sea of doubt and fear, distress and anxiety; and yet there is a bond of union between him and us firmer than the Atlantic cable.

3. We also abide in him by love. We know naturally what an abiding bond love is. When we cleave to our wives or our children, or our friends, how close and firm is that union, because cemented by love; and so when we cleave to the saints of God in love and affection, it forms one of the strongest bonds that can knit soul to soul. But how much more does the bond of love strengthen and cement union and communion with Christ. His love revealed to the soul and shed abroad in the heart, drawing out love to him in return, forms the strongest of all ties and the closest of all bonds.

4. We abide in him also by the fear of God, for the fear of God is a blessed covenant grace, of which the Lord himself has said, “I will plant my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.” Thus, as the fear of God springs up in a believing soul, and is maintained and kept alive by the influences which come out of Christ as a covenant Head, it produces, as its effects, an abiding in him. We cannot depart from him through the fear of God. It is therefore called “a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death.” If a fountain of life, it must be fed out of him who is the life; and as it departs from the snares of death, it cleaves more fully and closely to him as these snares are broken to pieces and left behind. If we examine the movements of godly fear in our hearts, we shall see that all tendencies are toward life and the Source of life; toward hatred of sin and love of holiness; toward a desire after the enjoyment of heavenly realities, and a deadness to the things of time and sense; toward a knowledge of Christ in the

manifestation of himself, and a longing to live more to his praise, to walk more in his footsteps, and to be more conformed to his suffering image. Now, as none of these things can be produced but by union with Christ and abiding in him, we see how the fear of God helps forward and is needful to this abiding. For directly that the fear of God burns low in the soul, there is a gradual withdrawing from, and a sensible declining of this abiding in Christ.

5. But we abide in him also by patience, or, as the word more strictly means, “endurance.” How we see this grace of patience or endurance manifested in the saints of God, whose experience is recorded in the word of truth. How firmly, through patience, Abraham abode by the promise that he should have a son by Sarah: “And so after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.” (Heb. 6:15.) James tells us, “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord.” (James 5:11.) He patiently endured all his trials and afflictions, and found in the end how blessed it was to abide by his hope in the Lord. So, we, in our measure, abide in union with the Lord by the grace of patience, for by this heavenly grace, and the strength communicated by it, we are preserved from giving way to unbelief, or sinking under the weight and pressure of our trials and afflictions. “Tribulation,” we read, “worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope;” and thus, as patiently bearing what the Lord may lay upon us, we are not beaten out of our faith or beaten down by despair, but are enabled to stand firm to our post, and keep our ground, not fearing the wrath of our adversaries, nor giving way to all the opposition which may be arrayed against us from without and from within, in order that we may still, in spite of all, maintain union and communion with our gracious Lord.

ii. But there are certain means which the Lord has kindly afforded, whereby our faith, and hope, and love, our godly fear and patience, these divine graces the power and effects of which I

have just shown, may be all strengthened, watered, and kept alive. Let me name some of these means of grace.

1. First, there is the diligent and prayerful reading of the word. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." (Col. 3:16.) Now this surely means something more than merely reading the word in a careless, formal manner. It is "to dwell in us," that is, take up its firm and lasting abode in our heart, and that "richly;" not poorly and niggardly, but copiously and abundantly, unfolding to us and putting us into possession of the wealth of its treasures; and that in "all wisdom," making us wise to salvation, opening up to us the manifold wisdom of God, and how it displays itself in the great mystery of godliness. Now, we shall not attain to this rich and heavenly wisdom unless we search and study the Scriptures with prayer and supplication to understand what the Holy Ghost has revealed therein, and what he is pleased to unfold therefrom of the will and way of God for our own personal instruction and consolation. We very easily fall off from abiding in Christ; nor can we expect to keep up sensible union and communion with the Lord Jesus, if we neglect those means of grace which the Holy Ghost has provided for the sustentation of the life of God in the soul. When we get cold, sluggish, and dead, to read the word of God is a task and a burden; but not so, when the life of God is warm and gushing in the soul. Then, to read his holy word with prayer and supplication, entering by faith into its hidden treasures, and drinking into the mind of Christ as revealed therein, is a blessed means of maintaining the life of God in the heart, and keeping up that union and communion with Christ which we hope we have from time to time enjoyed. Never, perhaps, was the Bible more read, and never, perhaps, less understood, less felt, less tasted, less handled, less enjoyed, and above all, less acted on than in our day.

But if reading the word under divine influence is so blessed, how much more is it when the Holy Spirit applies it to the heart; when there is some sweet breaking up of the word of truth in

some gracious promise, or the application of some part that speaks of Jesus, or that holds forth some encouragement to our languid faith.

2. Prayer and supplication, I need not mention, is also another special means of grace to enable us to abide in Christ. Indeed, I may say, that without it it is impossible sensibly to abide in him. When the breath of prayer is faint and languid in the soul, when there are few desires after the Lord, there is no sensible abiding in him as a branch in the Vine, so as to receive out of his fulness.

3. Another means of grace is assembling ourselves with the people of God at the seasons of public worship. The ordinance of preaching and united prayer should never be neglected by any who fear God. It is indeed a precious privilege to join with the ransomed family in hearing the word, singing his praises, and meeting together as a family in his house. Nor can we hope to abide in union and communion with the Lord and his people, if we neglect the house of prayer and make lazy excuses why we should not come up to worship in his courts. In fact, to very many of the family of God, who are toiling and labouring all through the week to earn the bread which perisheth, there is no sweeter or more suitable means of grace than the preached word on the Lord's day; and to some it seems almost the only one fully available.

4. The ordinances of God's house were also instituted by our most gracious Lord as a means of maintaining the life of God in the soul, and thus keeping up union and communion with himself. Baptism is an ordinance which God has much blessed, not only to those who, in obedience to his revealed will, have gone through it, but to those who have witnessed its celebration. How beautifully and blessedly it sets forth the union of the church with her covenant Head in his death, burial, and resurrection, in his sufferings and sorrows, when he could of a truth say, "All thy billows and thy waves have gone over me." The Lord's Supper, in which figuratively we eat his flesh and drink his blood, is a blessed

means also of keeping up and maintaining the life of God in the soul, and cementing our union with the Lord and his people.

5. Associating ourselves in spiritual intercourse with the dear family of God, making them our choice friends and bosom companions, and taking sweet converse together in speaking of the Lord's word and the Lord's work, is a blessed means of keeping up and maintaining in vigorous exercise the life of God in the soul. How often are we strengthened and encouraged, cheered and comforted by our intercourse with the spiritually minded, of whom, alas! there are few, of the family of God. From them we get sometimes a word to help us in the path of temptation, as finding them no strangers to it; and at others, the example of their liberality, consistency, self-denial, and practical godliness, whilst it may cast us down at our own dissimilarity, may yet stir us up to walk more closely with God as we see them to walk.

6. Private meditation, close and frequent self-examination, leading a life of separation from the world, being much alone with the Lord and ourselves, in searching his word for direction, and often looking up to the God of all our mercies for the support that he is able to communicate; this path, though sadly neglected, for in our day as in the days of Jael, "this high way of holiness is much unoccupied, and travellers now walk through by-ways" (Judges 5:6), yet, is, when persevered in, a most blessed means of abiding in Christ.

These are the Lord's appointed means of maintaining his own life in our breast; and if you will search the Scriptures you will see how continually they are spoken of either in the form of precept or that of example. Compare, for instance, with what I have laid down, the Psalms, and especially Psalm 119, and the precepts and directions of our Lord in the gospels, and of his inspired apostles in the epistles, and I think you will find I have traced out a scriptural path. And O the blessedness of abiding in Christ, in sensible union and communion with him so as to talk with

Jesus, hold intercourse with him, receive his gracious promises as he has revealed them, sit under his shadow with some measure of delight, and find his fruit sweet to our taste. But we cannot attain to all this by sloth, carelessness, and indifference; by that easy, loose, slipshod profession so rife in the present day, just as if all religion consists in believing a few doctrines, and adopting a few set phrases without any vital operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. One thing, at least, is very evident, that the Lord would not have said to his people, "Abide in me," unless there were an abiding in him on our part as well as an abiding of him in us on his. You will perceive how he unites them together. "Abide in me, and I in you," as if he should say, "My charge is, Abide in me; but do not think it remains with you to do it, or that you possess any such power, except as I work it in you by Spirit and grace." The Lord guards us well against any self-righteous idea, that without him we can do it; for he tells us implicitly, "Without me, ye can do nothing." "The branch can not bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine." When, therefore, he says, "Abide in me," he immediately adds, "And I in you." Why do ye abide in me? Because I abide in you. How are ye able to abide in me? By my abiding in you. He therefore puts them together: "Abide in me, and I in you."

iii. But how does the Lord abide in us? I have shown you or endeavoured to show you how we abide in him; I must now take up the other side of the question, and show how he abides in us. As we must be in him before we can abide in him, so he must be in us before he can abide in us. He therefore must first come to us before he can take up his abode in our hearts. Till the Lord has given us some visitation of his presence, some manifestation of his Person and work, and some discovery of himself in the word that we may see him by the eye of faith, receive him into our heart as the Son and Christ of God, and find and feel him precious as revealed to us by the power of the Holy Ghost, there is no coming of the Lord into our souls; and, therefore, he cannot abide where

he is not come. Many of the dear children of God are tossed up and down on a sea of great uncertainty, doubt, and fear, because they have not had these sensible manifestations of Christ to their soul. He has not come into them in the power of his love; still they often say, "When wilt thou come unto me? O visit me with thy salvation; speak a word to my soul; it is thyself, and thyself alone, I want to hear, to see, and to know." Now these are drawings of the gracious Lord, the secret beginnings of his coming, the heralds of his approach, the dawning of the day before the morning star arises and the sun follows upon his track. But when the Lord does come in any sweet manifestation of his presence or of his power, then he will abide where he has come, for he never leaves or forsakes a soul which he has once visited. He may seem to do so; he may withdraw himself; and then who can behold him? But he never really leaves the temple which he has once adorned and sanctified with his presence. Christ is formed in the hearts of his people the hope of glory; their body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and Christ dwells in them by faith. Though we often mourn over his absence and do not feel his gracious presence as we would, still he is there, if he has once come. But he is to abide; and how he does this I shall now endeavour to show you.

1. First, then, he abides in his people by that wherein he came: viz., by his presence. Whenever the Lord is pleased to manifest his presence to any of his dear family, there he abides as long as his presence lasts; and as he never will withdraw himself from any of them fully or finally, he now and then shows his presence. It is almost like the court of an earthly sovereign. The sovereign has apartments of his own, where he keeps himself sequestered and retired from his court. They may inhabit the same palace, but only—especially in eastern countries—only at rare times does he come and visit them. So it is in divine things. The Lord is never out of the palace, but he sequesters himself and lives in his own, so to speak, private apartments, in those glorious heavens which

he fills with the blaze of his divine Majesty. But now and then he will glance through the lattice, and give a passing visit to those who resort to his earthly courts, and thus cheer and gladden their hearts.

2. He abides in us also by his word: "Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you." He therefore says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will." Thus, by the power of his word upon the conscience, by the application of his truth to the heart, by the promises, the invitations, the glorious truths, and the sweet declarations with which he has filled the Scriptures, the Lord first comes to, and then abides with his people. When we can believe the promise, there is a fulfilment of it by taking hold of Jesus as the great promiser. When there is an invitation which falls sweetly upon the soul, and we can avail ourselves of it and make use of it, that is a renewed pledge that he is abiding in us. When there is a gracious belief of any word, any declaration, any scriptural truth, which seems to fall with a measure of sweetness and savour upon the heart, Christ abides in the soul by virtue of that sweetness and savour which he communicates through the word.

3. But Christ abides in his people chiefly by his Spirit, according to John's testimony: "And hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he hath given us." He, therefore, dwells in us mainly by his Spirit; for the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ as coming from him and testifying of him. Paul, therefore, puts them together, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. And if Christ be in you" (Rom. 8:9, 10), clearly showing that where the Spirit of God dwells, there Christ is.

III.—But what is the sure and unerring test of our abiding in Christ and his abiding in us? The production of fruit. "He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." Fruit is that which God expects to see in every one who names

the name of Christ, for fruit is that whereby we are manifested as living branches. Solemn is the warning which the Lord gives in this chapter to fruitless, graceless professors: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." Every branch, therefore, that bears not fruit, is under the solemn sentence of excision. Of course, the Lord does not mean that those branches which are unfruitful were really in him by living union; but they were in him by their own profession of it. He therefore takes them on their own ground; he speaks to them as occupying in their own eyes and others a certain visible position. If you take the name of Christ into your lips, if you call yourself a Christian, if you say "Lord, Lord," if you are a member of a Christian church, the Lord takes you on that assumption, and speaks of you as a branch in himself—the result proving whether in him vitally or in him nominally. So that as to bear no fruit is a certain work of excision, so to bear fruit is a certain mark of union and communion. Now there is no bearing fruit to his honour, praise, and glory, except by our abiding in him and by his abiding in us.

But what is it to bear fruit? Here we are often mistaken. There is inward fruit and there is outward fruit. We must look at the inward before the outward; for the apostle in recounting the fruits of the Spirit in the Epistle to the Galatians gives us a long catalogue of them; and you will find they are nearly all internal. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Only two out of the fruits named are outward, and even they are partly inward—"meekness and temperance."

The first in this catalogue is "love." This love we may consider as embracing the whole of our love to the Lord, to his ways, to his people, and to his truth; mainly and chiefly however to the Lord, because he is so worthy of all our love; and, secondarily, to his dear people, because they carry about a resemblance to him. The next fruit is "joy," as rejoicing in the Lord for what he is in

himself and what he has done for our soul, which we only can do by abiding in him, and maintaining union and communion in the way that I have spoken of. The third is "peace," as flowing into the soul through the blood of the Lamb, which peace can only be kept up by virtue of abiding in him in faith, and hope, and love. The next is "long-suffering," bearing patiently injuries, oppression, and all that the malice of men and Satan may devise against us or lay upon us, as knowing it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, and better to suffer affliction with Christ than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. The fifth is "gentleness," as being melted, softened, and humbled by a sense of his undeserved grace and the riches of his mercy, and putting away from us all wrath and clamour, violence of temper, peevish and passionate words, and everything inconsistent with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. "Goodness," also, is another fruit by which is meant kindness, tenderness, and a loving spirit to the family of God and doing them what good we can. "Faith" stands next on the list into which I need not enter, as having spoken so much upon it already; and then come the closing fruits of "meekness and temperance."

Now with all these internal fruits, and in proportion to them, there will be the external fruits of a consistent, godly, and upright life, living separate from the world, and adorning the doctrine by bringing forth those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and honour of God.

Now look at these things in the way that I have endeavoured to bring them this morning before you. You know, all of you that have received any measure of divine teaching, that without Christ you can do nothing. You are deeply and painfully convinced you can no more bear fruit of yourself than a branch can bear fruit except it abide in the vine. But this has been, and ever will be, a difficulty in your way—the secret of abiding in Christ; for you find, as we all find, so many things to draw you away from this abiding in him. The whole spirit, the whole tendency of the flesh is to

draw us from Christ into the world and into self. We have therefore to maintain such a continual battle without and within against the world, against Satan, against sin and self, in any way to abide in Christ, in any way to keep up and maintain the life of God in the soul, and to be receiving out of his gracious fulness those supplies without which we can bear no fruit to his honour and glory. And yet we feel the misery of not abiding in him; the strength which it gives to sin and temptation; the power which it seems to put against us into the hands of Satan; the guilt which it lays upon the conscience; the occasion it furnishes to the adversary; the leanness which it brings into our own soul; the state of poverty and death which we are reduced to by it. All these things testify to the misery of not abiding in Christ, and to urge and stimulate us to seek more earnestly to abide continually in him.

But in the depths of his infinite mercy, in the tenderness of his love, the Lord is graciously pleased from time to time to revive his work upon our heart in answer to our lamentations and complaints of our poverty. He has a tender, sympathising, affectionate heart, and he comes to the rescue when all is gone but himself. He drops in a kind word, or gives a gracious touch; he affords some renewal or revival of faith, hope, and love, and thus he teaches us again the blessedness of abiding in him by his abiding in us. Still, however, he graciously charges us, "Abide in me. Do not leave me, as I will not leave you. Do not forsake me, as I will never forsake you. Keep close to my wounded side, hang upon me, look unto me, cleave unto me with purpose of heart, and lay aside all those hindrances which keep thee from abiding in me, whatever they be. Be it a right hand, be it a right eye, cut it off, pluck it out, part with anything and everything which hinders abiding in me.

Thus we learn, after a long struggle it may be with sin, self, and the world, the blessedness of abiding in Christ, the firmness of every word which he has spoken, and his faithfulness to his own promises, the end of which is to see ourselves the vilest of the vile, and him the chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely—

to see ourselves less and worse than nothing, and him, God over all, blessed for ever.

209 The Ordering Of The Cause Before The Mercy-Seat

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening,
29th July, 1866

"Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments."

Job 23:3, 4

There was a reality in Job's religion. It was not of a flimsy, notional, superficial nature; it was not merely a sound Calvinistic creed, and nothing more; it was not a religion of theory and speculation, nor a well-compacted system of doctrines and duties. There was something deeper, something more divine in Job's religion than any such mere pretence, delusion, imitation, or hypocrisy. And if our religion be of the right kind, there will be something deeper in it, something more powerful, spiritual, and supernatural, than notions and doctrines, theories and speculations, however scriptural and correct, merely passing to and fro in our minds. There will be a divine reality in it, if God the Spirit be the Author of it; and there will be no trifling with the solemn things of God, and with our own immortal souls.

But, before we enter into the text, let us look a little at the character of Job, the speaker here. Not that I mean to enter at any length into the spiritual character of Job, for that would take up the whole of the discourse; but just to drop a few hints, so as to throw, if God enable me, some little light upon the words of the text.

Job, then, had been a highly favoured child of God, and had known divine consolation in his soul, previous to this period. Upon that favoured state he looked back with fond regret, when

he said "O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle." Job 29:2-4 But those consolations and those sweet visitations Job had lost. And how came he to lose them? The Holy Ghost has, if I may use the expression without irreverence, admitted us behind the scenes to explain this mystery.

In the first and second chapters of Job, we find out how he lost all those precious consolations that his soul had once enjoyed. Up to the time of the circumstances recorded there, he had known but little of his own heart; the awful depth of nature's depravity had not been opened up to him; and he knew little of the temptations of Satan, and of the fiery darts which he throws into the carnal mind. We, therefore, find Satan taunting God respecting him: "Doth Job," he asks, "fear God for nought? Hast not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?" Job 1:10 This hedge, set up by the favour of God, kept off the fiery darts which Satan would otherwise have shot into his soul. But when the hedge was removed, we find Job believing that all the dreadful things his soul was exercised with, came from himself; and all the rebellion, blasphemy, and enmity that worked in his heart, he, not knowing that Satan was the secret author of them, took as his own. The Lord too having testified, as he thought, his displeasure against him by visiting him with calamities so great, with stroke upon stroke, and blow upon blow, he felt deserted by God and man. Where his religion was, what and where he himself was, and how he stood, he knew not, for "he walked in darkness, and had no light:" all his evidences were obscured and he could not tell what to make of himself. Now it was in this darkness, this horrible darkness, that fell upon him, that he poured forth his soul in the words of the text. "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with

arguments."

Job, then, had found the Lord, and Job had lost him too. And you may depend upon it, it is a solemn truth that none but living souls ever find the Lord, and none but living souls ever lose the Lord; that none but those whose hearts God has touched ever feel the Lord's presence, or ever mourn the Lord's absence; and that none but God's children ever walk in the light of his countenance, or in such thick darkness, as not to see a single evidence, or trace out a solitary waymark.

But the desire of Job's soul was, to find the Lord. And if he could but find him, O, then he would pour out his very heart before him, and tell him all that he wanted. I can conceive bear with me a conclave of ministers sitting upon Job's case. When a patient is very ill naturally, you know there is often a consultation of physicians; and I can picture to myself a consultation of ministers on Job's case, with the various opinions they would give, and the various remedies they would propose. Here is the poor patient, and he keeps crying out, "O that I knew where I might find him!" The chief Rabbi of the Pharisees would say, "Kneel down Job, and say your prayers; is not that sufficient?" The Puseyite clergyman would urge, "Hear the voice of the only true Church; attend daily upon her admirable Liturgy; come to the altar, and partake of the flesh and blood of the Lord." The Wesleyan minister would cry, "Up and be doing; try your best; exert your free will, and shake off this gloom and despondency." The general Dissenter would advise "cheerful and active piety, to subscribe to Societies, and exert himself in the Lord's cause." And the dry doctrinal Calvinistic minister, with a look of contempt, would say, "Away with your doubts and fears, Job; this living upon frames and feelings, and poring over yourself. Do not gloat over your corruptions; look to Jesus; you are complete in him; why should you fear? you are quite safe." But the sick patient would still groan out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" He would say, "You may all be very wise men, but to me you are 'physicians of no value.' 'Oh that

I knew where I might find him!”

And this will be the feeling of every God-taught soul. Men may say, “Away with your doubts and fears;” but he cannot away with them at the exhortation of letter ministers. They may cut down frames and feelings, and yet the poor soul who has frames and feelings knows that all his religion consists in them. They may tell him to look to Jesus: but, as Bunyan says in his experience, “they might as well tell him to reach the sun with his finger.” After all, the poor soul would still groan out in darkness and sorrow, “Oh that I knew where I might find him!” “If I could but once find him whom my soul loveth, there would be an end to all my darkness.” But it is in the possession of these feelings of light and darkness, life and death, the Lord’s presence and the Lord’s absence, the finding of Jesus and the losing of Jesus, that “the secret of the Lord” which “is with them that fear him” Ps 25:14 consists: and those that know these things have the Lord in their hearts and will be with him in glory when the world is in a blaze.

But with God’s blessing, we will look a little more closely at the words. We find, first, Job breathing out his desire after a certain object which he was earnestly pursuing; and that is couched in the two first clauses of the text—“Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!” And then he tells us what he would do, if the Lord would so favour his soul—“I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.”

Let us look at these two distinct portions of the subject. This desire of Job to obtain a certain object—and, what he would do, when that object was attained.

I.—The first object that he desired was this—“Oh that I knew where I might find him!” But how was it that Job could not find him? Job must have known what it was to find the Lord, or he would not have desired now to find him in his soul’s experience. He must have tasted, felt, and known something of the Lord’s presence, or he would not so sadly have mourned over the Lord’s absence. He must have walked in the light of God’s countenance,

to make him feel what the darkness was when the Lord forsook him.

(i) This, then, is the grand goal toward which every runner in the heavenly race strains every nerve and sinew: this is the grand object of every quickened soul—to find the Lord. The Lord himself creates these desires in the heart; and certifies in every awakened conscience that the soul must find him by a living faith and by a divine revelation, or eternally and inevitably perish. Now, it is this conviction, thus fastened by God himself upon the conscience, that there is such a reality as finding the Lord, that so winnows out false religion from a man’s heart. O what heaps of chaff are there in our hearts when God first takes us in hand! What mistakes, what blunders we make as to what true religion is! And though, wherever the fear of the Lord is, the heart is right in the main, yet we are continually mistaking the way.

But in spite and in the midst of all these blunders and mistakes, there is this conviction created by the power of God in the soul, that it must feel something, know something, enjoy something, and have something let down from heaven; must experience dew, savour, unction, power, love, blood and salvation. Thus when the Lord leads the soul under the law, and reveals his wrath in the covenant of Mount Sinai, what refuge can it find in the works of righteousness? The hailstones come down, the waterflood rises, and these drive the soul out of its refuges of lies. And thus, its own righteousness being beaten to pieces by the sentence of inward condemnation from a fiery law, the soul knows that unless pardon, mercy, and justification are sealed upon the conscience by the power of God the Spirit, it will live and die in its sins.

Wherever this conviction is fastened on the conscience, the soul, sooner or later, must come right; it cannot be deluded long; it cannot hide its head for any length of time in false refuges: it cannot take up with mere empty or insufficient evidences. Being hunted out of false refuges, it is brought to this solemn, deep, and inward conviction, that there is no peace but what the Lord

speaks with his own voice to the soul; no pardon but what springs out of his atoning blood sprinkled upon the conscience; and no justification except in the application of Christ's righteousness, received and put on by a living faith. And you may depend upon it, if God the Spirit has wrought that conviction with power in a man's conscience, he never can be fully nor finally deceived; he will never long call evil good, nor good evil; he will never mistake darkness for light, nor light for darkness; he will never put bitter for sweet, nor sweet for bitter. He cannot be plastered over with untempered mortar; he will not let man or woman sew pillows under his armholes; he cannot be satisfied with the opinions of men, nor daubed over with an empty profession of religion; because he feels that he must have the light, the life, the power, and the witness of God in his conscience. The soul that knows this, knows something of the experience which Job breathed out from his soul—"Oh that I knew where I might find him!"

But some might say, "Is there not a Bible to read! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not a mercy-seat! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such and such a chapel! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such a duty! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such a doctrine! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such an ordinance! Cannot you find him there?" Another might say, "Is there not such a gospel church! Cannot you find him there?" But the poor soul still groans out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" for I have tried all these things; and I cannot find him in these doctrines, duties, privileges, ordinances, in hearing, reading, or in talking. "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" though at the very ends of the earth, though through flames of persecution, or through the waters of affliction, though it were inside the walls of a Union Workhouse! "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" says the poor sorrowing, groaning soul. "If I could but find the Lord in my heart and conscience, if I could but taste his blessed

presence in my soul, I should want no more, but be certain of going to heaven; glory would be begun, and the first-fruits of heaven be realised."

Now, such a one is perfectly safe, though he has not arrived at the desired enjoyment; the Spirit is secretly guiding him right by stripping him of all lying refuges, pulling the down out of the pillows sewed to the armholes, and digging the trowel into the untempered mortar that so many servants of Satan are plastering souls with. Eze 13:15,18 The soul is safe that is here; for none ever breathed out these sighs, groanings and cries into the bosom of the Lord, and said, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" that did not find him sooner or later, and embrace him in the arms of faith and affection as the "altogether lovely."

(ii) But this experience which I have endeavoured to trace out is not exactly that of the text, because Job had known something of the Lord's presence. The secret of the Lord had been upon his tabernacle; the dew of the Lord had rested upon his branch; and by the light of the Lord he had walked through darkness. Job 29:3,4 But the Lord had withdrawn himself; and a cloud in consequence had come over his soul, through which neither prayer nor faith could pierce. He looked "backward" to see the path in which he had been led, but darkness rested upon it; he could not run back to his past experience, and find the Lord there. He looked "forward," but he could not see any gleam of light there; dark clouds so hovered over his soul that he could not see the face of the Lord. If he looked "to the left hand" to see if he could trace out the Lord's hand in providence, he could not behold him through the cloud of his afflictions; and if he turned "to the right hand" where once he had set up his Ebenezers, they were all effaced. And therefore, not knowing which way to go, backward or forward, to the left hand or to the right, he could only sigh out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" What he wanted was, the sweet presence of the Lord in his soul, access unto him by faith, some testimony from the Lord's lips, some sweet and precious discoveries of the Lord's

grace, mercy and peace. And satisfied I am in my conscience, that nothing but what Job wanted can ever satisfy one that fears God.

(iii) But there is another clause of the text in which Job breathes out the fervent desire of his heart—"That I might come even to his seat!" The Lord, we read, "waits to be gracious." There is a mercy-seat where he sits to receive the petitions of his people. This was beautifully prefigured by the mercy-seat in the temple, that golden covering of the ark, where the Shechinah, the glory of God, was manifested, which hid the broken tables of the law, and which once a year, on the day of atonement, was sprinkled with the blood of the sin-offering. This was typical of the mercy-seat above, where mercy, grace, pardon, peace and salvation shine forth with glory and lustre, far beyond the Shechinah of the Tabernacle, in the Person, love, blood and work of Jesus. It was to this seat that Job desired to come. He wanted to be indulged with nearness to the Lord, with some sense that He was looking upon him, and with some testimony and inward witness that He was listening to and accepting his requests.

What a different thing is this spiritual access from mere wordy prayer! People talk about the duty of prayer, and how right it is and it is right, it is my daily privilege to bend the knee morning and evening before the Lord. But to bend my knees, and use words, is not necessarily to come near to the mercy-seat. I may bend my knees, and use words, may have my mind engaged in what I am saying, and be free from wandering thoughts. I may tell the Lord what I honestly want; I may confess my sins, and seek for mercy; I may ask for all the blessings that my soul really stands in need of; and yet not come in faith to the mercy-seat, have no sense of access, no enlargement of heart, no melting down of soul, no felt presence of God in my conscience, no sweet testimony that my prayers are heard and answered, no inward witness and token of the indwelling Spirit.

You may depend upon it, a living soul can never be satisfied with mere wordy prayer; I mean by the expression, words and

no more. O, true prayer is something deeper than this! it is to have the groans, sighs, pantings, breathings, longings, hungerings and thirstings of a believing heart. Nor do these satisfy a living soul; he is glad to have them, and he is condemned when he has them not. But he can never put hungering instead of eating; nor thirsting instead of drinking; nor running instead of winning the race; nor wrestling instead of gaining the prize. To come in faith to the mercy-seat, to see it sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb, to view the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, to receive atoning blood into the conscience, and to enjoy the sweet witness and testimony of acceptance in the heart—this is what Job wanted to feel, and nothing but this can really satisfy a heart made honest and tender in God's fear.

How few know what prayer is! How little they know of the secret intercourse that a living soul carries on with the Lord! How few we hear at a prayer-meeting whose prayers drop into our conscience! and, though I am a minister myself, yet, I must say, there are very few men who stand up in the pulpit whose prayers seem indited by the Holy Ghost in their souls. They appear to have no reverence for the great God to whom they draw near; no pantings and longings for his felt presence; no hungerings and thirstings after the dew of his Spirit on their branch: but round and round they travel through their usual form, as though they were speaking to man, and not to the Lord of heaven and earth. But Job did not want any such mere wordy prayer. He knew there was something deeper, something higher, something more real, something more blessed, something more spiritual in coming to the mercy-seat than in any mere words that may come out of the lips; he wanted to be drawn by the Holy Ghost, to feel his power in the heart, to come near to the throne of grace, and there in all filial boldness and sweet confidence, with divine access, to breathe out his wants and petitions.

II.—But we pass on to consider what Job declared he would do, if the Lord would thus indulge him. You see, Job would not

have been satisfied with merely drawing near; he wanted to have something done for him and in him. What this was, with God's help, I shall endeavour now to trace out.

(i) The first thing he would do, if the Lord would but indulge him with access to his seat would be this "I would order my cause before him!" But did not Job all this time feel pantings and longings after the Lord? Did not his soul groan out its desires through a sense of felt necessity, and was he not really pleading with the Lord all the time? But still he had not a sense of access in his soul; he could not tell the Lord all that was in his heart; he could not pour out his soul before the Lord. How much there is in that expression! Shall I use a familiar figure to illustrate it, as sometimes familiar figures are best adapted to that purpose? Look at a sack of corn: you know, when the mouth of the sack is tied up, there is no pouring out its contents; but let the sack be opened and thrown down, and then its contents are immediately poured out, and the rich grain falls upon the floor. Our hearts are sometimes like the sack with the mouth tied; there are desires, pantings, and longings; there are wants, and these urgently felt; but we cannot give them utterance. As we read, "I opened my mouth and panted." Ps 119:131

But the Lord in mercy at times opens the mouth; and then when the mouth is opened, the heart can pour out its desires, just as the rich grain is poured out of a sack when the mouth is untied. But must not the sack be full before the grain is poured out? If there are but a few grains at the bottom, or only half-a-pint of wheat in one corner of the sack, though you open the mouth, there is no pouring out of the rich grain. So with our hearts. If the heart be not full; if there be no vehement desires struggling for utterance, we may open the mouth, but there is no pouring it out in pantings and longings. This is to pour out the soul before the Lord. If you want a scriptural instance of it, read the first chapter of the first book of Samuel, where you will find a gracious woman, Hannah, so agitated, and so discovering the state of her

mind by the convulsive movements of her frame, that the High Priest charged her with being drunken; but though her heart was so full that her lips quivered, and her very features betrayed what was passing within, yet she meekly replied to his chiding speech, when he bade her to put away her wine, "No, my lord, I am a women of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord." 1Sa 1:15 That was something like prayer! And we know what a blessed answer the Lord gave her, and how the Holy Ghost has recorded her triumphal song.

If Job, then, were thus enabled by the Holy Ghost to come to the mercy-seat, he says, "I would order my cause before him!" The eternal work of the Spirit of God on the heart is sometimes compared in Scripture to a cause, or law-suit. For instance, "Let my sentence come forth from thy presence" Ps 17:2; where the Lord is requested, as a judge, to pronounce the decision in his favour. So, "Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment even unto my cause, my God and my Lord." Ps 35:23 "I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor." Ps 140:12 So in Mic 7:9: "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me."

The Lord is often spoken of as an Advocate, who pleads the cause of his people; and thus the work of grace in the heart is compared to a cause to be decided, and, the soul hopes, in its favour. Job therefore says, if he were but privileged and enabled to come before the mercy-seat, he would "order his cause" before the Lord; that is, he would spread it out before the divine tribunal in all its bearings. He would tell the Lord that there was a great cause to be tried, a law-suit to be decided, a judgment to be passed; and what he wanted was, to lay before him all that was going on in the court of conscience. He "would order his cause;" he would draw it out, in regular order, like a brief; would spread before the Lord all the pros and cons; would explain it thoroughly, and tell Him all

MERCY-SEAT

that was for, and all that was against him, and draw it out that the Lord might decide upon it.

Now, you may depend upon it, that when the Lord makes a man honest by His grace, he will have a cause; and when He brings him before His mercy-seat, he will “order that cause before Him.” It will not be just a word of confession, and then all passed over; but everything will be raked up from first to last; all the exercises of his mind, all the perplexities of his soul, all the temptations he has been harassed by, all the snares his feet have been caught in;—in short, the whole work of God on his conscience, in all its puzzling points, mysterious turnings, and intricate workings, will the soul order before the Lord, and spread out before His mercy-seat.

If a man is heir to an estate, and yet be kept out of it because he cannot establish a legal title, he will go to a lawyer, and when he gets his attention, how he will keep dinning into his ears all the particulars of his case; how he will bring out his pedigree, and weary the man by telling him how this is in his favour, and that is in his favour; and how he fears this point may be against him, and that may be against him; and how he considers this or that will turn the scale. He will “order his cause,” and spread it out in all its intricacies and all its bearings, all its difficulties and niceties, and endeavour to make it out as plain as he can. And why? Because he is deeply interested in it; the point at stake is so valuable, that he wants a decision in his favour to put him in possession of the property.

The man who feels the importance of eternal things will be like the person I have just described as wanting to get the estate. He cannot be satisfied with telling the Lord a few things about his soul; but he will spread out the whole case before the Lord, from the beginning to the end, that all that is for him and all that is against him may be examined and looked at in their various lights, and weighed up in the balances of the sanctuary.

Are there not some here who make a great profession of religion, and perhaps are members of churches, who have never

MERCY-SEAT

done this in their lives? Are there not those who have never weighed up their religion, never been tried about it, never have had doubts and fears to shake them to the very foundation, never turned the whole work over from first to last, never examined how the Lord dealt with them, when the work began, how it was carried on, where they are now, and what state their souls are in? Are there not some before me at this present moment, confident of their state, who have yet never spent half-an-hour in their lives in looking over their religion, in examining it from the very foundation, and scanning it through with all the anxiety that an heir to an estate examines the documents, and looks over the title-deeds to establish his title.

Why, surely, if your souls are at stake, and you feel the solemn importance of the things of eternity, there will be times and seasons when you will be examining how your souls stand for another life: you will be looking over all the work of grace from the beginning, at all its weak points and all its strong points. When a general knows the enemy is about to besiege a fortified town, he minutely examines all the works; and as he goes over them he sees there is a weak point here; and a strong point there; here the curtain needs to be defended, there the bastion needs to be fresh armed; he looks over all the fortress, and sees where the enemy can come in, and where he can be kept out. So an honest man before God will look at his religion; here is a weak point in his experience; it had not a striking beginning; here the enemy may come in; he has not been led deeply enough into a knowledge of his own heart. But here is a strong point, a clear manifestation.

Thus he will review his religion as a skilful general looks over a fortress, and examines every weak point, and every strong point, to see how the weak may be strengthened, and the strong be confirmed: for he knows, unless this is done, if the enemy come against him, he will be more than a match for him. When we come to look at religion in this way, and bring it to the test of God’s word, what a mere shallow pretence to vital godliness

satisfies most ministers, most hearers, and most congregations! How they take up with the flimsiest evidences of the work of grace, not considering their immortal souls are at stake! But that would not do for Job, nor will it do for me; nor will it do for anyone that fears God.

(ii) But there is another clause of the text, in which Job declares what he would do if the Lord would indulge him with access to his presence; “I would fill my mouth,” he says, “with arguments.” What! could not Job pray without access? No; prayer is a supernatural thing, the gift and work of God the Spirit in the heart. We cannot pray whenever we please; we may use words, may bend our knee, and utter a number of expressions; but we cannot pray spiritually except the Lord the Spirit help our infirmities; for “we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.” Ro 8:26.

Job, then, says, if the Lord would but enable him to come before his mercy-seat, he would “fill his mouth with arguments.” He could not do so till the Lord enabled him. But if he could but find the Lord, if he could but have access to his gracious Majesty; if he could but be indulged with one glimpse of his countenance; if he could but feel the drawing of his Spirit; if he could but know his ear was open; he “would fill his mouth with arguments” to move the divine clemency. What arguments, think you, would he make use of? Let us look at them. When a Counsellor stands up to plead a cause, he must have, you know, some arguments, or it is of no use to take up the time of the Court. So when the soul comes before the Lord, it must make use of some argument to move the bowels of divine compassion.

But what arguments would he make use of? Would he tell the Lord what great things he had done for him; The scores of pounds and shillings he had spent in his cause, the many Societies he subscribed to, the quantity of tracts and Bibles he had dispersed

abroad, the number of sermons he had heard, the numerous times he had knelt at the sacrament or sat down to the ordinance, the regularity of his private and family prayer, and the duties civil and religious that he had so faithfully discharged? The Court will not hear such arguments; the King of kings will not listen to such pleas; not one of them is valid in the Court above. None but Jesus’ merits and righteousness are pleadable there. If a man comes into that court with his own doings and duties, he will meet with no acceptance; he has not an argument that the Judge will listen to.

When, then, the spiritual petitioner fills his mouth with arguments, there will not be one taken from his own piety, consistency, or sincerity. For, mark you, he goes as a petitioner, not as a claimant. Talk of claiming spiritual favours! A condemned felon in Newgate might as well claim a pardon, as a sinner claim God’s mercy; a bankrupt lawyer might as well claim to be Lord Chancellor, as a poor insolvent, who has nothing to pay, claim heaven and glory. What can men know of themselves, and of the God they profess to serve, who set up this presumptuous notion of claiming spiritual blessings? What is given to us is given on the footing of mercy, not on the footing of claim. If we claim anything, it is hell and damnation; we can claim nothing else. But as to claiming mercy, pardon, love, blood, salvation, and glory, a man who knows what he is by divine teaching will never dare to do it before a throne of mercy. I do not say, that good men have never used the term; Hart says,

“Brethren, by this your claim abide;”

but he means, not your claim upon God, but your claim against Satan; these are very different things.

But let us look at the arguments that Job’s mouth would be filled with. All the arguments he would make use of, may be divided into two classes. One class would be taken from his own misery, and the other from God’s mercy; all spiritual arguments are included under these two heads.

(i) He would tell, then, the Lord what a filthy creature, what a vile sinner, what a base backslider he was; that, in a thousand instances, he had deserved eternal wrath and indignation; that he had never done any one thing spiritually good; that he was a rebel and a wretch, and had done everything to provoke the Majesty of the Most High. This class of arguments is made up of mourning, sighing, groaning, and bemoaning our lost, ruined, and helpless condition. O, these are very prevailing arguments with the divine clemency!

Look at what the Lord himself sets forth in that wonderful chapter, Eze 16! What was the moving argument o! the Lord to spread his skirt over the child left to perish in the wilderness? Why, the wretched, lost, and ruined condition of that child. There was no eye to pity the perishing outcast; but its helpless state moved the divine clemency. And is not that too a prevailing argument with us? When we see a man clothed in rags, starving with hunger, cold, emaciated by sickness, and misery painted in all his features—is not that a moving argument to give him relief? A beggar must not come to our house if he wants to get anything, looking hale and hearty, well-clothed and well-fed. Nor must a beggar go before the throne of the Lord well-clothed, well-shod, and his eyes standing out with fatness; he will never so move the bowels of divine clemency. A beggar need not speak; his rags and sores speak for him. Or look at a mother with her infant; the very helplessness of the child is the moving argument for her tender care. The cry of the child is the moving argument for her to give the nutritious breast. The nakedness in which the child comes into the world is the moving argument why the clothes should be got ready, and the child dressed in them. Ye mothers, are not these the arguments that move your tender bosom?

So when a poor soul comes before the Lord, he fills his mouth with similar arguments. His helplessness, sinfulness, wretchedness, misery; his lost, ruined, and desperate condition;

his inability to do good, his headlong proneness to evil; his filth, his guilt, his rags;—O what a class of arguments to move the divine clemency with! If enabled to come before the mercy-seat, his mouth will be filled with these arguments. And shall we not tell the Lord what base backslidings we have committed? Shall we not confess what inconsistencies we have fallen into? Shall we not catalogue before him the various slips and falls we have been guilty of? Shall we not tell him that nothing but his mercy can save such hell-deserving wretches?

These are very humbling arguments for a man to fill his mouth with. It is a very humbling place for a sinner to take. I am not surprised we have so many bold claimants. It is much pleasanter to go to a gentleman's front door, and give a double knock as an equal, than tap at the back door as a beggar. To go into a banking house, present a draft, and say, "Pay me that!" is much less humbling than to beg for a halfpenny in the street. That is the very reason why there are so many bold claimants in the visible church. They cannot bear to be humbled under a sense of wretchedness, helplessness, and misery; they cannot endure to be beggars and paupers; so they rush on the bosses of God's buckler with a presumptuous claim. I am sure of this, if God the Spirit bring such to his mercy-seat, he will effectually cut up their presumption, root and branch, and will bring them as needy petitioners—not to claim, but to beg—not to rush presumptuously on, but to wait till the Lord bids them approach.

(ii) But there is another class of arguments which the poor soul will make use of; such as are drawn from God's mercy in the face of Jesus Christ. And as the first class of arguments is drawn from creature helplessness, creature ruin, and creature misery; so the second class of arguments is drawn from God's superabounding grace in the Person, face, blood, and work of Jesus. And I may add, that the first class of arguments taken from our misery will have no prevalence in his holy court, unless there was mercy,

pardon, and salvation laid up in the Person and work of the Son of God. Our ruin and misery do not of themselves move the divine clemency; but because Jesus has made a way for pardon through his atoning blood, so that it flows freely through him; and God now can be “just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus;” therefore, it is that man’s helplessness, ruin, and misery are pleadable in the court of heaven.

One grand argument of this latter class that the soul makes use of, is the promises that God has made. Has he not, for instance, promised to hear and answer prayer? Has he not said, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out?” Joh 6:37 Has he not said, “Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price?” Isa 55:1 Has he not said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?” Mt 11:28 The soul that comes to the mercy-seat employs as arguments these promises in the Word.

He also rakes over what God has done in times past for him. Has not the Lord delivered and blessed me? Has not the Lord shewn himself merciful and gracious? Will he not appear again? “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?” Ps 77:7-9. So the soul takes occasion from the past to ask for the future; and uses all those arguments that his mouth is filled with, in order to prevail upon divine compassion to bestow mercy, peace, and salvation, and manifest Himself once more.

Sometimes the spiritual petitioner takes occasion from what God has done for others. He cannot always trace out clearly the work of grace in himself, but looks at what the Lord has done for others, especially at what he has done for those recorded in the Word. He sees an adulterous and murderous David restored, a

bloody Manasseh pardoned, a backsliding Peter reclaimed, and a persecuting Saul called by divine grace. And he sees how in repeated similiar instances grace has superabounded over sin. Is there not, too, some brother or sister, some wife or husband, some parent or child, some friend and companion, whose experience is commended to his conscience, to whom the Lord has shown mercy blessed and delivered?

All these are made use of, because his mouth is to be “filled with arguments;” yes, with as many as ever it can bring. Will not a pleading soul make use of every argument that it can think of, to move the divine compassion? How piteously will a man in want plead to have his necessities relieved! How he will try to touch the string that most vibrates in our natural heart! How the poor blind beggar in the streets of the metropolis will cry, “Remember the blind!” because he knows what a string it touches! Even the imposters, of which this great city is full, use a whining tone to tell their pretended misery, because they know there is something in our heart that vibrates at the accents of woe. So with the spiritual beggar. If the Lord do but give him access to Himself, I know he will fill his mouth with arguments. O what a mercy it is to have a soul panting after the Lord, and not to be satisfied except with the presence of the living God!

What a mercy to lie upon our bed, and instead of having every vile thought working in the mind, every base imagination passing through our heart, to be crying to the Lord for the sweet manifestations of his mercy and grace! And as we sit at home, what a mercy it is, instead of being full of ill-humour and worldliness, to have the soul sighing and breathing after the Lord that he would appear! I dare say, you gracious fathers and mothers, when all is still, and your children are in bed, and you sit up a little while after them, you know what it is now and then to pant after the Lord’s presence and the manifestations and revelations of his goodness in your heart. I know something of this matter. I know it is very

sweet, when all is still and quiet, to have the soul going out after the Lord in earnest breathings after his manifested presence, to feel the dew of his favour upon our branch, and enjoy nearness of access and approach unto him. Then is the time when we fill our mouth with arguments. Why, sometimes it is as hard to leave off, as at others it is hard to begin. Sometimes the soul can no more help praying, breathing, and panting after the Lord, shall I say half-an-hour, an hour, or two hours together, than at other times, it cannot breathe out a single petition, or feel a single desire after the living God.

Now, was not Job here, the old patriarch, whose experience is recorded for our strength and consolation? Was not Job in the same spot where we often are? Why, if the old patriarch had not known something of access and of pouring out his very soul before the mercy-seat, he would not have wanted to order his cause before the Lord, and fill his mouth with arguments.

Are there not many here this evening, in whose ears I have uttered nothing but enigmas, and who know no more spiritually and experimentally of what I have been speaking than if I had been talking in Arabic or Hebrew? We must get into these spots, into these circumstances, before we can know anything of these things in soul experience. If this aged patriarch had not known what it was to be shut up in his mind, harassed, and distressed, and well-nigh overwhelmed with the attacks of the wicked one, he would not have said, "Oh that I knew where I might find him; that I might come even to his seat; I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments!" Job 23:3,4 Has that ever been, is it now, the genuine feeling, the real experience of your soul?

Do look into your heart, you that fear God. Do look for a moment, if you have never looked before, at the work of grace, and where are you, if you have never looked at it? and consider if you know any of these matters. Did you ever, in a feeling of

darkness, gloom, bondage, and distress of soul cry, I do not say the words, it is the feelings we want, let the words go, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" "Lord I do want to find thee; my soul longs after thee; I want a taste of thy blessed presence; I want to embrace thee in the arms of my faith; I want the sweet testimonies of thy gracious lips; 'Oh that I knew where I might find thee!' I would not care what I went through."

If so, then these very things shew that you have the fear of God in your souls, and the teaching of the Spirit in your hearts. You are where Job was; and know ten thousand times more than all the dry Calvinists, and all the presumptuous claimants that swarm in this metropolis. There is more true religion in a poor tried, exercised, tempted soul, who most deeply feels the power of unbelief, and is pressed by mountains of guilt; there is more of vital godliness, more of divine teaching in such a man, than in a whole chapel full of presumptuous claimants, who have never known God or themselves; who have never found God by a discovery of Himself to their consciences, who have never known anything of the horrible depths of nature's evil, nor groaned under the workings of inward corruption.

I say then, if you know something of what Job speaks here, "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!"—if that is the desire of your soul, you have Job's affliction in this matter, and you will have Job's deliverance, Job's joy, Job's peace, and Job's salvation. Job's God is your God, and you will be where Job now is, bathing your ransomed soul in all the glory of the Lamb.

It is a mercy to know by heart experience what the Holy Ghost has revealed here; and it is better, if it be the will of God, to be groaning out, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"—it is a thousand times better to be groaning out this in darkness, solitude, heaviness, and misery, through mourning and sorrowing, than to have a name to live while dead, and the form of godliness, while

you inwardly and outwardly deny the power of it. For this is divine teaching, this is the work of grace, this is the life of God in the soul, this is the kingdom of God in the heart. And those who know these things by divine teaching will one day mount up and be where Christ is, be with the Lord of life and glory, and enjoy his blessed presence for ever.

There are many persons present who perhaps will not hear my voice again, as this is the last Lord's day that I speak here. I leave this testimony, therefore, to the blessing of God, and may he apply it to your conscience. What you know of this heart-felt experience, and of these dealings of God in your soul, the Lord enable you that fear him to look at and examine; and may he give us sweet testimonies that we do know these things by his divine power. In his hands, then, do I leave it; and God grant, that the "bread cast upon the waters may be found after many days." I have endeavoured to deliver my own conscience, and to speak the truth in all faithfulness as far as I know it, neither seeking to please, nor fearing to offend; but leaving the matter simply in the Lord's hands that he may apply it powerfully, and seal it upon the hearts of his own people, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.

King Hezekiah lay diseased,
With every dangerous symptom seized,
Beyond the cure of art;
With languid pulse, and strength decayed;
With spirits sunk, and soul dismayed,
And ready to depart.
His friends despair; his servants droop;
The learned leach can give no hope:
All signs of life are fled!
When, lo! the seer Isaiah came,
With words to damp the expiring flame,
And strike the dying dead!

Entering the royal patient's room,
He thus denounced the dreadful doom:
Of flattering hopes beware!
God's messenger, behold, I stand;
Thus saith the Lord: Thy death's at hand;
Prepare, O king, prepare!
Where is the man, whom words like these,
(Though free before from all disease)
Would not deject to death?
Favourite of heaven! in thee we see
The miracles of prayer, in thee
The omnipotence of faith!
Methinks I hear the hero say;
And must my life be snatched away,
Before I'm fit to die?
Can prayer reverse the stern decree,
And save a wretch condemned like me?
It may; at least I'll try.
Ye damps of death, that chill me through,
God's prophet and prediction too,
I must withstand you all;
Both heaven and earth awhile begone:
I turn me to the Lord alone,
And face the silent wall.
He said; and weeping, poured a prayer,
That conquered pain, removed despair,
With all its heavy load;
Repelled the force of death's attack,
Brought the recanting prophet back,
And turned the mind of God!

Joseph Hart.

210 The Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation in the Knowledge of Christ

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day Morning,
September 16, 1866

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."

Ephesians 1:17, 18

Where there is little prayer, there is little grace. Where there is much grace, there is much prayer. I mean, of course, spiritual prayer; for there may be much prayer which is not spiritual. When, therefore, I lay it down as a religious maxim, a spiritual test, that where there is little prayer there is little grace, I cannot similarly adduce the converse of the proposition and say, "Where there is much prayer there is much grace;" for there are heaps upon heaps of prayers made every day throughout this land in which there is not one grain or atom of grace. Of such prayers I take no account. Like "the sacrifice of the wicked," they are "an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 15:8); and God himself has testified of them and of their offerers, "When ye make many prayers I will not hear." (Isa. 1:15.) The Pharisees "for a pretence made long prayers," and they even thought that "they should be heard for their much speaking." Much prayer, therefore, is no index of the grace of God, or of the acceptance of its offerer as a spiritual worshipper. But where there is much of the grace of God, it will much manifest itself in prayer and supplication. If I may use a figure—and you know I am fond of figures—we may call prayer the thermometer of the soul. The heart we may compare to the bulb, and prayer to the spirit in it which rises and sinks within the tube. Now, when the beams of

the Sun of righteousness play round and upon the heart, the spirit of prayer expands and rises upwards in earnest supplication; and the height to which it rises and the length of time during which it continues at a certain height manifest the warmth and the duration of the power of God in the soul. But in nature the sun does not always shine; clouds gather over the sky; chilly nights come on; and there are wintry frosts as well as summer days, the effect of all which is soon seen in the thermometer, for the spirit gradually sinks in the tube, and in very cold and severe weather seems almost to retire out of sight into the bulb, and rises but a few degrees in the scale. So in grace, when the Sun of righteousness withdraws his cheering presence, dark clouds come on, and damp, chilly night often gathers over the soul. The Lord, we read, "has made summer and winter" (Psa. 74:17); and thus even in grace there is a winter as well as a summer season. "He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly. He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoar frost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold?" (Psa. 147:15, 16, 17.) "Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word." (Psa. 148:8.) We thus see that in giving snow like wool, and casting forth his ice like morsels, the word of God runneth very swiftly; and that snow and vapours and stormy wind are as much a fulfilling of his word as preparing rain for the earth, and making the grass to grow upon the mountains. Do we not see in all this a lively representation of the dealings of God with the soul as well as of his dealings with the earth? When, then, these wintry seasons come on and succeed the summer days, the Spirit of grace and of supplications seems to sink almost into the bulb of the heart, out of which it is not able to expand itself and rise till some warm ray again shines upon it, and the Beloved says, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." (Song Sol. 2:10, 11, 12.)

But I will not this morning give you a sermon upon prayer, nor indeed should I have dwelt even thus long upon that subject had it not been so closely connected with our text; for you have probably observed that the words of the apostle which I have read, and from which I hope to preach to you contain a part of the prayer of that man of God.

Now, there are several things very noteworthy in this man of God viewed as a praying man, and especially as so continually engaged in prayer and supplication for the churches, which I wish to bring before you.

1. And first, have you ever noticed the striking fact that there is scarcely a single epistle written by him in which the apostle does not make special mention of his prayers for the church or the individual to whom he addresses his weighty letters? He was not content, as perhaps some of us are, with praying for himself. His large heart embraced all the family of God, and was almost more fervent on their behalf than on his own. Have you not also found as a matter of gracious experience, that the more you can pray for yourself the more you can pray for the family of God; and that there are times and seasons when you can pray for others almost more fervently than you can pray for yourself? It is good to mingle prayers and supplications for the saints, and for those especially with whom we are personally connected by family ties or church relationship, with prayer and supplication for ourselves.

2. Mark another thing; the union of thanksgiving with prayer in the breast of this man of God. "I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." Thanksgiving gives, so to speak, wings to prayer. It is like the incense which the priest carried into the tabernacle that filled the house of the Lord with sweet savour. We therefore read, "They shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord." Praise especially glorifies God,— "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." (Psa. 50:23.) And if we were under the Divine blessing, more to mingle thankfulness for mercies passed with prayers for mercies

to come, it might make our petitions more of a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Like the union of the different spices in the incense, it might give additional influence to our prayers, and they might enter more effectually into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

3. But take another feature so visibly stamped upon the prayers of the apostle in the chapter now before us: the cause that drew forth thanksgiving and prayer out of his breast. It was "when he heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints." No sooner were tidings brought to him that these Ephesian believers were living in the blessed exercise of faith in the Son of God, and abounded in love to all the saints, than it touched the springs of prayer and thanksgiving in his breast, and the water welled forth in a stream of praise and supplication. So it will be with us when we read or hear of those who believe in the Son of God, and manifest their love to the Lord Jesus by loving his people, if we have any of Paul's grace; for such blessed tidings create a sweet union of heart and spirit with them, so that we can bless the Lord for his grace in them, and beg of him to manifest himself more and more both unto them and unto us.

4. Nor must I pass by another feature in this prayer of the apostle almost more worthy of notice than those which I have mentioned. I mean the subject matter of his desires and supplications; for this is a point especially worthy of our consideration that we may examine our prayers in the light of his. The Holy Ghost guided him how to pray for others as well as for himself, and has placed upon permanent record two solemn prayers in this epistle, that they might be, so to speak, patterns of what prayer is, or should be, on behalf of others and ourselves. It would be well, then, if we were to examine the prayers we offer for ourselves and for others by these sacred patterns, and see how far they correspond with them in spirit and in substance, if not in letter and word.

But in order to do this more clearly and effectually, I shall endeavour to bring before you the prayer of the apostle as

contained in the latter part of this chapter. And as the subject is too long for me to handle fully in one discourse, I shall take up a portion of his prayer this morning in connection with my text, and reserve the remaining for the afternoon service.

After, then, this long introduction, we will now come to the special subject of this morning's meditation. Observe, with me, three prominent features in it.

I.—First, the titles by which the apostle calls the God to whom he directs his prayer. He calls him “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and “the Father of glory.”

II.—Secondly, the special blessing prayed for,—“the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation.”

III.—Thirdly, the fruits and results of those blessings when they are so freely given, which we shall find to be these four:—1. They enlighten the eyes of the understanding. 2. They give us a knowledge of Christ. 3. A knowledge of the hope of his calling. 4. A knowledge of the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

As I open up these divine realities, and you follow me with your usual attention, I venture to hope that before I have finished my discourse they may be made clear to your mind, and if the Lord be pleased to seal them with power upon your soul, and give you a testimony of your personal interest in them, you will, I am sure, freely give him all the glory.

I.—I shall first then, call your attention to the titles which the apostle gives to God.

You will observe that they are two, and that he speaks of him first as “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and secondly as “the Father of glory.” I shall endeavour, with God's help and blessing, to open the meaning of both of these titles, and especially to show their connection with our text.

You have, perhaps, observed in other parts of Scripture, the Epistles especially, that certain titles are ascribed to God, and that these titles often stand in close connection with the blessings

spoken of or prayed for. Let me open up this point by naming a few examples. In 1 Peter 5:10, we find the apostle thus speaking, “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.” You will observe that God is there termed by the apostle “the God of all grace,” and that this special title stands in close connection with his making the Church of God perfect, stablishing, strengthening, and settling her. Do you not see the connection, and that because he is “the God of all grace” he is able and willing to strengthen and establish the Church through suffering? If you will examine in the same way Rom. 15, you will find in it various titles ascribed to God, and you will find a connection between the special title given to him and the grace which he communicates or the blessings which he imparts. Thus in verse 5 he is called “the God of patience and consolation,” which connects it with the preceding verse, where we read “that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” If then we have patience and comfort, the God of patience and consolation must be the author of all the patience given, and all the consolation felt; and if blessed with this patience and this consolation, we shall be “like minded one toward another according to, or after the example of Christ Jesus;” for nothing more enables us to bear with others than a feeling sense how God has borne with us, and every sip of gospel consolation will strengthen us to walk after the example of Jesus. In the same chapter, 13th verse, God is spoken of as the “God of hope,” and the connection is that “the God of hope would fill them with all joy and peace in believing, that they might abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.” In the last verse of that chapter he is spoken of as “the God of peace,” and the prayer offered in connection with that title is that he “would be with them all,” that he might be with them all, viz., to give them that peace which would be felt by his presence with them. In 2 Cor. 1:3, he is spoken of as “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us

in all our tribulations,” thus connecting what he is as “the God of all comfort” with the communication of it to his afflicted people. We thus see that the titles of God, given to him in the word of truth, are not mere arbitrary descriptions of his grace or of his glory unconnected with the communication of special blessings, but contain not only sweet and general instructions, but such as are suitable to particular circumstances. They are thus meant not only to instruct us into the character of God and give us right views of his divine Majesty that we may know who and what he is, but also to show how suitable every distinctive character is to our particular and individual wants. Do we want grace to save, grace to sanctify, grace to keep, grace to bless; grace to be with us all through our life, and grace to support and comfort us in the arms of death? He is the God of all the grace that we can ever want or he can ever give. What limit can you put to “all grace?” and if he is “the God of all grace,” where else shall we look for it, and who else can bestow it on us? There is not a grace you need, nor a blessing which grace can give which is not contained in the words “all grace,” and as the God of all grace, he holds it in his bounteous heart and hands to bestow it freely according to the good pleasure of his will. Do we want patience to bear us up and support us under all our trials and afflictions? He is “the God of patience,” and therefore can give us all that is needed in every tribulation. Do we want consolation under heavy afflictions, cutting sorrows, and deep trials? He is “the God of consolation.” Nay, “the God of all comfort,” so that all the consolation and comfort which we can need or he sees fit to bestow so dwells in him that he has but to communicate it out of his own fulness, and it flows forth as a stream out of a fountain. Do we want hope, that anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast? He is “the God of hope,” and therefore can let down that blessed anchor into our breast to hold us up amid every storm. Do we want peace, the peace of God which passeth all understanding, the peace which flows like a river, peace in believing, peace to accompany us through life, and peace to calm

and compose us in death? He is the “God of peace,” and being the God of peace can at once speak peace to the afflicted soul or wounded conscience, and set up his own blessed kingdom in the heart, which is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” We thus see that these titles of God, as used by the inspired writers of the New Testament, are not mere arbitrary designations used without intention or discrimination, but are intended to unfold to us the diversified character of God, and more especially to instruct and assure us that as being the God of all these blessings as indicated by his titles, he has but to speak, and the blessings come in rich abundance out of his gracious and glorious fulness into our breast.

Now, view the titles ascribed to God in our text in that light. Look at the two titles to which I have called your attention with a special reference to their connection with the blessings prayed for by the apostle. I have already observed that they are 1. “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” and 2. “the Father of glory.” I shall, now then, consider each of them with a view to this connection.

i. As “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.” How is God “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ?” Is he the God of our Lord Jesus Christ as regards his Sonship and Deity? Or as regards his humanity? Or as respects his complex person, God-Man, Immanuel, God with us? Let us look at these points in the light of divine truth.

1. God is essentially invisible. He “dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see.” How then can we know him? How then can we see him? That we might both know and see him he has been pleased in the depths of his wisdom and mercy to manifest himself in the Person of his dear Son. This is John’s blessed testimony: “No man hath seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” The same witness also declares, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life” (1 John

1:1); and that this essential Word might be manifested, John also testifies, “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 1:14.) This, then, is our unspeakable mercy, that we have not to go far to find God; for having revealed himself in the Person of his dear Son, when we see Christ we see God. As the Lord answered his unbelieving disciple when he said unto him, “Lord, show us the Father:” “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, show us the Father?” Here, then, is our chief blessedness, that the God in whom we live and move and have our being, the great and glorious self-existent I AM, who fills heaven and earth with his glory, is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. We want a Person to be the object of our faith; for faith needs an object, and especially in the matter of worship or service, a personal object. Do you not feel that you want some personal object to believe in, to hope in, to worship, to adore, to love? The feeling of this want has been the source of idolatry. When men had lost the knowledge of the only true God and could not look forward in faith to the Messiah who was to be revealed, they set up a visible idol that they might have a personal object to worship—a visible representation, as they conceived, of invisible Deity. A personal God, then, is an object with us of prime necessity, for we cannot worship what is unknown or wholly invisible. The invisible God therefore has made himself visible in the Person of his dear Son; and when he is pleased to shine into the heart, he makes himself known there in his personal glory, as the apostle beautifully speaks, “For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor. 4:6.) It is in the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, that God is thus seen and known; and when the Lord the Spirit takes the veil of unbelief and ignorance off our

heart, then is fulfilled that inward transformation into the same glory of which the apostle testifies: “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.)

Now it is most necessary for our faith and hope to believe in this glorious gospel which thus makes known the glory of God in the face, or, as the word might be rendered, the Person of Jesus Christ; for we cannot worship or serve God under a sense of his burning displeasure in a broken law. We cannot draw nigh to the Majesty of heaven as a consuming fire, any more than the children of Israel could draw near to Sinai’s blazing top. But he has come near to us when we could not come nigh to him. He has come near to us in the face of a Mediator; “for there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Thus he is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and if we believe in his name he is our God also. As our Lord blessedly said by Mary to his disciples, “Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Why your Father? Because my Father. Why your God? Because my God.

But you will be desirous to hear more clearly and particularly, in what sense the God of all our mercies is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is then, “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” in various ways.

1. First, he is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ as the eternal Father of the eternal Son. In that sense therefore, as regards his Deity and Sonship, he is the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ; the second Person in the sacred Trinity being the true, proper, and eternal Son of the Father in truth and love; in that highest, truest, noblest sense therefore he is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whilst we firmly hold the essential co-eternity and co-equality of the Son with the Father, we fully accept that peculiar relationship which he bears to him as being his only begotten Son; and though

reason cannot understand or explain the nature of this relationship, yet faith receives, and love embraces the divine testimony that he is “the Son of the living God,” and as such, God is his God.

2. But in his human nature, in what he is as God’s servant he bears that peculiar relationship to the Father whereby God is his God. Nor will you fail to observe a peculiar blessedness in this circumstance that in every relation which the Lord Jesus bears to his heavenly Father, God is still his God. The Son of God lost nothing of his Sonship and Deity by taking our nature into union with his divine Person. Though he was God’s servant (“Behold my servant whom I uphold,” Isai. 42:1) he was still God’s Son; and though reduced so low as to say of himself, “I am a worm and no man,” yet God was still his God; for in his lowest humiliation, in the hour of his bitterest agony, he could still cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.” It is beautiful and blessed thus to trace what our Lord was before he came into the world, and what he was when he was in the world, and to see by the eye of faith, that as he was the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of his Person when he was in heaven, so though he humbled himself and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men, he lost not an atom of his eternal glory, but still possessed the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

3. He is also “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” as the God-Man Mediator at the right-hand of the Father. God has exalted Jesus with his own right-hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins, and in this sense therefore he is his God. Nothing is more strengthening to faith than to view the Son of God in his present glory as the great High Priest over the house of God. This gives us a holy confidence to come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need. We see in a crucified Christ, a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us

through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and in a risen, ascended, and glorified Christ, an Intercessor, an Advocate, a Mediator ever presenting to the Father the virtue and validity of his finished work. We are thus encouraged, “to 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.) This view of Jesus in his mediatorial glory at the right hand of the Father, gathers up our roving thoughts, guides and influences our conceptions of God, and restraining all those vague, wild, and delusive ideas which our natural heart might frame of him, which have ever been the fruitful root of error and false worship, draws up our faith and affections to him as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and teaches us to worship him acceptably in the Son of his love. The connection of this title with the blessings prayed for, I shall have occasion presently to explain.

ii. The second title by which the apostle calls him, is “The Father of glory;” which may mean, according to a common Hebraism, the glorious Father. But I prefer to take the words in their natural and literal sense, and to understand that by “the Father of glory;” is meant, that God is the Author of all glory. As he is the Father of mercies by being the Author of all mercies; so he is the Father of glory by being the Author of all glory. From him all glory comes; to him all glory flows. Hence, heaven itself would not be glorious unless God were there in his essential glory; earth would not be glorious unless it were the creation of God’s fingers and bore upon every object the impress of a divine hand. All glory comes from him who dwells in essential glory, and out of him and without him, glory there is none. Thus, of all the glory that fills heaven and earth, of all the glory that will ever fill the souls of the redeemed to all eternity, God is the Father, as its essential Source and only Fountain; and as giving it forth to the creatures of his hand, that illuminated with its light and possessed of its life, they may show forth that glory here in its beginning, hereafter in its ending, if

that may be called ending, which will be the blaze of an eternal day, where neither sun, nor moon, nor stars will be needed, for “the glory of the Lord will lighten that heavenly city and the Lamb will be the light thereof.”

But now take these two titles in their connection with each other, and as bearing upon our personal experience.

As “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” he draws forth our faith, our hope, and our love; as “the Father of glory” he impresses our mind with a solemn reverence of his great name, and gives us a foretaste also of the glory which shall be revealed. Thus would we worship him in spirit and in truth, would we draw near to his throne with some measure of holy confidence, would we love his name, we do so as viewing him by faith the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Would we be impressed with a solemn reverence of his dread Majesty, and yet look forward with a good hope through grace to the glory to be revealed, we bow down before him as “the Father of glory.” Thus these titles are not mere arbitrary names, but lessons pregnant with most instructive and establishing truth. When you approach the throne of grace, the Lord the Spirit give you a view of him whom you worship as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Father of glory; and you will find that one of these titles will draw forth your faith upon the Son of God, and the other will aid in solemnising and sweetening your earnest petitions for spiritual blessings.

II.—But I now pass on to the special blessing prayed for by the apostle. This was “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.”

Wisdom is bounded by the confines of earth, and never can rise beyond it. Needful for time, it is useless for eternity. It would be foolish to disparage and cast contempt upon human intellect, and what it has achieved not only in matters of pure science, but as providing in various ways for the daily necessities and conveniences of life. What but intellectual science, combined with practical skill, has built and navigates our ships, constructed our

railways, devised and made our telegraphs, not to say, raised our crops, furnished our houses, and filled the land with wealth and abundance? Daily to enjoy all its benefits, and yet to cast contempt on human science and wisdom is to abuse the hand which feeds and clothes us, warms our houses, and lights up our streets. Nor would we disparage mental intellect when rightly guided by the blessed Spirit, or human learning when duly sanctified to the glory of God and the good of his people. It is only when it steps out of its place, and claims to understand divine things without divine teaching, that it is to be thrust aside as an intruder. No man by natural wisdom ever knew God. Well, therefore, and wisely does Zophar speak, “Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.” (Job 11:7, 8, 9.) So high, so deep is the knowledge of God, that it is out of the sight and out of the reach of man’s natural understanding; for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.” There is, then, a wisdom which earth knows not, and of which the only wise God is the Author and Giver. This is the wisdom spoken of in our text.

But you will observe that the blessing prayed for is not wisdom, even heavenly wisdom simply and nakedly, but “the Spirit of wisdom,” by which I understand the Holy Ghost, who is the Author and Giver of all spiritual wisdom. But this ascription of the gift of wisdom to the blessed Spirit may seem, at first sight, to clash with what I have just advanced, that God, that is, God the Father, is the Giver of all wisdom. But not so. Each person in the Trinity being alike God, each may be said to be the Author and Giver of all grace and glory. Thus, not only is the Father the Giver of all wisdom, and the Holy Ghost the Author of it by his teaching and inspiration, but our blessed Lord, the Son of the Father in

truth and love, is said to be of God “made unto us wisdom,” and this is not so much by imputation as by all wisdom dwelling in his fulness, and his giving out of that fulness wisdom to supply all our need and make us wise unto salvation. When our gracious Lord went up on high, he received gifts for men, and especially the gift of the Holy Ghost, as was made manifest on the day of Pentecost, as Peter testified on that memorable occasion, “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.” (Acts 2:32, 33.) When, then, the apostle prays that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give unto the Ephesian saints the Spirit of wisdom, it was the expression of his heart’s desire that God would fulfil in their experience, the promise which he had given to his dear Son by bestowing upon them the Spirit of wisdom to lead them into all truth.

Now, what is the first lesson which the Spirit of wisdom as thus given, writes upon our hearts when he is sent to make us wise unto salvation? Is not his first lesson that which teaches us to flee from the wrath to come? Is it not his first gracious work to show us what we are as sinners before a holy God, by planting convictions of sin in our breast? And does he not with those convictions, communicate a secret power whereby there is a fleeing from the wrath thus apprehended? Until the Spirit has given us wisdom to flee from the wrath to come, under that cloud of wrath we must needs be; for the wrath of God abideth on him who believeth not in his dear Son. (John 3:36.) Similarly, until he give us wisdom to flee from the curse of the law to the blessing of the gospel, we are still under the curse and bondage of the law. Until he has given us wisdom to see, and faith to believe in the Son of God so as to embrace him in faith and affection as revealed in the word, we are still under guilt and condemnation. Putting these things therefore together, we may say that the Spirit of wisdom thus given, instructs

us mainly in these two important lessons: what we are by nature and what we are by grace; what we have to flee from and what we have to flee unto; what sin is and what salvation is; what is man’s misery and what is God’s mercy. Let this suffice for the present to show what the Spirit of wisdom is, for I shall have other points to touch upon before I finish my subject.

ii. He is also called in our text, “the Spirit of revelation.” There is much divine truth and gracious experience couched in these words. However men may hate and despise the doctrine of inward revelation to the soul now by the power of the Spirit as distinct from the outward revelation in the word of truth by the same Spirit, I am thoroughly satisfied in my own mind, that no man can rightly and savingly know the things of God but by the Spirit of revelation. Nor do I believe that Christ can be effectually known until revealed unto and in us by the Spirit. Is not this the Lord’s own testimony? “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” (John 14:21.) Is not Christ manifesting himself the same as Christ revealing himself? And does not Paul speak of God’s revealing his Son in him (Gal. 1:16), of Christ being formed in us (Gal. 4:19), and of being in us, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27)? Surely these revealed and inward blessings are something more than the outward revelation of Christ in the written word.

But there is sometimes a misunderstanding of what is meant by the word revelation. Misled by the current meaning of the word, and not exactly knowing or attending to its true signification, whilst most are deriding all idea of inward revelation in these days, some are looking for and expecting something mysterious which God has never promised in the word, and which he rarely or scarcely ever gives; and others by such expectations lay themselves open to the delusions of Satan as an angel of light. We are not to look for dreams, visions, voices, supernatural appearances, sights

in the sky, open and outward views of Christ in his glory, or of Christ hanging upon the cross. We are not to expect or even desire any thing that is visible, something which the eye of sense might almost apprehend or the bodily finger almost touch. I cannot, I dare not, limit the power or the wisdom of God: and I doubt not that some, if not many of the Lord's people, have been so powerfully impressed by what they have seen and heard of and from the Lord, that it was to them as if they had actually seen his bodily shape or heard his spoken voice. But we walk by faith, not by sight, and if we seem to see invisible things, we see them only by the eye of faith, or if we hear gracious words, we hear them only by the ear of faith. God in his word has given no promise to the natural eye or the natural ear; nor are we saved by what our natural eyes see or our natural ears hear. It is by grace we are saved through faith, and not by seeing supernatural sights or hearing audible words. The apostle Paul was indeed caught up to the third heaven, and there heard unspeakable words, and doubtless viewed ravishing sights; but the Holy Ghost has drawn a veil over them, for the apostle says of them, that they were "things not lawful for a man to utter."

But I do not know a better explanation of the word "revelation" than is contained in the signification of the term itself. It means, literally, uncovering, or taking a veil off an object. There are two of those veils which the Spirit of wisdom and revelation takes off. There is a veil by nature upon the heart and a veil upon the word, and revelation is a removing of these two veils, and that at the same time and by the same power. When, then, this double veil is graciously taken off by the Spirit, he becomes a Spirit of revelation. You will find this double veil spoken of in 2 Cor. 3, where the apostle is speaking of the veil which Moses put over his face. When, then, we turn to the Lord by the power of his grace, the veil is taken away both from the heart and from the word. Thus, as we are to believe nothing except what is written in the

word; so we can know nothing, vitally, spiritually, savingly, except what is revealed in the heart. God does not speak with a new revelation from heaven, nor give us something with his own voice from above, as though he would furnish us with a new Bible, or reveal to us some fresh truth not contained in it. All truth is in the Scripture; but though truth is in the Scripture, there is a veil over the book of God, so that we can neither understand nor believe it until it is removed. But when the Lord the Spirit is pleased to take the veil of unbelief and ignorance from off the mind, and to remove the veil from off the word of truth, and thus gives us power to receive and believe what God has there written, this is a revelation, or an uncovering of the word without, and the heart within; and the Spirit who works this, is a Spirit of revelation; for it is the Lord the Spirit who takes the veil away, as the apostle declares: "Now the Lord is that Spirit." (2 Cor. 3:17.) It is thus that Christ is revealed in the heart, as he is revealed in the word. Do we see by faith his Deity? It is because in the word he is revealed in the Scriptures as God, and the Son of God. Do we see by faith his humanity? It is because he is spoken of in the word as the Son of man. Do we see his complex Person as the God-Man? It is because he is revealed there as Immanuel, God with us. Many of the dear saints of God, when they hear or read of a revelation of Christ, are tempted to look for some supernatural sight or mysterious manifestation which God has never promised to give. He will reveal his dear Son in them and make him known unto them; but it will be in his way, not in theirs, in harmony with his word, and not with the fancies or expectations of their own mind.

III.—Having thus far, then, spoken of the blessing prayed for by the apostle, I shall now endeavour to bring before you, as I proposed, what he knew would be the fruits and results of this divine gift of wisdom and revelation. I mentioned that they were four.

- i. The first of these fruits is to enlighten the eyes of our

understanding.

Our understanding was darkened by the fall; so darkened that no ray of light remains in it of that knowledge of God which Adam possessed when made in his likeness and after his image. Unless, therefore, God is pleased to cast a ray of light into the soul to remove this native darkness, it still remains in the very shadow of death. Now, one of the first fruits and effects of the gift of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, is to enlighten the eyes of the understanding. You will recollect that I was speaking just now of the veil of ignorance and unbelief which is spread by nature both over our heart and over the word of truth, and that this double veil was taken away by the Spirit of revelation. As, then, the Spirit of wisdom and revelation takes off this veil, he at the same time and by the same act of divine power, enlightens the eyes of our understanding. The blessed Lord, we read, after the resurrection, opened the understanding of his disciples that they might understand the Scriptures. When Paul was called by grace, and Ananias came unto him as sent by the Lord, that he might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost, there fell from his eyes as it were scales. It is true that his natural eyes had been blinded by the brightness of the light which shone into them at Damascus' gate; but we may view this point also as a representation of the enlightening of the eyes of his understanding. The scales of ignorance and unbelief which before had sealed his eyes in blindness, dropped from them when he received the Holy Ghost. Then he saw light in God's light. So you, so I, though not called so powerfully or so miraculously as he, like him, once had our eyes sealed with the thick scales of darkness, ignorance, and unbelief. We read the word, but understood it not; we might even have heard the word preached, but we knew nothing of the truths sounded in our ears. There was a veil of ignorance over our heart, over the Scripture, and over the truth preached from the Scripture. We did not, could not understand what was addressed to our conscience in the clearest, plainest manner; nor did we care

to understand it. But there was a memorable time when the Lord was pleased to shine with a ray of light into our dark benighted mind; and life and power attending that heavenly ray, there was communicated thereby a measure of spiritual understanding of divine truth. It might have been a word of conviction or a word of sharp rebuke and reproof. God does not limit himself nor tie his hands to work in the same way upon the hearts of all his people. He speaks, and that with power to each and all of them through his word; and when he thus speaks with power his divine voice, as in creation, says, "Let there be light, and there was light." The apostle, therefore, runs a parallel between the light given in creation and the light given in grace. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6.) We cannot indeed tell how it was done, though we may know in some measure when it was done. Does not our Lord say of regeneration? "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8.) But the effects of the wind are seen, though not the wind itself; and it is the effects which make manifest the cause. So we can, I hope, some of us, look back to the time when the eyes of our understanding were sensibly enlightened; when a mysterious light was cast into our souls, for we saw things as we never saw them before, understood them as we never understood them before, believed them as we never believed them before, felt them as we had never felt them before. It was then, for the first time, we began to apprehend the things of God as personal matters, as divine realities which concerned our own soul and our own salvation; and eternal matters were then laid upon our mind, which before we had neither thought of nor cared about. Now, I believe I may say, that until this be done, nothing is done. Until the eyes of the understanding are enlightened, no truth can reach the heart with any power; for it is clogged and obscured by a

darkened understanding. The heart is like a piece of thick, opaque, or darkened glass, through which no light can enter, and it thus offers an effectual obstruction to the entrance of God's word. But God makes his own way for his own truth; "The entrance of thy words giveth light." When God then speaks by his word, light enters with it, and this light shining into the dark recesses of the breast penetrates into those remote corners which hold the very roots of sin, those dens and caves in which every unclean reptile crawls and breeds.

Now, all the way through our journey heavenward, we shall find our continual need of this enlightening of the eyes of our understanding. Many persons, and amongst them, even some ministers who profess to know and preach the truth, cannot distinguish between the gracious enlightening of the eyes of the understanding and what is called head knowledge; and therefore, sillily and almost stupidly put down as carnal and worthless that divine gift which they cannot understand. But, in judgment, it is a great blessing to have a clear, enlightened understanding in the precious things of God. It is a great blessing to be able to read the word of God with an understanding eye; for an understanding eye ever goes hand in hand with a believing heart. Can I believe God's truth if I understand not God's truth? Can I believe a promise if I understand not the meaning of a promise? Can I obey a precept if I understand not the meaning of a precept? Can I believe in the Son of God unless I have some gracious understanding of his Deity, humanity, and finished work, atoning blood and justifying righteousness? I must have an enlightened understanding that I may apprehend God's truth as God has revealed it, or else how can I believe, experience and realise it? This enlightened understanding dwells in a regenerate soul. It is "the light of life," which the Lord has promised to give, that we should not abide in darkness; and was a part of the work given to Paul as an instrument, for he was sent to the Gentiles "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light."

ii. The next blessing is a knowledge of Christ, for the apostle prays that God would give them "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him."

We cannot know Christ except by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. But the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation communicated to the soul as a divine blessing, is given for the express purpose of leading us into a gracious, spiritual knowledge of the Son of God. You perhaps are mourning and sighing under a sense of your darkness and ignorance, and take that as a very bad mark against you, especially when you hear how grace enlightens the eyes of the understanding. Most of God's people have to lament and sigh under the burden of a darkened mind and an understanding not illuminated to the degree that they would desire. But this very sense of your ignorance shows that you have some light to see it, and the complaint you make is a proof that you have some life to feel it. The eyes of our understanding are for the most part only partially enlightened; the knowledge we have of Christ is but faint and feeble, scanty and imperfect. We only get glimpses, glances, and passing rays of his gracious Majesty. The Sun of righteousness has not risen in its full orb; it is not yet his day. The morning may have dawned, and the day-star may have risen; beams and rays may have shot athwart the air, and given us some knowledge of the Son of God; yet we may have much to complain and mourn over in our weak understanding, in our narrow minds, in our unbelieving hearts, and the difficulty and perplexity which often beset us through want of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. If the Ephesians had all the wisdom and all the revelation that they could have had, why should the apostle offer up this prayer for them? If the eyes of their understanding were so enlightened that they needed no further teaching, why should he pour his soul out before God on their behalf, that he would give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, and enlighten the eyes of their understanding? It is because we sensibly feel our deficiency in these matters that we beg of God to give us the Spirit

of wisdom and of revelation; as so desirous to know the Son of God for ourselves, and yet knowing so little of his Person and work, beauty and blessedness, grace and glory. It is because we feel so much of the old veil of ignorance upon the word and upon our heart, that we desire to see light in God's light, and that he himself would enlighten our darkness that we sleep not the sleep of death. It is because we know so little of the darling Son of God, and feel the scantiness and imperfection of our knowledge, that we long for a clearer, brighter, and more blessed revelation of him to our soul. Write not therefore bitter things against yourself because your understanding is so weak and your knowledge of Christ so feeble, and you have not attained to that degree of faith and hope and love you desire. Who in this life sees but through a glass darkly? Who in this life has those clear and bright views of the Son of God with which he would desire to be favoured? And yet we are brought to this point to say with the apostle, "Yea, doubtless I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord."

iii. But the apostle speaks of another fruit of this gift of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation—that "they might know what was the hope of his calling."

Calling is a special blessing of God, for it leads to every other blessing. "Whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Divine calling is the beginning of divine life. But there is a blessed hope stored up in the bosom of this calling which cannot be realised till the calling itself is made plain. We are therefore bidden to make our calling and election sure, because in the bosom of the calling there is lodged a hope which can only expand itself as the calling is made clear. We may compare it to a rose, or any other flower just in bud. In the bosom of the rose there are petals enfolding themselves leaf over leaf; but when the rose expands itself in full bloom, then the bosom of the rose comes up to view. So in the bosom of calling there is lodged every blessing that God can give for time and eternity, especially

what the apostle calls the "hope of eternal life." Now, what the apostle prays for is, that the saints of God might know "what is the hope of this calling;" in other words, that they might clearly and fully realise their calling as being of God; be able to look back upon the first work of grace upon their soul; and by believing that to have been wrought in their heart by the special power of God, see what the bosom of that calling contains and gradually unfolds. This the apostle calls "the hope," by which I understand the hope of eternal life; the hope of salvation by the Son of God; the hope that all things shall work together for their good; the hope that Satan shall be defeated and all his arts and arms put to the rout; and that when they have journeyed through life's lonely, sorrowful vale, they shall at last be welcomed to the mansions of the blest. In fact, every thing which hope embraces, and in which it anchors, may be considered as embosomed in our call by grace; and as the hope thus engendered is made more and more clear, it becomes more manifestly "an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."

When then, the eyes of your understanding are enlightened to see your calling plain and clear; when the Spirit of wisdom and revelation is given to you in the knowledge of Christ; when the Lord himself manifests himself in his beauty, blessedness, grace and glory, it casts such a ray of divine light upon the first work of grace upon the soul, which might have lain long obscured; and it so sweetly assures the believer that God has called him by his grace, that every blessing which God can give seems locked up and enfolded in it. This part of gracious experience is very desirable to be able to realise, for we often do not know what is the hope of our calling. We grovel here below, fond of these earthly toys, swallowed up it may be by carking cares and worldly anxieties, and covered over with the folds of time and sense. But there are times and seasons when the Lord is pleased to enlighten the eyes of the understanding, and give the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. And what is the effect? To see what

is the hope of his calling, and that by it God has called us to his eternal glory; to the knowledge and enjoyment of himself; from sin to salvation, from law to gospel, from misery to mercy; from hell to heaven; for this calling is a special token of God's everlasting love to our souls. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

iv. The last fruit and result of the gift of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ is to know "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." I wish that time and strength were allowed me to unfold all the blessedness contained in these words; but I can only give you a sip out of this rich, overflowing spring.

God is the inheritance of his saints, and what is more astonishing still, the saints are the inheritance of God, and especially of God's dear Son; and so delighted is he with his inheritance that he says in one of the Psalms, in the language of prophecy, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." (Psl. 16:6.) That these are the words of Christ is evident from the connection, for he says in the same psalm "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption." All the delight that the church takes in Christ is but a drop compared with the ocean of Christ's delight in her. We can only love to the utmost of finite power; he loves to the utmost of infinite power. Our love, therefore, is finite and human; his love is infinite and divine. The delight therefore that Christ takes in the church as far exceeds the delight which the church takes in him, as what is infinite exceeds what is finite, as God is greater than man. The church, then, is Christ's inheritance; and as his mystical body consists wholly of saints, his inheritance is said to be in the saints. O, what must have been the love of Christ's heart to his beloved bride to move him to come down from heaven to earth and wade through a sea of suffering and blood to redeem her from the lowest! O what love was there? And what an inheritance! How glorious in his eyes, though so mean and worthless in the eyes of man. Nay, glorious in his eyes, even amidst all the depths of the fall; for our

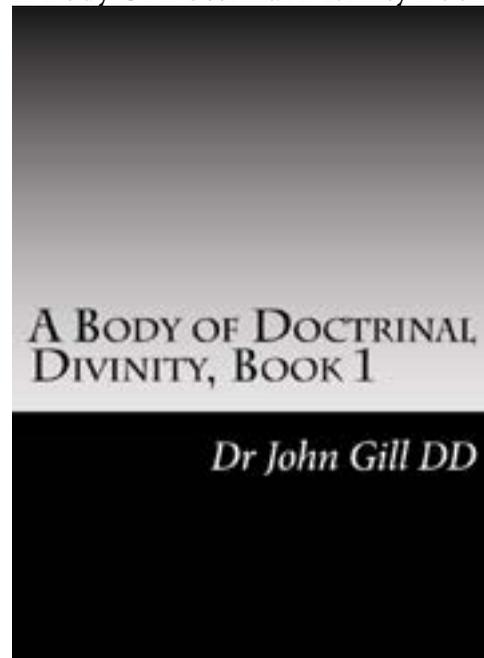
gracious Lord saw and loved the church, not in her filth and rags, but resplendent in all the beauties of holiness. He saw her as his darling bride, radiant in all the splendours of heaven, clothed in a robe of righteousness, and decked with those resplendent jewels with which he himself had adorned her. Hear her language as thus decked and adorned: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." This glorious church, then, is Christ's inheritance; and the apostle prays that we may know the riches of his glory in this inheritance, that we may look beyond a few poor dying men and women, look beyond the wrappings of the creature, and see what a saint of God really is as dressed in immortal robes, and made meet to sit down at the supper of the Lamb. We now see men and women wrapped in the miserable rags of our fallen humanity; but we do not see in them what they will be when resplendent with all the glories of heaven. But Christ sees them as we do not, comely in his comeliness and complete in him. If, then, we were able to look a little beyond these mere trappings of humanity and these creature rags, which wrap up a mortal body and contain in the rags of mortality an immortal soul, and could realise that one day these rags of mortality will be changed into a glorious body, according to the pattern of the glorified body of Christ, we should enter a little into Christ's love for the church, and the certainty that every saint would be brought to see him as he is and to dwell with him in the matchless perfection of his own glorious splendour.

How these things should lift us up out of the mud and mire of this wretched world. If the God of our Lord Jesus Christ would but give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ; if he would but enlighten the eyes of our understanding; if he would give us to know more what is the hope of our calling and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

we should not be such muck-worms, raking and scraping a few straws together, and running about like ants with our morsel of grain. We should have our affections fixed more on things above; we should know more of Christ, enjoy more of Christ, be more like Christ, and walk more as Christ walked; we should love the saints of God more, esteem them more, honour them more, and bear with them more; and we should look forward to an eternal inheritance, when mortality would be swallowed up of life. If these things were brought into our hearts with divine power, how they would sweeten every bitter cup and carry us through every changing scene, until at last we were landed above to see the Lord as he is in the full perfection of his uncreated glory.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

A Body Of Doctrinal Divinity Book 1



A System of Practical Truths

Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Created by David Clarke CertEd

List Price: \$8.99

8.5" x 11" (21.59 x 27.94 cm)

Black & White on White paper

176 pages

ISBN-13: 978-1543085945

ISBN-10: 1543085946

BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

THIS IS BOOK 1 Treating The Subjects:

Of God, His Works, Names, Nature, Perfections And Persons.

And Contains:

Chapters

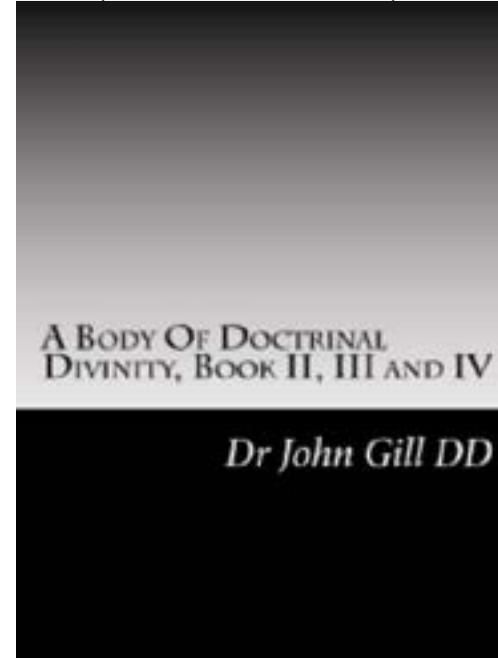
- 1 Of The Being Of God
- 2 Of The Holy Scriptures
- 3 Of The Names Of God
- 4 Of The Nature Of God
- 5 Of The Attributes Of God In General, And Of His Immutability In Particular.
- 6 Of The Infinity Of God,
- 7 Of The Life Of God.
- 8 Of The Omnipotence Of God.
- 9 Of The Omniscience Of God.
- 10 Of The Wisdom Of God.
- 11 Of The Will Of God And The Sovereignty Of It
- 12 Of The Love Of God
- 13 Of The Grace Of God.
- 14 Of The Mercy Of God.
- 15 Of The Long suffering Of God.
- 16 Of The Goodness Of God.
- 17 Of The Anger And Wrath Of God.
- 18 Of The Hatred Of God.
- 19 Of The Joy Of God.
- 20 Of The Holiness Of God.
- 21 Of The Justice Or Righteousness Of God.
- 22 Of The Veracity Of God.
- 23 Of The Faithfulness Of God
- 24 Of The Sufficiency And Perfection Of God.
- 25 Of The Blessedness Of God.
- 26 Of The Unity Of God.
- 27 Of A Plurality In The Godhead, Or, A Trinity Of Persons In The Unity Of The Divine Essence.
- 28 Of The Personal Relations; Or, Relative Properties, Which Distinguish The Three Divine Persons In The Deity.

29 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of The Father.

30 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of The Son.

31 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of The Holy Spirit.

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity II, III, IV



A System of Practical Truths

Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Created by David Clarke Cert.

Ed

The contents of Book II treats the subject of Of The Acts and Works of God

Chapter I Of The Internal Acts And Works Of God; And Of His Decrees In General

Chapter II Of The Special Decrees Of God, Relating To Rational Creatures, Angels, And Men; And Particularly Of Election.

Chapter III Of The Decree Of Rejection, Of Some Angels, And Of

Some Men.

Chapter IV Of The Eternal Union Of The Elect Of God Unto Him.

Chapter V Of Other Eternal And Immanent Acts In God, Particularly Adoption And Justification.

Chapter VI Of The Everlasting Council Between The Three Divine Persons, Concerning The Salvation Of Men.

Chapter VII Of The Everlasting Covenant Of Grace, Between The Father, And The Son, And The Holy Spirit.

Chapter VIII

Of The Part Which The Father Takes In The Covenant.

Chapter IX Of The Part The Son Of God, The Second Person, Has Taken In The Covenant.

Chapter X Of Christ, As The Covenant Head Of The Elect

Chapter XI Of Christ, The Mediator Of The Covenant

Chapter XII Of Christ, The Surety Of The Covenant.

Of Christ, The Testator Of The Covenant

Chapter XIV Of The Concern The Spirit Of God Has In The Covenant Of Grace.

Chapter XV Of The Properties Of The Covenant Of Grace

Chapter XVI Of The Complacency And Delight God Had In Himself, And The Divine Persons In Each Other, Before Any Creature Was Brought Into Being.

Book III treats the subjects Of The External Works Of God.

Chapter 1 Of Creation In General

Chapter 2 Of The Creation Of Angels

Chapter 3 Of The Creation Of Man

Chapter 4 Of The Providence Of God

Chapter 5 Of The Confirmation Of The Elect Angels, And The Fall Of The Non-Elect.

Chapter 6 Of The Honour And Happiness Of Man In A State Of Innocency.

Chapter 7 Of The Law Given To Adam, And The Covenant Made With Him In His State Of Innocence; In Which He Was The Federal Head And Representative Of His Posterity.

Chapter 8 Of The Sin And Fall Of Our First Parents.

Chapter 9 Of The Nature, Aggravations, And Sad Effects Of The Sin Of Man.

Chapter 10 Of The Imputation Of Adam's Sin To All His Posterity

Chapter 11 Of The Of The Corruption Of Human Nature.

Chapter 12 Of Actual Sins And Transgressions.

Chapter 13 Of The Punishment Of Sin

Contents Book IV.

Of The Acts Of The Grace Of God Towards And Upon His Elect In Time

Chapter 1 Of The Manifestation And Administration Of The Covenant Of Grace

Chapter 2 Of The Exhibitions Of The Covenant Of Grace In The Patriarchal State

Chapter 3 Of The Exhibitions Of The Covenant Of Grace Under The Mosaic Dispensation

Chapter 4 Of The Covenant Of Grace, As Exhibited In The Times Of David, And The Succeeding Prophets, To The Coming Of Christ

Chapter 5 Of The Abrogation Of The Old Covenant, Or First Administration Of It, And The Introduction Of The New, Or Second Administration Of It.

Chapter 6 Of The Law Of God

Chapter 7 Of The Gospel

Table of Contents Book V

Chapter 1 Of The Incarnation Of Christ

Chapter 2 Of Christ's State Of Humiliation

Chapter 3 Of The Active Obedience Of Christ In His State Of Humiliation

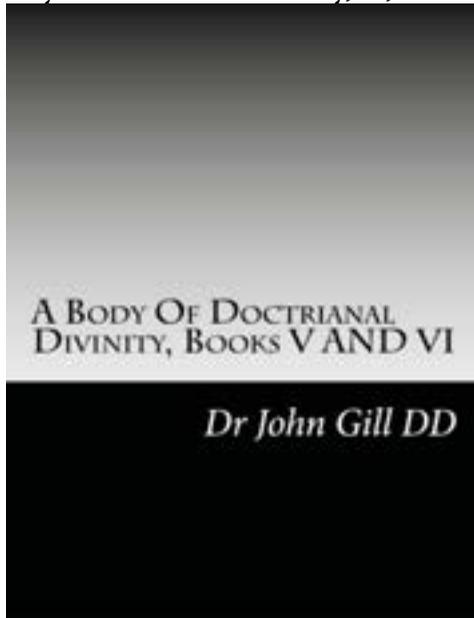
Chapter 4 Of The Passive Obedience Of Christ, Or Of His Sufferings And Death

Chapter 5 Of The Burial Of Christ

Chapter 6 Of The Resurrection Of Christ From The Dead.

- Chapter 7 Of The Ascension Of Christ To Heaven
 Chapter 8 Of The Session Of Christ At The Right Hand Of God
 Chapter 9 Of The Prophetic Office Of Christ
 Chapter 10 Of The Priestly Office Of Christ
 Chapter 11 Of The Intercession Of Christ
 Chapter 12 Of Christ's Blessing His People
 As A Priest
 Chapter 13 Of The Kingly Office Of Christ
 Chapter 14 Of The Spiritual Reign Of Christ

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, V, VI



A System OF Practical Truths

Book V

Of The Grace Of Christ In His State Of Humiliation And Exaltation,
 And In The Offices Exercised By Him In Them.

- Chapter 1 Of The Incarnation Of Christ
 Chapter 2 Of Christ's State Of Humiliation

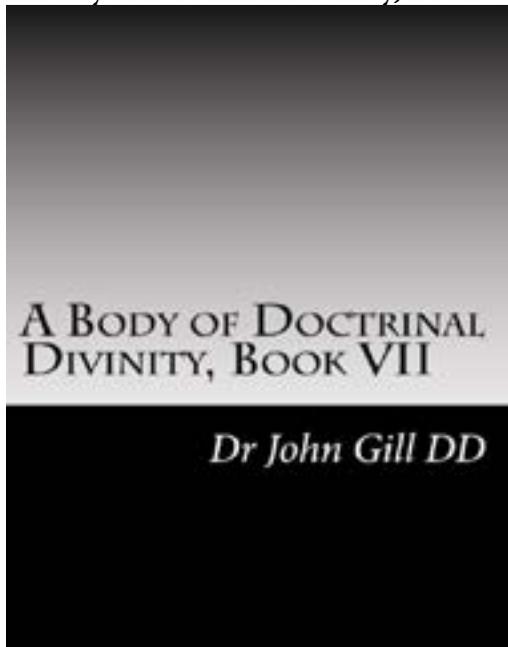
- Chapter 3 Of The Active Obedience Of Christ In His State Of
 Humiliation.
 Chapter 4 Of The Passive Obedience Of Christ, Or Of His
 Sufferings And Death.
 Chapter 5 Of The Burial Of Christ.
 Chapter 6 Of The Resurrection Of Christ From The Dead.
 Chapter 7 Of The Ascension Of Christ To Heaven.
 Chapter 8 Of The Session Of Christ At The Right Hand Of
 God.
 Chapter 9 Of The Prophetic Office Of Christ.
 Chapter 10 Of The Priestly Office Of Christ.
 Chapter 11 Of The Intercession Of Christ
 Chapter 12 Of Christ's Blessing His People As A Priest
 Chapter 13 Of The Kingly Office Of Christ
 Chapter 14 Of The Spiritual Reign Of Christ

Book VI

- Chapter 1 Of Redemption By Christ
 Chapter 2 Of The Causes Of Redemption By Christ
 Chapter 3 Of The Objects Of Redemption By Christ
 Chapter 4 Of Those Texts Of Scripture Which Seem To Favour
 Universal Redemption
 Chapter 5 Of The Satisfaction Of Christ
 Chapter 6 Of Propitiation, Atonement, And Reconciliation, As
 Ascribed To Christ
 Chapter 7 Of The Pardon Of Sin
 Chapter 8 Of Justification
 Chapter 9 Of Adoption
 Chapter 10 Of The Liberty Of The Sons Of God
 Chapter 11 Of Regeneration
 Chapter 12 Of Effectual Calling
 Chapter 13 Of Conversion
 Chapter 14 Of Sanctification
 Chapter 15 Of The Perseverance Of The Saints
 Chapter 9 Of Adoption Of The Liberty Of The Sons Of God

- Chapter 11 Of Regeneration
- Chapter 12 Of Effectual Calling
- Chapter 14 Of Sanctification
- Chapter 15 of the perseverance of the saints

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, Book VII



A System Of Practical Truths

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

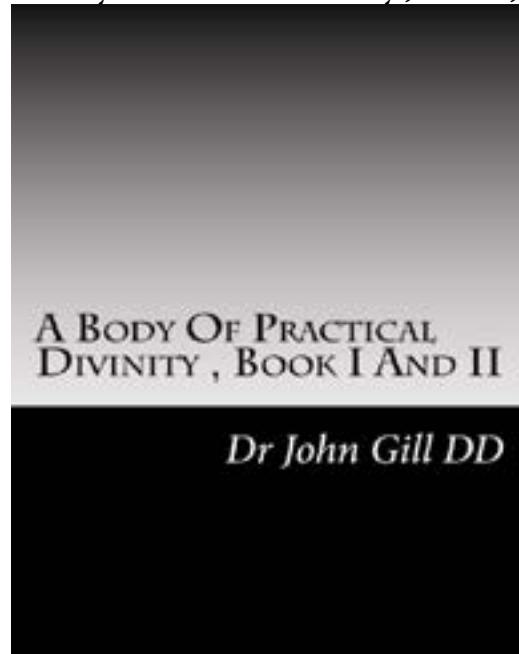
BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

Contents

Chapter 1 Of The Death Of The Body

- Chapter 2 Of The Immortality Of The Soul
- Chapter 3 Of The Separate State Of The Soul Until The Resurrection,And Its Employment In That State
- Chapter 4 Of The Resurrection Of The Body
- Chapter 5 Of The Second Coming Of Christ, And His Personal Appearance
- Chapter of Of The Conflagration Of The Universe
- Chapter 7 Of The New Heavens And Earth,And The Inhabitants Of Them.
- Chapter 8 Of The Millennium Or Personal Reign Of Christ With The Saints On The New Earth A Thousand Years
- Chapter 9 Of The Last And General Judgment
- Chapter 10 Of The Final State Of The Wicked In Hell
- Chapter 11 Of The Final State Of The Saints In Heaven

A Body Of Practical Divinity , Book I, II



A System of Practical Truths

Authored by Dr John Gill DD,

Created by David Clarke Cert.Ed

ISBN-13: 978-1545542088 (CreateSpace-Assigned)

ISBN-10: 1545542082

BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

This reproduction of Dr John Gill's Body of Divinity is book I and II of Practical Divinity of total of IV books.

Contents

Book I

Chapter I Of The Object Of Worship

Chapter 2 Of Internal Worship; And Of Godliness The Groundwork Of It.

Chapter 3 Of The Knowledge Of God

Chapter 4 Of Repentance Towards God

Chapter 5 Of The Fear Of God

Chapter 6 Of Faith In God And In Christ

Chapter 7 Of Trust And Confidence In God

Chapter 8 Of The Grace Of Hope

Chapter 9 Of The Grace Of Love

Chapter 10 Of Spiritual Joy

Chapter 11 Of Peace And Tranquility Of Mind

Chapter 12 Of Contentment Of Mind

Chapter 13 Of Thankfulness To God

Chapter 14 Of Humility

Chapter 15 Of Self-Denial

Chapter 16 Of Resignation To The Will Of God

Chapter 17 Of Patience

Chapter 18 Of Christian Fortitude

Chapter 19 Of Zeal

Chapter 20 Of Wisdom Or Prudence

Chapter 21 Of Godly Sincerity

Chapter 22 Of Spiritual Mindedness

Chapter 23 Of A Good Conscience

Chapter 24 Of Communion With God

Book II Of External Worship, As Public

Chapter 1 Of The Nature Of A Gospel Church, The Seat Of Public Worship

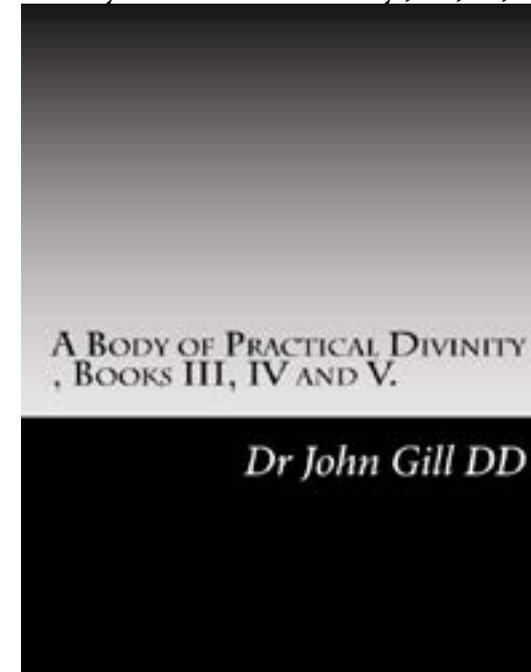
Chapter 2 Of The Duties Of The Member Of A Church To Each Other

Chapter 3 Of The Officers Of A Church, Particularly Pastors

Chapter 4 Of The Duties Of Members Of Churches To Their Pastors

Chapter 5 Of The Office Of Deacons

Chapter 6 Of The Discipline Of A Church Of Christ

A Body of Practical Divinity , III, IV, V**A System of Practical Truths**

Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Created by David Clarke Cert.

Ed

ISBN-13: 978-1546846659 (CreateSpace-Assigned)

ISBN-10: 1546846654

BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

Book III

Of The Public Ordinances Of Divine Worship

Chapter 1 Of Baptism

Chapter 2 Of The Lord's Supper

Chapter 3 Of The Public Ministry Of The Word

Chapter 4 Of Public Hearing The Work

Chapter 5 Of Public Prayer

Chapter 6 Of The Lord's Prayer

Chapter 7 Of Singing Psalms, As A Part Of Public Worship

Chapter 8 Of The Circumstances Of Public Worship, As To Place And Time Of Private Worship, Or Various Duties, Domestic, Civil, And Moral

Book IV

Chapter 1 Of The Respective Duties Of Husband And Wife

Chapter 2 Of The Respective Duties Of Parents And Children

Chapter 3 Of The Respective Duties Of Masters And Servants.

Chapter 4 Of The Respective Duties Of Magistrates And Subjects

Chapter 5 Of Good Works In General

Chapter 6 A Compendium Or Summary Of The Decalogue Or Ten Commands

Book V

A Dissertation Concerning The Baptism Of Jewish Proselytes.

Chapter 1

A Dissertation Concerning The Baptism Of Jewish Proselytes Of The Various Sorts Of Proselytes Among The Jews

Chapter 2

The Occasion Of This Dissertation

Chapter 3

The Proof Of The Baptism Of Jewish Proselytes Inquired Into; Whether There Is Any Proof Of It Before, At, Or Quickly After

The

Times Of John And Christ.

Chapter 4

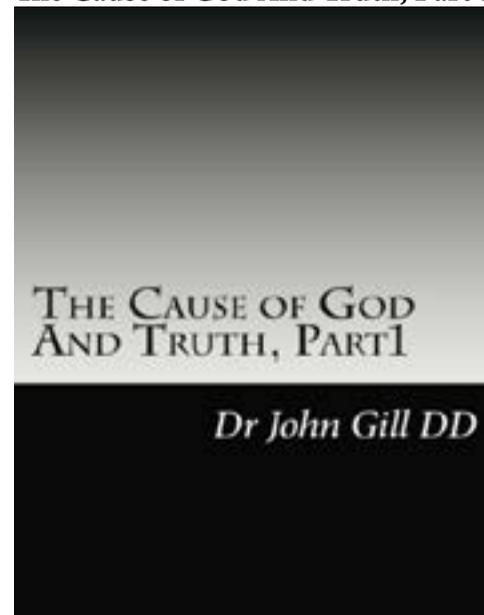
The Proof Of This Custom Only From The Talmuds And Talmudical Writers

Chapter 5

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 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.

Contents

Sections 1-60 Scriptural Passages

Genesis 4:7

Genesis 6:3.

Deuteronomy 5:29.

Deuteronomy 8:2.

Deuteronomy 30:19.

Deuteronomy 32:29.

Psalms 81:13, 14.

Psalms 125:3.

Psalms 145:9.

Proverbs 1:22-30.

Isaiah 1:16, 17.

Isaiah 1:18, 19.

Isaiah 5:4.

Isaiah 30:15.

Isaiah 55:1.

Isaiah 55:6.

Isaiah 55:7.

Jeremiah 4:4.

Ezekiel 18:24.

Ezekiel 18:30.

Ezekiel 18:31&32.

Ezekiel 24:13.

Matthew 5:13.

Matthew 11:21, 23.

Matthew 23:37.

Matthew 25:14-30.

Luke 19:41, 42.

John 1:7.

John 5:34.

John 5:40.

John 12:32.

Acts 3:19.

Acts 7:51.

Romans 5:18.

Romans 11:32.

Romans 14:15.

1 Corinthians 8:11.

1 Corinthians 10:12.

2 Corinthians 5:14,15.

2 Corinthians 5:19.

2 Corinthians 6:1.

2 Corinthians 11:2, 3.

Philippians 2:12.

1 Timothy 1:19, 20.

1 Timothy 2:4.

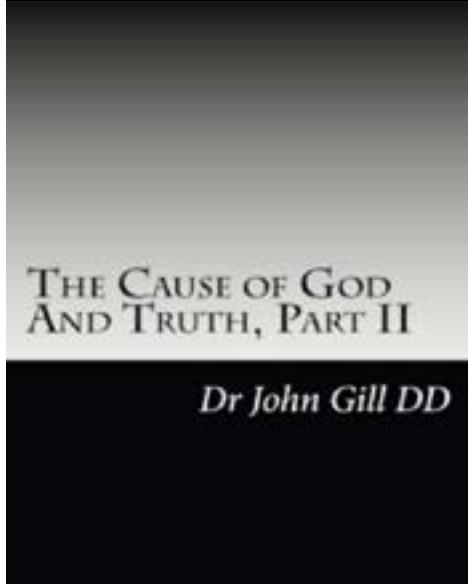
1 Timothy 4:19.

Titus 2:11, 12.

The Epistle to the Hebrews.

Hebrews 2:9.
 Hebrews 6:4-6.
 Hebrews 10:26-29.
 Hebrews 10:38.
 2 Peter 1:10.
 2 Peter 2:1.
 2 Peter 2:20-22.
 2 Peter 3:9.
 1 John 2:2.
 Jude 1:21.
 Revelation 2 and Revelation 3.
 Revelation 3:20.

The Cause of God And Truth, Part II



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

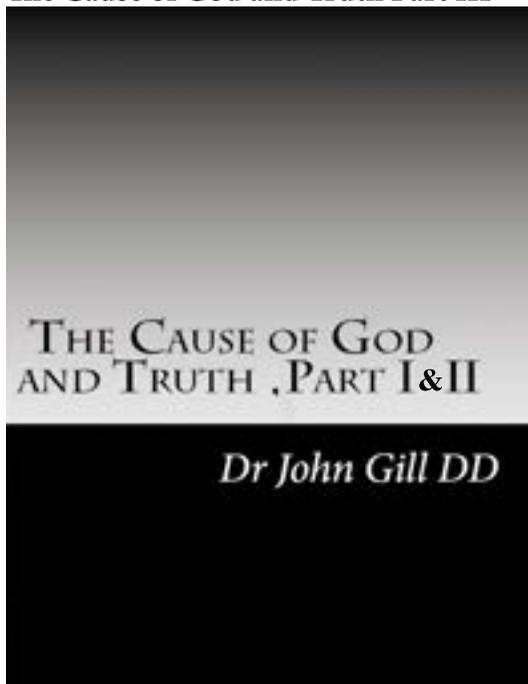
108 pages
 ISBN-13: 978-1544648729 (CreateSpace-Assigned)
 ISBN-10: 1544648723
 BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

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 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.

Contents
 Chapter 1
 OF REPROBATION
 Proverbs 16:4.
 John 12:39, 40.
 1 Peter 2:8.
 Jude 1:4.
 Revelation 13:8.

Chapter 2
 OF ELECTION
 1 Peter 2:9.
 Romans 9:10-13.
 Colossians 3:12.
 Ephesians 1:4.
 Romans 8:28, 29.
 John 6:37.
 Acts 8:48.
 Romans 8:29, 30.
 2 Timothy 2:19.
 Romans 5:19.
 Chapter 3
 OF REDEMPTION
 Matthew 20:28.
 John 10:15.
 John 17:9.
 Romans 8:34.
 Romans 8:32.
 Romans 5:10.
 John 15:13.
 Chapter 4
 OF EFFICACIOUS GRACE
 Ephesians 1:19, 20.
 1 Corinthians 5:17.
 John 3:5.
 Ephesians 2:1.
 1 Corinthians 2:14.
 2 Corinthians 3:5.
 John 15:5.
 John 6:44.
 Acts 11:18.
 Acts 16:14.
 Jeremiah 31:18.

Jeremiah 31:33.
 Ezekiel 11:36:26.
 Philippians 2:13.
 1 Corinthians 4:7.
 Ephesians 2:8, 9.
 Chapter 5
 OF THE CORRUPTION OF HUMAN NATURE
 John 14:4
 Psalm 51:5.
 Genesis 6:5.
 John 3:6.
 Romans 7:18, 19.
 Romans 8:7, 8.
 Chapter 6
 OF PERSEVERANCE
 John 13:1.
 John 17:12.
 Romans 11:29.
 Matthew 24:24.
 John 6:39, 40.
 Romans 11:2.
 Romans 8:38, 39.
 Ephesians 1:13, 14.
 1 Peter 1:5.
 1 John 2:19.
 1 John 3:9.
 Isaiah 54:10.
 Isaiah 59:21.
 Hosea 2:19, 20.
 Jeremiah 32:40.
 John 14:16.
 John 10:28.
 1 Corinthians 1:8, 9.

The Cause of God and Truth Part III

The Doctrines of Grace

Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Authored by David Clarke

CetEd

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.

Chapter 1

OF REPROBATION

Proverbs 16:4.

John 12:39, 40.

1 Peter 2:8. 10

Jude 1:4. 1

Revelation 13:8. 1

Chapter 2

OF ELECTION

1 Peter 2:9. 16

Romans 9:10-13.

Colossians 3:12.

Ephesians 1:4.

Romans 8:28, 29.

John 6:37.

Acts 8:48.

Romans 8:29, 30.

2 Timothy 2:19.

Romans 5:19.

Chapter 3

OF REDEMPTION

Matthew 20:28.

John 10:15.

John 17:9.

Romans 8:34.

Romans 8:32.

Romans 5:10.

John 15:13.

Chapter 4

OF EFFICACIOUS GRACE

Ephesians 1:19, 20.

1 Corinthians 5:17.

John 3:5.

Ephesians 2:1.

1 Corinthians 2:14.

2 Corinthians 3:5.

John 15:5.

John 6:44.

Acts 11:18.

Acts 16:14.

Jeremiah 31:18.

Jeremiah 31:33.

Ezekiel 11:36:26.

Philippians 2:13.

1 Corinthians 4:7.

Ephesians 2:8, 9.

Chapter 5

OF THE CORRUPTION OF HUMAN NATURE

John 14:4

Psalms 51:5.

Genesis 6:5.

John 3:6.

Romans 7:18, 19.

Romans 8:7, 8.

Chapter 6

OF PERSEVERANCE

John 13:1.

John 17:12.

Romans 11:29.

Matthew 24:24.

John 6:39, 40.

Romans 11:2.

Romans 8:38, 39.

Ephesians 1:13, 14.

1 Peter 1:5.

1 John 2:19.

1 John 3:9. 87

Isaiah 54:10.

Isaiah 59:21.

Hosea 2:19, 20.

Jeremiah 32:40.

John 14:16.

John 10:28.

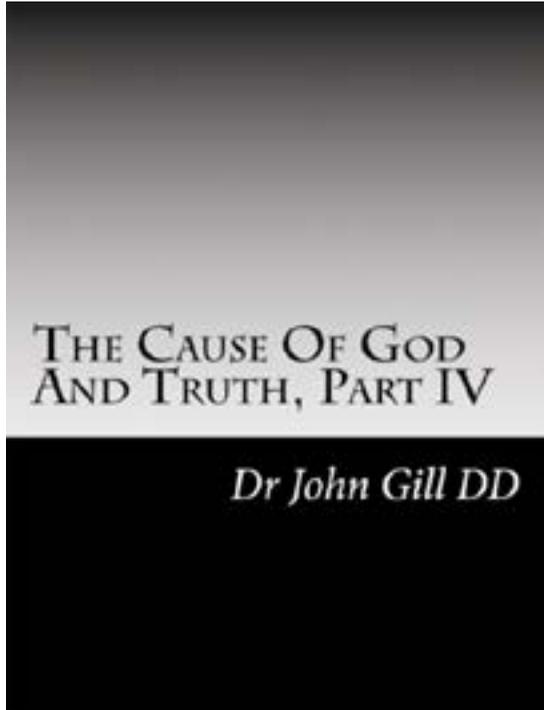
1 Corinthians 1:8, 9.

The following work was undertaken and begun about the year 1733 or 1734, at which time Dr. Whitby's Discourse on the Five Points was reprinting, judged to be a masterpiece on the subject, in the English tongue, and accounted an unanswerable one ; and it was almost in the mouth of every one, as an objection to the Calvinists, Why do not ye answer Dr. Whitby ? Induced hereby, I determined to give it another reading, and found myself inclined to answer it, and thought this was a very proper and seasonable time to engage in such a work.

In the year 1735, the First Part of this work was published, in which are considered the several passages of Scripture made use of by Dr. Whitby and others in favour of the Universal Scheme, and against the Calvinistical Scheme, in which their arguments and objections are answered, and the several passages set in a just and proper light. These, and what are contained in the following Part in favour of the Particular Scheme, are extracted from Sermons delivered in a Wednesday evening's lecture.

The Second Part was published in the year 1736, in which the several passages of Scripture in favour of special and distinguishing grace, and the arguments from them, are vindicated from the exceptions of the Arminians, and particularly from Dr. Whitby, and a reply made to answers and objections to them.

The Third Part was published in 1737.

The Cause Of God And Truth, Part IV

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

It should be known by the reader, that the following work was undertaken and begun about the year 1733 or 1734, at which time Dr. Whitby's Discourse on the Five Points was reprinting, judged to be a masterpiece on the subject, in the English tongue, and accounted an unanswerable one ; and it was almost in the mouth of every one, as an objection to the Calvinists, Why do not ye answer Dr. Whitby ? Induced hereby, I determined to give it another

reading, and found myself inclined to answer it, and thought this was a very proper and seasonable time to engage in such a work.

In the year 1735, the First Part of this work was published, in which are considered the several passages of Scripture made use of by Dr. Whitby and others in favour of the Universal Scheme, and against the Calvinistic 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.

The Third Part was published in 1737, and is a confutation of the arguments from reason used by the Arminians, and particularly by Dr. Whitby, against the above doctrines ; and a vindication of such as proceed on rational accounts in favour of them, in which it appears that they are no more disagreeable to right reason than to divine revelation ; to the latter of which the greatest deference should be paid, though the Rationalists of our age too much neglect it, and have almost quitted it ; but to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them.

In this part of the work is considered the agreement of the sentiments of Mr. Hobbes and the Stoic philosophers with those of the Calvinists, in which the difference between them is observed, and the calumny removed ; to which is added, a Defence of the Objections to the Universal Scheme, taken from the prescience and the providence of God, and the case of the Heathens.

The Fourth Part was published in 1738, in which the sense of the ancient writers of the Christian Church, before the times of Austin, is given ; the importance and consequence of which is

shown, and that the Arminians have very little reason to triumph on that account.

This work was published at a time when the nation was greatly alarmed with the growth of Popery, and several learned gentlemen were employed in preaching against some particular points of it ; but the author of this work was of opinion, that the increase of Popery was greatly owing to the Pelagianism, Arminianism, and other supposed rational schemes men run into, contrary to divine revelation, This was the sense of our fathers in the last century, and therefore joined these and Popery together in their religious grievances they were desirous of having redressed ; and indeed, instead of lopping off the branches of Popery, the axe should be laid to the root of the tree, Arminianism and Pelagianism, the very life and soul of Popery.

This is Part 4 of 4 parts, and a new edition, with some alterations and improvements, is now published by request.

This work contains:

Chapter 1 Of Predestination

Chapter 2 Of Redemption

Chapter 3 Or Original Sin

Chapter 4 Of Efficacious Grace

Chapter 5 Of Perseverance

Chapter 6 Of The Heathens

A Vindication of The Cause of God and Truth

This work contains:

Chapter 1 Of Predestination

Chapter 2 Of Redemption

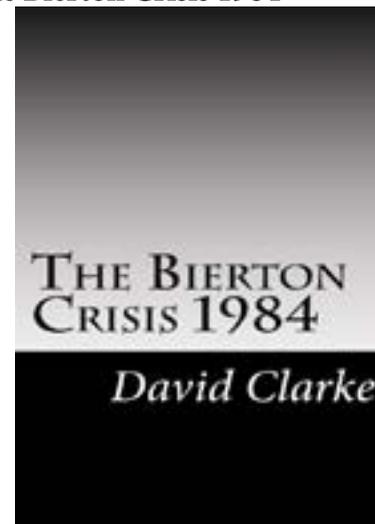
Chapter 3 Or Original Sin

Chapter 4 Of Efficacious Grace

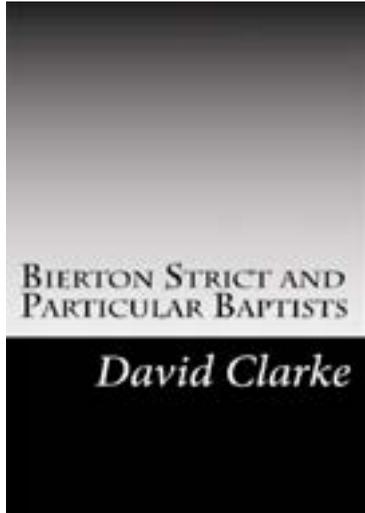
Chapter 5 Of Perseverance

Chapter 6 Of The Heathens

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.