

J.C. Philpot

Sermons

Volume 7

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Strict and Particular Baptists Minister

For 26 years

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

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

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

J. C. Philpot.

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107 The Everliving Intercessor

Preached in the Baptist Chapel, Bedworth, on Wednesday Evening,

April 1, 1846

“Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

Hebrews 7:25

We have reason to bless God for the Epistle to the Hebrews, for it so unfolds the Levitical dispensation, and casts such a divine light on all the types, figures, rites, ceremonies, and sacrifices of the Old Testament.

What is the main subject of the Epistle to the Hebrews? It is this: to set forth the High Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to show how much this High Priesthood excels in virtue and efficacy all those sacrifices of the Old Testament which were but figures of it. The Lord Jesus Christ, then, being the High Priest of His people, we may divide His priestly office into two distinct periods; one period comprehends all that Jesus Christ once did on earth, and the other period comprehends all that Jesus Christ now does in heaven.

There were two things chiefly that the high priest had to do under the Old Testament dispensation; one was to offer sacrifices, the other to make intercession for the people. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the great High Priest after the order of Melchisedec, performed on earth the first part of the priest's office, being both the Sacrificer and the Victim. And now, being ascended, He performs the second part, in making intercession for the people of God, and presenting before the Most High His blood and righteousness in behalf of His people. It is this second part of His priestly office that the text chiefly speaks of: “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

In looking at these words I shall endeavour to consider them under three distinct heads:

First, the characters described in the text: Those that come unto God by Jesus Christ.

Secondly, how He is able to save these to the uttermost; and

Lastly, the reason why He is able to save them to the uttermost, because “he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

I. The people of God are described in the word of truth under various characters. It seems as if the Holy Ghost had taken His pen of inspiration, and traced out the characters of God’s people, that they, by seeing and feeling in their own hearts a correspondence to the characters described in the word of truth, might have sweet encouragement to believe that indeed they are the people of the living God. For instance, sometimes they are described as hungering and thirsting after righteousness; sometimes, as poor and needy; sometimes, as groaning under a body of sin and death; sometimes, as the flock of slaughter; sometimes as wandering through a waste, howling wilderness; and sometimes as afflicted, tried, and tempted.

When the people of God, then, feel in their own consciences that they have those marks that the Holy Ghost has described, and when the blessed Spirit is pleased to seal this persuasion upon their hearts, it raises them up to a living hope that they are God’s people, because they have such marks, and are such characters as the word of inspiration has traced out.

In the text we have a description of the people of God in whose hearts the Spirit of God has begun, and is carrying on a gracious work. They are described as coming unto God by Jesus Christ: “Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.” This is their character; this is the description that the Holy Ghost has given them—that they come unto God by Jesus Christ. Now, if you have never come to God by Jesus Christ, you have no manifested interest in the text; but if God the Spirit

has quickened your soul into spiritual life, if He has begun, and is carrying on a work of grace in your conscience, depend upon it, you will find your character here traced out. What is man by nature? The Holy Ghost has given this description of him: that he is “dead in trespasses and sins:” that he is “alienated from the life of God by the ignorance that is in him, because of the blindness of his heart;” that he is “an enemy to God by wicked works.” that he is utterly unable to bring his soul near to God. and to do anything acceptable in His sight. Now, if this be the case, that man is dead in trespasses and sins. far from God by wicked works, alienated from the life of God by the ignorance that is in him because of the blindness of his heart, if the carnal mind is nothing but implacable enmity to God and godliness, how can he come near to God? He may come in a form or in the mere exercise of his natural faculties—but a holy and just God cannot accept such a coming as this. True worshippers come in spirit, as Jesus declared to the woman of Samaria. “The hour cometh, and now is. when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” And all worship, except spiritual worship, and all coming, except spiritual coming, is only a stench in God’s nostrils. Here, then, is one that is as unable to come to God by living faith as Lazarus was to come forth from the tomb, till the voice of the Saviour spake with power, “Lazarus, come forth.” But no sooner does the blessed Spirit speak to the conscience, no sooner does His sovereign voice reach the soul, than there is a doing spiritually what Lazarus did naturally,—a coming forth. No sooner did the voice of the Lord, that is full of Majesty, that breaketh the cedars, and maketh the hinds to calve,—no sooner did this Almighty voice break into the ears of Lazarus, than he came forth. And no sooner does the Lord begin to speak to the soul by the blessed Spirit, than it comes; it is moved, it rises out of the grave of death, and comes unto God. So that every soul whom God has quickened to fear His great name, has a manifested interest in this text,—in that he cometh unto God. Here, then, we see a grand distinction, a distinction ever to

be made, between those natural convictions of sin that a man may have in the flesh, and those spiritual convictions that are produced by a work of grace on the heart.

What is the effect and tendency of natural convictions? it is to drive the soul from God. Was it not so with Cain? What was his language? "My punishment is greater than I can bear;" and "he went out from the presence of the Lord." What was the effect of natural conviction in the bosom of Adam, our first parent? He hid himself among the trees of the garden. And what do we read is the feeling of the carnal mind? "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." A man may have deep convictions of sin by the workings of natural conscience; but they will only drive him from God. But when the blessed Spirit, by opening up God's law in the conscience, convinces a vessel of mercy, there is at the same time put into his soul by the same Spirit that crying, that groaning, that begging, that entreating, in a word, that "coming," whereby he answers the description in the text, that he "comes unto God."

The same apostle tells us Heb 11:6 what is necessary in a sinner that comes to God. Does he not say, "that without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him?" Faith then is needful; so that he that comes spiritually and acceptably to God comes in faith. This is it which brings a sinner near unto God. The blessed Spirit raises up the grace of faith, whereby he apprehends the character, and feels the power of God; whereby he bows down before the Majesty on high; whereby God's presence is solemnly realized, that he sees into the secret recesses of his bosom, and knows all the thoughts of his heart as they lie "naked and open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

He comes also in the cries, and sighs, and groans of his soul. We may have prayed much before the Lord was pleased to quicken our souls; we may have said many prayers; we may have used long prayers, prayed in the morning, prayed at noon, and prayed at night; and yet not a single breath of true prayer was there in our

hearts until God was pleased to quicken our souls into life. But I believe from experience, that one of the first marks of divine life is for God to raise up a spirit of supplication enabling us to breathe out our soul before God. It was so with me, and it is so with every quickened soul. "Behold, he prayeth," was said of Paul when first arrested by the hand of God.

He comes, then, to God in prayer, in sighs, in breathings, in longings, and pantings; and yet all the time there is a heavy burden of guilt upon his conscience. Sin often lies with a heavy weight upon his soul; the sins of his past life awfully rise up to his view; the corruptions of his nature are laid open; and yet, though he feels he deserves a thousand hells, and were God to banish him from His presence he could not but say, that in hell he should justify Him for all: yet there are those cries that he cannot stop if he would. He does not pray because it is his duty to pray, neither does he pray because six o'clock is come, or because nine o'clock is come, but he prays because he must, and groans, and cries, and sighs because he cannot help it. It is like water that must have a vent. It is like a stream that must gush forth; and therefore he prays because he cannot help but pray.

He comes with breathings toward God that He would show mercy upon him; that He would manifest Himself unto him; that He would pardon his sins, break in upon his soul, make Jesus known, reveal love and blood in his heart, and sprinkle his conscience with the blood of sprinkling; for you perceive the text says they "come to God by Jesus Christ."

Now, after the soul has thus been well plagued, well exercised, and well stripped, brought down, and its mouth put in the dust, there is a discovery made to it of the way of salvation through a crucified Immanuel. There is a discovery to the heart by faith, through the teachings and applyings of God the Spirit, of the glory of Christ's Person, of the fulness of Christ's righteousness, and Jesus is revealed as set forth in the Scriptures. And when the blessed Spirit takes of these things of Christ and unfolds them to

the soul, and gives it a glimpse of what Jesus is to the poor and needy, at the same time and in the same way He imparts living faith toward the blessed Redeemer; and thus He enables him “to come to God by Jesus Christ.” He sees now there is a Mediator; he now knows that blood has been shed, that a propitiation has been made, that everlasting righteousness has been wrought out and brought in, and that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And, when the blessed Spirit is pleased to reveal these things with power in his soul, and to give blessed faith whereby they are laid hold upon in the conscience, then is there a coming to God by Jesus Christ, and a beseeching Him to apply the blood of atonement to his guilty conscience, and to reveal His dying love to the soul.

It may be asked, what is it that makes him come? Why, is it not a sense of felt necessity? It is guilt that makes him long for pardon. It is condemnation that makes him long for justification. It is helplessness that makes him long for help, it is blindness that makes him long for light. It is ignorance that makes him long for the teaching of the blessed Spirit, it is worthlessness that makes him long for Jesus’ righteousness as a justifying robe to cover his nakedness, in which to appear before the throne of the Most High. Necessity, felt necessity, lies at the root of coming unto God. If we have no wants, we can do very well without Jesus Christ. But, if we are full of wants, if we are poor, and needy, sinful, filthy, and guilty, helpless, hopeless, and undone, and then see by the eye of faith what a rich provision there is in the gospel; that “there is forgiveness with God that he may be feared”—when these things are experienced in the soul, then they draw forth feelings that are better known than described.

These, then, are the characters that Jesus Christ saves,—who “come unto God by him.” All others think they can save themselves. But, if I can work out my own righteousness, I want not Christ. If I can please God with my own performances, I want none of Immanuel’s. If I can purge myself from my sins, I want not the blood of Jesus. If I can please God with my own works, I do not

want to be accepted in the Beloved. But on the other hand, if I feel full of guilt and shame, and have not a rag to cover myself with, but a life stained with sin, and my nature horrible in the sight of a holy God; if, then, I see by faith the blood and righteousness of the Son of God, His tender mercy, and the superaboundings of His grace over all the aboundings of my sin,—this draws me to His feet.

When He says “Look unto me, for I am God, and there is none else,” and a sense of my wants and His fulness, my guilt and shame, and His righteousness—when these two things meet together in a sinner’s heart, then only do we come as God would have us to come, in faith and feeling, in poverty and emptiness, in beggary and bankruptcy; and then only is our soul ever filled out of His fulness who filleth all in all. “He openeth His hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.”

There is no other coming but this; all other coming may be moving our body, but there is no moving of our soul. It may be a moving of our lips, but not of our heart. It is “the bodily exercise which profiteth little,” not that spiritual exercise which is “profitable unto godliness.”

II. Now of these characters it is said, “He is able to save them to the uttermost.” There is something to my mind very sweet and expressive in the words, “to the uttermost.” It seems to my mind to convey two things. It seems first, to convey the desperate condition of those whom He saves; and it seems also to convey the all-sufficiency and omnipotency of that almighty arm that can pluck a poor sinner out of the very depths of hell.

Now, first, see whom the Lord is able to save to the uttermost.

The Lord Jesus Christ had a mighty work to do. Would God have sent His only begotten Son into the world to do a little work? Would God and man have been united in one glorious Person to do a little work? Would an everlasting covenant have been entered into between the three Persons in the Trinity to do a little work? And would the only-begotten Son of God have come out of His

Father's bosom, where He dwelt from everlasting, to do a little work? Does not the very act of the Lord Jesus Christ, in taking our nature into union with His own divine and glorious Person, clearly show what a mighty thing salvation must be, when such an act was needful to accomplish it? And do we not see by it how desperately sunk man must be to require such a sacrifice,—that nothing would do but God's co-equal and co-eternal Son; that He who was from everlasting to everlasting, should stoop so low as to bleed and die to save us from the Fall, and go into the depths into which we were sunk, and into which our first ancestor plunged himself and all his race.

When God the blessed Spirit, then, is pleased to open up in their hearts the depths of the fall, depend upon it they want every word of the text—One who is able to “save to the uttermost.” They want that “uttermost” to be revealed to their hearts' experience.

For instance, some of those who are coming to God by Jesus Christ, are full of doubts and fears. Is the work genuine? Do my feelings spring from the work of God on my heart? Is my religion such as will stand in the last day? Is it the mere hypocrisy of my fleshly heart or the teaching of God the Spirit?

Others of the Lord's people are passing through grievous temptations; temptations to infidelity, temptations to blasphemy, temptations to suicide, temptations to curse God, temptations too base, too black even to be hinted at. And when their poor souls are groaning and labouring beneath these temptations, can a little Saviour do for them? No; they want just such a Saviour as Jesus is, one who is able to save to the uttermost; if I may use the expression, one who has an arm long enough, and one who has an arm strong enough, to reach to the ends of the earth; aye, and in some cases to reach to the very gates of hell.

Others are passing through deep convictions; they see the length, and breadth, and spirituality of God's law; that God requires a righteousness perfect in all respects; and they have proved that they sin in all they think, say, and do. They see they must have the

righteousness of God, and be clothed in it, that they may stand before God without spot, or blemish, or any such thing.

Others are mourning and sighing under a sense of their helplessness, that they cannot raise up one gracious feeling, that they cannot move nor melt their own souls, nor utter one single breath of prayer; nor can they create in their own hearts any faith, hope, or love. Others are mourning and sighing on account of the deep depravity and desperate corruption of their nature, that all manner of wickedness is lurking and working in their carnal mind, and that do what they can, sin works in them, and that continually. Others can get no answers to their prayers; they have cried, and the Lord has not heard; and they have begged and prayed, but fear they shall never come forth into the light, life, and liberty of the gospel.

Now all these want a Saviour that can save them to the uttermost; not a one-half Saviour, not a nine-tenths Saviour, but a Saviour that can save them to the uttermost, that can look down from the heights of the sanctuary into their soul, that can apply His blood to their conscience, that can sweetly whisper to their heart, “Fear not, for I have redeemed thee;” that can bless their souls with the sweet enjoyment of this love, lift them up into His bosom, and assure them that when they die they shall be with Him in glory.

The very exercises and afflictions, and the sore temptations through which God's family pass, all eventually endear Christ to them. They thus learn salvation is of grace, not of works, that Jesus alone must save, that nothing but His blood can pardon sin, nothing but His righteousness can justify. And depend upon it, if you are a child of God, you will sooner or later, in your travels through this wilderness, find your need of Jesus as “able to save to the uttermost.” There will be such things in your heart, and such feelings in your mind, the temptations you will meet with will be such, that nothing short of a Saviour that is able to save to the uttermost can save you out of your desperate case and felt

circumstances as utterly lost and helpless.

This a great point to come to. All trials, all temptations, all strippings, all emptyings that do not end here are valueless, because they lead the soul away from God. But the convictions, the trials, the temptations, the strippings, the emptyings, that bring us to this spot—that we have nothing, and can do nothing, but the Lord alone must do it all, these have a blessed effect, because they eventually make Jesus very near and dear unto us.

The text declares, that “he is able to save them to the uttermost.” But has He not already saved them? Do we not read, “Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling?” Salvation is a past act. The elect were saved in the purposes of God, when their names were written in the Book of Life; and they were saved actually, when the Saviour died on the tree. But they are saved in their consciences, when there is a manifestation of salvation of their souls. And this all the people of God have experienced, or are longing to experience; and not a single soul thus longing will go out of the world before he has received a manifestation of this salvation in a greater or less degree. This salvation is manifested when the Lord of life and glory is pleased to make Himself known to the soul. And when the blessed Spirit takes of the things of Christ and reveals them to the conscience, then and there salvation is brought into the heart. Thus all the living family will sooner or later experience what it is for the Lord Jesus Christ to save them to the uttermost.

III. We pass on to the last consideration, and that is, why He is able to save them to the uttermost. This is the reason: “Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” The high priest under the law had two offices to perform. If you read carefully Le 16, you will find them pointed out. One office was to sacrifice the victim, and make an atonement for his own sins, and for the sins of the people. This was a type and a figure of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, by the eye of faith, we view the bleeding Lamb of God. But the high priest was also to take a censer, and put coals therein from off the altar, and put incense thereon, that so the cloud

of the incense, when he went into the most holy place, might rise up and cover the mercy seat. This was typical of the intercession that the Son of God makes at God’s right hand. “He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

Some may say, “How does the Lord Jesus Christ make intercession? Does he pray for His people in words?” Not so; but He intercedes by virtue of His sacrifice upon earth. Do you not see, in what I have just quoted, how the incense was fired from the altar? And was not the morning and evening sacrifice typical of the sacrifice of the Son of God? It was the coals off the altar that kindled the incense, and caused it to mount up before the mercy seat. So it is with the Son of God now within the veil. It was the sacrifice on earth, and the blood that was shed that speaketh better things than that of Abel. And from His body that He has taken for that purpose rises a perpetual odour of intercession for the people of God, for whom He pleads at the right hand of the Most High. This is what the apostle holds forth. Thus the priesthood of Christ excels the priesthood of Aaron. That passed from father to son; but this man hath an unchangeable priesthood. There He is at God’s right hand in majesty and glory; there He is with all his tenderness and sympathy, the Lamb slain before the throne, with pierced hands and wounded side; and by virtue of His meritorious sacrifice and obedience, making intercession before the throne of the Most High. If I may be allowed to use the expression, the whole court of heaven is filled with His intercession for His people, just as on earth the temple was filled with the cloud of incense ascending before the mercy seat.

Now, how sweetly encouraging to souls that come to God by Jesus Christ, when felt by faith, is it to know that they have a Mediator at God’s right hand; one who has put all things under His feet, and “is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.” And when by the eye of faith, we are enabled to view atoning blood and dying love, and all this ascending before the

throne, how it encourages us! how it draws forth our desires to know Christ and the power of His resurrection; and how it seems to raise up living faith in the soul that He is able to save to the uttermost!

We know naturally what it is to make use of an intercessor. Here is a child; it has offended its father; it runs to its mother; the mother must be the intercessor. You are a servant, and you have displeased your master; you speak to the foreman for him to intercede. Or you have a friend, and have quarrelled with him, and wish to be reconciled. A mutual friend brings about the reconciliation. Now carry these out. Jehovah is just, and you are a wicked transgressor; the holiness, majesty, and authority of God flows forth against your sin. You are a sinner; you have broken God's law morning, noon, and night. How are you to be saved? how is the forgiveness of sin to be experienced, a guilty conscience to be purged, and your soul brought near to God? Here is the answer, and such an answer as God has revealed in His word and in your soul. There is a Mediator, an Intercessor—there is a Jesus.

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!

There is a Jesus! Look at Him! Did He ever pass by a case unnoticed? Did He turn a deaf ear to any cry? Did the blind call upon Him, and He not give him sight? Did He not unstop the deaf ears? The lepers cried, and did not the Lord make them clean? Were not the hungry fed, and the dead raised? Was there ever a poor needy object that came and fell down at the feet of Christ when upon earth, whom that blessed Man of Sorrows sent away unheeded? Not one! And has He not now the same tender feelings, and are not these all united with infinite power, mercy, grace, and love? Thus He is able to save to the uttermost. He is always at God's right hand. Thus when His poor and needy family see and feel that

He ever liveth to make intercession for them, how this enables them to believe in God, and to cast themselves as poor and needy at His footstool!

Now are you these characters? Has God traced out your experience in this text? Look at it, and look at the words, "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him." Ask your conscience, are you one of those that come unto God by Jesus Christ? that come sometimes by night, and sometimes by day; sometimes on your bed, and sometimes at your work; sometimes by your fireside, and sometimes in company. Only as there is a secret groaning and mourning under all your sins, trials, and temptations, is there a coming unto God by Jesus Christ. By faith you view Jesus. You view Him as a blessed Mediator, looking to His precious blood, casting yourself upon His righteousness, and feeling how able He is to save to the uttermost. Do you come with hungerings and thirstings after righteousness, and that He will bless your soul with that blessing that maketh rich and addeth no sorrow with it? Is it necessity that presses the cry out of your hearts? Are you like Hannah, of a sorrowful spirit? Is your heart full, and do you pour it out in sighs before the Lord? Then you are the characters, whether John, or Thomas, or Sarah, or Mary, or Elizabeth, as much as if you could see your names in the Book of Life; and just as clearly so as though a voice from heaven had spoken to you, you John, you Thomas, you Mary, you Sarah, you Elizabeth. The text does not give our names, it gives our characters; and though we cannot take the comfort of it until God seals the same upon our soul, yet if written in the word of God below, our names are in the book of God above. If you find your experience traced here, then you are the characters. "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."

"But," some may say, "I have such a wicked nature, such a hard heart, and feel such obscenity and filthiness within." He does not say in the text that you are to get a little better, a little wiser, or a little holier, and then He will save you. No, but we are

in brokenness, in humility, feeling a sense of our wants, crying and sighing, groaning, praying, begging, and pleading, when He saves us. And these things are the effects of the work of God going on in our soul.

Now the text says, "He is able to save to the uttermost." However desperate the circumstances of the case may be, the Lord's arm is long enough and strong enough to pluck His child out of the depths of the Fall. Why? Because He ever liveth to make intercession for them; because the steam of His incense ever fills the court of heaven above. By sitting at God's right hand in glory, majesty, and power, "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him."

Shall not this be more or less our experience to the end of our days? Shall we ever get beyond this coming to God by Jesus Christ, and being saved experimentally by His blood and righteousness? No, there will be a daily coming to the Lord through Jesus Christ,—coming as poor and needy, having nothing and being nothing, and looking up to Him to supply all our wants out of His fulness, seeing we are destitute and have nothing but rags, and ruin, and misery in ourselves. It is thus we get comfort, and crown Him Lord of all. And what a precious thing it is for a poor sinner who is come to the Lord, though it may be from the ends of the earth, to know that He is a God that cannot lie! He hath said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

108 The Breaker

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Tuesday Evening,
May 12, 1846

"The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them."

Micah 2:13

I should not do justice to my conviction of the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures if I did not state that I believe this passage has a prophetic as well as an experimental meaning. Let us give a glance at the context. We read in the preceding verse, "I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold; they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men. The breaker is come up before them." Now as to the prophetic meaning of this Scripture, it appears to my mind to point to a day not yet arrived, to "the latter day" of which the Old Testament prophets speak so much. When the Lord shall set his hand a second time to gather the remnant spread abroad on the earth, then this prophecy of Micah will be literally fulfilled: for there will be those difficulties in the way which none but "the Breaker" going before can remove. But the Scriptures are written with that mysterious wisdom that there is not only in the Old Testament prophecies what is strictly prophetic, but also experimental. We are not to discard the prophetic meaning as some do, for God has given it, and every word of God is pure. But on the other hand, it is the spiritual and experimental part which is food for the church of God. Therefore though we dare not pass by the literal meaning, yet we confine our attention chiefly to the spiritual. And in this way, with God's blessing, I shall view it this evening, taking the words much in the order as they now lie before me.

"The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them."

There are two main things here:

First. The people of whom these things are said.

Secondly. That wondrous Individual who is here pointed out by the expression, “The breaker.”

I. The people here spoken of are the people of God, the remnant according to the election of grace, God’s own beloved family. But we gather from the words used that they had great difficulties, for why need they to have a breaker go before them unless they were in such difficulties as nothing but an almighty hand could break down and remove? Thus we gather that the people to whom this promise is made are in such straits and difficulties, that they can never succeed in making a passage for themselves: but that this wondrous Person, this Immanuel, God with us, is to go before them; and for that reason he is called “the breaker,” because with his almighty hand he breaks up and breaks down these difficulties that lie in their path, and which they themselves could not by any wisdom or strength of their own remove out of the way.

Let us look at this a little more closely, and open it a little more in detail. When the Lord is first pleased to quicken a soul dead in sin, he sets before him the narrow gate; he shews him that his sins merit eternal wrath and punishment, and he raises up in his heart a desire to flee from the wrath to come. However the circumstances of the new birth may vary, there will always be this leading feature accompanying the work of the Spirit in the heart—a fleeing from the wrath to come; a cry in the soul, “What shall I do to be saved? God be merciful to me a sinner.” As Bunyan sweetly sets forth in the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, a quickened soul, like Christian, immediately begins to run. All the difficulties that encompass him are nothing compared to the burden on his back. Wife, child, family, money, all are considered less than nothing compared with the salvation of his soul. Therefore he begins to run, setting his face Zionward, earnestly desiring to be found saved at last with an everlasting salvation.

But no sooner does he begin to run, and move onward in the heavenly way than he begins to find difficulties. The way to

heaven is described as “a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen” (Job 28:7). “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:14). We must “through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” The Lord, therefore, knowing the difficulties of the way, on one occasion, when he saw great multitudes following him, turned and said to them, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26, 27). As though he would check this rash forwardness by shewing them that no one could run in that way except he denied himself and took up his cross; implying that the way to heaven is one of continual self-denial, a path of daily crucifixion. And what is the object of this? It is to teach a soul this great lesson—that he cannot by any wisdom, any strength, any righteousness, or any goodness of his own obtain eternal life. We are very slow learners in this school. The pride of our heart, our ignorance, and our unbelief, all conspire to make us diminish the difficulties of the way. But the Lord has to teach us by painful experience that the road to heaven is so difficult that a man can only walk in it as he is put in and kept in it by an almighty hand.

When these difficulties first begin to rise, they startle him that is first running in Zion’s way. For instance, the discovery of a broken law, and of the curse that flames from Mount Sinai is an obstacle insuperable in the way to glory; for if a sinner has to get to glory by the burning mount, he must be consumed as he passes over it, for from that mount nothing but wrath comes. Again, he is startled by the discovery of the corruptions of his heart, the workings of that inward iniquity, which before was hidden from him. He now becomes aware of secret sins that before he was utterly unacquainted with. He becomes aware too that there is such a thing as living faith, and that without faith it is impossible to please God; and he finds he has not this living faith, and is

unable to raise it up in his own heart. He finds love also spoken of; and he finds he cannot by any power of his own raise up this love to God or to his people. He finds hope too spoken of; and he is sinking in the waves of despondency. He finds prayer spoken of; and he feels utterly unable to pour out his heart before God. He finds submission to God's will spoken of; and he perhaps feels little else but repining and hard thoughts of God. He finds an inward knowledge of Jesus spoken of, and the revelation of Christ to the soul; and he finds darkness and gloom within. He cannot bring this knowledge of Christ into the heart. A man may have all the religion of the world in his head, in the theory, and never meet with one difficulty. But if once he is put into the strait way by the hand of God, he will meet with difficulties; nay, he will feel the whole scene to be more or less a scene of difficulties. Now this prepares a man for the knowledge of "the breaker." "The breaker," we read in the text, "is gone up before them." But what use is the breaker if there be nothing to break down? no obstacles in the way? no rocks or stones in the road, all a smooth, grassy meadow with nothing to obstruct the course? The very circumstances of a breaker being wanted implies there are such difficulties in the way as nothing but an almighty hand can break down. There was a custom in primitive times which throws a still further light on the text. In those times there were no great highways as there are now. When kings wanted to go out on an expedition, men went before them to clear the way, to fill up the hollows, and dig down the mountains in order to make a path for the king. So this divine breaker has to go before, and as he goes before he breaks down those difficulties and obstacles that lie in the path.

II. But who is this breaker? Need I say it is the Lord of life and glory; Immanuel, God with us? Why is he called a breaker? This is one of his titles. But why is this title given him? Because he breaks down those obstacles that lie in the road. For you will observe if you read the text, it speaks of a people coming up, and passing through the gate, and journeying onward, and the king passing before

them, and the LORD, that is Jehovah, being at the head of them. And you will observe also that this breaker is Jehovah: for it is the LORD in capital letters, which always implies Jehovah. The LORD that is Jehovah "is at the head of them," implying that the breaker is Jehovah, and he is called a breaker because he breaks down the difficulties that lie in the path. For instance, there is the law; and how are we to get by that obstacle? Bunyan represents this in that invaluable work, the Pilgrim's Progress. When Christian was drawn aside from the path through the persuasion of Mr. Legality, and was going to the city pointed out to him, he saw a mountain that overhung the road, and thunder and lightning flashed from it, and he was afraid it would fall on his head. There Bunyan shews that there will be these flashes of God's wrath from the law, and the mountain will appear as if it would fall upon him, so that he dare not go by that road. But the breaker has travelled that way; he endured the curse of the law for us. He so to speak broke down its curse against God's people. As the Scripture speaks: "He took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;" and thus he so removed it that it should not be a covenant of condemnation to his dear family. In this sense he is a breaker. But not only is the law against them, but also God's holiness, majesty, justice and purity, what God is as an eternal Jehovah—all these things have to be removed out of the way. But when Jesus died upon the cross, he satisfied justice, and all the claims of God's holy law. By suffering himself he made such a propitiation for sin as God the Father could accept.

But besides these external difficulties that lie in the road there are internal difficulties. The Lord's people find internal difficulties as great and heavy to grapple with as external difficulties. For instance, there is an unbelieving heart; and what a difficulty an unbelieving heart is! If you are one that is journeying Zionward, do you not know experimentally the workings of unbelief? And is not this sometimes the sincere cry of your soul?

O could I but believe,

Then all would easy be;
I would, but cannot; Lord, relieve,
My help must come from thee.

Do you not find the workings of unbelief in your carnal mind? that you cannot raise up living faith in your own heart, and yet you are persuaded you must have living faith, or you can never please God? Now this glorious breaker, this Immanuel, God with us, breaks down this evil heart of unbelief by communicating precious faith; and when he communicates precious faith, this evil heart of unbelief is broken down. Unbelief does not then rule and reign, it gives way to a better principle, for the elder is to serve the younger.

But there is also a hard heart. And how the Lord's people have to lament and mourn continually on account of their hard heart; that they cannot feel as they would; soft, and contrite, and broken; that they cannot see and feel sin as they would see and feel it; that they cannot mourn nor sigh on account of the iniquities that work in them; that they cannot look to a crucified Saviour, and mourn over him, and grieve and groan because his holy soul and body were so afflicted for sin. "The heart of stone," as the Scripture speaks, is in them, and nothing but the power of God can take it away; for this is God's promise, "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26), implying that there is a heart of stone, and implying that nothing but the hand of God can take it away. Now the breaker, when he comes up before the people of God, breaks this hard heart; he melts it, and softens it, dissolves it, and humbles it, and lays it low in holy admiration and adoration of this blessed Immanuel. And thus he breaks the heart by breaking into the heart, and breaks the soul by a sense of his dying love and atoning blood, and this breaks it all to pieces, so that it crumbles into nothing at his feet. And thus contrition, sorrow, and grief blend together with faith, hope, and love. In this sense, then, "the breaker is come up before them." Because when he breaks their hard hearts he goes before them and leads them in the ways of truth and righteousness.

But as they journey onward they find arising immeasurable difficulties. What the Scripture calls, "gates of brass and bars of iron." And there is a promise made to spiritual Israel, "I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron" (Isa. 45:2), implying that there are these difficulties which the Scripture compares to brazen gates and iron bars in the way of a believer. These are so great that the believer cannot break them himself. He needs the breaker to go before him; and when the breaker has come up before him, he has but to touch them, and the way is made plain. As when Peter was in prison, and the angel came to set him free, the gate opened of its own accord. The angel had but to look, and the iron gate opened. But what is the power of an angel, though angels are said in Scripture to "excel in strength" (Ps. 103:20), compared with the power of God himself? His power is incomprehensible. Words would fail to speak of the distance betwixt the power of the brightest seraph or the highest angel and the power of Jehovah. In a similar way, then, as the gate opened of its own accord when the angel looked or spoke, whatever the gates of brass and bars of iron a child of God feels in his own experience to be obstacles that obstruct his path, when the breaker is come up before them, he breaks them asunder and takes them out of the way. Thus there are temptations, and these are gates of brass and bars of iron; there are trials, and there is the very nature of brass and iron in them; and there are afflictions and difficulties, all the evils of an evil heart, God hiding himself, not giving an answer to their sighs and groans. The weary soul finds, through the difficulties of the way, that all these are insuperable obstacles. But the breaker goes up before them: and as he moves onward and goes before the soul, all these difficulties vanish. The good Shepherd goes before his sheep, and they follow him, for they know his voice. And so the breaker is here represented, not as following, but as going before; not waiting for his people to accept offered grace, nor waiting for them to close in with the invitation, but as going before them, and

they following in the path that he precedes them in.

III. And this leads me to consider what is contained in the next portion of the text. "They have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it." They have broken up. Now the word 'broken up' here means that they have left the camp where they were stationed. It is a common expression. Boys are said to break up when they go home from school, that is, a leaving the place where they are, and going home. So spiritually, a breaking up here does not mean a breaking up of the soul, but it means that they move onward from the spot in which they were standing. "And they pass through the gate, and go out by it," which implies that until the breaker goes before them, they are stationary. It is with the children of God spiritually as it was with the children of Israel. There is a sweet description in the book of Numbers of the children of Israel moving as they saw the pillar of the cloud move, and resting as the pillar of the cloud by day and of fire by night rested on the tabernacle. When it was taken up, they moved forward: and when it stood still, they stopped; where it abode, they rested: implying that the spiritual Israel can only move forward as the Lord goes before them. But directly the pillar of the cloud was taken up, they journeyed forward: but there was no stirring until that took place. So it is with the spiritual Israel. They cannot move forward until they see the pillar of the cloud move; until the Lord goes before them, they cannot stir. There they are; some full of darkness, others full of doubts and fears; others, exercised with a heart full of unbelief; others, conflicting with powerful temptations; others, well-nigh swallowed up in despair, but all feeling themselves unable to move forward. This marks the true Israel. We read in the book of Job of those who "run upon the thick bosses of God's bucklers" (Job 15:26). These are different characters from those who wait at the footstool of God. "Your strength is to sit still" (Isa. 30:7). So with the children of Israel when they were at the Red Sea; they did not rush through the waters, but they waited till God appeared; and when God appeared and Moses struck

the waters with his rod, and the channel was opened, then they passed through. Thus it is spiritually: there is no moving except as the Lord goes before the soul; and immediately that the breaker is come up and goes before, the soul goes on; when he stops, it stops; and when he moves, it moves. And then what takes place? "They pass through the gate." Here is this gate that has before stood closed against them, and they were unable to pass through; but when the breaker goes before them, then the gate is opened, and they pass through the gate just as the breaker precedes. And is not this sweetly typical and descriptive of the way in which the Lord's people move forward? This gate is not only, perhaps not chiefly, the strait and narrow gate that leads to eternal life. There are other gates besides that; for we read, "Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in." And thus the gate here spoken of is not only, perhaps not chiefly, the strait and narrow gate, but it is also any of those difficulties that lie in the path which may be compared to a closed gate. But when the breaker goes up before them, he opens the gate. We read that the Lord will open "a door of hope in the valley of Achor;" that is, he opens the gate, and when he opens it they pass through. But what is the meaning of "passing through the gate," viewed spiritually? When the Lord, for instance, does not appear to the soul, then the gate is closed; there is no going up of faith to the Lord, and there is no answer from him; there is no view of his glory such as Jacob had in Bethel when he said, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:17). What made him see that this was the gate of heaven? Because in his dream, when he had chosen stones for his pillow, he saw a ladder, and angels ascending and descending it; and he looked up and saw where the ladder was fixed. Then he saw heaven opened. This too, was what Stephen saw when the enraged populace ran upon him and stoned him to death. He said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). There was a view in his soul of heaven and the glory and blessedness of

it. As his eyes looked up, he saw it, and his heart's affections flowed out to it. So with God's people; this gate is often closed; they cannot look up, or if they do, they cannot see anything for their comfort. But when God is pleased to go before them and unbar the gate of heaven, then they look up and see such things as God is pleased to manifest to their souls. Then they "pass through the gate." And the difficulties, trials, temptations, and exercises that have lain in their path, like closed gates, are removed when the breaker comes up before them.

Some of the Lord's people are exercised with powerful temptations. And this makes access to God a closed gate. Others of the Lord's people are greatly cast down in their minds because they have not received the pardon of their sins. Others because they are not brought into the enjoyment of gospel liberty. Others because they have not had the application of Christ's blood to their consciences. These are so many closed gates; but when the breaker comes up before these gates, then they pass through the gates and enter into the sweet enjoyment of those things which are beyond the gate, such as the love of God, the salvation of their souls, and all the rich treasures of love and mercy that are beyond the gate. But the breaker goes up, the gate opens, and they pass through it. Then they pass through that gate and have some manifestation and discovery of these blessed realities to their souls.

IV. But it goes on to say, "And their King shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them." Now this King is the same as the Breaker; the same as the Lord. This King is King Jesus, the King of Zion, the King and Head of his covenant people. And why is this expression used? Not only because he is their King, but because they are his subjects. The titles given in Scripture to the Lord Jesus Christ are not uselessly scattered up and down God's Word, without a meaning to them. But every title that is given to the Lord Jesus Christ is not only exactly adapted to the wants of his children, but is suitable to the very text where it occurs. It is like a diamond because it exactly fits it. So every text that speaks

of Jesus by any title, the text fits it, and it fits the text, and he is the glory of it, as the diamond is the glory of the setting. So he is called here "the King," not merely because he is a King, but because they follow him as obedient subjects. And we never give ourselves, our hearts and souls to Jesus; we never yield up our affections unto him until he comes and manifests himself as a breaker. But when he comes up in this great and glorious character as breaker, to break the hard heart into contrition, humility, and love; to break down the difficulties and obstacles that lie in the road to Zion; to break down every temptation, every besetment, and every snare, every sin, and everything distressing to a living soul—when he breaks these things down by his almighty love and power, then his children go in through the gate and pass onward, and then the King passes before them.

He is a King because he is such a precious disposer of kingly power; for you know the office of a king is to rule over his subjects, and to fight their battles for them. Then when they yield to him their hearts, and fall down before his footstool, he becomes enthroned in their affections as King of Zion, and being their King, he is to be at their head. What! is not a king to be at the head of his people? What! a subject to precede the king? What an indignity to the monarch! So when the Lord Jesus Christ moves onward in royal dignity as Monarch and Prince, those who know him, believe in his name, and love him in their hearts, follow him obediently as his subjects. He says to such, "Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house" (Ps. 45:10). He addresses them tenderly as his people, and in the same way as king Ahasuerus addressed the queen when she touched the golden sceptre.

V. "And the LORD on the head of them." O what dignity is this that the Lord Jehovah should be at their head! What if the Lord is to be at your head? If he is to go before you in the way to glory, what obstacle can there be in the path that he cannot, and will not in a moment surmount? You have a hard heart. Can that stand before the almighty power of God? You have an

unbelieving nature. Can that stand before the power of God put forth? You have temptations, you have trials, you have difficulties, you have hardness and darkness, and worldly-mindedness, pride, presumption, and hypocrisy, every evil, every iniquity, nameable and unnameable. But if you are God's people, the Lord Jesus Christ is your King, the King of Zion. Everything must disappear before him. And if he is the Lord Jehovah, who is to stand against Jehovah, who can frown devils into hell in a moment, before whose word creation itself would vanish like a scroll?

What a mercy it is for God's people to have the Lord Jehovah going before them, making a way through the deep waters, as of old he made a way through the Red Sea, and made every difficulty to move, and every mountain to melt down, leading them on in the ways of peace and righteousness. But some may say, "How am I to know whether I am one of these people for whom these mercies are written?" Let me ask you two questions. First, have you found any difficulties in the way you are travelling? Have you found the way you have been taking in divine things a hard way, a difficult way, a strait and narrow way? "Why," say you, "I have found it a very hard way, but I sometimes fear lest my difficulties are natural difficulties." Now do you not need a breaker to break them down for you? But let me ask you a second question. Has the breaker ever done anything for you? Any meltings, any movings, any softenings, any humblings, any actings of faith, hope, and love; any godly fear, any goings out to him in the yieldings of your heart's worship, any subjection of spirit, any obedience to his blessed will, ways, and word? Now if you can answer these two questions; that you know by experience that the way you have been led in is a difficult way, a distressing way, an afflicting way, such a way as you never could have walked in of yourself, but God has put you in and kept you in, then you have an evidence that you are one of those to whom the promise is made. Have you not found at times that the breaker is gone up, and has melted, softened, and humbled your heart, and appeared for you, when nothing but his hand could deliver? Then

you have a further testimony you are one of the Lord's people. And this breaker will go before you all your days: and you will need this breaker, for all your days you will need something to be broken down. And this breaker will go before you all your days as your King and your Lord, until he bring you safe to glory.

109 Prayer, and Its Answer

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on
Lord's Day Morning,
July 26, 1846

*"Call unto me, and I will answer thee; and shew thee great
and mighty things, which thou knowest not."*

Jeremiah 33:3

These words were spoken by the Lord unto the prophet Jeremiah under peculiar circumstances. We read in the first verse of this chapter, "Moreover the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison." Jeremiah, at this time, then was a close prisoner. But what brought him into prison? The real cause of his imprisonment was his faithfulness; as we find in the preceding chapter. "Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which was in the King of Judah's house. For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying, Wherefore dost thou prophesy, and say, Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it." (32:2, 3.) Jeremiah's faithfulness, in the exercise of his prophetic office, was then the real, substantial cause of his imprisonment. But it would not do to assign this as the real cause; they must needs therefore lay hold of a pretext; and this pretext was, that Jeremiah was a traitor to Judah and Jerusalem. For when the army of the King of Egypt came up to deliver Jerusalem from Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah, going out of the city, was apprehended in the gate of Benjamin, and imprisoned

as intending to desert to the Chaldeans. (Jeremiah 37:11-15.)

But what were the circumstances of the city itself? Jerusalem at this time was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar. For nearly a year had that mighty conqueror hemmed her in; the sword was made bare against her bosom; famine and pestilence were walking in her streets; and God was about to bring down upon her those judgments which he had so long denounced. It was a time of general mourning; a period of universal sorrow. Deeply was the heart of the prophet bowed within him; not merely by his own personal calamities, of which he had so very large a share, but also by the dark cloud of destruction which he saw was about to burst forth upon the city of Zion.

It was, then, under this trying state, and amid these perplexing circumstances that the Lord spoke these words to Jeremiah: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee; and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

Two things strike my mind as particularly worthy of notice in the text.

I.—The invitation—"Call unto me."

II.—The promise connected with the invitation—"And I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

I.—It seems to me, that the condition of Judah and Jerusalem at this time is emblematical of the state of God's people before the Lord stretches forth his right arm to deliver them. If you read this chapter attentively, you will find it contains a whole cluster of the richest blessings for God's people. "Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth; and I will cause the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity whereby they have sinned

against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities whereby they have transgressed against me." (verses 6-8.)

What, then, was the season, and what the opportunity, that the Lord took to give these blessed and unconditional promises? When Judah and Jerusalem were sunk to the very lowest point; when there was no hope, nor help; when Nebuchadnezzar was about to burn the city with fire, and to drag into a miserable captivity those of her children who should escape the sword. At that very gloomy time, at that very hopeless season, God revealed these promises, which he fulfilled in a measure when he restored Judah from the Babylonish captivity; and which, I believe, he will one day more fully accomplish, when he sets his hand the second time to bring back his own for a time cast-off Israel.

Judah's sunken condition seems, then, emblematical of that of the Lord's people before there is any real deliverance. They have to sink down into similar spots of helplessness and hopelessness, out of which he, and he only can deliver them. And when all that the creature can do is thoroughly exhausted, when the right arm of man's strength is withered, then is the time that the Lord usually appears, and manifests himself as "the God of all grace." Jerusalem must be besieged, and Jeremiah imprisoned, before any promise can come to the one or the other.

But let us, with God's blessing, look a little more closely at the invitation before us; for it is applicable not merely to Jeremiah under his distressed circumstances, but to all the family of God under similar states spiritually. "Call unto me."

True prayer is the gift of God. It is one of those "good gifts," and those "perfect gifts," which "come down from the Father of light, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17.) The Lord, therefore, says, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications." (Zech. 12:10.) And again, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for

us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Rom. 8:26.) There is no real, no spiritual, no acceptable prayer to the Lord except that which is created by the operation of God the Spirit upon the heart of a believer. The invitation, therefore, is not addressed to men generally; nay more, it is not addressed to the people of God generally; but it is addressed to the people of God under peculiar circumstances. It belongs to them only so far as they are brought into those trying circumstances and perplexing states into which God is pleased to bring them that he may enable them to cry and sigh unto himself. The gracious invitation, “Call unto me,” is made to that prayer only which enters into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, and brings down in God’s own time and way the desired answer.

But it is necessary for several things to be wrought with divine power in the soul before we can spiritually act upon this invitation. The Lord says, “Call unto me.” Can I therefore at once call unto him? can I seek his face? can I pray unto him acceptably? I cannot, except he is first pleased himself to work certain things in my soul. What are these things?

1. The first is, a deep sense of my sinfulness, guilt, and vileness. There is no real prayer to the Lord except the soul is abased, humbled, and laid low. And what abases, humbles, and lays low? Reading about sin, hearing about sin, talking about sin? No: a spiritual sense of our guilt, our shame, our vileness, our pollution, our unworthiness, divinely wrought in the soul, abases, humbles, and lays low at the footstool of mercy. And I am bold to say, no prayer will rise up with acceptance into the ears of the Lord of hosts, except that which springs out of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, made so by the blessed Spirit of God, discovering to us what we are, and thus humbling us, laying us low in our own eyes, and making us to feel guilty and filthy in our own sight.

2. A sense of our ignorance is another gracious qualification before we can call upon the Lord. As long as we think we can teach ourselves, instruct our own minds, and bring into our own hearts, by dint of creature exertion, the truth of God, we shall never pray

sincerely, earnestly, and spiritually for divine teaching. But when we are brought to this point, that we know nothing, absolutely nothing, except what God himself is pleased to teach us by the special operation of the Spirit; when we feel so shut up in blindness, darkness, and folly, that nothing short of God’s light, nothing short of divine manifestation, can communicate to our souls that which we want to feel and enjoy,—then we begin to pray aright. This knowledge, then, of our own ignorance, blindness, and folly is absolutely necessary to make us cry to the Lord with sincerity and earnestness that he himself would be pleased to teach us. If I can teach myself the truth as it is in Jesus; if I can bring into my own heart with sweet and unctuous power the word of God’s grace; if I can feed upon it, enjoy it, and sit under the shadow of it by my own exertions, it is but awful mockery in me to pretend to go to the throne of grace to ask the Lord to do it for me. But if, on the other hand, I am oppressed by a sense of my ignorance; if this feeling is deeply wrought in my heart, that I know nothing, absolutely nothing, except so far as the Spirit of God is pleased to unfold the truth to my soul, then I come to the Lord to ask him to teach me, not because I have read in the Scriptures of such a doctrine as divine teaching; nor because I have heard others ask the Lord to teach them; but because I feel utterly unable without this teaching to bring into my soul those heavenly realities it longs to experience.

3. A sense of our helplessness, inability, and impotency in divine things is a third qualification before we can truly and spiritually call upon God. How much there is of false prayer in us! How much there is of formality and self-righteousness even in true Christians! How much bowing of the knee without God’s hand bowing down the heart! How many words escape from the lips that have never been indited by the Holy Ghost in the soul! But a sense of our helplessness, insufficiency, and inability must be created by the hand of God in our souls before we can sincerely and spiritually ask him to bless us, manifest himself unto us, shine

upon our hearts, and lift up upon us the light of his countenance.

4. A glimpse of the things which we desire to experience, is another qualification before we can put in practice this divine invitation. It is not because we read about certain blessings in God's word, that we are enabled to go to a throne of grace, and ask the Lord to confer these blessings upon us. We may do it naturally; but this reading and praying in the letter will not profit; for "the flesh profiteth nothing." But, on the other hand, when the Lord is pleased to shine upon the sacred Scriptures; to give us glimpses in our hearts of the blessings revealed in them; to show us the promises which are all "yea and amen in Christ Jesus;" and the blessings which are stored up in him for those that fear God—when we enjoy glimpses of these heavenly blessings, then we rightly, sincerely, and earnestly call upon God to bestow them upon us.

5. Faith in the promises; faith in God who gives them; faith in Jesus in whom they are stored; faith in the blessed Spirit through whom they are communicated;—this precious faith, God's gift and work, is absolutely indispensable before we can call upon God aright. "Let him," says James, "ask in faith, nothing wavering." (1:6.) "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." (Heb. 4:20.) If there be no faith in our prayers they are not acceptable to God; they do not enter his ears; they do not bring down the promised blessing. Therefore, before we can call upon the Lord aright, we must have a living faith raised up in our heart, whereby we believe that God hears us, and that he will in his own time and way communicate his blessings to us. It is thus that we find access through the Mediator into God's presence, and plead with him for those blessings which he has to bestow.

6. Hungering, thirsting, panting, longing, and languishing after those blessings which God has to grant, is another qualification before we can call upon him to bestow them upon us. Is it not mockery, awful mockery, to go to the Lord in prayer, and to ask him to give us this, and to give us that; to bestow this mercy, to enrich our souls with that blessing; to apply this and that promise;

and all the time have no earnest longings, pantings, thirstings, hungerings, and breathings after them? It is awful mockery to ask God for a blessing, and have no desire in the soul after that blessing; to ask him for food, and have no hunger; to beg of him the water of life, and feel no thirst; to request divine clothing, and to know no nakedness; to implore sweet manifestations of his favour and love, and not desire them above thousands of gold and silver. It is but awful mockery, I repeat it, to go with these pretended petitions, and all the while have no earnest, sincere longings or languishings after the blessings which God has to bestow.

7. The last qualification I shall mention is, patience and perseverance to wait at God's footstool; as we read, "Be followers of them, who, through faith and patience inherit the promises." (Heb. 6:12.) We must resemble the woman, of whom the Lord spake in the parable, that though the unjust judge feared not God, nor regarded man, yet he was overcome by her importunity; we must be like the man who was in bed with his children, but was brought out of it by the importunity of his friend to give him all that he needed. So must the Lord's people not only seek, cry, and beg, but also wait and persevere till he arise to satisfy their desires.

If, then, these qualifications are absolutely needful; if there is no right calling upon God except this experience has been wrought in the heart by God the Spirit himself, how much true prayer is there in the world? How much true prayer is there in our hearts? And is not this the reason why there are so few answers? why we pray so much, and get so little? why we have so little prevalency with God? why we seek, and so seldom find? knock at the door, and find it so rarely opened? May not this be the reason, that with all our calling upon God, we lack these needful qualifications? They are indeed God's own gifts, God's own work; but still, if we lack these needful qualifications, prayer is but empty breath, and the words of the lip but idle mockery.

But when the Lord himself would give us a blessing; when it is in his heart to bestow a favour, he raises up these divine

qualifications in the soul; he puts us spiritually where Jeremiah was naturally—in the prison; shuts us up, lays burdens upon us, makes our chain heavy, brings upon us troubles, trials, temptations, afflictions, sharp distresses, perhaps outward persecutions; in a word, puts us into those spots and states out of which none but he can deliver. When then, in this state, the divine “Author and Finisher of faith,” the bounteous Giver of every good and perfect gift, begins to raise up desires and breathings in the soul; prayer at once springs up out of the heart, and enters into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth; and, in God’s own time and in God’s own way, brings down the blessed answer.

And this leads us to the second branch of the subject.

II.—”Call unto me, and I will answer thee; and shew thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not.”

Let us cast a glimpse at the state of Jerusalem at that time. It is, as I before observed, emblematical of the state of God’s people before he answers their prayers, and reveals to them the abundance of peace and truth. Was not Jerusalem sinking as low as she could possibly fall? Was not the sword of destruction hanging over her head by a single thread? Was not Nebuchadnezzar about to thrust the edge of his slaughter-weapon into her very bosom? It was so. And did she not justly deserve it? Had not her sins and iniquities drawn down divine indignation? Could she plead innocent? Could she justly say, ‘I have not sinned! these things have come upon me unmeritedly?’ The carnal and self-righteous might have said so; as we know there were some who uttered that language in her streets, “Yet thou sayest, because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned.” (Jer. 2:35.) But the God-fearing people of the city could not say so. When the Lord said, “Hast thou not procured this unto thyself?” (Jer. 2:17,) each and all who feared

God would answer, ‘Yes, yes; we have, we have.’ And thus no God-fearing man, who has had a discovery of his own sinfulness, can ever plead innocent. Whatever he suffers, he suffers deservedly; whatever he endures, he has justly merited. This makes him put his mouth in the dust; because he knows that every suffering, yea, hell itself, is his just desert.

In this state, then, when the cloud of destruction was lowering over Jerusalem; when the lightning-flash at times was bursting through the heavens; when the pattering drops, the harbingers and precursors of the coming storm, were falling thick and fast, and it seemed as though Judah and Jerusalem were about to be swept utterly away—then God reveals the promise, that “he would bring her health and cure; would cause her captivity to return, would cleanse her from all her iniquity, and make her a name of joy, and praise, and an honour before all the nations of the earth.” O how wonderful that God should take that very time and that very occasion to lay open the bounty of his loving bosom, and assure her, that his heart was full of love to her! At the very time that his sword, bathed in vengeance, hung over her to destroy, he tells her there was love in his heart towards her; that his covenant should stand for ever, and the purposes of his heart be fulfilled. Is not this emblematic? Is not this strikingly descriptive of the dealings of God with his people? That he smites with one hand, while he blesses with the other; and that while he holds the sword of chastisement over their head, yet his heart is full of love and mercy? He, therefore, says to Jeremiah, “Call unto me;” I have blessings to bestow; my heart is full of love to Judah and Jerusalem; I have promises to bestow upon her; I will never leave her, nor forsake her; I will forgive her; I will restore her; she shall be a name and praise to all around her; my covenant with her shall stand for evermore. “Call unto me:” thou hast but to ask, thou hast but to seek, thou hast but to beg, thou hast but to implore; I will shew her mercy, I will make known my love, I will reveal pardon and peace, I will comfort her, I will bless her and do her good.’

How suitable is this for a child of God in a similar state! And to such a soul, he says, “Call unto me.” Thou hast but to plead, but to beg, but to petition; the blessing is in my bosom: thou hast but to draw it forth. My heart is full of love; it only waits for thee to open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it with every good thing. “Call unto me, I will answer thee;” not by the sword, not by judgments, not by pestilence, not by famine. “Call unto me, I will answer thee; and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”

But what are these “great and mighty things” which Jeremiah knew not? He could not believe that God had love in his heart towards Jerusalem. But the Lord says, ‘Only seek me, only supplicate me; I will shew thee these great and mighty things.’ So he says to his people: ‘Though thou art deeply sunk under a sense of thy sinfulness, ignorance, helplessness, yet “Call unto me, I will shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”’

What are some of these “great and mighty things” which they know not?

1. One is, Divine sovereignty—that God “doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and that he will fulfil all his pleasure.” The doctrine of God’s sovereignty is very easily learnt: it may be caught up under one sermon, or by reading half a page of a tract; it may be known in theory in less than half an hour. But have I then learnt it? Have I got it aright? Say, I have read an author, Elisha Coles for instance, who writes admirably on God’s sovereignty—can I learn it thus? I might walk by the Bank of England, and say, ‘What a noble building! what beautiful architecture! its cellars too full of bullion!’ But is it all mine because I walk by and look at it? Just as much might I lay hold of divine sovereignty by merely reading a book, or hearing a preacher explain it, as I can lay claim to all the gold in the Bank cellars by walking round it, and admiring it as a beautiful structure. I must learn divine sovereignty in a very different way from merely

reading, hearing, or talking about it. I must know and feel it in my heart by a divine power. And how must I learn it there? For the most part, by having this divine sovereignty cross me at every turn. If I lay plans, to have divine sovereignty overthrowing them; if I wish for something very much, to have divine sovereignty thwarting me in it; if I want to be something, to have divine sovereignty in that very thing pulling me down; nay, if I want something really good, to find divine sovereignty bestowing it in a way most painful to my flesh. Thus we learn divine sovereignty where Jeremiah learnt it—in the prison-house, amidst persecutions, through afflictions, in sharp temptations, and having the corruptions of our heart laid bare. Here we learn God will execute his own purposes, let proud nature kick and rebel, pine and fret her utmost.

When, then, you “Call unto the Lord,” he begins to show you a little of divine sovereignty; and not merely shows it you, but brings you to submit to it. That is a very hard thing to be brought to—to submit to God’s sovereignty when it is thwarting some desired purpose, some deeply-cherished and much-longed-for plan, crossing you at every turn, disappointing the wishes of your heart! Can man, proud, rebellious, independent man, submit to God’s sovereignty? Yes! he can, when he is brought down by the Spirit of God, laid low, and made to find and feel that God will execute his own purposes, whether man kick against it or submit. To learn God’s sovereignty thus is somewhat different from lying on a sofa on a May morning, and reading Elisha Coles.

2. The salvation of the soul by the blood and obedience of God’s only-begotten Son, is another of these great and mighty things which God reveals in answer to true prayer. Is that point easily settled? the salvation of our souls? our interest in the love of the Lamb? our election before all time? our redemption by the precious blood of Jesus? our regeneration by the power of the Spirit? and our certain perseverance unto the heavenly kingdom? Is all this easily learnt? If you have learnt it so easily, you will have to go to another school. You have got to learn it again, to know

it in a different way. Salvation, as a doctrine, may be learnt in a quarter of an hour; salvation, as a blessing, may not be learnt in many years. When a vessel of mercy becomes exercised to know whether his name is in the Book of Life; whether the work of the Spirit is begun upon his heart; whether he is one of those for whom the Lamb of God shed his atoning blood; whether he is one of the sons or daughters of the Lord God Almighty; and becomes restless, tried, and exercised upon this point, he will call upon God to make that point clear in his soul. And it will be made manifest in God's own time and way; he will in answer to prayer give clearer or fainter testimonies to the soul's eternal salvation in the blood and righteousness of his dear Son.

3. The reason of all our trials; the end to be answered by all the providential circumstances through which we pass; the cause of all the afflictions, temptations, and distresses that the soul has had to endure; is another of those great and mighty things which God makes known in answer to true prayer. Can I often see the reason of them? I cannot. And I must say, if you often or usually can, you are favoured. There are some who, directly a trial comes, say, 'I know why this trial befalls me;' directly an affliction visits them, 'O, I see the reason of this affliction, and I am sure it will be a blessing to my soul.' If you can feel and speak in this way, you have stronger faith than the majority of God's people. The usual operation of affliction on the souls of God's people is this,—they know not why it has come upon them; they see not what profit it is to produce; they cannot believe any blessing is couched beneath it. As we cannot perceive the sun behind the cloud, so they cannot see the Lord's face when he hides himself behind a cloud of afflictions and sorrows. But the Lord says to his afflicted people, "Call unto me; seek my face; lay your petition at my footstool; press earnestly forward with thy request. I will show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not." "Thou knowest not what this trial is for; thou knowest not what is the benefit of these temptations thou art labouring under; thou knowest not what this affliction is to

produce; thou knowest not what this reverse in circumstances is to bring about. Thou art therefore tried, perplexed, exercised. But do not go to man; do not look to the creature; seek not to unravel it thyself; "Call unto me; I will show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." I will show thee what this trial is for, what this temptation is to do—to humble thee; this trouble is to wean thee from the world, this affliction to break some snare, this exercise to meeken and soften thy heart, and bring thee to the footstool of mercy. Thou shalt see that there is a blessing lodged beneath this trial and couched in this affliction, which thou wilt have reason to bless God for to the latest day of thy existence.' And I believe (it is not part of my theory, but, through mercy, part of my experience,) that our greatest blessings spring out of our greatest trials; and that those clouds which seem most dark, so dark that we think we never shall see a ray of light upon them, in God's own time and way disperse; light bursts through them;—and we bless God for the very trial, however heavy it may have been at the time, however much we may have despaired of seeing it made a blessing to our souls.

4. That all things work together for good to our souls; that whatever we pass through in providence or in grace, is for our spiritual profit—is another thing that God will show us when we rightly call upon his name. He says, "Call unto me." 'Do not go to the creature that is but a broken reed; do not trust to an arm of flesh—that will fail you when you want it most; come to me, to my bosom—pour out your petition in my ear; seek my face; lay your wants at my footstool. "Call unto me, I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."'

To believe that all our trials, temptations, and afflictions are working together for our spiritual good—is a great, a mighty thing, which often we know not. 'How can that be for my good, and how can this be for my good?' Is not our mind often thus perplexed? But the Lord says, "Call unto me, I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not;" amongst them,

that “all things are working together for good;” and that spiritual profit will be answered by all and each.

5. The superaboundings of God’s grace over the aboundings of our sin, is another great and mighty thing that God will shew and make known to those that call upon him. What a blessed truth is this—the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin! yet how painfully learnt. How the soul must grapple hard with sin and temptation! What workings up of the depth of our fallen nature before we can know any thing of the superaboundings of grace over it! But the Lord says, “Call unto me, I will answer thee; and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not”—and amongst them, the superaboundings of my mercy and grace over the aboundings of thy iniquity. Have iniquity and sin abounded in us? Have we felt and known it, and been so filled with it, as to have sunk very low at times with a sight and sense of what we have thought, said, or done? Have our backslidings, our vain thoughts, our inward adulteries and idolatries, and the workings of our fallen nature, sometimes made us sink very low, and to feel that sin has indeed abounded in us? “Call unto me, I will answer thee; and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.” Among them shall be the superaboundings of my grace over the aboundings of thy sin; that though “sin hath reigned unto death, grace shall reign through righteousness unto everlasting life;” that God takes occasion by the very sins of his people to manifest more of his mercy in forgiving them, his love in covering them, and his grace in superabounding over them.

Are not these rich blessings? Time will not suffice to enumerate more, such as the pardon of sin, the sweet enjoyment of God’s favour, testimonies of his eternal love, smiles of his loving countenance, the witness of the blessed Spirit, the leadings, guidings, and teachings of that divine Comforter.

These are the “great and mighty things” that God’s people are longing from time to time to experience. And is not the Lord from time to time drawing us to his bosom? and raising up sighs and cries

in the soul? When the Lord has raised up these inward desires, he answers them, and begins to show the “great and mighty things” which we know not, and to reveal the abundance of peace and truth.

If you have gathered my meaning (however feebly and faintly expressed,) from what I have endeavoured to speak this morning, you will have observed, that there are two leading features in every gracious man’s experience; one, a sense of his own sinfulness, ignorance, and helplessness; and the other, a longing and languishing after those blessings which God has to bestow. And these the Lord from time to time opens up to his soul, revealing to his heart, and discovering by the teaching and operations of his blessed Spirit those blessings, favours, and mercies, that he is longing to enjoy. And I believe, if you will look at your experience under the teachings and leadings of God in your soul, you will know something of this. You will find, that your experience may be summed up in these two features. Sometimes you have sunk very low, have been tried in your mind, harassed in your soul, deeply perplexed, every thing making against you and little for you. But the Lord from time to time has raised up desires, sighs, cries, and groans in your heart, draws you to his footstool of mercy, and there enables you to tell him all that you are and all that you want. And then, there are times and seasons when the Lord graciously and mercifully opens his hand, gives you a testimony, bestows upon you a word, a visit, a whisper, a smile, softens your heart, melts your soul, raises up some evidence, and blesses you more or less with that blessing which maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it.

Do you expect to have any other experience all your life long? Do you expect to find the dream of your early youth ever realized? to be better and better, holier and holier, wiser and wiser, stronger and stronger; every day that you live? I never expect to find the fond dream of my early religious youth thus fulfilled. But I believe, so far as God is our teacher, this will be, more or

less, our daily experience, so long as we are tenants in this fallen world—a growing sense of our sinfulness, ignorance, helplessness, nothingness, inability, and impotency. At times (for the Lord only at times makes us to feel our complete dependence upon him) we shall cry, sigh, and groan, breathe out our heart, wrestle with the Divine Majesty, and supplicate at his footstool. And then, there will sometimes come a word, a promise, a testimony, a token, a smile, a whisper, a melting, a softening, a breaking down, an encouragement; and this produces a going forward in the strength of the Lord. It is thus, and thus only, that we shall live to praise his name, and crown Jesus Lord of all.

Is not this the way which is most glorifying to God, though so humbling to man? And must not this be a right way? Shall you and I be such sacrilegious wretches, as under the cover of religion to creep into the very sanctuary, and snatch the Redeemer's crown off his head? But to be nothing but what God makes us, know nothing but what God teaches, feel nothing but what God inspires, enjoy nothing but what God communicates—this is to bless him for everything which he freely imparts. And therefore, in order to keep a sinner at the footstool of mercy all his days; to hide pride from man, and abase him in his own eyes; to break to pieces all his wisdom, strength, and righteousness, God keeps his people ever poor and needy, ever crying, sighing and begging for what he has to bestow. And when he gives it, it is in a gracious, in a sweetly manifestative way, that the creature shall know from whom it comes, and not be able to take to itself an atom of glory. And thus, by these gracious dealings upon the hearts of his people, contrary to flesh and blood, contrary to our fond dream of early days, contrary to all the arguments and reasonings of our reasoning mind, and to the creed of all the world, religious or profane, the Lord carries on his own work in his own way. And thus, when a man is sufficiently humbled to be raised; sufficiently brought down to be made to stand; sufficiently stripped to be clothed; and sufficiently emptied to be richly filled—then, the Lord begins to manifest his favour,

grace, and love; and thus he covers the creature with shame, while he crowns himself with glory.

110 The Valley of Baca

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie street, London, on Lord's Day Evening,
July 28, 1846

“Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee, in whose heart are the ways of them, who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength: every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.”

Psalm 84:5, 6, 7

The time and circumstances under which this Psalm was written we may fairly gather from the internal evidences of the Psalm itself. First, then, this Psalm was composed whilst “the ark of God dwelt within curtains,” and therefore whilst the tabernacle was yet standing, before Solomon's temple was erected. This we gather from verse 1: “How amiable are thy tabernacles,” (or tents) “O Lord of hosts!” Secondly, it was written after the ark of God had been brought to Mount Zion, the city of David, of which we have a full account given us in 2 Samuel 6; this we gather from the 7th verse, “They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.” Thirdly, the Psalm was composed during the time of David's flight from Jerusalem: for it is the language of one who was sighing after the courts of the Lord, and yet was debarred from approaching them. By this internal evidence, therefore, the time is strictly fixed to the flight and exile of David from Jerusalem on account of Absalom's rebellion.

David, then, in his exile, was mourning after the blessings and privileges of those true believers who were going up to the house of the Lord, according to his command, to worship at Jerusalem. We cannot enter into the feelings of a true Israelite upon these occasions. The Lord has ordained that three times in the year all

their males should appear before him. They came up from different parts of the land, according to this command; and there, from time to time, the Lord met with and blessed their souls. There they had a glimpse of the glory of the Lord dwelling between the cherubim; there they had their prayers answered, and their souls refreshed; and there they beheld, typically and figuratively foreshadowed, “the true tabernacle,” the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, “which God pitched, and not man.”

But David was debarred from going up to the house of the Lord. He was sitting solitary, and mourning, not only on account of the deep mortification of being driven from his throne, but also at not being able to come before the Lord, as in times of old. He envied therefore the very sparrow and the swallow that could fly through the air, and take up their happy abode beneath those altars which his soul so longed to approach. And doubtless, there was one feeling which pressed very hard on David’s soul: that his sins had driven him into exile. The finger of scorn throughout Israel was pointed at him as an open adulterer and convicted murderer. Thus, he had not only the melancholy feeling of being debarred from approaching God’s sanctuary; but this feeling was deeply increased by the guilt and shame that he had brought upon his own head.

Now while he was thus solitarily musing upon these pilgrims going upward to Jerusalem to worship the Lord in his earthly courts in Zion, his soul seems to have fallen into a train of holy and spiritual meditation. This earthly pilgrimage foreshadowed to him the pilgrimage of a saint heavenward; and thus, viewing all the circumstances of their journey, his thoughts turned upon what this pilgrimage spiritually typified; and he breaks out into this blessing upon God’s worshipping people : “Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will still be praising thee.”

But are these the only persons blessed? No. He adds “Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee;” who has something more than the mere outward privilege of drawing near these courts; whose inward strength is in God, and who draws his supplies out of his

fulness of grace and mercy. “Blessed is the man,” he further adds, “in whose heart,” that is, in whose experience, through divine teaching and divine testimony, “are the ways of them, who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well.”

In considering the words of the text this evening, I shall view them as the Holy Ghost has given us the spiritual clue to their import. There is a true spiritualization of God’s word, and there is a false spiritualization of it. Some men can see deep mysteries in the “nine-and-twenty knives” that came from Babylon; in the oak beneath which Deborah was buried; and I dare say, some would find unfathomable depths in “Appii Forum, and the Three Taverns.” (Acts 28:15.) But we cannot build up a spiritual interpretation except the Holy Ghost has laid a foundation, nor track out a path unless he has given us a clue. But as the blessed Spirit, by the mouth and pen of David, has here given us a spiritual clue, we may follow these pilgrims in their journey up to the earthly Jerusalem, and see in it a lively representation of the true pilgrims journeying to heaven, their happy home.

We will then, as the Lord may enable, endeavour severally to unfold the distinct clauses of our text. Observe, then,

I.—First, the blessing that David pronounces upon the man whose strength is in God. “Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee.” But where shall we find that man? Where are we to look for him? In what corner does he dwell? I am bold to say, that no man ever had his strength in God until he had lost all his own. I am bold to say, from Scripture and from experience, that no man ever felt or ever knew, spiritually and experimentally, what it was to put his trust and confidence in God, who had not been thoroughly weaned and emptied from putting all trust and confidence in himself. Therefore, when David pronounces this spiritual blessing, “Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee,” his eye was fixed upon a certain gracious character, one who had been deeply emptied, one whose strength had been turned into weakness, his wisdom into

folly, and his comeliness into corruption. How are you, how am I, to put our trust in an invisible God? Can I see him? And can I put my trust in an invisible being? It is impossible, unless I have faith to see God, who is invisible. Two distinct things must therefore meet in my heart, under the Spirit's secret operations, before I can come in for any share of this blessing. I must, first, by a work of grace upon my soul be weakened; as we read, "He weakened my strength in the way." "He brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help." I must be weakened by being experimentally taught that all my natural strength in divine things is but impotency and helplessness. And how can I learn this, but through a series of trials? I must have temptations; and find my strength against these temptations utterly powerless. I must have trials; and find these trials so great, that my own strength is insufficient to bear them. I must have a discovery of God's majesty, purity, and holiness, that all my strength may wither at the glance of the eye of God in my conscience. I must sink down into creature ruin, hopelessness, and helplessness, before I can ever give up the fancied idea of strength in myself. Man is born an independent creature. It is the very breath of a natural man. "Independence" was once my boasted motto. It suits the proud heart to rest upon itself. And our rebellious nature will always rest upon self, until self has received its death-blow from the slaughter-weapon that the man clothed with linen carries in his hand. (Ezek. 9.)

Now this in most cases will take a series of trials to produce. We are not stripped in a day; we are not emptied in a day; we are not ruined and brought to beggary and rags in a day. Many of the Lord's people are years learning that they have nothing and are nothing. They have to pass through trial after trial, temptation after temptation, affliction after affliction, before they learn the secret of creature weakness, creature helplessness, and creature hopelessness.

But there is another requisite. It is not sufficient for me to know my poverty, my ruin, my wretchedness; I must have something

more than this revealed in my heart. I must have another lesson unfolded to my soul by the power of God the Spirit. I must learn this sacred truth, "I have laid help upon One that is mighty." I must be taught to say, "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." I must know what the Lord Jesus so sweetly unfolded to the Apostle Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9.)

Have you found out these two things in your heart? How many years have some here made a profession, have come to hear the truth preached, have approved of the testimony of God's servants, and have read the writings of gracious men! But have you learnt these two lessons yet? first, creature weakness, helplessness, and hopelessness; to sink down into your miserable self; to be filled with confusion; to have nothing in yourselves but rags and ruin? And then, has the Spirit opened up, brought down into your heart, and unfolded to your soul that precious Mediator between God and man, "the Hope of Israel," the blessed Jesus, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, that on him you may lean, in him you may trust, and upon whom you may rely to bring you safely through all? If you have learnt experimentally in your conscience those two lessons,—creature weakness and Creator might—the helplessness of man and the power of God—then you come in for the blessing, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee."

II.—"In whose heart are the ways of them, who passeth through the valley of Baca, make it a well." David casts a glimpse here at those pilgrims who were travelling their upward journey to worship God in Zion. He marks their road, and takes occasion to spiritualize it; for he says, "In whose heart," in whose experience, in whose soul, "are the ways" of these pilgrims Zionward.

What are these "ways?" It is this, that "passing through the valley of Baca, they make it a well." This valley of Baca appears to have been a very perilous pass, through which pilgrims journeyed toward Jerusalem: and on account of the difficulties, dangers, and sufferings that they met with, it was named "the valley of Baca," or

‘the valley of weeping,’ ‘the vale of tears.’

And is not this very emblematical and figurative of the vale of tears through which God’s people journey in their course heavenward? There are many circumstances which draw tears from their weeping eyes. Depend upon it, if, in the course of your profession, you have never known anything of this valley of Baca, you have mistaken the road; you are not travelling through the true valley to reach Zion; you are taking another route which leads not heavenward, but to eternal destruction. Many are the circumstances in providence that draw tears from the eyes, and cause poignant sorrow to be felt in the heart of the true child of God. Men naturally have many sorrows in their course through life. But the Lord’s people seem to have a double portion allotted to them. They have the cares of life like their fellow-mortals; they have sources of temporal sorrow in common with their fellow-sinners. But, in addition to these providential afflictions, they have that which is peculiar to themselves—spiritual grief, burdens, and sorrows. Some of the Lord’s people are deeply sunk in poverty; others, have an almost daily cross from a suffering and weakly tabernacle; others, have to endure persecutions, and to receive many severe blows from sinners and severer from saints; others, have family afflictions; others are mourning over their blighted schemes, and the disappointment of all their temporal expectations. But, added to these temporal trials that the Lord’s people have to pass through in common with their fellow-men, they have spiritual trials that far outweigh any of a temporal nature. Sharp and cutting temptations; the workings of a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; the hidings of the Lord’s countenance; the doubts and alarms that work in their minds whether their feet are upon the rock; the fear of death, and the prospect of eternity; the harassing darts of the Wicked One; inward guilt and grief on account of an idolatrous, adulterous, and backsliding nature—these are but a small portion of those sorrows

that draw tears from the true pilgrim’s eye. It is indeed a vale of tears for the Lord’s family, a “valley of Baca,” which they have to pass through to reach the heavenly Zion.

But the Psalmist says, “Blessed is the man in whose heart are the ways of them, who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well.” Here is the distinctive character of the true pilgrim. Not that he is journeying merely through the “valley of Baca;” not that his eyes are drowned in tears; not that his heart is filled with sorrows; not that his soul is cut with temptations; not that his mind is tried by suffering. But this is his distinctive feature—he “makes it a well.” This the ungodly know nothing of; this the professing world, for the most part, are entirely unacquainted with; but this is the “secret which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen.”

One feature of the “valley of Baca” was, that the burning sun above, and the parched ground beneath, at the time of year when the pilgrims travelled, made the whole valley arid and dry. But “they made it a well.” There were wells dug in this valley of Baca for the pilgrims to slake their thirst at. And David, looking at these wells dug for the pilgrims, applies them spiritually to the refreshment that the Lord’s people meet with in their course Zionward.

“Make it a well;” that is, there are from time to time sweet refreshments in this valley of tears; there are bubblings up of divine consolation; there are fountains of living waters, streams of heavenly pleasures. And when the sun-burnt, weary pilgrims, all parched and dry, are journeying through this valley, and their tongues cleave to the roof of their mouths with thirst, the Lord from time to time opens up in this valley a well; as we read, Isa. 41:17, 18, “When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.” Some manifestation of his gracious presence, some promise coming with

power to the soul, some testimony of interest in the love and blood of Jesus, some smile from his countenance, some word from his lips, some encouraging testimony that the feet are upon the Rock, is given. This is a well at which his thirst is slaked; his parched tongue no longer cleaves to his palate; he drinks of the water that bubbles up from the thirsty soil to refresh the weary Pilgrim.

By this you may know whether you are a pilgrim Zionward. You all find this fallen world a vale of tears; you have burdens, sorrows, and afflictions of various kinds. But have you nothing more? If there be nothing more, are you a pilgrim? This is their distinctive feature—they “make it a well.” What! no refreshments from the divine presence? no sweet encouragements from time to time in prayer? no blessing under the preached word? no melting of heart from a sense of the Lord’s kindness to your soul? no glimpses and glances of a precious Jesus? no bubblings up of life and feeling to soften a hard heart? It will not do to call yourself a pilgrim merely because you have trials, and are journeying through a vale of tears. We must have something more than this to prove that we are pilgrims; we must have wells—“a well of water,” as the Lord speaks, “springing up into everlasting life”—divine refreshments, gracious manifestations, heavenly testimonies—something from God that comforts, that blesses, that waters the soul, and makes it like a watered garden. And is it not the vale of tears, the dry, the parched, the arid, the sun-burnt valley, that makes the well so acceptable? I remember a friend of mine telling me, that once journeying through one of the deserts in Asia, they came to a well; and the disappointment of the company when they found the well was dry, he said, no language could depict; their grief and trouble when, after hours’ travelling, they came at night to encamp by the well, and found that the sun had dried it up, were indeed most acute. As therefore, none but pilgrims through the dry and parched valley could adequately feel the sweetness of the natural well; so none but spiritual pilgrims, afflicted, exercised, and harassed, can feel the sweetness of the “pure water of life” that the Lord at times refreshes

the soul with.

When David therefore blesses the pilgrims, he does not bless them on account of their travelling through the “valley of Baca;” he does not bless them for the tears that fall from their eyes, for the sorrows that fill their hearts, for the afflictions and perplexities that they are tried with; but because they make it a well. Because it is not all darkness, but there is sometimes a ray of light; because it is not all despondency, but sometimes beams of hope; because it is not all unbelief, but sometimes the actings of faith; because it is not all temptations, trials, and afflictions, but sometimes the sweet refreshings and revivings of God’s gracious presence.

III.—“The rain also filleth the pools.” It appears that there were “pools,” or tanks, which were built for the use of the pilgrims as they journeyed through this valley. The wells of springing water were not their only resource; lest they should fail, there were tanks or pools constructed; and these derived their supplies of water from the rain that fell into them. And may we not give this a spiritual interpretation? I think we justly may, without violating the mind and meaning of the Spirit. These pools, then, seem to represent what are called the means of grace, the ordinances of the Lord’s house, and those various helps that God himself has appointed; but which are in themselves as desolate and dry as the pool or tank, and want the rain of heaven to fill them with sweet and refreshing water for the use of the weary pilgrims.

1. For instance—prayer and supplication, waiting upon the Lord, going to his footstool, begging him to appear on our behalf—this is a pool which the Lord has appointed. “Call unto me; I will answer thee.” “Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” “For all these things will I be enquired of by the house of Israel, that I may do it.” “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.” Here are pools; but do we not want the rain to fill them? What is prayer, unless the Lord inspire the petition? What is prayer, unless the Lord give

an answer? I remember, many years ago, seeing in Canterbury Cathedral, the shrine of Thomas a Beckett; and—would you believe it?—the pavement is actually worn into hollows by the pilgrims who used to kneel there in the superstitious days of Popery. How many true prayers were offered at that idolatrous shrine? Prayers! Abominations in the sight of a holy God! Yet they could wear the pavement hollow with their knees. But have not you and I offered prayers equally unacceptable to the Lord God of hosts as the prayers that were offered at the shrine of Thomas a Beckett? Yes, thousands. But when “the rain filleth the pools,” it is different. When the Lord draws, the soul runs; when the Lord inspires, the soul breathes; when the Lord smiles, the soul melts; when the Lord invites, the soul follows; when he says, “Call unto me,” we come, beg, and pray. When “the rain filleth the pools,” we are like Hannah of old, who when she had poured out her heart before the Lord, and got the answer of peace from Eli’s mouth, went her way and was no more sad; she had drunk a draught of the pool.

2. Are not God’s promises pools? How they are strewed up and down God’s word, like the pools or tanks in “the valley of Baca!” But have you not sometimes come to the promises, and found them as dry as the brooks spoken of in the 6th chapter of Job, which so disappointed the companies of Sheba. I read the promises—can they refresh my soul? I may come to the pool; but if the pool is dry, will coming to the dry pool refresh my parched palate? No. The rain must fill it. When the rain has filled the pool, I can then bow down, and slake my thirst. The rain of God’s grace, and the dew of heaven, must drop into the promise, and fill the pool that you and I may come to it, feel a sweetness in it, and have our souls refreshed and strengthened by it.

3. And is not preaching a pool? Has not God appointed “by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe?” But have not you and I often found it a dry pool? How many sermons have you heard during the past year that really blessed, comforted, and strengthened your soul? Has one in ten, one in twenty, one in a

hundred, really brought a blessing into your heart by the power of God? How often these pools are dry! I find them so; you find them so, who know the difference between letter and spirit, between “bodily exercise which profiteth little,” and the power of vital godliness that is profitable unto all things. The Lord will teach his people this; and he will teach it his ministers also. They may construct a pool: in their parlours at home they may build a very pretty tank; it may be divided and sub divided; a cell here, and a compartment there: and they may come with their pools to chapel; but unless the rain fill it from above, all their ingenuity will be thrown away, and they had better have left it high and dry at home.

4. Are not the ordinances of God’s house pools? And have we not had continual experience how barren, how dry these pools sometimes are? Have we not sometimes sat at the table of the Lord, and blasphemous thoughts, filthy imaginations, horrible workings filled our minds? Have we not felt carnality, deadness, bondage, darkness? no rain filling the pool? And have we not looked upon the baptismal pool, and though filled with rain from the roof, it never profited unless the rain from heaven filled the spiritual ordinance, as well as the rain from above has filled the natural baptistery.

So we might travel through the various means of grace which God has spoken of in his word; and we should find alike in all, that unless God fill the pools, they cannot slake our spiritual thirst.

But this is the blessedness of the pilgrims, that the rain does sometimes fill the pools. It is not with them all deadness in prayer, all coldness in reading, or all darkness in hearing. There are sometimes heavenly manifestations, diving refreshments, and breakings in of the Lord’s presence and favour; this is the rain filling the pools. And when the rain fills the pools, then it is, and then only, that they afford any life or feeling to our souls.

IV.—“They go from strength to strength.” It is in the margin, “from company to company.” I rather think, that the meaning

implied is, “they go from halting place to halting place.” There were certain fixed spots where the whole company rested at night; as we read, when the infant Jesus tarried in Jerusalem, his parents knew it not: they supposed that he was “in the company;” that is, had gone on with the travelling pilgrims: but when night came, and they looked for him, he was not there. (Luke 2:44.)

These halting places were certain spots where the caravan of the travelling pilgrims rested at night; by these successive haltings their strength was recruited, and they were enabled to bear the long journey, rising in the morning refreshed with their night’s rest.

The Psalmist viewing it spiritually, says, “They go from strength to strength.” At each halting place they received fresh strength to pursue their journey onward. And is not this true in grace? There are halting places in the divine life, spots of rest, where the true pilgrims renew their strength. For instance; every manifestation of the Lord is a communication of divine strength, a recruiting place, where the soul renews its strength to travel onward. Every promise that comes with sweet power is another halting place where the traveller may rest. Every discovery of interest in Christ; every glimpse of the grace and glory of Jesus; every word from the Lord’s lips; every smile from the Lord’s face; every token for good; everything that encourages, supports, blesses, and comforts the soul, enabling it to go onwards towards its heavenly home—is a halting place, where the pilgrim rests, and where he recruits his weary limbs. And where can we rest, except where God rests? But does not God “rest in his love?” And can we rest anywhere short of God’s love shed abroad in our heart? Does not God rest in his dear Son? Did not this voice come from the excellent glory, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?” All the satisfaction of God centres in Jesus; all the delight of the Father rests in the Son of his love. “Behold my servant; whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth!” (Isa. 42:1.) Can we then rest anywhere but where God rests? Is it not spiritually with us as with the Israelites of old? When the cloud tarried, they tarried;

when the cloud went, they went; when the cloud moved onward they followed it; and when the cloud stopped, they halted, and rested beneath its shadow. What rest can I have in my troubles, afflictions, exercises, and temptations? Can I rest in them? I might just as well think of trying to rest myself on the bottom of the Thames; I might just as well try to lie down on some deep slough, and there recline my weary bones. As to resting on doubts and fears, trials and temptations, griefs and sorrows, exercises and perplexities, the troubled bosom of the sea is as much a bed for the storm-tossed mariner, as exercises and troubles are for the weary pilgrim. I cannot, I must not rest short of that rest which “remaineth for the people of God.” What is that? Christ—the true Sabbath. I can only rest in his finished work, in his atoning blood, in his dying love, in his imputed righteousness. He, and he only, can be the rest of my restless soul. And when I can do that, I am like the weary caravan of pilgrims travelling Zionward; they halted for the night; they sweetly slept, for the shadow of God’s everlasting love was over them; and thus they recruited their strength for the next day’s journey. But mark, they were not always resting. They had alternate journeyings by day, and restings by night; the thorns of the valley often lacerated their tender feet; the burning sun beat upon their aching heads; the wild beasts of the valley howled and shrieked through the bushes; banditti perhaps hovered upon the rocks, waiting to cut off a stragglng passenger; the trackless wilderness was behind, the wild desert before, and Zion to them at a boundless distance. Yet on they journeyed, and never went back. They had a certain goal in view; Zion, Zion, their eyes were fixed upon; and the thought of reaching this cheered them as they went on.

Is it not so with spiritual pilgrims? Is it always rest with you? Are you always satisfied that you are a child of God? Are you always certain that heaven is your home? Can you always rest in God’s love to your soul? Can you always find Christ precious to your heart? I cannot; if you can. We have to journey onward; another day of

sorrow, another day of trial, another day of temptation, another day of exercise—each day bringing a new trial. Yet we journey onward; not driven from truth, not driven from Zion, not driven from God, not driven from Jesus—onward, onward, onward we go; our faces set Zionward, our backs towards the world. These poor weary pilgrims would often march staggering and fainting on under their burdens, burnt by the rays of the sun, scarce able to move one foot before another. But the halting place is reached; the signal is given; they draw up on the sand; once more they rest, and their strength is recruited. It is so spiritually. God gives a little rest to the soul; some manifestation, some evidence, some testimony; a word, a look, a smile, a glimpse, a glance. “They go from strength to strength.” Is not this strength? There is no other. “Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee.” Therefore it is “from strength to strength.” It must be God’s strength he goes forward in, not his own. If it were his own, he would not come under the blessing; “whose strength is in thee.” If he could rest when he would, eat when he would, drink when he would, he would not want the Lord to be the “strength of his heart and his portion for ever.” This puts sweetness into the pilgrimage: “they go from strength to strength,” from halting place to halting place, from refreshment to refreshment. For it was at these halting places the wells were dug; at these pools they tarried for the night, and sometimes found them filled with the rain of heaven. Thus they not only rested their weary limbs upon the desert, but they slaked their thirst at the well, or pool, and ate of the palm that overshadowed their head. And is it not so spiritually? Where we rest, there we find water, refreshment, and strength. We do not find the pool when we are journeying onward; but when we are weary, exhausted, and faint, the Lord opens rivers in the wilderness, and waters in the desert; and when we come there, we are allowed to tarry for a night, as the children of Israel encamped by the waters of Elim.

V.—And then, what comes as the glorious consequence? O sweet winding-up of this heavenly subject! O blessed crown that the

Lord puts upon it all! “Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.” None perished by the way, none were devoured by the wild beasts, none cut off by the wandering banditti, none fainted on the road; some perhaps, straggling in the rear, and others coming in late and lagged. But when the company is counted, none are missing; old men and young children, tender women and stout youth—all the company of the pilgrim caravan—when they are counted, one by one, all answer to their names. “Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.”

And is not this true spiritually of God’s own family? What did the Lord say? “Those thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition.” And when he presents his innumerable host of redeemed souls before the throne of the Almighty, will not this be the language of his lips to his Father? “Behold me, and the children whom thou hast given me.” “Thine they were; for all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.” And will not this be the theme of every spiritual pilgrim? “Kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.” As the Lord is true, no spiritual pilgrim will ever fall and die in the valley of Baca. Some may fear that through temptation, their strong passions or boiling lusts will one day break out and destroy them. No, not if they are pilgrims. “Every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.” Others may think they never shall have a testimony; they never shall read their name clearly in the Book of Life; the Lord will never appear in their heart or bless their soul; they never shall be able to say, “Abba, Father.” If Jesus is theirs, they shall. But are they spiritual pilgrims? Do they find it a vale of tears? Are their faces Zionward? Have they come out of the world? Do they sometimes make the valley of Baca a well? And does the rain fill the pools? And have they ever had strength made perfect in weakness? Then every one of them will appear before God in Zion. Blessed end! Sweet accomplishment of the pilgrim’s hopes, desires, and expectations! The crowning blessing of all that God has to bestow!

“Every one of them appeareth before God,” washed in the Saviour’s blood, clothed in the Redeemer’s righteousness, adorned with all the graces of the Spirit, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. No weeping then! The valley of Baca is passed, and tears wiped from off all faces. No thorns to lacerate the weary feet there; no prowling wild beasts to seize the unwary traveller there; no roving banditti to surprise stragglers there; no doubts and fears and cutting sorrows to grieve, perplex, and burden them there. Safe in Zion, safe in the Redeemer’s bosom, safe in their Husband’s arms, safe before the throne, every one of them appeareth before God in glory.

Pilgrim of Zion, take a glimpse at your spiritual life. Do see if you can find the features of the spiritual pilgrimage in it. How does it begin? “Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee.” Is your strength in God? Have you learnt your weakness, feebleness, helplessness, hopelessness, and been enabled to cast anchor within the veil, and lean your weary soul upon the strength of Jesus? You are a blessed man; you have set out Zionward; your feet are in the road that leads to glory. How have you found the road? Very easy to your feet? A green, grassy, flowery garden? a smooth meadow, with primroses and violets in the hedges, and you every now and then sitting on a stile, inhaling the breath of the May morn? or sometimes reclining on the grass, listening to the nightingale? This is not the way to heaven; you have mistaken the road. The way to heaven is through “the valley of Baca!” the vale of tears—a dry, parched, and burnt up valley, with thorns lacerating the passenger’s feet; the wild beasts lurking in the covert; and Satan and his host, as armed prowlers, seeking to destroy. Depend upon it, if we find the way very smooth, very easy, very pleasing, and very agreeable, we have made a grand mistake; we have not got into the right road yet. God bring those in the road who are his people, that have at present mistaken it!

But you, traveller and pilgrim Zionward, have you not found it a valley of tears, have you not had cutting things in providence,

heavy trials, harassing temptations, fiery darts, persecutions, sufferings from men, and above all from yourselves? But have you not sometimes found a well open? Have you not sometimes found the Lord to be, what he says he is, “a Fountain of living waters?” And have you not sometimes come to the blessed Jesus all dry, all parched, all languid, and all sinking; and found some glimpses, glances, and testimonies? These have refreshed, strengthened, comforted, and blessed you. Then you are a pilgrim! though you have found the way that leads to Zion a vale of tears; yet in that tearful valley you have every now and then found a well. Then you are a pilgrim! Let the devil, let unbelief, let men, let persecutors, let the world, let your heart say to the contrary, God has blessed you in his word as a spiritual pilgrim.

And have you not found also that rain has filled the pools? It has not been always dry with you; it has not been always a barren land; there has been a melting, a softening, a breaking down, a something that has watered your heart; you have felt blessed from time to time under the preaching of the truth, in reading the word, in secret prayer, in the pouring out of your soul before God. You are a pilgrim!—another mark for you! And have you not sometimes found strength? You have had temptations, but you have had strength to bear them; you have had trials, but you have had grace to endure them; you have had persecutions, but you have had support under them; you have had heart-rending afflictions, but the Lord has not suffered you to be destroyed by them; there has been some secret strength communicated to your soul; you have leant upon an unseen arm, and have found support in invisible realities. Another mark that you are a pilgrim!

And then, sweetest, crowning mercy, that “every one”—(O what there is in these words? doubting, fearing, tried, tempted, distressed, exercised, and sorrowing pilgrim)—“every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.” So that when the Redeemer counts his sheep, and they shall again pass under the hand of him that telleth them, not one of the ransomed will be missing, but all will

be present to sing for ever the glory and praise of a Three-One God.

111 Heavenly Buying

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening,
August 3, 1846

“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”

Rev. 3:17, 18

These words, I need scarcely remark, are addressed to the church of Laodicea. The seven churches in Asia Minor are thought by some to represent so many distinct phases or appearances of the church from the Lord's ascension to his coming a second time in glory. But, whether it be so or not, one thing is certain, that the messages addressed to them are pregnant with the richest instruction; that they are adapted to the wants and exigencies of the church of God in all time; and that they form a part of the inspired word of truth, of that treasury out of which the Holy Ghost applies promises, precepts, and counsels, as the church of God from time to time needs. Of all these churches, that of Laodicea seems to have been most deeply sunk, to have departed most widely from the right ways of the Lord. But we are not to suppose that the church of Laodicea had drunk in erroneous principles. We have no charge brought against her that she had fallen into error or heresy. She, no doubt, maintained the truth; but how did she maintain it? In form, but not in power; in the letter, but not in the spirit. She had all the requisites of a church, as to external forms; but the life-giving Spirit

of God was sadly wanting. Yet, with all her declensions and all her decays, she was doubtless a church of God; for she is addressed as such. The Lord gives counsels, such as he gave her, to those only that are his. But she had departed from the state in which she was when first named in the New Testament, for we have her honourably mentioned about thirty years preceding this time in the Epistle to the Colossians (4:13-16.) Those thirty years had witnessed a great change in her. Many of her gracious members had been taken home; and circumstances had introduced into her communion those who appeared to be, but were not, partakers of the grace of God. Thus, though she maintained all the external appearance of a church of God, the eye of eternal Purity and Omniscience detected in her those symptoms which marked her decay, and probably were the prelude to her utter excision.

In considering these words, we may look:—

I.—At the state of the Laodicean church.

II.—At the good and wise counsel that the Lord gives her.

I.—With respect to the state of the Laodicean church, we may observe that there was her real state, and there was her fancied state. These did not agree. In her own opinion, she was “rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing.” But the Lord knew her to be in a very different state, actually and experimentally, from what she thought of herself, and the standing she maintained among her sister churches. He knew, that with all her pretensions, she was really “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Let us, then, take a glance at her fancied state, before we enter more minutely into her real state.

i. What she says of her fancied state, she no doubt uttered in the honesty of her heart. Like a person in a consumption, she

was unaware of the malady preying upon her vitals: she sincerely believed she was what she appeared to be. It was the language of sincerity, though it was the language of mistake. She had no eyes to see her spiritual condition, no tender conscience to feel it, no spirit of discernment to be aware of it. When therefore, she said she was “rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing,” she really believed that things were with her as she professed them to be. But the Lord’s eye viewed her far, far differently.

1. This, then, was the language of her lips, “I am rich.” But what made her utter these words? Doubtless she had a sound knowledge of the doctrines of grace; and holding them firmly in her judgment, and knowing that the church was enriched with all heavenly treasures in Christ, she therefore laid claim to a personal interest in these riches. Thus merely because she held the doctrines of grace, she believed she was “rich” in God’s favour, “rich” in the mercies that God bestows on his people in Christ Jesus. But she was completely ignorant all the time of her desperate bankruptcy. In this she resembled what often takes place naturally. How many a merchant or tradesman bears the character of possessing great wealth! Nay, he himself, from want of a knowledge of his affairs, of the state of his books, and of his outstanding engagements, may believe himself to be what he is generally thought—a man of property and substance. But a crash comes, and his name is in the Gazette. Such appears to have been the state of the church at Laodicea. Because she had a knowledge of the doctrines of grace; because she maintained the ordinances of God’s house; because she had not fallen into open sin; because she had not drunk into error or heresy; because she maintained her standing among the churches; because they highly extolled her as a church which contended for the truth as it is in Jesus, she took all these external appearances for inward divine realities; and therefore, in the language of honesty, though in the language of self-deception, she said, “I am rich.” ‘Look at me,’ she boldly said, ‘I maintain an exalted standing among the churches of God; I hold firmly the doctrines of

grace; all the treasures of Christ are therefore mine.’

2. “And increased with goods.” Not only did she boast that she was rich, as not doubting her interest in God’s everlasting love, and as being blessed with heavenly riches in Christ Jesus; but she went a step further—“I am increased with goods.” She possessed a sound and clear judgment; she knew perfectly truth from error; who were the ministers of God, and who the ministers of Satan; who preached with power, and who preached in the letter; who were right in the things of God, and who were wrong. She had a keen eye to discover the first breakings out of heresy, and she had a clear knowledge in her judgment what were the operations of God in the soul. Outwardly too, she was in a flourishing condition. She could boast, perhaps, of ‘a talented pastor;’ had probably many wealthy members; had large accessions, and was spreading on the right hand and on the left. And having this carnal prosperity, she could boast, “I am increased with goods.” Her members too had many spiritual gifts; some could pray, some exhort, some open up Scripture, some converse on the things of God. Thus all seemed prosperity, while there was rottenness at the very heart’s core.

3. But besides all this, she could go even a step farther, and say, she stood in “need of nothing.” She was not sensible, as the people of God deeply are, of her poverty, want, and necessity. She had “need of nothing.” She had that unwavering assurance, that undoubting confidence, that firm standing in the things of God, to which nothing could be added. She wanted no more knowledge; for she had the perfection of knowledge in herself. She needed no communications of grace to her soul. As long as she maintained the doctrine of grace, she wanted nothing of the power of grace. She wanted no heavenly testimonies, no divine smiles, no sweet assurances from the Lord’s own lips, no breakings in of the light of the Lord’s countenance upon her soul, no gracious whisperings, “I have loved thee.” She had no temptations to be delivered from, no snares to be broken, no idols to be purged out of her heart, no worldly spirit from which to be cleansed. She had “need of nothing.”

She was so firm in her own standing, so wise in her own conceit, so built up in pride, ignorance, and presumption, that she could look God in the face, and tell him that she had “need of nothing.” Can we believe—could we believe, if it were not the express testimony of God—that ever a church of God could be in this self-deluded state? Yet, doubtless, there are hundreds of churches in this land on whom the Laodicean stamp is as deeply marked, and who are as completely eaten up with pride and wrapped up in delusion as ever the church of Laodicea was.

ii. But what was her real state? Her fancied state was one thing—her real state was another. She was like a patient who goes to a physician; and the physician’s eye sees in a moment the real state of the case. He examines his chest, and listens attentively to those sounds that unpractised ears cannot discover; and he perceives the man is afflicted with some heart or lung disease, of which he himself and his family are completely ignorant. He thought perhaps it was some trifling ailment; that he should be well in a day or two, and would soon pursue his usual business. He was not aware of the real nature of the disease; he knew not the dangerous state of the case. So spiritually. The church of Laodicea was saying, “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” ‘I have everything that a church of God should have—I am everything that a church of God should be.’ But O, how differently did the eyes of Omniscience see her from what she fancied herself to be! And what was the judgment which the voice of Omniscience pronounced upon her? “Thou knowest not”—there was the misery! She knew it not! It was hid from her eyes! She had not light to see it; she had not life to feel it. Had she but known it, there would have been some escape for her. Had she but mourned under it, then the Lord would have healed her disease. But this was the fatal symptom of the malady that was preying upon her vitals—she knew it not! She was not aware of her real state; the veil of ignorance, blindness, and self-delusion, was spread over her; and she knew not how she stood in the sight of him with whom she had to do.

1. “And knowest not, that thou art wretched;” that is, she was altogether destitute of everything in God’s eyes that constitutes true riches. With all her pretended wealth, she was but a beggar, a “wretched” beggar, such as we meet in the streets, all filth, rags, and tatters. And yet, she said, she was “rich!” Spiritual insanity possessed her. She was like some maniac, enclosed in Bethlehem’s walls, who fancies himself a king. He takes the straw spread for his couch, and plaits it into a crown, and from the wood laid for his fuel cuts a sceptre; and when he has put his straw diadem upon his head, he wields his wooden sceptre, and swells, and struts, and mimics the majesty of kings. Alas! alas! his deluded mind makes him fancy himself a monarch, when he is but the tenant of a madhouse. Who would not pity such an object? If we went within those gloomy walls, should we not pity him, and pity him the more, because he fancied himself a king, while he was but an imprisoned slave? So was it with the church of Laodicea. She said she was “rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing;” and from labouring under this delusion was a “wretched,” pitiable object. Have you not sometimes visited the bed of a person dying of consumption? You have seen death stamped upon his brow, and you have been told by his physician that a few weeks or days will close the scene. Yet when you have spoken to him, he has told you all his plans; he has talked of returning health; and how soon he hoped to go abroad again as usual. Perhaps you wanted faithfulness to tell him what you knew; but did not your heart bleed all the more to see him wrapped up in such a delusion? And was it not sinking to your soul, when you knew that he was dying and that in a few weeks the grave would close over him, to hear him talk of returning health, and of his schemes never, never to be fulfilled? So with the Church of Laodicea. She was pluming herself upon her health, whilst disease was preying upon her vitals. She was “miserable” for that very reason—an object of compassion to be bewailed over, because she had so sunk from her first state, because she was deceiving and deluding herself, and believing she

was what she was not.

2. But besides this, she was “poor.” And why was she poor? Because she wanted that which alone is true riches. What are true riches? The manifestations of God’s mercy to the soul, the smiles of his countenance, and the whisperings of his love; the work of his grace, the operations of his Spirit; the power, savour, and unction that accompany divine blessings; the teachings, leadings, and guidings of the Lord the Comforter; the sweet bedewings that he drops upon humble, broken, and contrite hearts. The man who has these things is rich; not in himself, for he always will be poor and needy in himself; but he is rich, because the Lord is favouring his soul with that blessing which “maketh rich and addeth no sorrow with it;” because the rain and dew of heaven drop upon his heart, and make him fruitful in every good word and work; because the Lord is enriching his soul with grace, and leading him on to glory. These, and these things only constitute true riches. And what is it to be “poor?” To have all these things in profession, and none in possession; to have a sound creed, and know nothing by divine teaching; to hear experimental preaching, and be completely devoid of experimental religion; to love, or profess to love God’s servants, and yet have no real knowledge of the things they bring forth; to attend the place where God’s people meet, hear the truths that God’s servants preach, speak of the things that the Lord’s family know, and all the time be unacquainted with any one of them by divine manifestation—this is to be “poor.” And such was the state of the church at Laodicea. She was poor—doubly poor, because she said she was rich, and yet inwardly devoid of those blessings in which alone true riches consist.

3. She was also “blind”—blind to her own state; blind to her sunken condition; blind to the majesty, holiness, and purity of God; blind to the grace and glory of Jesus; blind to see herself as he saw her, and to know herself as he knew her.

4. And “naked”—not clad in Christ’s righteousness to cover her shame, not furnished with the ornaments and graces of the Spirit,

not decked with jewels such as the bride adorns herself with when she is made fit for the bridegroom (Isa. 61:10); not clothed with humility and the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, or any one of those fruits which the Holy Ghost brings forth in broken and contrite hearts.

II.—But this church of Laodicea had doubtless living members. She had doubtless those in her who knew and felt the malady, who could not run with the swift, who saw there was something deficient, who feared in their own conscience there was some lurking disease; and yet who might have drunk into a measure of the Laodicean spirit, and were neither hot nor cold—neither cold enough for the world, nor hot enough for God. There might have been, and doubtless were, sincere, God-fearing, praying members among them. To these the Lord speaks, and to these alone, and he gives them this wise and salutary counsel. “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”

Three pieces of counsel does the Lord lay before her; and these three directions did the blessed Spirit doubtless whisper into some of their hearts.

i. The first was, “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire.” What is this “gold tried in the fire?” Is it not faith? or, rather, is it not tried faith? And this the Lord bids her buy; as though he would sell no other. Do we not read, that “the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold which perisheth, though it be tried with fire, may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ?” (1 Pet. 1:7.) The faith then that the Lord counsels her to buy is “tried” faith, compared by himself to “gold tried in the fire.” But why should he compare this faith to gold?

1. First, gold is the most precious of all metals; and so faith is the most precious of all graces. It is that whereby the soul is saved,

whereby it is justified, whereby it walks in the ways of the Lord, and triumphs over death, sin, hell, and the world. And therefore, well may the Lord compare faith to gold, seeing that living faith in the heart of a child of God is such a precious grace.

2. But there is another quality in gold that the Lord makes use of to compare faith unto—gold is indestructible. Put it in the hottest furnace, submit it to the strongest flames, it loses nothing in the fire, it suffers no injury; it is still indestructible, unconsumable. And so faith, in the heart of a child of God, is a grace indestructible, unconsumable; the fire of temptation, the furnace of affliction, the flames of persecution, can never burn up living faith in the soul.

3. Again—gold is tried and made to shine forth in all its native purity and brightness by being subjected to the furnace. And thus faith in the heart of a child of God is separated from all the dross and impurity that attach to it, from the carnality and unbelief and infidelity that surround it, as the dross and tin surround the gold, by being subjected to the burning flame. And as there is no other way whereby the gold is made to shine forth in all its intrinsic splendour, but by the fire; so there is no other way by which faith is made to shine brightly forth out of the defilements that surround it, except by being put into the fire of affliction and the furnace of temptation.

Thus it is as if the Lord, giving this wise counsel to the Laodicean church, said to her, “I counsel thee to buy of me this precious gold tried in the fire. I give no other. It is that which I bestow upon my people; it is what I give to all my saints; it is that which comes down in answer to prayer—faith tried by the test of affliction, persecution, and distress; and made to shine more brightly in proportion to the furnace which tries it.”

But some may say, ‘Does not the Lord counsel the church of Laodicea to buy this gold? How can she buy it? Is she not poor, miserable, and wretched? What has she to buy this faith with? Shall she present her gifts? Shall she offer her graces? Shall she bring her knowledge? Shall she come with her consistency? Shall she offer

her merits? What has she to lay at the Lord’s feet in exchange for this “gold tried in the fire?” Nothing—absolutely nothing; for she is poor, wretched, and miserable. What then has she to offer in exchange for this “gold tried in the fire?” for if she buy, she must have something to give in exchange. But still there is great beauty in the expression: it was not used in vain. The Lord does not say to her, ‘I counsel thee to ask of me gold tried in the fire;’ but he used the word “buy.” And yet she has nothing to buy it with. How is this enigma to be solved? Thus: Does not the word “buy” imply some exchange? Where there is a buyer, there must be a seller, and there must be an exchange between the parties. How does this take place in spiritual traffic? Thus:—when the soul is deeply convinced of its helplessness, ignorance, blindness, wretchedness, and folly, and lays all these at the Lord’s feet, he takes them, so to speak, upon his own shoulders; and then, in return, he deals out of his loving bounteous heart, out of the fulness that dwells in himself, his precious treasures.

There is one passage that seems to show what this spiritual buying is, “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (1 Cor. 5:21.) That is, our sins, our iniquities, our defilements, our shortcomings, our imperfections, were all laid upon Jesus; as we read “He hath laid (or made to meet) upon him the iniquities of us all.” (Isa. 53:6.) As one says in the Old Testament, “Let all thy wants lie upon me, only lodge not in the street.” (Judges 19:20.) So, when the Lord draws a poor guilty sinner to his bosom, he says, ‘Let all thy wants lie upon me. Lay at my footstool thy infirmities and thy backslidings; thy darkness, deadness, and coldness; thy doubts and fears, thy misgivings, thy troubles, thy exercises, thy temptations, and thy perplexities. Bear them not in thy own strength; carry them not in thy own arms; lay them not on thine own shoulders; thou canst not bear them; they would sink thee to hell. Let them all lie upon me.’ And as the Lord speaks, he draws the poor, needy, guilty sinner to his bosom, and enables him to lay

at his feet all the exercises, temptations, and distresses of his soul. Thus the Holy Ghost dictates, “Cast thy burden upon the Lord; he will sustain thee; he will never suffer the righteous to be moved.” (Psa. 55:22.) And thus when the poor sinner is enabled to come, with all his helplessness, guilt, shame, sinfulness, and misery, and spread them before the Redeemer’s feet, and by an act of faith casts his burden upon the Lord, there takes place in the court of conscience a spiritual exchange, set forth in the text under the word “buy.” And this is the only buying—a buying “without money and without price.” (Isa. 55:1.)

The Lord saw living members in the Laodicean church, and he therefore gave them this counsel: ‘Be not like the rest; do not think that you are “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;” I know what you are, and honest conscience in your bosom tells you the same tale. Draw near to my throne of grace; open before me your sorrowful heart: confess to me how you have backslidden, into what a carnal state you have sunk, and how lukewarm in the things of God; tell me what temptations try, what snares entangle, what sins beset you. Come, buy of me gold tried in the fire.’ Thus the Lord, when he draws the poor needy soul to his footstool, communicates the precious gift of faith to his heart—living faith, a faith that is exercised with burdens—a faith “that lives and labours under load”—a faith that struggles against the world, the flesh, and the devil—a “tried faith”—for he gives no other. And when the soul takes his counsel (and we only can take his counsel as he enables us), then there is this blessed exchange—our poverty and his riches, our shame and his glory, our sins and his pardon, our defilement and his righteousness. And therefore, he adds, “buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich,”—not in pretension, not in profession, but in reality; rich in the eyes of a heart-searching God; rich for eternity; rich by the possession and enjoyment of heavenly riches; rich in divine treasure; rich in that which the moth corrupts not, nor thieves break through and steal.

ii. But, he adds also, “buy white raiment, that thou mayest

be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.” What did she need? “White raiment.” And why? Because she was naked, defiled, polluted, and unclean. But did she not maintain the doctrine of Christ’s imputed righteousness? Doubtless she did. It is never brought against her that she had departed from the truth; it is never thrown as a reproach against her that she had imbibed soul destroying error. She held the doctrines of grace as firmly as ever. Her ministers preached truth; her members held it; it was written in her church articles; it was her creed and boast. But she had not received it with power into her soul. It had not been communicated to her by the teaching and testimony of the Holy Ghost. She had the doctrine, but not the power; she had the letter, but not the experimental reality. God the Spirit had never wrought with power in her soul to believe. He had never brought forth the garment of Christ’s imputed righteousness, and put it on her, nor had she received it by the hand of living faith. She was indeed a very sound Calvinist; she held the doctrines firmly; but the sweet enjoyment and divine unction of them in her soul she had not experienced.

Now, the Lord speaks to her conscience. He saw there were members of the church at Laodicea who could not be satisfied with doctrines in their head. They wanted the life and power of God’s teaching and God’s testimony in their conscience. They could not be contented with being members of a gospel church, submitting to the articles of a sound creed, hearing the truth preached Lord’s day after Lord’s day. They wanted something deeper, something more powerful, something more spiritual, something more experimental than this. They were at times full of guilt and fear; temptations and troubles exercised their mind. They felt they had a soul to be saved or lost; they felt they were standing upon the brink of eternity, and one plunge might hurl them into the dread gulf. These the Lord counsels, and says to them, ‘Listen to me: I am the only wise Counsellor; it is I only who give true wisdom; I counsel thee to buy of me white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the

shame of thy nakedness do not appear.' As though he thus spoke to the heart, 'Thou thinkest in thine own mind thou hast need of nothing, that thou canst appear boldly before the throne of God, and canst lift up thy head without shame in that awful day; and that thou canst say, "Lord, Lord, have we not called upon thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works." 'But,' he says, 'this will not do. There is something more wanted than this; I counsel thee to buy of me, who alone am able to bestow it, white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear before men and angels, as it appears to my heart-searching eye.' But what are we to do to obtain it? To merit it? to work for it? to earn it? No; the Lord despises all such things as these. The only qualification is, a deep feeling of our necessity, our nakedness, and our shame; and a feeling that there is no other covering for a needy, naked, guilty soul, but the robe of the Redeemer's spotless righteousness. And when the soul is led to his divine feet, full of guilt, shame, and fear, abhorring, loathing, and mourning over itself, and comes in the actings of a living faith, in the sighs and cries of a broken heart, in hungerings, thirstings, and longings, desiring that the Lord would bestow upon him that rich robe; then the blessed exchange takes place; then there is a buying; then the Lord brings out of his treasure-house, where it has been locked up, the best robe, puts it upon the prodigal, and clothes him with it from head to foot. What had the prodigal done to merit the best robe? Was it by his consistency? by his obedience to his father's precepts? by carefully keeping the portion bestowed upon him? No: he had "wasted his substance in riotous living," had gone into a far country, and there trampled under foot, lavished, and spent all that he had received. But was there nothing else? We read, "He came to himself:" guilt and sorrow worked in his bosom; repentance unto life was given unto him; he felt himself unworthy of the least of God's mercies; that he was not worthy to be called his son; and he said—"I will arise and go unto my father." He rose, and went to his father. (This was all of grace.) And when the father

saw him at a great distance, he had compassion on him, ran, fell on his neck, and kissed him; and said to the servants, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him." No other qualification (and this itself was the fruit of divine operation) was needed but a sense of his misery, nakedness, and guilt, and a cry unto his father to pardon, pity, and forgive. This is buying; sweet buying! blessed exchange! Our nakedness for Christ's justifying robe; our poverty for Christ's riches; our helplessness and insufficiency for Christ's power, grace, and love.

iii. But the Lord adds a third counsel. "Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." What was the climax of wretchedness in the Laodicean church? She did not know her real state; did not see her true standing; was not acquainted with her own deceit and hypocrisy, and the delusions of Satan, wherewith he was blinding her eyes. Had she seen herself as God saw her, there would have been some hope for her; had she beheld herself in the light of God's countenance, and felt herself to be what the Lord knew she was, it would have been her mercy. But this was the climax, the ultimatum, the crowning-point of her misery—that she was blind! She saw not how deeply sunk she was. She mistook evil for good, darkness for light, bitter for sweet, crooked for straight, the delusions of Satan for the teachings of God. Therefore, he says, "Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see;" mayest have a view of thy real case; go no longer on in this awful state of self-deception; that the devil may no longer blind thine eyes to thy state before God; that thou mayest not go unto the very verge of, or into eternity, with the veil over thine heart. "Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."

How is this to be done? With eyesalve! Is it to be had in every street? O no. Where is the eyesalve, this wondrous eyesalve, which has such efficacy that when the least particle of it is spread over the eyelid, sight is given to see light in God's light? Who keeps in his bosom, who holds in his treasury, for the church of God, this marvellous, miraculous, supernatural eye-ointment? Is not

this the teaching of the blessed Spirit? the “unction that teacheth all things, and is truth, and no lie,” the “anointing which is from above?” In a word, is not this eyesalve heavenly teaching? And thus, when the Lord counselled the Laodicean church to anoint her eyes with eyesalve, he directed her to a throne of grace, that there she might apply to the Lord to bestow upon her that divine unction, that heavenly anointing, which “opens blind eyes.” It does not mean that you and I have power, as creatures, to anoint our own eyes with heavenly unction. If we could do so, we should teach ourselves. But is not this the promise to the church, “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord?” But this is the meaning of it, ‘Come to my throne; plead with me in fervent prayer; pour out thy heart at my footstool; feeling thy blindness and ignorance, without special teaching, beg it of me; and, in answer to thy prayer, I will anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, and then thou shalt see.’

But why are the blessed Spirit’s teachings compared to eyesalve, or eye-ointment? Because her eyes had films over them; darkness had covered them; cataract had seized them; and her eyes becoming blinded in this way, she could not see her real standing. But the Lord says, ‘If thou hast but the least particle of heavenly eyesalve, and that eyesalve is spread over thy eyelids; in other words, if the unction of the Holy Ghost touch thy conscience, and the anointing of the blessed Spirit come with power into thy soul, thou wilt see then (and this is the only sight worth having); and what wilt thou see? The first thing thou wilt see is, thy nakedness, thy shame, thy helplessness, thy misery, thy wretchedness.’ And this is the prelude to receiving the blessing. Depend upon it, you and I shall never go to a throne of grace sincerely, earnestly, fervently, and perseveringly, unless we feel our need of those blessings which God alone has to bestow. If I can teach myself, do I need heavenly teaching? If I can see by my own unaided sight, do I want heavenly eyesalve spread over my eyelids? If I know God, and Jesus Christ, and myself—the workings of my fallen nature, and the deceitfulness, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness of my evil heart—by my own knowledge, or my

own understanding, I want not God to teach me. But when I see and feel I know nothing except by divine teaching, have nothing but by divine communication, and feel nothing but by divine inspiration—this leads me to a throne of grace to beg of the Lord to teach me and show me what I am, take the veil off my heart, discover to me my real state; not suffer me to be deceived and deluded by the devil; not permit me to call evil good and good evil, to put darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, and think I am something while I am nothing. Divine light in a man’s conscience will teach him what he is, and divine life in a man’s soul will make him feel what he is. When he has not God’s light, he is dark; when he has not God’s teachings, he is ignorant; when he has not God’s wisdom, he is all folly; when he has not God’s guidance, he goes astray; when he has not God’s upholding, he falls; when he has not God’s preserving, he turns aside into the paths of crookedness and error. So that we cannot see ourselves, we cannot see others; we cannot see the truth, we cannot see our interest in the truth; we cannot see the Person of Christ, his justifying righteousness, his atoning blood, his dying love, nor our participation in them, except so far as the blessed Spirit anoints our eyes with eyesalve that we may see.

Are there any here whose conscience tells a tale not to be mistaken, with a voice not to be silenced, that you are very dead in your souls, very cold in your affections, very dark in your mind, very worldly in your spirit? that you have very few or no smiles of God’s countenance; few or no whisperings of God’s love to your soul; that you have few or no intimations of your interest in the love and blood of the Lamb? Is there something that tells you all this? In prayer you are very cold, very short, and very formal. The word of God is to you a neglected book. When you go to hear preaching, your thoughts and affections are at the ends of the earth. Instead of being what most think you, a flourishing Christian, poverty, emptiness, and want are stamped upon your inward soul. Do you feel it? Then there is some hope for you. There is some hope for a

man whose conscience is made honest and tender in God's fear. It is a good sign for him: and the Lord speaks to him, and gives him this good advice. May it not be thrown away! May we have ears to hear it! May the Lord himself speak it home to us!—"I counsel thee,"—(and what the Lord speaks will be attended to by the Lord's people,) "I counsel thee to buy of me gold." 'Come to my bosom! Come out of the world! Come to my feet!' How the Lord speaks to the soul! 'Come sincerely, come honestly, come boldly, come tenderly.' "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire." 'Ask me for it, plead with me to bestow it on thee, tell me that nothing else will satisfy thee except that living faith that justifies the soul; saves it, and takes it home to glory.'

Are there here those who feel they have not enjoyed the clear manifestations of God's love to their soul, and are trembling to think how they will stand at the great day? The Lord counsels them (may he give them an ear to hear) to buy of him also "white raiment," his righteousness, that spotless robe that covers the needy and naked soul; "that they may be clothed, and the shame of their nakedness do not appear," that they may stand at the last day in that robe of righteousness in which there is neither spot nor blemish.

"Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve." 'Beg of me to teach thee; call upon me—I will show thee things that thou hast not known; plead with me for the internal teachings and sure testimonies of the blessed Spirit and then thou wilt see thyself in thy true colours, as a poor, blind, naked, filthy, helpless wretch; and thou wilt see the glorious Person of Christ, the riches of his atoning blood, the sympathy of his merciful bosom, the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin.' If you be thus highly favoured, you will also see others; you will not be deceived by pretensions then. It will not be mere profession of the truth that will satisfy you then; no mere outward consistency will do for you then; you will want to see something more than this in others, as well as in yourself; you will want to see the mind of Christ in them, to see the image of a suffering Jesus, and the likeness of Christ stamped upon their

hearts, lips, and lives. And if you cannot find this in the church to which you belong; if you cannot find this in the congregation with which you worship; if you cannot find this among those who profess the same doctrines with yourself, then you will be a separate person. You will not associate with those who have not the life of godliness; but you will walk with the Lord, that he himself may teach and bless you; and you will come out of every thing that you find by experience defiles your conscience, that you may have the inward testimony and witness of the Lord himself in your soul.

Did the church of Laodicea listen to these counsels? Not as a church. There might be, and doubtless were, individuals, who did listen to this counsel; they got the blessing, for the blessing was designed for them. The blessing was not designed for the church at large. She was in due time to be spued out of Christ's mouth, for she was "neither hot nor cold." But the members, the spiritual members, were saved, though as by fire. There were doubtless in the Laodicean church (as there are at the present day) living members, gracious people; and these were, for the most part, mourning and sighing over their lukewarmness, deadness, and barrenness in the things of God. The Lord speaks to such, and gives them wise counsel; and they only will hear it. Dead professors resent all this. It is like going to a tradesman who is thought highly of in the city, and asking him if he can pay twenty shillings in the pound. He resents it as an insult, though his conscience tells him he cannot. So these professors want no such counsel. They would rather be plastered over with untempered mortar, and have their vain minds pleased by being thought highly of, than have the point of the trowel pick out all their putty. God keep me from going about with lime and a brush to whitewash dead professors, and sepulchres filled with rotten bones! God enable me (he only can) to speak to the living souls of sensible sinners, and hold up before them a Saviour's blood and righteousness! But God keep me from bolstering up dead professors, who have but a name to live; and from sewing pillows to the armholes of those who are not taught

of God, and have nothing but an outward profession, without the inward reality! I believe all God's ministers will be faithful according to the measure of faithfulness that is bestowed upon them. They are not to be bribed or frightened into silence. They will speak out of the fulness of an exercised heart what they have known, felt, and experienced. So I desire ever to speak in this pulpit or any other. Not to come here to deceive souls, and foster delusion by uttering smooth words; but to detect hypocrisy in hypocritical hearts, to unmask empty profession in empty professors; and at the same time, to strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; and thus to say to them that are of a fearful heart, 'Fear not, the Lord is with you: and in his own time and way will abundantly comfort and bless you.'

112 Getting and Losing

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening,
August 6, 1846

"A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away."

Ecclesiastes 3:6

The blessed Spirit saw fit under the old dispensation to make much use of proverbs and aphorisms; and there seems to be in that mode of instruction something peculiarly suited both to the character of the people, and also to the time in which the holy Scriptures were written. In those days, compared with our own, there was very little reading or writing; and therefore it was very desirable that instruction should be conveyed in short sentences (such as we find in the book of Proverbs), which might be easily remembered. And when these pithy sentences were written in what is called an "antithetical" form (that is, where one clause is

opposed to, and as it were balances the other) like the point of an arrow, it gave the instruction a keener edge, and fastened it more deeply and firmly in the heart. But, besides this, we are to bear in mind that the Old Testament was given to the whole people of Israel. That dispensation did not resemble ours, in being restricted to the elect of God: it was a national dispensation; and therefore the Old Testament was, to a certain extent, a national book. We find, therefore, not only in the books of Moses, but scattered up and down the Sacred Writings, and especially the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, most clear and beautiful lessons on what is generally called "morality," and the guidance of conduct in the various relations of life.

But though the genius and character of that dispensation were national, yet God had an elect family, who were spiritually taught, in the same way as God's elect family are taught now. The Holy Ghost, therefore, in revealing these Proverbs, pointed sayings, and aphorisms, so indited them, that under the external cover of moral instruction there was spiritual instruction deeply couched. So that, whilst the Proverbs afforded the most beautiful lessons of morality to those who looked no farther than mere morality, they also afforded blessed lessons of spiritual instruction to those who were enlightened by the Holy Ghost to see into the kernel, and were not satisfied with merely handling the shell.

Thus the Holy Ghost, in this chapter of Ecclesiastes, treating on the various incidents of human life, declares, that "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away." Here is a great deal of moral, natural truth. It is true, literally and naturally, that "There is a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.” But, under these natural incidents is contained spiritual instruction; and what appears to me to prove that there is an experimental meaning couched under the whole, is the expression—“a time to kill.” It cannot surely be true, literally and naturally, that there is “a time to kill;” for that would make the Holy Ghost sanction murder. “Thou shalt not kill” is one of the precepts of the Decalogue. The blessed Spirit, therefore, could never mean, literally and naturally, that there was “a time to kill.” So that from this clue I gather that the Holy Ghost had a spiritual interpretation in view—“a time to kill” by the application of God’s law to the conscience; a season to slaughter the soul, so as to cut off all hope and help. And thus, this one expression, “a time to kill,” seems at once to take our minds from the literal and natural interpretation of the whole; and to shew us there is a spiritual, experimental interpretation which lies hidden beneath the surface.

But what says the text? “A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away.” When God favours a man in providence, when he smiles upon his plans and arrangements, it is with him “a time to get.” But if the Lord do not prosper a man in providence, he may rise early, and go to bed late; he may keep the best accounts, and lay out his plans in the most complete way; if it be not “a time to get,” every hope and fair expectation will be entirely blighted. Thus also, there is “a time to lose,” as many of our railway gentlemen have found. And how many too of the Lord’s people have experimentally found in natural things there has been “a time to get,” when the Lord has prospered every undertaking; and how painfully have they also found there is “a time to lose,” when, as with Job, messenger comes after messenger to tell them of the loss of their worldly prosperity. So also, literally and naturally, there is “a time to keep” what a person gains by honest industry; and there is “a time to cast away” in acts of charity and liberality.

But shall I confine myself to this mere literal interpretation, which floats upon the surface? Shall I merely dip my hand into

the froth and foam of the text, and leave untouched the spiritual treasures that are couched beneath? I cannot do so. I shall therefore, with God’s blessing, entirely discard all further allusion to the literal and natural interpretation of the passage; and come at once to the spiritual and experimental signification.

The text, you will observe, is divided into two portions, each containing two clauses; these, I hope, with God’s blessing, to take up and consider separately. May he who alone can give the blessing, clothe with power what may be spoken in weakness.

I.—“A time to get.” The Lord, in answer to a question put by his disciples, declared that “The Father hath put the times and seasons in his own power.” (Acts 1:7.) Thus, there is appointed “a time to get.” But to get what? Why, that which shall do our souls good for eternity; that which shall save us from “the wrath to come;” that which shall translate us from “the power of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son;” those “treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.” (Matt. 6:20.)

But let us examine more closely the spiritual things that a living soul “gets.” Of the things thus got some are painful, and others pleasurable; some are attended with sorrow, and others with joy; some kill, and others heal; some bring down, and others raise up.

i. Among the painful lessons experimentally learnt in the school of divine teaching are,

1. A spiritual knowledge of God’s holy character; a gracious sight into, and a divine acquaintance with, Jehovah’s perfections, his purity, his holiness, his majesty, his greatness, his omniscience, his omnipotence. Thus to know “the only true God” by the manifestations of himself to the soul, is a branch of heavenly getting. But this we cannot get without a corresponding discovery of our own deformity and vileness, our loss of the divine image, our alienation from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, because of the blindness of our heart. Job had this discovery of the purity of Jehovah, when he said, “I have heard of thee by the

hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job. 42:5, 6.) Isaiah, under a view of the glory of the Lord in the temple, cried out, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5); and all Daniel’s comeliness was turned into corruption when he saw the Lord by the side of the great river. (10:8.)

2. A knowledge of the spirituality and breadth of God’s holy law, whereby the soul is brought in guilty before God, is another of those painful gettings which a living man has to experience. “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” Through its application guilt falls upon the conscience. “Whatsoever 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.) This cuts up self-righteousness, brings to light secret iniquities, and makes the offence to abound. It discovers sin of the eye, heart, hand, and tongue, and curses and condemns the least deviation from a perfect righteousness.

3. A sound conviction of sin is also one of the things got by the Lord’s living family; not merely those natural convictions that go and come, that ebb and flow, and leave the soul for the most part as they found it, under the power of lust, and in the services of Satan; but that sound conviction of sin which penetrates into the very heart’s core, and never leaves the sinner’s conscience till it brings him to the Redeemer’s feet; which never wears off till the blood of atonement is applied to the conscience; which brings out of the world, separates from dead professors, makes a man honest and sincere, leads him to sigh and cry to the Lord for a sense of his pardoning mercy, and finally issues in a blessed deliverance.

4. A knowledge of the corruptions of our fallen nature—of our unbelief, infidelity, pride, hypocrisy, worldly mindedness, carnality, sensuality, and selfishness, with all the abounding evils of our deceitful and desperately wicked heart, is another branch of this painful getting. Without it there will be no humility or self loathing; no dread of falling, nor desire to be kept; no knowledge

of the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin; no justifying of God, no condemning of ourselves.

5. A knowledge of Satan’s temptations, wiles, and snares, of his craft and power, subtlety and malice, serpent windings and lion roarings, is another part of this painful getting.

ii. But there are gettings of a different kind—of a pleasurable nature. Such as,

1. A spirit of grace and supplications; and the “time to get” it, is then, and then only, when the blessed Spirit is pleased to communicate it. Wherever, by the Spirit’s application of God’s holy law to the conscience, there is got a sound conviction of sin, there is got, under the operation of that only and almighty Teacher, a heart to pour itself out in supplications, sighs, tears, and breathings at the footstool of mercy. “They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them.”

2. There is, also, “a time to get” a knowledge of Jesus; as we read, “this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3.) There is “a time to get” this knowledge of Jesus Christ; a knowledge of him as the Saviour from “the wrath to come;” a knowledge of him as “the Mediator between God and men;” a knowledge of the efficacy of his atoning blood to cleanse a guilty conscience; a knowledge of his justifying righteousness to clothe the needy, naked soul; a knowledge of his dying love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost; a knowledge of his glorious Person; a knowledge of his tender sympathizing heart; a knowledge of him as “able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him.”

3. There is “a time” also “to get” faith. When the blessed Spirit is pleased to raise up this precious grace in the soul, he draws it out to lay hold of the promises that he applies, the blood that he sprinkles, the Saviour that he reveals, the love that he sheds abroad, and the truth that he makes experimentally known.

4. There is “a time” too “to get” the pardon of sin by the sweet manifestations of pardoning love to the soul.

5. And to mention summarily other branches of this heavenly getting, there is “a time to get” a knowledge of interest in the love and blood of the Lamb; at “a time to get” a spiritual sight of the Lord Jesus Christ in his sufferings; “a time to get” that union and communion with him which is life and peace. There is “a time,” also, “to get” heavenly affections, spiritual delights, tender sensations, holy longings, divine feelings. And, to add no more, there is “a time to get” everything which fits the soul for a glorious and happy immortality.

iii. But you will observe that the blessed Spirit has said, there is “a time to get.” And this time is in his hands who holds all times and seasons at his own sovereign disposal. This indeed is a lesson which the Lord’s people have, for the most part, painfully to learn; that though they see the blessings revealed in the gospel, they cannot get them except when they are dropped into their heart and shed abroad in their soul by the Holy Ghost. But what are these times to get?

1. One time is a time of affliction. This is, for the most part, the time that the Lord first begins the work of grace upon the sinner’s conscience. The Lord often makes use of affliction to take the sinner aside, as it were, that he may speak to his heart. A sick bed separates him from the world, or some family affliction shews him the emptiness of all human happiness, or some reverse in circumstances brings down his pride and ambition. And at this season the Lord often opens his ear to receive instruction; and thus the time of affliction often proves “a time to get.” So also, with respect to the manifestations of grace, mercy, and love—it is, for the most part, in times of trial, of sorrow, and despondency; in times when there is no hope for the soul except in the free mercy of God, that any real blessing is got from the Lord.

2. A time of temptation is also usually “a time to get.” In seasons of temptation, we get a knowledge of our own weakness and wickedness, learn our helplessness against Satan’s temptations, and experience the Lord’s delivering hand.

3. There is also a time to favour Zion and when that set time comes it is “a time to get.” Before that time arrives, we may try to get; but, like the disciples, we toil all night, and get nothing. But when the set time arrives, the net is cast on the right side of the ship, and the blessings come as it were spontaneously to hand.

II.—But there is not only “a time to get,” there is also “a time to lose;” and the one season is set over against the other. And just as it is the blessed Spirit, and he alone, who brings about the “time to get;” so it is the blessed Spirit, and he alone, who brings about the “time to lose.”

But what does a man lose? In the same way, as what he “gets” is for his soul’s good, his everlasting profit, his eternal peace; so what he “loses” is only that which, were it not parted with, his soul would be a sufferer. For instance,

1. There is a losing of our own righteousness. O how many there are who are building their hopes of heaven entirely upon this sandy foundation! But not so with the Lord’s family. There is “a time” for them “to lose” this cobweb garment; a time when creature righteousness is taken from them, and they are stripped of those filthy rags which cannot shield them from the eye of omniscient justice. And when is this time? When there is a discovery to the conscience of the perfections of Jehovah; of the purity of his law; of that holy majesty and justice which eternally dwell in him, which require a righteousness pure, spotless, and undefiled, and can accept no other. Thus, when the Lord is pleased to bring before the eyes, and let down into the soul, a sense of his greatness and majesty, and applies the edge of his spiritual precepts to the conscience, then is the time when we begin to lose our own righteousness; then it appears in our eyes as nothing but filthy rags; then we know, that if we have no other righteousness, we must be eternally lost; and thus we are made to part with it, that we may be clothed with the Lamb’s imputed righteousness, and so stand before God without spot, or blemish, or any such thing.

2. There is a losing also of our fleshly holiness. What Christian

in days past has not aimed at creature holiness? Even after he had been convinced that his own legal righteousness will not save him, yet how hard he has toiled and tugged to get some gospel holiness, something in himself that he can look upon as spiritual and heavenly, something of an evangelical nature that he can present to God, and lay down before him as acceptable in his sight. But there is “a time to lose” this fleshly holiness, however dressed out in a gospel garb, as we lost our legal righteousness. And when is that time? When the corruptions of our heart are laid bare, when sin is allowed to come in like a flood, so as to sweep away all those dreams (for dreams they are) of fleshly holiness and creature perfection; when we are put into Satan’s sieve and have our religion riddled backwards and forwards till every sound grain seems gone, and nothing rises to the top but the chaff which the wind blows away; when the Lord puts the soul into the furnace of affliction, and nothing comes to the surface but the dross and scum which are taken away by the Refiner;—then is the “time to lose” this fleshly holiness that we once so dearly prized, and so ardently and anxiously longed to obtain. It is lost, utterly lost, when the Lord gives us a sight of what we are, and gives us a glimpse of what He is.

3. Our own wisdom—there is “a time to lose” that. There was a time, doubtless, with us, when we fancied ourselves very wise; especially when we had made some little progress, as we fancied, in religion, and had stored a few doctrines in our heads; when we had read a few authors, or had studied the Bible, and compared passage with passage and chapter with chapter. We doubtless congratulated ourselves on possessing a vast amount of wisdom, and thought we knew everything because we had some understanding in the letter of God’s word. But there is “a time to lose” all this wisdom. When we get into difficulties, trials, temptations, and perplexities, then our wisdom all disappears, and we find it little else than ignorance and folly. It does not avail us when most needed. It cannot guide us into paths of peace; it cannot keep us from evil or error. Like a broken tooth, or a foot out of joint, it gives way the moment any

weight or stress is laid upon it. (Prov. 25:19.)

4. There is a time, also to lose all our self-strength, self-confidence, and self-dependence. Strength to stand against temptation, to overcome sin, to crucify the flesh, to pluck out right eyes and cut off right hands; to believe, hope, or love; to think, speak, or do any one thing spiritually good; to bless, comfort, or deliver our own souls; to raise up one sigh, cry, or desire Godward;—in all these things we painfully learn that strength we have none.

But there is “a time to lose.” And this time is in the hand of the Lord. We can no more bring upon our souls “a time to lose,” than we can bring upon our souls “a time to get.” When the “time to get” comes, then we get what the Lord is pleased to bestow. “That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good.” When the Lord bestows a blessing, when he gives a smile, when he drops a word, when he favours the soul with some intimation of his goodness and mercy, it is “a time to get.” But when the Lord hides his face, withdraws his presence, allows the corruption of the heart to work, lets Satan stir up that filthy pool we carry within us—then it is the “time to lose.” “Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled, thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.” (Psalm 104: 2:.) If we are the Lord’s, he will bring upon us, sooner or later, the “time to lose;” and then we shall lose everything that thousands rejoice in—yea, everything that creature can boast of, or put its confidence in. Wherever there has been “a time to get,” there will be also “a time to lose.” These two are closely connected; the one is the mortise, the other the tenon; the one is the sinking bucket in the well, and the other the rising bucket; the one is the day of adversity, and the other the day of prosperity, which the Lord has set the one over against the other.

Now, there may be some here, with whom it is “a time to get.” Some, perhaps, are getting convictions of sin such as they never before felt; some are getting a knowledge of the perfections of God’s character which they never before were acquainted with; some are

getting views of Jesus that their souls never before were favoured with; some are getting promises, some are getting invitations, some are getting peace, some are getting encouragements, some are getting evidences, some are getting testimonies, some are getting whispers, and some are getting smiles. And then, perhaps, in this congregation (as we would hope there are some of the Lord's people here present this evening) it is with others "a time to lose." They find all their own righteousness beginning to fade before their eyes and becoming as filthy rags; they find the corruptions of their heart made manifest, so that they are losing by degrees all their fleshly holiness; they find the workings of secret sin continually boiling up within; they feel their strength oozing away, and that they have not the power they thought they once had to stand against indwelling evil; they find they have not power to read God's word as in times past, nor power to cry unto the Lord, nor power to realize his presence, nor power to believe, hope, or love. Thus with some, it is "a time to get;" and with others, it is "a time to lose." Happy getting! happy losing! The getting is of God, and the losing is of God! Yes; it is a mercy to get, and it is a mercy to lose. It is a mercy that God should ever favour our souls with his own times and seasons to drop something worth having into our hearts; or to take something away worth losing; to give us that which shall make our souls meet for eternity, and to strip us of that which is nothing but deception and delusion.

III.—There is also "a time to keep, and a time to cast away." Is it not one thing to "get," and another thing to "keep?" Is it not one thing to "lose," and another thing to "cast away?" It is so naturally. There are some people who can "get"—persons who have a peculiar turn for business, and whom the Lord favours with natural wisdom and earthly prosperity. Whatever they put their hand to seems to succeed. Yet they cannot keep it; they cannot retain what they have earned: it flies hastily out of their hand, or dribbles insensibly away. So spiritually; we must "get" before we can "keep." Is it not so naturally? Before a man can keep a thing, surely he must get it.

And so it is in divine things. "A time to get" comes before "a time to keep." And do you not observe how the "time to keep" follows the "time to lose?" This, then, is the order of the Spirit's teachings in the heart. He begins with a sinner's conscience, and he communicates certain things, such as a conviction of sin, a knowledge of God's holy law, cries and sighs after mercy; and in due time he gives him a knowledge of Jesus, evidences and testimonies of interest in him, love visits, smiles, and manifestations. All these a living soul gets. But then the "time to lose" comes, when he loses all his own righteousness, his own holiness, his own strength; his own wisdom, his own comeliness. But he does not lose any one thing which God has put into his heart. As, therefore, there is "a time to get" what God gives, and "a time to lose" what God takes away, so there is "a time to keep" what the Lord himself is pleased to bestow upon the soul.

But what is it that we are "to keep?" In our early days we amass a great deal of what we fancy to be religion; and when the "time to lose" comes, it seems pretty well all lost. Have not some of you had such storms to blow down upon you, as though they would sweep out of your heart everything that you hoped God had put there? And have you not had such seasons of darkness come upon you, that you could not see any one mark of divine teaching, or any one feature of Christ's image? That was "a time to lose." But if God has done anything for your soul, has communicated any real blessing to your heart, or spoken one soft word to your conscience, that is to be kept. We are not to part with any one thing God is pleased to do for our souls. We are not to cast away one grain of the treasure that God has lodged in earthen vessels. We are not to throw to the moles and to the bats any one thing, however feeble it may appear, that comes from God; for having come from him, it is a good and perfect gift.

The blessed Spirit works upon the heart; but our most holy and religious flesh will work with the blessed Spirit. In early days are we not very ignorant, and often mistake the letter for the spirit, and

the form for the power? But when the Lord begins to put the soul into the furnace, and permits it to be riddled in Satan's sieve, the effect is to burn up, or sift away every thing that is of the creature and of the flesh. But mark, that which God himself has done for the soul, it leaves untouched. There is, therefore, "a time to keep." Satan does not care how much you keep of the flesh but he will try hard to baffle you out of everything that God has done for your soul. If he see you heaping up chaff, he will encourage you to heap up more; but if he see you storing up a few grains of solid wheat, he will try, by a blast of his mouth, or a whirl of his sieve, to blow those few grains out of your hand. If he see you very self-wise, self-righteous, or self-confident, he will encourage you in all that; but if he see you doubting, fearing, desponding, tried, and exercised, he will endeavour, in another form, to persuade you that you have never received anything from God, and that all your religion is but a mass of hypocrisy. When, therefore, the blessed Spirit has told us there is "a time to get," and also "a time to lose," in order to shew that we do not lose any one thing which he has communicated, he adds, there is "a time to keep."

But what have we to keep? Everything that God has done for the soul, especially everything that we can look upon as a real blessing. For instance: have you ever had any deliverance? Has the Lord ever proclaimed liberty to your soul? Has he ever applied a promise to your heart? Has he ever dropped a word softly and sweetly into your conscience? Has he ever answered your prayers? Has he ever made darkness light before you, and crooked things straight? Has he ever revealed himself to you? Has he ever raised up in your heart faith in his blessed self? Has he ever sprinkled your conscience with atoning blood? Has he ever discovered to you his glorious righteousness and assured you, you are personally interested in it? Has he ever shed abroad any measure of his love in your heart, and made himself very near, very dear, and very precious to your soul?

Now these things Satan will be perpetually trying to baffle your

soul out of. He will keep whispering, 'It was all delusion and fleshly excitement; it was not real; it did not come from God; it did not come in this way, it did not come in that way. How do you know,' he will say (for he can reason very ably; he is a thorough master of rhetoric) 'that it was from God? Those broken feelings you once had—those tears that rolled down your cheeks—that melting of heart under a sense of the Lord's presence—that whisper which came into your conscience—that word which dropped into your soul—that deliverance out of trial—that snare so powerfully broken—that temptation out of which you were brought—how do you know' (Satan can plead with all the art and craft of a counsellor) 'it came from God?' And the poor soul very often in these seasons of darkness, temptation, and perplexity, cannot answer, 'Yes it was God.' As the church of old said, "We see not our signs;" so he cannot see that this was of God, or that was of God. He can see it in others; he can see the image of Jesus in the children of God: but he cannot see the work of God upon himself.

But the Holy Spirit says, there is "a time to keep." And when is this time? Why, the very time that Satan is trying to baffle you out of it; when he says, 'Give it all up; cast aside your profession; go into the world; never come before God's face any more, lest he strike you dead for presumption; never go to hear an experimental minister again, lest he unmask you as an hypocrite; never read the writings of gracious men again, lest you only add to your condemnation.' When Satan is dealing out his rhetoric and infernal oratory, that is the very "time to keep." What! will you part with your blessings, with your evidences, with your manifestations, with your sweet discoveries, with your love visits, with the Lord's smiles, with anything that you believe, in your right mind, God has done for your soul? There is "a time to keep;" and it is in temptation, in trial, in difficulty that this time is. It is like a man going into the city with a large sum of money about him—how he keeps his hand upon it, lest sharp fingers should pilfer his treasure! So with the children of God. If the Lord bestow a favour, how careful the soul is lest

that footpad Satan should rob it of its heavenly treasure! When the blessed Spirit shines upon the soul, brightens its evidences, shows it that this or that word came from the Lord—that this was a token for good—that this deliverance was an answer to prayer—that the Lord appeared for us here, and appeared for us there—when the blessed Spirit is thus pleased to lift up a standard when Satan comes in like a flood—then it is “a time to keep.” And, depend upon it, we shall want to keep all we have got. The Lord will ever make us feel poor and needy, and will bring us into such spots and places as to make us value the least blessing; he will make us prize the feeblest evidence, and cleave to the scantiest testimony. But are there not some bright spots that you can now and then look back upon? some “Ebenezers?” some “hill Mizars?” Can you look back upon the time when the Lord first blessed your soul? Can you put your hand upon the season when there was first a discovery of Jesus? when you first heard the word with power? when your heart was first melted with sensations of mercy and love? Now, these are to be diligently kept, highly to be prized, deeply to be stored up in your heart. These are the jewels that Bunyan speaks of in the ‘Pilgrim;’ the roll in the bosom, the mark on the forehead. By these the soul will be recognised when it stands before the “great white throne;” and therefore, they are to be kept, not to be parted with, whatever Satan may urge, whatever reason may argue, whatever the flesh may say, whatever the wickedness and infidelity of our hearts may plead. Every thing from the Lord is to be kept, and highly prized, because it springs from the mercy and goodness of God.

IV.—But as there is “a time to keep,” so there is also “a time to cast away.” What do we cast away? That which in time past, perhaps, we hoarded as a great treasure, prized very highly, and set an amazing value upon. As we keep everything that comes from God, so we cast away everything that does not bear his stamp upon it. Everything that does not come with divine savour and unction into the heart; everything that wears upon its face the

suspicious tint of nature, and does not bear the stamp of grace, is to be “cast away.” God puts his mark upon genuine silver only; the plated goods never wear the stamp of heaven. Just as in nature we cast away whatsoever is refuse and vile; as we sweep the dust and rubbish out of our house, and the filth and dirt into the streets; so when the Lord is pleased to shine into a man’s soul, and shows him what he has done and is doing for him, he casts away as dust and rubbish all that does not bear God’s mark, and is not stamped from heaven’s own mint. For instance,

1. We “cast away” presumption. There was a time when, perhaps, some of you mistook presumption for faith; but when the Lord shewed you what a horrible thing presumption was, and made you see and feel the difference between presumption and faith, then the closer did you clasp living faith to your bosom, and the more you cast presumption away.

2. There was a time, perhaps, when you were satisfied with a notional acquaintance with the gospel; and because you were a sound Calvinist, you thought you were a sound Christian. But you have been taught, some of you, by painful exercises and soul perplexities, the distinction between the letter and the spirit, the form and the power: and you “cast away”—not the doctrines; no; they are to be highly prized, for they are the very sum and substance of gospel truth; but you “cast away” a natural knowledge of them, a notional acquaintance with them, as a thing quite distinct from the application of truth with divine power to your heart.

3. You “cast away” also fleshly excitement in religion. Fleshly excitement is the all in all of most professors of religion. A few natural tears trickling down the cheeks; a few carnal passions wrought upon by the eloquence of the preacher; a few movings and meltings of natural affection under a pathetic discourse; a calm, softened feeling produced by a well-sung hymn or a swelling organ; a thrill of rapture from listening to a description of the joys of heaven; a hearing others talk of their assurance till by imitation they are persuaded of their own—this carnal excitement passes

for religion with hundreds and thousands. But you who are better taught “cast it away;” you are afraid of this fleshly excitement; you are afraid to mistake the natural tear trickling down the cheek for the godly sorrow that the blessed Spirit raises up; you are afraid to mistake the mere raising up of the natural spirits for the liftings up of the light of God’s countenance. Therefore you “cast away” as dangerous and delusive all mere fleshly excitement.

4. And you cast “away” also all dependence on the creature; all confidence in self, all looking to man, all resting upon an arm of flesh. You have been so wounded and pierced by resting on an arm of flesh, that you cast it away, as you would a reed that had run into your hand and pierced you, or as Paul shook off the viper into the fire.

5. You “cast away” too your own wisdom, for it has proved to be folly. You “cast away” your own strength, for you know it to be utter weakness. You “cast away” making resolutions, for you know you cannot keep them. You “cast away” making promises, for you know you cannot fulfil them. You “cast away” creature faith because you know it cannot stand your soul in the day of wrath. Your desire to “cast away” pride; to “cast away” self-seeking; yea, to “cast away” everything that wears the appearance of godliness, and yet does not bear the stamp and mark of God upon it. You “cast away” an empty profession, and a name to live while dead, and being settled upon your lees. In one word, you “cast away” with contempt and shame, everything that the blessed Spirit has discovered to you to spring from the creature, and to be the mere product of nature and the flesh.

But there is “a time to cast away”—such as a time of sickness, when death is in sight, and when the heart sinks and quakes before eternity; a time of temptation, when the heart wants something to bear it up amid the storm; a time of trial, when we want God himself to be the strength of our heart here, and our portion for ever.

Thus, as the Lord leads his people, he carries on in them

two apparently opposite, yet blessedly reconcilable operations. The Spirit keeps stripping and clothing, wounding and healing, making poor and making rich, bringing low and raising up. Sometimes he gives, and sometimes he takes away; sometimes makes Jesus precious, sometimes makes self hateful; sometimes gives true signs, sometimes takes away false tokens; some times bestows real testimonies, sometimes takes away false evidences; sometimes gives spiritual faith, sometimes takes away natural faith; sometimes gives true confidence, sometimes takes away vain confidence; sometimes gives true love, sometimes takes away the mere excitement of the flesh and of the creature. And yet, all for one end—to render Jesus precious, and make the soul meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He deals with the soul in grace, as the clever sculptor deals with the marble block. He chips out a piece here, and makes prominent a piece there; and at last brings out the beautiful figure of man. So the blessed Spirit—that true sculptor, who engraves Christ’s image in the heart—sometimes gives and sometimes takes; sometimes pares here, sometimes puts on there; till at last he brings forth the image of Christ in the soul, and forms him in the heart, “the hope of glory.”

Now, this religion with two sides to it, only the family of God are acquainted with. As to those who know nothing of divine teaching—with them it is all getting, getting, getting. But what does it end in? When God manifests his displeasure, it is all blown away in a moment. They are storing their granaries with chaff, heaping up treasures of dross, filling their bottles with smoke, and making ropes of sand. All, all that is so laboriously got, and so highly prized, one breath from the Lord will one day disperse to the four winds of heaven. But the Lord’s people have a religion which has two sides to it. All their religion consists in what the blessed Spirit is pleased himself to communicate to them. What he teaches they know; what he gives, they possess; what he inspires, they feel; and what he breathes into their heart, they enjoy. His work is, to keep stripping them of self, and manifesting to them a precious Jesus,

and their interest in him. And thus, under the Spirit's teaching, they grow weaker, and yet stronger; they get worse in self, and more sensibly complete in Christ; they grow down in humility, and upward into faith. Thus, by the Spirit's blessed work upon their souls, they lose all that stands in nature, and they get all that stands in the Spirit. So that, the Lord's people all experimentally prove the truth of these words, "There is a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away."

And what have you got? How many years have you made a profession? Ten, twenty, thirty years? What have you got during all this time? Anything worth keeping? Any religion that will stand the storm? Any faith that will abide the trying hour? Depend upon it, if you have got anything that will stand the storm, that will endure in the trying hour, it is what the Spirit has been pleased to lodge in your heart. And, depend upon it, if ever we have got anything from God, we have lost as well as got; there has been "a time to lose" as well as "a time to get." And if we have anything that we keep, and sometimes can bless God for, and look upon with sweetness as an Ebenezer—if there is anything that really we feel, in dark trying seasons, worth keeping, something that God himself has done for our souls—depend upon it, we shall have to "cast away" every thing else. The Lord will never suffer us to keep the flesh, and keep the Spirit; to keep his testimonies, and to keep our own; to keep true confidence, and to keep false confidence; to keep the favour of God, and to keep the favour of man. He will never let us keep in the one hand a spiritual religion, and in another a fleshly religion. He will never let us keep in one hand Christ's righteousness, and in the other our fleshly holiness. We shall not have two chambers in our heart, and fill one with Christ's riches, and the other with creature riches. We shall never have self to bow down to, idolize, and worship in one niche, and the Lord of life and glory to worship in another. The same bounteous hand that gives, strips and spoils; the same kind Benefactor that puts it into the heart to keep what God has committed there, enables us, yea, "casts

away" for us, "casts away" in us, what does not bear God's stamp, and his heavenly mark. And O, when we come to look at things in this light, how little we have that really seems got from God! how little we have that seems really worth keeping! If you "cast away" all that you have learnt from men; all your dry, notional knowledge; all your self-righteousness and fleshly holiness; when you "cast it all away" as the mariners on board Paul's ship cast the wheat into the sea, and leave nothing behind but what God has done for you—a word here, and a smile there; a promise now, and a whisper then—how little there is! How many things will there be worth keeping when we lie upon a death-bed, are made honest before God, and eternity stares us in the face? When fears, and doubts, and trials, and temptations have blown away all fleshly confidence and all creature religion, how many testimonies will then be left in our soul to go into eternity with? How many answers to prayer? How many applications of the blood of Jesus? How many sweet manifestations of his presence? How many visits from his gracious self? How many words dropped with his own power into the heart? One, two, three, four, five, or ten? If we have one, it will save us; but one will not satisfy. Like Gideon, we must have token upon token, sign upon sign: one will not satisfy; evidence upon evidence, testimony upon testimony, whisper upon whisper, smile upon smile, answer upon answer. We never can have too much; yet how little it is when all is summed up!

Now, when your religion is held up in these balances; when all is pared away except God's teaching and God's revealing—how little, O how little remains! When weighed up in these strict, unerring "balances of the sanctuary" how scanty a shred is left! And yet that little will save. And sure I am, the man whose heart is made honest before God, never wants to have any religion but what God teaches; he never wants to lean upon anything but what God does for him. No; he cannot go into eternity except with what the Lord has been pleased to work in his heart with power.

As the Lord, then, carries on from time to time his gracious

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work in the soul, and brings these times and seasons over our head and into our heart, we shall find and prove to the very letter the words of the text, there is "a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away." The Lord favour us with many such times.

113 The Master's Bounty, and the Servant's Obedience

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Elie Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning,
August 9, 1846

"Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live and keep thy word."

Psalm 119:17

What a fund of true and vital experience is contained in the 119th Psalm! What simplicity and godly sincerity shine through it! What breathings after God's presence and manifested favour! What desires to live to the glory of God! What fervent pourings out of the Psalmist's heart, that he might be enabled to keep God's precepts!

Three features especially seem to my mind stamped upon this blessed portion of God's word. One is, a deep sense of the Psalmist's sinfulness and helplessness. "My soul," he cries, "cleaveth to the dust; quicken thou me according to thy word." (ver. 25.) "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments." (ver. 176.) And indeed, what I may call the substratum of the whole Psalm is, creature weakness and helplessness. This feeling lies under well-nigh every petition; and springing out of it, and built upon it, is David's earnest cry that the Lord would supply his wants. The second feature that strikes my mind as stamped upon this Psalm is, the desire of David's soul to experience the quickening and reviving teachings and testimonies of God the Spirit in his heart. Being completely weaned from creature strength, and having felt from time to time the blessed

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teachings, guidings, and leadings of the Lord the Comforter, he here pours out his soul after those reviving influences and quickening manifestations. The Psalm is full of them: "Quicken me after thy lovingkindness." (ver. 88.) "I opened my mouth, and panted." (ver. 131.) "I have longed for thy salvation." (ver. 174.) "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." (ver. 135.) "Mine eyes fail for thy salvation." (ver. 123.) And the third striking feature, which in fact shines through nearly every verse of the Psalm, is, the desire of David's heart to understand and keep God's word. The tender affection that he displays to the word of God; his fervent desires to have that word brought into his soul; and the breathings he pours forth, that he may speak, and act, and live in perfect conformity to its precepts—is a feature peculiarly stamped upon the whole Psalm.

In the text, we find, first, a petition, "Deal bountifully with thy servant;" secondly, what David knew and felt would be the fruit and effect, if that petition were granted, "That I may live and keep thy word."

I.—What is man in a state of nature? We are never to forget our base original; we are continually to look to the rock whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we were digged. Israel was ever to say, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father." (Deut. 26:5.) We are, therefore, continually to look to the fall of man; for only so far as we are acquainted with the fall, can we experimentally know the remedy that God has provided for this desperate malady.

1. What, then, is man in a state of nature? He is, as the Apostle so emphatically describes, Romans 6:17, "the servant of sin." Before, therefore, he can become the servant of God, as David in the text declares himself to be, a mighty revolution must take place in his soul. By nature we are bond-slaves to sin; as the Apostle says, "We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures." (Titus 3:3.) We served them eagerly, we served them greedily; they were our willing masters,

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and we were their willing slaves. During the time that we are thus wearing the chains of servitude to the basest lusts, to the vilest sins, we are ignorant of our state as sinners before God. We know not that "the wages of sin is death." We are hurrying on to the chambers of destruction; yet we know not, we care not, whither we are tending.

2. But we are also, the servants of Satan. "When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace." This mighty conqueror has with him a numerous train of captives; this haughty master, the god of this world, has in his princely retinue a whole array of servants who gladly do his behests: him they cheerfully obey, though he is leading them down to the bottomless pit; for though he amuses them here awhile with a few toys and baubles, he will not pay them their wages until he has inveigled them into that awful gulf of destruction in which he himself has been for ages weltering.

3. Again. In our natural state, we are the servants of the world. What the world presents, we love; what the world offers, we delight in. To please the world; to get as large a portion as we can of its goods; to provide in it amply for ourselves and our children; to obtain and to maintain a respectable station in it,—this is the grand bent of man's carnal heart.

And lastly, we are the servants of self. Self in its various forms, proud self, lustful self, covetous self, righteous self—self in some shape or other, is the idol before whom all carnal knees bow, the master whom all carnal hearts serve.

See, then, the state into which every child of Adam is fallen and sunk—the servant of sin, the servant of Satan, the servant of the world, and the servant of self. He loves his master, hugs his chain, and delights in his servitude, little thinking what awful wages are to follow.

But if we look at the expression in the text, David calls himself God's servant, "Deal bountifully with thy servant." If, therefore, we are to be brought off from being servants of sin and self, it must

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be by some change taking place in the soul; for the Lord says, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other; ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matt 6:24.) We cannot serve sin and righteousness; we cannot serve the world and God; we cannot serve Satan and the Lord; we cannot serve self and Jesus. A mighty revolution must, therefore, take place in the soul, in order to bring us into that state and posture where David was, when he said, "Deal bountifully with thy servant."

In what way, then, are we made God's servants? It is true, that so far as the Lord has adopted us into his family, we are God's sons; "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." But we are not only sons of God, so far as the Lord has begotten us unto eternal life, we are servants also. The one relationship does not destroy the other. It is often so naturally; the son will often be to the father as a servant. He shall assist him in his labours; he shall take a share of his daily toils. Jacob was Laban's servant, though his son by marriage. "I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle" was the complaint of the aggrieved patriarch. (Gen. 31:41.) Jacob's own sons afterwards kept their father's flock. And does not the Lord call himself Master as well as Father? "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is my fear?" (Mal. 1:6)—one relationship not annulling the other. Nay, the very angels who are called in Scripture "sons of God," (Job 1:6, 38:7), are yet called "servants of God;" as the angel said to John, "See thou do it not; I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book." (Rev. 22: 9.) And thus we find the Apostles, when writing to the churches, call themselves "servants." For instance, "Paul and Timotheus, servants of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:1.) "James, a servant of God." (James 1:1.) "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:1.) As if their highest title, and their most blessed employment, was to be servants of the living Jehovah.

But how are we brought into this relationship? for the Lord finds us in the chains of slavery; the servants of sin, self, and Satan. Must, then, not some mighty change take place before we can be made the servants of the living God? There must. The change takes place in this way.

1. First, the Lord, by casting divine light into the mind, and bringing his holy word with quickening power into the conscience, alarms, terrifies, deeply convinces the soul of its state by nature, as "serving divers lusts and pleasures." This is the first stroke that God usually makes to loosen the chains of slavery off the hands, and the fetters off the limbs. By piercing and penetrating the conscience through the communication of light and life, sin is felt to be sin, and its wages are known to be death.

2. But this is not sufficient. This does not strike the fetters off the captive's limbs. He may still clank his chains, though he clanks them in misery. Other processes are necessary before the manacles can be stricken off. One is, to make him fairly sick of sin; not merely to arouse the soul, to awake the conscience, to alarm the mind by the convictions of the Spirit from the application of God's law, but also to make him fairly sick of sin, sick of the world, sick of Satan, and sick of self; to make him feel such bondage, such darkness, such wretchedness, and such miserable sensations, as to loathe those lusts in which he has been so cruelly entangled, to loathe the world which he has so gladly served, to loathe Satan who has so perpetually drawn him aside, and loathe himself as the vilest and worst monster of all.

3 But even this is not sufficient. By these means we are brought to hate our servitude; by these means our chains and fetters are somewhat unloosened, and the links are partially struck off the limbs. But still, we want something more before we can be servants of the Lord. "Thy people," we read, "shall be willing in the day of thy power." We want some manifestation of the Lord's mercy, grace, and favour to our hearts; and when this is felt, we gladly leave the old servitude, and enlist ourselves, so to speak, under

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a better master, and yield our hearts, our affections, our bodies, our souls, our spirits, our all—we yield them all up into his hands who has made himself dear, near, and precious to our souls. This is to obey the counsel which the blessed Spirit gives the Bride, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly delight in thy beauty; for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him." (Psa. 14:10, 11.)

4. But a fourth thing is necessary to complete it—to be crucified with Christ, entering by living faith into a knowledge of the sufferings of Jesus, his blood, and his righteousness; and thus being crucified and dying with him, to be killed to sin by virtue of his death. This is the point so beautifully set forth, Rom. 6:2-6, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." And this was Paul's own blessed experience. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20.)

Thus, by these powerful operations of the Spirit of God upon the heart; first, awakening and alarming the conscience; secondly, sickening and surfeiting us completely of our fetters; thirdly, making Jesus dear, near, and precious by some discovery of his beauty and glory; fourthly, leading us into some fellowship with him in his sufferings, some knowledge of his death and resurrection—by these distinct operations of the Spirit of God upon the soul, are we brought to be his willing servants, to delight in serving him, to feel it to be our highest privilege and our chiefest pleasure to yield

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ourselves up unto the Lord that we may be eternally his, that he may mould us into his image here and take us to be with him in a glorious immortality hereafter.

David, then, was in this posture and state of soul, when he breathed forth the words, "Deal bountifully with thy servant." He had been enlisted into the service of this blessed Master. He had been delivered from serving sin, the world, Satan, and self. He had been brought to yield up his heart's affections into the hands of Jesus, to be his in life and in death, for time and for eternity. But, like all other children of God, he felt, deeply felt, his own sinfulness, helplessness, and inability to bring forth in his own heart that which he longed to realise there. He therefore makes use of this as a plea before the mercy-seat. As though he would say, 'I am thy servant; it is my desire to live to thy glory; I would serve thee with singleness of eye; I would renounce everything incompatible with my service to thee; I desire to be thine, thine only; and that thou wouldest "work in me to will and to do of thy good pleasure." "Deal then bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word."

But what is it for the Lord to "deal bountifully" with the soul? All that the Lord does for his people, he does in a way of bounty. There is nothing to be gained by merit; there is nothing to be obtained by creature service. The servant of the Lord does not bring his services to the foot of his Master, and thereby lay a claim to God's goodness and favour. Whatever is communicated to him, is communicated as an act of mercy; whatever he receives, he receives as an act of grace. And yet feeling a desire after those bountiful mercies and favours which God has to bestow, he puts in his lowly plea. How earnestly and yet humbly he lays his petition at his Sovereign's footstool, "Deal bountifully with thy servant!"

But in what way does the Lord "deal bountifully?"

1. When he gives a sweet manifestation of the pardon of sin, he deals bountifully; for when the Lord pardons sin, he pardons completely; he makes no reserve; he pardons sins past, sins present,

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and sins to come; his forgiveness is extended to every thought of the heart, every look of the eyes, every word of the lip, every action of the hand: it is a complete, irrevocable amnesty. Therefore the Scriptures use such declarations as these, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." (Isa. 38:17.) "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19.) "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." (Isa. 44:22.) "In those days, and at that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." (Jer. 50:20.) When, then, a man's conscience has contracted guilt; when he feels himself indeed to be one of the vilest wretches that crawls upon God's earth; when temptations press his soul down; when there is little else felt but the workings of inward depravity, filth, and iniquity—does not he then long for the Lord to deal bountifully with him—freely to pardon, graciously to accept, mercifully to forgive him? to reveal this full pardon to the heart, to seal this entire forgiveness upon the conscience, and to bless the soul with a clear testimony that the Lord has put away all his iniquities and blotted out all his transgressions?

2. The Lord deals also bountifully when he opens up the treasures of mercy, grace, love, and salvation that are stored up in the Saviour's fulness. "It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;" and therefore the Apostle John says, "Of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace." Now, the Lord unfolds, from time to time, the riches of Christ's grace to his waiting family. This is the covenant work of the blessed Spirit, "He shall take of mine, and shew it unto you." The blessed Spirit takes of the things of Jesus; and shows, at times, the glory of his justifying righteousness, and the balmy sweetness of his atoning blood and dying love; and as he unfolds these blessed things to the soul, he raises up in the heart earnest desires to experience them, to enjoy them, to realise them, and have them divinely shed abroad in the heart. We are not satisfied with eyeing these blessings at a

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distance; that is but a Balaam's view, "I shall see him, but not nigh." We are not contented with reading of them in the word; we are not contented with knowing that Jesus has this and that blessing to bestow; nor can we be satisfied with seeing, by the eye of faith, all the grace and all the glory stored up in his inexhaustible fulness. We want something more; we want a communication of these blessings to the heart. When the ground is parched and dry, it does not satisfy the farmer to see the clouds rolling over his head filled with rain, unless they let fall their rich showers upon his fields. It does not satisfy a hungry man to see the table loaded with a noble banquet, unless some of that ample fare reach his mouth. Nay, the sight without the enjoyment raises up jealous feelings against the guests, if we see the table richly spread, and may not approach ourselves and feast. When, therefore, the Psalmist says, "Deal bountifully with thy servant," it is as though he had said, "Lord, I see such grace and glory in the blessed Jesus; I view such mercies and blessings stored up in him; I behold in him a Saviour so suited to my need; he so has and is everything that my poor lost soul can desire; O deal bountifully with thy servant by satisfying my need, by pouring into my heart some of those unspeakable riches, by bringing down into it a measure of those blessings, and communicating them with thy bounteous hand to my needy, naked soul." All this seems comprehended in the petition, "Deal bountifully with thy servant."

3. Again; the superaboundings of God's grace over the boundings of sin, seems also implied in the petition put forth here. Sure I am, if we watch the movements of our heart; if we daily mark the various thoughts, desires, and workings that from time to time pass through our minds, we shall feel that sin indeed abounds in us. Pride, hypocrisy, covetousness, deadness in the things of God, selfishness, sensuality—a thousand evils are perpetually struggling and lifting up their heads in our souls. Who that knows himself does not feel, painfully feel, that sin is perpetually working and striving for the mastery in his heart? that evil in all its shapes,

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in all its subtle and various forms, is perpetually abounding in him? What then does one thus taught want? Is it not to feel the superaboundings of grace over the boundings of these sins? Is it not to feel the superabounding grace of God freely blotting out, freely putting away, freely covering, freely justifying from, and freely spreading its divine glory over the boundings of these inward and horrible iniquities? When, then, he says, "Deal bountifully with thy servant," it is as though he said, "Lord, I sin with every breath that I draw; my eye, my hand, my tongue, every member of my body is continually committing some evil; but, Lord, where sin has thus abounded, there let thy grace much more abound."

But there is something, also, to my mind, very sweet and very experimental in the expression, "Deal bountifully." It is as though the Psalmist longed to experience some special and sensible dealings of God upon his soul. He wanted to feel the fingers of the Almighty in his conscience. He was not satisfied with merely reading or hearing about grace; he wanted some manifestations and testimonies, some inward witness, some word applied with power, some smile from the Lord's countenance, some gracious promise from his lips to cheer and encourage him. And this is the feeling, more or less, of every living soul, and of none but a living soul; for by this the Lord's family are distinguished from all others—that they, and they only, have dealings with God, and God only has dealings with them; that to them only the Lord speaks, in them only the Lord works; that to them only the Lord appears, and upon them only the Lord smiles. They are the favoured of the Lord; he guides their steps, he directs their way, and guards them every moment; he keeps them as the apple of his eye. "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." (Isaiah 27:2, 3.) The Lord's people are, as it were, in a blessed circle, on which alone the sun shines, and on which alone the rain falls. All but the Lord's garden is left a waste wilderness;

all but the Lord's people are suffered to perish in their sins; all but the Lord's family are left unprovided for in the economy of grace, unredeemed by the blood of the Son, unblessed by the work and witness of the Spirit. But when the Lord's people are dark and dead, when their souls are barren and dry, when they can only see their vileness, and feel as though they had little to distinguish them from those dead in sin, they cannot but pour out a simple and sincere desire Godward, "Deal bountifully with thy servant."

II.—But there were certain fruits and effects which David knew would follow, if the Lord would but "deal bountifully" with him; and it was these effects and these fruits which would be a proof to him of God's bounteous dealings. It is not with the child of God, that so long as the Lord appears for him he cares for no gracious fruits to follow. He wants certain effects and fruits to be brought forth; and knowing his own deadness, feeling his own hardness, and being thoroughly convinced of his own helplessness, he is looking up to the Lord, as he enables him, that he would work in him; for he knows that if the Lord will but work in him, these blessed fruits and effects must follow. Two of these fruits are mentioned in our text: "That I may live, and keep thy word."

1. "That I may live." David, no doubt, at times felt, as you and I so often and so painfully feel, great deadness of soul. Is not this one of the chief standing lamentations of God's family? Go amongst the Lord's family, the deepest taught, the most highly favoured, and those whom we could envy most for the leadings and teachings of God upon their heart; and you will hear them lamenting their great deadness of soul, their darkness and barrenness in the things of God. And go to others who are not so deeply taught; who are less highly favoured, and you will find them with the same language of complaint upon their lips—bemoaning their coldness, deadness, and barrenness Godward. The saints of old felt this. Paul says, "Death worketh in us, but life in you." The Psalmist cries, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust."

But can the child of God rest contentedly in these feelings

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of deadness and darkness? Are they not sources of continual lamentation? Can we take no notice of these feelings? Can we say, they shall not be a burden to us? Can we wholly set them aside, and say, so long as we are interested in Christ's love and blood, it matters not how dead, dark, cold, and barren we are? Such language may suit those who know nothing of the vital teachings of God the Spirit in the heart; but a living soul cannot, dare not, use such presumptuous language. It is his lamentation, his grief, his complaint, that he is, day by day, so dead, so cold, so stupid, and so hard-hearted in the things of God. But the very lamentation proves that there is a principle of life that feels deadness: the very mourning and sighing shew that there is a tender conscience which groans under it; the very desire to be delivered out of it proves there have been times and seasons when the light and life of God have been inwardly felt: and the very bondage and misery that these feelings create, manifest that there have been times when the Lord has been the light of our countenance, and liberty and love have been felt in the heart. It is the contrast, the painful contrast, between light and darkness, life and death, liberty and bondage, spirituality and carnality—it is this painful contrast that makes the soul so lament and mourn its darkness, deadness, and barrenness in the things of God. But can the creature help itself? Can the creature bring itself out of these wretched feelings of darkness, death, and bondage? No; it is utterly impossible for any child of Adam to quicken or keep alive his own soul. Therefore, the Lord, from time to time sends forth the blessed Spirit into the heart; and as he revives his work in the soul, the child of God pours out this simple petition: "Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live;" that I may not always be dead and cold; that I may not ever be dark and stupid; that I may not perpetually be in bondage and carnality; but that there may be those sweet revivings, those blessed renewings, those divine inshinings, and those heavenly testimonies whereby the heart being enlarged runs in the way of God's commandments with perfect freedom; "Deal bountifully

But in what way "live?" We can scarcely call it life when we are in that dead, cold, stupid, indifferent state where there is just enough life to feel our death, just enough light to see our darkness, just enough liberty to mourn over our chains. As to life, we cannot call it life, except there be some manifestations from the Lord, some revival of soul, some shining-in of the light of the Lord's countenance, some bountiful dealings of God himself with the heart. But no sooner does God begin to "deal bountifully," no sooner does he begin to work with his own blessed Spirit upon the heart; no sooner do light and life, liberty and love, flow out of the fulness of Christ into the soul—than it lives, it lives! it revives! New feelings are experienced; life flows in and life flows out; prayer comes in, and prayer flows forth; the Lord is endeared to the soul; what the Lord loves the soul loves, for he makes himself very precious; and this is living, living indeed! "Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live."

But when we "live," we live by faith; as the Apostle says, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." We live by faith when the Lord is pleased to communicate true faith, the precious gift of faith to the heart. Then indeed we believe. We then believe in Jesus, believe in his blood, believe in his righteousness, believe in his person, believe in his dying love; and as faith begins to lift up its drooping head in the soul, we begin to live a life of faith upon the Son of God. And as we begin to live, we also begin to love. When we are in darkness, coldness, and barrenness there is neither love to God nor man; the very ways of God are a perfect misery to us; the Bible is neglected, and prayer is little attended to; under preaching we are cold, dead, and listless; the company of God's people is forsaken, and the things of eternity seem to fade from our view. But let the Lord revive his work upon the heart, let him bestow a gracious renewing, let him drop the unction of his Spirit, let the rain and dew of his grace fall, let him manifest himself with life and power; then the whole

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scene changes. It is like spring after a dreary winter; it is like the outpouring of the rain from heaven after a long season of drought, "Thou renewest the face of the earth." There is a blessed change when the Lord himself is pleased to appear in the soul. Then it begins to live. There is life in prayer, life in the reading of God's word, life in hearing the truth preached, life in conversing with God's people. Life must ever be experimentally felt in the soul when the Lord is pleased to deal bountifully with his servant.

And this life will manifest itself in various ways. Whilst we are dead, prayer is a burden; when we have life, prayer is our very breath. When we are dead, the very thoughts of God are grievous; when we are alive, the thoughts of God are sweet and pleasant. When we are dead, our affections cleave to the things of time and sense; when we are alive, our affections mount upward. When we are dead, the world is our home, though it is but a miserable one; when we are alive, we are looking upward to heaven as the home of the soul when time shall be no more.

But we are utterly unable to produce these feelings in our own soul. We feel our deadness, and mourn over it; we lament our barrenness, and cry unto the Lord, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But to revive our own souls, to bring life and feeling into our own hearts, to lift ourselves up out of the pit of carnality, is beyond our power. We want sovereign grace to do this; we want almighty power put forth in our hearts to bring about this blessed change; we want a touch from the Lord's finger, a smile from the Lord's countenance, a manifestation of the Lord's mercy. But when he deals bountifully with the soul, then it lives; and when he does not deal bountifully with it, then it droops and dies.

How different is this experience of a living soul from those deceived and deceiving professors, who think they can do something to revive their own hearts! Poor deluded creatures! they have not yet felt the misery of slavery. Poor deluded wretches! they have not yet learnt this lesson, that in them, that is, "in their

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flesh, dwelleth no good thing." Poor blind creatures! they know not the depth of the fall into which man has sunk. Therefore, they may talk of doing this and doing that; of reviving their own souls, and of cultivating this or that grace. But the Lord's people, who have felt both sides of the question, and know what it is sometimes to sink and sometimes to rise, sometimes to be miserable, and sometimes happy, sometimes to be in bondage and sometimes in liberty, sometimes shut up and sometimes able to come forth, sometimes dead and sometimes alive—they know, painfully know, experimentally know, that no man ever quickened, and that no man ever kept alive his own soul; and if they are to live, if ever they are to have gracious revivals, if ever their soul is to enjoy the presence and favour of God, come it must as a gracious gift from him who deals bountifully with those whom he makes and manifests as his servants.

2. "And keep thy word." David earnestly desired to keep God's word. However men may slight and despise God's word, or however little they may think about obeying it, David was not so minded. Read the 119th Psalm, and see what godly sincerity and simplicity run through it, what earnest desires, what fervent breathings, that he may keep God's word. But he could not do it himself. He could not obey God's precepts; he could not shape his life in conformity with God's will; he could not for a single half hour keep his thoughts upon God; nor could he obey God's revealed will except by the Lord's grace. But he was not therefore satisfied with neglecting God's word. He could not pack it off upon the "old man," or upon the devil, and say, 'If I am one of the Lord's people, it does not matter whether I keep God's word or not.' He well knew that without God's power he could not keep it; his inability and helplessness were too deeply wrought in his soul; he was too acutely sensible of the awful fall of man, and the carnality of his depraved nature to think of keeping God's word unless he enabled him. But he was looking up to a higher power to help him to obey God's precepts. Still there was that principle in his soul,

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that love of God, that holy fear, that tender conscience, that desire to please God and that dread to offend him, which made the real bent of his mind to desire to keep God's word. Seeing, therefore, what a blessed thing it was to keep God's word, but feeling his inability to do so, and yet desiring to have this obedience brought forth in his heart, in his lip, and in his life, he goes to the footstool of mercy, and pouring out his soul there in simplicity, he breathes forth this petition, "Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word."

But when do we keep God's word?

1. We keep it when we feel any part of it to be very precious to our soul. Is it not so in nature? We are very careful of that which we value; bank notes, gold, silver, jewels, precious stones—how carefully these are kept because a certain value belongs to them. So if the word of God is ever made precious to our souls, we keep it. It is with us like the Virgin Mary, she "pondered these things in her heart." They were kept by her, pondered over, diligently treasured, carefully stored.

2. But again. If the Lord has ever applied any word to the conscience; if any portion of his blessed truth, has ever come home to our hearts, has ever enlightened our eyes, has ever been made sweet to our souls, has ever enlarged our captivity, has ever delivered us from temptations, has ever broken a snare, has ever made Jesus precious, has ever melted us at the footstool of mercy—that word is kept. It is God's word; it has been made life and spirit to the soul, and it is kept because a high value is put upon it. When the Lord deals bountifully with his servant, it is, for the most part, by dropping a word into his soul, by opening up some precious Scripture to his heart, by giving him some manifestation from the revealed word of his goodness and love; and then, as this word drops from the mouth of God, it is caught up by the hungry and thirsty soul, lodged in the heart, stored and locked up in the treasure-house of his conscience.

3. But we also keep God's word when we obey it, attend to it,

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act upon it, when it is our regulator and our guide; as the Psalmist says, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." If the Lord give a check, to attend to it; if he drop an admonition, not to despise it; if he send a reproof, to submit to it; if he bring a warning, to heed it;—in this way we keep God's word. The word is thus made life and spirit to the soul; it is brought with power into the heart; and the soul keeps it, because the Lord applies it with savour and unction to the conscience.

The Lord's family are, more or less, exercised in this way; and thus they can all, more or less, join with David in this petition at the footstool of mercy. Do not all the Lord's family, for instance, feel at times their deadness and darkness? Do not they all sensibly mourn over their coldness and barrenness in the things of God? Is it not their daily complaint? Is it not sometimes their hourly burden? Is it not often a dark cloud that seems to depress and cast them down, and spread itself over every faculty of their soul? And when they feel this, they feel also that none but the Lord can remove it. How often they cry, sigh, beg, and groan, 'Lord, that thou wouldst remove this deadness! O revive my heart, strengthen my soul, shine upon me, lead me, guide me, hold me up, visit me, bring me out of this coldness, deadness, and darkness!'

And do not all the Lord's people earnestly desire to keep God's word? They have a holy fear of offending him; they have an earnest desire to please him; they know him to be a kind Father, a tender Parent; and the longing of their souls is, to live according to his word. But they cannot do it. Their wicked heart draws them aside in one direction, Satan drives them aside in the other direction. Sometimes lust entangles, sometimes pride inflates, sometimes hypocrisy seizes, sometimes presumption swells, sometimes one corruption, sometimes another so lays hold upon them, that they cannot obey God's word. Then conviction comes, and guilt follows; their hearts are burdened, their souls are bowed down, and they desire again to keep God's word, "O that they could live to God's

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glory! O that they could obey him always! O that their hearts, lips, and lives were all directed according to God's revealed will and word!" But they cannot create these fruits in their own hearts, lips, and lives; and therefore, when the Lord brings them, as he does bring them, from time to time, to the footstool of mercy, they lift their hearts, if not in the very words, yet in the substance of this petition, "'Deal bountifully with thy servant;" Lord, appear for me; give me some smile, melt my heart with some discovery of thy mercy, bring a sense of thy love into my soul, visit me with thy salvation and the light of thy countenance, and give me those sweet teachings and divine testimonies whereby I shall live and keep thy word.'

Thus the feeling sense of our own deadness becomes overruled to bring us more fervently to the footstool of mercy; and a feeling sense of our own sinfulness becomes divinely overruled to bring us more earnestly to the Lord that he would enable us to live to his glory. And thus the Lord takes occasion by our very complaints, our very mourning, our very lamentations, our very self-abhorrence and self-loathing—the Lord takes occasion by these things to manifest more of the riches of his sovereign grace, and to shew that "where sin hath abounded, grace doth much more abound."

But can the Lord deal any way but bountifully with his servants? Why has he made you his servants? Why did he strike the chains of former servitude off your hands? Why did he bring you out of the service of sin, the world, Satan, and self? Why did he ever make himself precious to your heart, win your affections, and enable you to give yourselves wholly unto him? That he might cast you off? that he might mock your calamity? that he might trample you one day into hell? that he might leave you to yourself? that he might suffer Satan to overcome you; permit your lusts to destroy you; or allow your sins to be tied one day, like a millstone round your neck, to sink you into hell? O, can our heart ever indulge thoughts so derogatory to sovereign grace? Was it not because the Lord had bounty in his heart towards you, that he first turned your

heart towards himself? Was it not because the Lord had purposes of love towards you, that he first led your feet into his paths? Was it not because God first loved you, that he gave his Son to die for you? Now if he has taught you, led you, upheld you, kept you, all this time, is it to cast you off now—to let you sink at last? He cannot do so, will not do so. Those whom he loves, he loves to the end; the good work which he has begun, he will accomplish, and bring to final perfection; and therefore, all the Lord's acts are acts of bounty.

But your soul may say—'Why, then, am I so straitened? Why am I so imprisoned? why so dark? why so dead? why so deserted? If the Lord "deal bountifully with his servants," and I am one of his, why does he leave me to all this carnality and wretchedness?' Why, the Lord has a purpose in so doing; he means to humble you more thereby; he means to lead you thereby more deeply into an acquaintance with the fall; he means, in the end, thereby to endear himself more to your soul; that you, sinking more and more deeply into nature's wretchedness and ruin, may more bless his precious name when he appears on your behalf. If you are his, he must deal bountifully with your soul. Let us never entertain such niggardly thoughts of God as to think that he can deal in any way but bountifully. He has a princely heart, he has a royal hand; and he therefore never has dealt, and never can deal in any way but bountifully with those that are his. Did not bounty move him to give up his only begotten Son? Did not bounty lead him first to deal with your conscience? Did not bounty induce him first to bless and deliver your soul? Did not bounty move him to keep you every step of the way? And will not bounty lead him to take you safely home? It is high treason against the Majesty of heaven to think he can deal niggardly, sparingly, scantily with his people. It is treason against his princely hand and his royal heart. He declares of himself, "I am God and not man;" and being God and not man, he therefore deals bountifully with all his servants. They live upon his bounty here, and they will live upon his bounty hereafter. He admits them to a seat at the table below, that they may sit at his

board above; and thus he gives to his people all the comfort, and gets to himself all the glory.

113 Wrestling Jacob

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on
Lord's Day Morning,
August 16, 1846

"I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

Genesis 32:26

The person by whom, and the circumstances under which these words were uttered, must be familiar to all here who have a tolerable acquaintance with the letter of God's written word. I need therefore scarcely remark that they are the words of Jacob when he was wrestling with the angel. He was returning to his native land under peculiar circumstances. Though he was a child of God, his treachery against his brother Esau had not passed unnoticed and unchastised by the Lord. Nay, for that very reason, because he was a child, he experienced chastisement. And not only so, but he had the very same treachery that he had shown to his brother Esau amply repaid into his own bosom by the Lord's permitting Laban to deceive him in a point where his tenderest affections were concerned, besides oppressing and defrauding him continually.

After a lapse, then, of twenty years, at the Lord's command he escapes from the hard oppression of Laban, and sets out to return to the land of his fathers and to his kindred. Ge 31:3 But after being miraculously delivered from the vengeance of Laban, and drawing near the borders of Canaan, he learns to his dismay that his brother Esau was at hand with four hundred men. The recollection of his former treachery flashing upon his conscience immediately filled him with the deepest distress and alarm, lest his justly incensed brother should fall upon him, all defenceless as he was, and "smite the mother with the children." But what was

Jacob's resource? He did what every child of God must do under similar circumstances. He goes and wrestles with the Lord. We read that he "was left alone." He allowed no person to be present while he poured out his soul before God. Thus Hezekiah "turned his face toward the wall," when the sentence of death was felt in his conscience. Isa 38:2 Thus Nehemiah stood in silence behind the king, when he put up a secret petition on Jerusalem's behalf. Ne 2:4 Thus Moses lay at the feet of the Lord on the shore of the Red Sea, venting the secret groaning of his soul, unknown and unnoticed by the ear of man. Thus Hannah too left her husband and her rival, to pour out her soul before the Lord in solitude and sorrow. 1Samuel 1:9,10,15 And thus, in the days of his flesh, the Man of Sorrows "went into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" Lu 6:12; and again, deserted and alone in the gloomy garden of Gethsemane, "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." Heb 5:7 Sweet and encouraging examples for living souls to follow!

But O! how graciously did God interpose on Jacob's behalf! When reduced to extremity, the Lord showed Himself. And how did He appear? In human shape; not indeed by an actual assumption of real flesh and blood, as some have vainly imagined; that was reserved for the time when He took part of the "flesh and blood of the children." Heb 2:14 The Son of God could only once become actually incarnate; and therefore these appearances in the Old Testament of the Lord in human shape were but shadowy representations, and preached to the church that then was, the future incarnation of the Son of God. With this "man," as He is called in the word, Jacob wrestled till the break of day; and whilst thus wrestling, these words, the words of the text, burst forth in the extremity of Jacob's case from his lips, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

Two things in the text strike my mind as its leading features.

1.—The earnest importunity of the wrestling patriarch "I will not let Thee go." And,

2.—The desired object which pressed so hard upon his soul—"except Thou bless me."

I.—Let us revert once more to the circumstances under which these words were uttered. Several things appear to me to have met together in Jacob's soul, in order to bring this petition out of his lips. And I believe, the very same things must, to a degree, meet also in our hearts, if the same petition is to escape from our lips honestly and sincerely before God.

1. Guilt lay hard upon Jacob's conscience. He knew that he justly deserved to be cut off by the angry sword of Esau. The recollection of his past treachery came fresh before his eyes, and his soul sank under the sense of his guilt, as knowing that he merited all that his incensed brother might do against him. Thus it is also with every quickened soul that comes earnestly and sincerely before the throne of mercy. If the guilt of sin lie not upon his conscience, it is but mocking God to ask Him to take it away. If the recollection of his sins do not press him down, it is but insulting God, it is but deceiving himself to beg of the Lord to remove the burden. Guilt, when laid upon the conscience by the blessed Spirit, will make a man honest; guilt, under the Spirit's intercession, will press a cry out of a man's heart, and force the language of confession and supplication out of his lips.

2. Fear was another circumstance that met in Jacob's soul—the fear of being cut off by the hand of Esau. The tidings brought back by the messengers that Esau was at hand with four hundred men, and he himself utterly defenceless, surrounded by weak women, feeble children and flocks and herds a tempting booty to the wild hunter of Mount Self filled Jacob's soul with alarm. Thus he felt that Esau had but to draw his sword, and he and all that belonged to him must be sacrificed to his vengeance. Is not the same thing, in a spiritual sense, felt in the heart of a child of God, when he

comes with similar language to the throne of grace? Does he not fear lest the Lord should draw His avenging sword against him, as Jacob feared lest the blade of Esau should be plunged into his heart; a fear arising, as in Jacob's case, from his defenceless state? fear lest he should not escape deserved punishment.

3. But, besides this, want also, urgent necessity, was another feature in Jacob's case; a pressing circumstance, which, combined with others, brought this petition out of his lips. He was in the extremity of need; he must have the Lord to appear for him, and that immediately. Delays would not suit his case; he must have help now. He could not wait; delay was death. Is it not so spiritually in the child of God, when he is brought to a throne of mercy? He must have immediate help; his soul is often in extremity; he cannot bear delay. God must appear for him, and that instantly; he must sink, he must faint, he must die, unless immediate help is given him.

4. But combined with these things, a measure also of faith was in Jacob's heart. If there had been no faith in Jacob's soul, he could not thus have wrestled with the Lord; for it is by faith alone that we come unto God. It is by faith alone that we have power with God and prevail; it is the prayer of faith alone, which enters the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth; it is the petition that is mixed with faith, which alone draws down an answer from God into the bosom. And this faith in Jacob's heart was strong faith. It was not faith, viewing dangers and difficulties at a distance, and then congratulating itself upon its amazing strength. It was not like some tall bully, who can be very courageous when no danger is at hand, but slinks immediately into the rear when anything appears alarming and terrifying. And this was the very mark of the strength of Jacob's faith—that it “lived under load;” that it manifested itself in spite and in the face of all opposing circumstances; that it was not damped, was not destroyed, was not overcome by dangers and perils; but shone the more brightly the more it was dipped in the floods, and struggled the more vehemently and manfully in proportion to the difficulties which it had to encounter.

Is not this the grand distinguishing feature of living faith in the soul—that it does not vaunt itself and swell high in times of quiet and ease, and immediately that difficulty appears shrinks and runs away? Living faith acts in a manner the direct contrary to this. It is indeed often timid and trembling in the face of danger; but yet the nearer the danger comes, the more boldly does it maintain its ground. Thus the very necessity of the case, so far from weakening, so far from overcoming, so far from destroying Jacob's faith the Lord making His strength perfect in the patriarch's weakness rather put fresh vigour into it. Thus he prayed the more earnestly and the more believingly, in exact proportion to the urgent want of his soul. Is it not so also in the heart of a child of God? When is faith most in exercise? When there is neither doubt nor fear, distress nor alarm? when the sun shines, and all things wear a favourable aspect? When things in providence go well? when outward circumstances flourish? when the family is in health? when everything in grace and everything in nature seem on our side? False faith may be lively and strong in such summer weather; but not that faith which is the gift of God. That is the most active when the sky is most cloudy; that shines the most brightly, when it is most opposed by enemies, has to fight against and triumph over most difficulties and perplexing circumstances. Did not Jacob take hold of the Angel in order to wrestle with Him? And is not this typical and figurative of the way in which faith lays hold of Jesus? Does not God say, “Let him take hold of My strength that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me?” Isa 27:5 This is the very character of faith—that it takes hold of God's word, brings into the heart God's promise, relies upon God's truth, hangs upon what God has declared, and maintains its hold in spite of death, Satan, and hell. If Jacob had merely viewed the Angel at a distance; if he had merely touched Him with his finger, and then immediately withdrawn his hand; or if he had begun to wrestle, and not gone on, would he have gained the blessing?

5. And this leads me to another feature that shines conspicuously

in the wrestling of Jacob with the Angel—his unwearied and persevering importunity. Jacob was not satisfied with merely beginning to wrestle, or with just taking hold of the Angel, and then immediately letting Him go. His case was so urgent; the extremity was so great; he so felt in his soul that the blessing he must have or die, that he not only took hold, but maintained his hold; he not only began, but he continued; he not only continued, but he persevered, till he came off more than conqueror through the Lord that loved him. And is not this the case with all living souls? Wherever there is true prayer, there is importunity. Wherever the Lord brings trials upon the soul, He pours out upon it the spirit of grace and supplications. He thus encourages and enables the soul to be importunate with him. The blessings and benefits of perseverance and importunity in prayer the Lord has brought prominently before us in two parables—one, of the man in bed with his children, who would not get up and relieve his friend, but yet was overcome by his importunity; and the other, of the woman, who had a cause at issue, and went before the judge who feared not God, neither regarded man; yet, by her continual going to him, overcame him at last by her importunity. Lu 11:5-8 Lu 18:1-7 Thus importunity and perseverance form the very feature of true prayer. If the child of God has a burden—if he is labouring under a strong temptation—if his soul is passing through some pressing trial—he is not satisfied with merely going to a throne of grace and coming away. There is at such times and seasons, as the Lord enables, real importunity; there is a holy wrestling; there are fervent desires; there are unceasing groans; there is a labouring to enter into rest; there is a struggling after deliverance; there is a crying unto the Lord, until He appears and manifests Himself in the soul, “I will not let Thee go.”

But what strength had Jacob against the God-Man so as to prevail? Might He not by one touch have ground him to powder? He might. But He graciously suffered Himself to be overcome; and yet to shew that it was not by might, nor by power, but by gracious

permission, that “the worm Jacob” prevailed, He touched “the hollow of his thigh,” and immediately it “was out of joint.” By this He shewed effectually that He permitted Himself to be overcome, and that it was no strength of Jacob, which procured him the victory. Thus this man of war, this God-Man, this “Immanuel, God with us,” who commanded all things into being, and before whose frown one day the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll, and all creation be dissolved into primitive nothingness, suffered Himself to be overcome by weak, timid Jacob, all fearing and trembling before the face of his brother Esau.

How encouraging it is for the Lord’s poor and needy family, that this manifestation of the Son of God was in the shape of a man! Do we not see in it a pledge of His incarnation in the fulness of time? Do we not view it in His infinite condescension in taking upon Him the flesh and blood of the children? For did not the Lord, in thus assuming human shape, foreshadow Himself as the divinely appointed Mediator between God and man? as the “Consolation of Israel?” as Jacob’s help? as the church’s hope? It is encouraging then, to the Lord’s people, as they are from time to time placed in similar circumstances of trial, exercise, perplexity, sorrow or distress with Jacob, to see the blessed result of his wrestling with the Angel. He crosses the ford of Jabbok all weakness; he recrosses it all strength. He leaves his family, and wrestles alone, a fainting Jacob; he returns to them a prevailing Israel. He goes to the Lord in an agony of doubt and alarm, fearing every moment lest he and all that was dear to him should be swept off from the face of the earth; he returns with the Lord’s blessing in his soul, with the light of the Lord’s countenance lifted up upon him. And is not this instance recorded for the instruction and consolation of the Lord’s living family? Are they not from time to time in circumstances experimentally, which resemble Jacob’s circumstances literally? Have they not often similar difficulties, similar wants and similar necessities? And does not the Lord from time to time raise up in their heart the same faith to lay hold? the same importunity to keep

hold? And shall He, who gave Jacob such a merciful deliverance—shall He, who has recorded in His holy word this remarkable event in Jacob's life for the edification and instruction of His people in all times—hear Jacob, and not hear them? It is derogatory to the sympathizing "Man of Sorrows;" it is treason against the Majesty of heaven to believe, that a child of God, in similar circumstances, can go to the Lord in a similar way, and not get a similar blessing.

But what is the reason why there are so few blessings bestowed? What is the reason why the Lord's people experience so few signal interpositions in providence or in grace? The reason is, because they have so little of the utterance of Jacob's lips, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

II.—And this leads me to the second branch of our subject, "Except Thou bless me." This is what Jacob wanted—a blessing for his soul. He wanted not merely deliverance, temporal deliverance from the threatening sword of Esau. He went indeed to the Lord with that burden; that was the petition he laid chiefly at the Lord's feet; for he said, "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children." Ge 32:11 But, it seems to me, whilst he was thus pleading with the Lord for a temporal deliverance, he was so overcome, and so overpowered with a view of the Lord's glory, and there was such an unfolding and flowing out of His fulness into Jacob's heart, that his soul's desires mounted above the temporal deliverance that he went mainly to seek, and he poured out his soul after a spiritual blessing. He seems in the very act of wrestling to have received some token and pledge of temporal deliverance; and then soaring upwards beyond mere temporal necessity, he begged of the Lord to give him a spiritual blessing. For he does not say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou answer me, except Thou deliver me from Esau, except Thou appear for me;" though he wanted all these. But his soul at this time was as if looking into the very bosom of the Lord; and seeing how that heart was full of mercy, kindness and love, and panting after those

spiritual blessings which alone can satisfy and save, he cried out with vehement desire, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

But what is a blessing? Blessings are very much talked about in our day; and there are those who speak of being blessed under well-nigh every sermon; but their blessing is all gone before they have walked a hundred yards from the chapel door. Blessings so transitory, that so soon evaporate, that slip away so easily, are not worth the name. A flash of transitory excitement, some movement of natural feeling, a trowelful of untempered mortar, or a fresh coat of white-wash, pass with many for blessings under the word; but none of them can be, or are considered, blessings by God's poor and needy family. An appetite so easily appeased, a thirst so soon satisfied, is not like the hungering and thirsting of God's own people. They call nothing a blessing but that which comes stamped with the hand of God, and carries with it its own clear and decisive evidence. All that falls short of coming into their hearts from the lips of God—all that falls short of the manifestation of the Lord's mercy and love, they cannot consider to be "a blessing indeed," or such a one as their souls are panting to enjoy. And yet there are minor blessings. I dare not deny that there are blessings that fall short of those full, clear and ravishing manifestations which the Lord's people are longing after and often on the look out for; and these the living family are glad to receive when they are not indulged with a full one. A sip will relieve thirst, though it falls short of a full draught; a crumb even from the table of the Lord will be prized for the time, when a more abundant morsel is withholden.

I. It is a blessing then to have the fear of God in the soul; for the implantation and possession of godly fear is a certain proof of the Lord's having quickened the soul into eternal life. Are not these the Lord's own words? "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good, but I will put My fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from

Me.” Jer 32:40 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Pr 9:10 It is therefore the very first evidence that God has planted in the soul spiritual life. There are many times and seasons, however, when the fear of the Lord appears as it were stagnant in the soul. It does not manifest itself; its refreshing streams for it is declared to be a “fountain of life to depart from the snares of death” are not sensibly felt; the heart appears cold and dead, the conscience less tender than formerly. There are not those godly sensations; there are not those trembling emotions; there is not that holy sensitiveness; there is not that sense of God’s great majesty; there is not that bowing down before His footstool, which the soul perhaps has experienced in times of old. But prizing highly godly fear almost as much from its felt absence as from its former presence, the soul may apply the words, and say, “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me” with this grace.

2. A testimony of our interest in the love and blood of the Lamb, is a blessing that those of the Lord’s people who have not yet attained to that favour are earnestly begging of Him to bestow. Many of the Lord’s people are kept very low for years; but still the Lord from time to time revives their souls. When harassed and perplexed with the evils of their heart, and mourning and sighing over the body of sin and death which they bear about with them, He sometimes shows them that this is the way, and that they must walk in it. Sometimes He draws forth tender affections towards Himself, opens up the word with savour and sweetness to their souls, makes the truth precious, and gives them a heart to love His people. Sometimes He makes the promises drop like dew into their soul, shows them the suitability of the invitations, and gives them to taste their sweetness and savour. Sometimes He gives them glimpses and glances of the glory and beauty of Jesus, and melts and softens their hearts at the sight of His sufferings and dying love. But yet they have not that full deliverance, that clear testimony, which their hearts are longing to enjoy.

There are, therefore, often times and seasons when they

are earnestly pleading with the Lord to bestow this rich mercy upon them. For instance: when they have been in company with any child of God more highly favoured than themselves, one more deeply taught, and who can speak more decidedly of the manifestations of God’s mercy and love and the sweet enjoyment he has experienced in his soul, their hearts begin to sink, and they are sent groaning home. It casts them down in their souls, as not being able to find a similar blessing in their own heart. But what is the effect? It leads them to go to the Lord more earnestly. They go home, perhaps up into their chamber, fall down upon their knees, and ask the Lord that He would appear for them, that He would give them a clear testimony, that He would shine upon their heart, that He would bless their souls with some sweet manifestation of His love,—in a word, that He would give them that rich and full peace and joy in believing which alone can abundantly and amply satisfy them that they are the Lord’s own children. And thus, at these seasons, the language of their heart is, “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.”

Sometimes too, when death seems near at hand; when some illness seizes their body, and they are laid upon a sick bed; when some neighbour, relative or friend is suddenly taken off; when some disease like cholera or fever is roving up the street, or approaching their door and they have no clear testimony that the Lord is their God—how it stirs up the sighs and cries of their souls that He would give them a manifestation, and shine into their hearts! So also, sometimes when guilt presses heavily upon their conscience, when the wrath of God is let down into their souls and they doubt and fear whether hell may not be their eternal portion, they are made to cry and sigh, and that earnestly, “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.” “Bless me instantly; bless me fully; bless me with that which shall amply satisfy me, that I am eternally thine.”

3. Sometimes the Lord indulges His people with a view of the glorious Jesus, opens up with savour and power some Scripture that testifies of His Person, lets down some discovery of it into

their conscience, enlightens the eyes of their understanding to see, and raises up faith in their heart to believe, though it falls short of the fulness of the blessing of pardon and peace. Jesus appears; but He does not come into their heart. They see His glory, and their souls are ravished by it. But they are not satisfied with beholding it at a distance; they want to have it brought fully and completely into their souls. But the Lord leads them out, from time to time, with earnest cries; He puts a wrestling petition into their heart; His own blessed Spirit intercedes for them and within them with some of His unutterable groanings, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

4. Others of the Lord's people who have been indulged with some testimony, who have felt a measure of the Lord's presence, and been enabled to rejoice in His name, are tried upon this point—they have not felt a full and powerful application of the atoning blood of Jesus to their conscience. They want it sprinkled upon their souls; to have it so clearly revealed to them that they may have no doubt whatever that that blood was indeed shed for them. They want it applied in a more clear, more manifest, more satisfying way than they have yet experienced. They cannot doubt that the Lord has done something for their souls; they do believe that He has given them some testimony of His goodness and mercy; but they are not yet assured that they have received upon their conscience the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. And this makes them from time to time, when they long to receive it into their souls and feel its cleansing efficacy, cry, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

5. Others of the Lord's people who have had a measure of the manifestations of the Lord's mercy, seem to fall short in this—that they have not had fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. They do believe that Jesus is the only propitiation for sin; that there is no other redemption, no other sacrifice for transgression. They have felt too a measure of the love and blood of Jesus in their conscience; but they have not been led, as they desire to be led, into

a fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. They have not been led into the garden of Gethsemane, nor have they accompanied Jesus to the cross; nor have they seen Him by the eye of faith crucified before their eyes Ga 3:1; nor have they entered by faith and feeling into the inward agonies and sufferings of the Man of Sorrows. They feel that this is one of the greatest blessings shall I not say, the greatest blessing? that the Lord can bestow. Thus, from time to time, as they see the glory of it, and feel their need of it, they cry, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

6. Others of the Lord's family are plagued with the world. The things of time and sense lay such hold of them; the temporal cares that they are beset with, anxieties in the family, distressing circumstances in providence, and that busy bustling world in which their hearts are sometimes shut up from morning to night, seem to steal away all their thoughts from the Lord. They desire therefore to have such a work upon their heart, and such divine teaching in their soul, as shall wean, separate, and bring them out of their carnal anxieties, that they may know nothing save Jesus and Him crucified. When their hearts are a little melted and softened, and they are brought a little off these perishing vanities, they want to retire into the innermost closet of their bosom, lie low before the Lord, and beseech Him to separate them from the spirit of the world; to accompany His word with power to their hearts, that they may live to His glory, enjoy His presence, and be delivered from being so much encumbered with worldly cares. This, then, is sometimes, if not the express language, yet the substance of their cry, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

7. Others of the Lord's people are much subject to the fear of death. Though the Lord has from time to time appeared for them, yet when their evidences are beclouded, when their testimonies have sunk out of sight, when guilt lies upon their conscience, when doubts and fears press hard, when Satan harasses or tempts, when eternity appears before them an unknown and awful reality, the fear of death will very often lie hard and heavy upon their

souls. They know that nothing but the Lord's own power, and the Lord's own manifestations of Himself in their soul, can take away this fear of death through which often all their lives they are subject to bondage. They want to have a happy dismissal when they come to lie upon their dying pillow; they want then to have the love smiles of the Lord sweetly experienced; not to die under a cloud; but to leave behind them some bright and clear testimony, that when the saints of God surround their bed, they may not be forced to hide their heads under the bedclothes in an agony of guilt and despair, or turn their faces away, and have nothing to tell of the Lord's goodness to their souls; but to be able to speak to His honour and praise, and tell aloud of the manifestation of His love and mercy to them; and, like aged Simeon, when he had seen the Lord's Anointed, may depart in peace. These too may say, when the fear of death lies upon them, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

8. Others of the Lord's family are labouring under temptations. And these temptations are so suitable to their fallen nature, and they are so unable in their own strength to overcome them, that they are afraid lest one day they should be awfully carried away by them. The lusts of their flesh; the evils and corruptions of their wicked heart; the daily, hourly snares that Satan spreads for their feet; and their own thorough helplessness, their own proneness to fall into these very snares, all contribute to distress their souls. And thus, sometimes, in an agony of soul, the tears rolling down their cheeks, and heaving sobs gushing from their bosom, they are importunate with the Lord, and say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me," in delivering me from this temptation, in breaking this snare, in setting my soul free from this besetment in which I am so cruelly and grievously entangled.

9. Others of the Lord's people desire to live to His glory; that they may not always be carnal and wordly minded, but that their thoughts and affections, body, soul and spirit, may be all devoted to His ways, all be such as He may approve of. When then they feel

their darkness, carnality and death, at what a distance they live from God, and how little they do for His glory, the desire of their souls is, that God would make it otherwise; that He would work in them to will and to do of His good pleasure, and bring forth in their hearts, lips, and lives, the fruits and graces of the blessed Spirit. Thus these too say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou thus bless me."

Whatever be the trial, the peculiar trial; the temptation, the peculiar temptation; the perplexity, the sorrow, the anxiety which each burdened soul feels, he is invited, he is encouraged and sometimes he is mercifully enabled to go with it to the throne of grace. What use is there venting our complaints into the ears of fellow morals, of poor dying worms? Can they relieve? What help could Jacob get from his lamenting wives, his crying children, his timid servants, his bleating sheep, his lowing herds? He had to leave them all. They could not comfort him; they might increase his distress by harrowing up the affections of his heart; but they could not relieve. And therefore he turns away from them all, to pour his complaint into the ears of that God who is ever mighty to save. He turns away from human help and creature strength, and goes as a petitioner to the Lord's footstool of mercy; and there he gets an answer; there he obtains deliverance; there he receives that which satisfies his soul, which blesses him, and makes him blessed. What profit shall you or I, then, ever get by pouring our complaints into the ears of some fellow sinner? or what relief shall we get by keeping our complaints locked up in our bosom? There is but one place whither we can go for these cares, these anxieties, these perplexities to be removed. And the Lord will bring all His people there. It is no matter of choice with them whether they will go or not. It was no matter of choice with Jacob. There was no wrestling whilst Jacob was keeping Laban's sheep; there was no wrestling whilst Jacob was travelling leisurely home. But when difficulty arose; when alarm presented itself; when the sword of revengeful Esau was being withdrawn from its scabbard, and its

gleaming edge was about to be sheathed in his heart, then extremity, necessity, urgency all met together in Jacob's bosom; and meeting together, they pressed this cry out of his lips, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

And will not this be the case with all the Lord's living family? I may go to the footstool of mercy; I may bend my knees; I may lift up my hands; I may use words; and what are they? words, words, empty words; breath, breath; the mere talk of the lips that tendeth to penury; that like the eddying smoke curls round and round, and never rises higher than the ceiling of the roof. But when the Lord is pleased to lay some urgent necessity upon a man's heart and this He ever does in the experience of all His people, though in different times and in different ways, and at the same time pours out a spirit of grace and supplications, and raises up and draws forth into exercise living faith, then he will, yea, he must come to the throne of mercy; not because it is his duty, or his privilege; not out of custom nor tradition, nor from what he has learned from men, or imbibed in childhood. All these things are effectually slain. But he comes under the immediate operation of the Spirit, under His immediate teaching, leading and guiding, under His supportings and blessed enablings. He it is who puts the cry into the heart and language into the lips, and intercedes in the soul with unutterable groanings, until in God's own time and way the answer comes full of mercy, grace and peace; an answer that amply satisfies, and more than amply satisfies every desire of the praying heart. "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

But some may say, "It seems almost like presumption in Jacob thus to speak. What could he have felt of the divine Majesty to use such irreverent language?" It was not so, my friends; it was not so. There was deep reverence mingled with faith in his soul; but his necessity compelled him. The Lord did not resent it. He did not rush upon the bosses of God's buckler; he did not intrude presumptuously into God's presence with a lying tale and a feigned lip. His was not the language of mock humility, that offends God

more than the language of confidence when He Himself raises it up. But the Lord Himself raised up these cries in Jacob's soul, and put these petitions in Jacob's lips, and the Lord Himself acknowledged it and honoured it with his manifested blessing, for He said to him, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with man, and hast prevailed."

How many wrestling Jacobs have we within these walls this morning? Just so many as have urgent cases; just so many as the Lord is powerfully dealing with; just so many as the Lord is laying trying perplexities and difficulties before their eyes and upon their hearts. And how many mock prayers have gone up before God this morning? how many unanswered petitions have ascended before the throne? From every heart not circumcised to fear God's name; from every unburdened, unexercised, unhumiliated professor; from every one that knows nothing of living faith mingled with his petitions and cries. So many sorrowing souls, so many earnest cries; so many urgent cases, so many urgent petitions; so many cases of extremity; so many cases of importunity; so many wrestling Jacobs, so many prevailing Israels.

Wherever, not the words, but the substance of them, has gone out of labouring, burdened, sorrowing, groaning hearts this morning, the answer is in the Lord's bosom already stored up, and in His own time and in His own way He will fully, He will amply, He will blessedly give you, who look to His throne in simplicity and godly sincerity, the desire of your souls. For wherever He has created the fruit of the lips, He will answer; wherever He has indited the language of supplication in the soul, His ear is open to hear, His heart is open to feel, and His bounteous hand is open richly and mercifully to bestow.

114 An Acceptable Present To The Lord Of Hosts

Preached at Providence Chapel, Cranbrook, Kent, on Wednesday Evening,

August 19, 1846.

“In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto: a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion.” Isaiah 18:7

When presents are made, there is usually a correspondence between the present and the person to whom it is given. An ample present for a beggar would be an insult to a nobleman. But especially when presents are made to kings, must the offering be worthy of the royal personage to whom the gift is made; otherwise he would consider it an affront rather than a present. And this more particularly in ancient times and eastern climates, where no one ever thinks of approaching a sovereign or man in power, without laying at his feet a suitable present. Thus the queen of Sheba, when she came to see and consult Solomon, brought the richest presents her country could produce.

The Lord of hosts is said in the text to have a present: “In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts.” And what present shall he have? Shall it be gold and silver, that object of almost universal idolatrous worship? Shall it be diamonds, and pearls, and precious stones? Shall it be noble buildings, and fretted aisles, and pealing organs, and chanting voices, and the fumes of incense? He that was born in a stable and cradled in a manger, can never look with acceptance upon such offerings as these. Shall it be then the best that nature can present? Shall it be such as the heart of man can lay at his feet as its primest offering? Shall it be creature piety? Shall it be natural religion? Shall it be human righteousness? Shall it be anything or everything that the creature may produce? The eye of eternal purity can never look upon the works or the words of man, except with abhorrence, for all, all are tainted, polluted, and deeply stained with original sin; and therefore, an offering entirely unacceptable in the eyes of infinite purity.

What shall he then have? What offering is fit for him, for his worth? The text tells us what the present is, that is to be brought to the Lord of hosts; what that offering is, which he will look upon with acceptance, and which he will graciously receive. “In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion.”

With God’s blessing, this evening, and looking up to him, as I am compelled, from time to time, from real soul necessity, that he would inspire thoughts, and dictate words, and crown with power what shall be spoken—I shall, in considering the subject, treat it under two heads.

I.—First, show the nature of the present which is made to the Lord of hosts;

II.—The place to which the present is brought, and the way in which the present is received.

I.—If we look at the present made to the Lord of hosts, it is declared by the Holy Ghost in our text to be “a people: In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of a people.” You will observe, that the “people” is the present which is brought to the Lord of hosts. But what “people” is this? It is the elect people of God—those that were chosen in Christ before all worlds; as the Lord speaks so clearly and emphatically (John 17:6), “Thine they were, and thou gavest them to me.” “All mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.” (John 17:10) The people, then, who are to be brought as a present to the Lord of hosts, are the elect of God; that people for whom Christ died; that people whom he hath formed for himself, and in whom he will show forth his praise.

But the Holy Ghost in the text describes the character of the

people who are thus brought. The text does not speak of the people of God merely as elect, merely as redeemed, merely as quickened by the blessed Spirit; but the Holy Ghost has selected certain marks, which are stamped upon this people, and which distinguish them from all other people upon the face of the earth. And here we see much beauty and much wisdom. If there were no description in the word of truth of the characters of God's people, many of the Lord's family would want evidences and testimonies that they belong to the election of grace.

Many of the Lord's people fully and firmly believe that there is an election of grace, but they are often tried in their minds as to whether they are personally interested in this election. They do not cavil and fight against God's sovereignty, and the doctrines of grace as revealed in the word of truth; their minds are bowed down to receive them, and they firmly believe them to be "the truth as it is in Jesus."

But the trying point with many—shall I say, the majority? of the Lord's people is,—their own personal, individual interest in these precious doctrines. These are the points which often try their minds; not whether God has an elect people, but whether their names, as individuals, are in the Book of Life. And therefore, that we may be able to distinguish them, and that they may be able, as the blessed Spirit shines upon their evidences, to trace out in their own hearts some decisive marks that they are of the Lord's family, the Holy Ghost has described their character, and pointed out those peculiar things which are to be found in them, and in them alone. These we shall, this evening, with God's blessing, endeavour more fully to enter into.

1. The first mark given of this people who are brought as a present to the Lord of hosts is, that they are scattered. Now, if we look at the election of grace generally, this word is most true of them. They are a scattered people. Look at this present congregation. Is it not made up of people from many different towns and villages? Cranbrook alone has not contributed its population to the large

assembly that fills this chapel. It is then literally true, that the Lord's people are a scattered people; dispersed far and wide; dwelling in the towns and villages where God has placed them, that they may be so many living testimonies for God's truth, and witnesses of God's grace. But there is something deeper than that. The Lord's people are not merely scattered as regards their local habitation, but they are scattered in an experimental sense; and this we shall see better, by viewing their state as contrasted with the case of formal, dead professors. Their religion lies altogether; their piety, their holiness, their goodness, their strength, and their wisdom lie all in one heap; and the more they accumulate, and the more they get together, the more collected and compact is their strength, their wisdom and their righteousness.

But not so with the Lord's family. God's children differ completely from them in this point, that they are scattered internally, as to their own feelings, and as to the experience of their own hearts, just as much as they are scattered locally up and down this ungodly world. They are "strangers, dispersed" in their feelings, as well as strangers dispersed in the midst of a wicked and crooked generation. (James 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1, 2)

Whence springs this scattering? Have you not seen sometimes on a barn floor the wheat and chaff lying together in one confused heap; but the barn doors are thrown open, a strong wind blows through, and what is the immediate consequence? A scattering: the strong breeze blowing through begins to scatter what before lay together in one confused heap. Is not this true spiritually and experimentally in the hearts of God's people, through the gales of the Spirit? The Lord himself compares the operations of the Spirit to the wind.

When these breezes blow upon the heart, is not their effect immediately to scatter? Here was a man, before the Lord was pleased to work upon his soul with power, dead in sin or dead in a profession. There was no scattering then going on in his heart; there was no separation then in his soul of that which was

of God and that which was of man, that which was of flesh and that which was of the Spirit. But when the Lord the Spirit begins to blow upon a man's heart, immediately a scattering takes place. His righteousness, which before he had got together with great pains, and looked upon in the same way as a miser often views his accumulated treasure—when the anger of God was made manifest in his conscience, and the breadth and spirituality of his holy law were revealed with power, this righteousness which he had so painfully and so laboriously accumulated was scattered to the four winds of heaven.

His wisdom, in which he once so gloried over other men; his clear knowledge of the doctrines in the letter, his acquaintance with God's word, and the good opinion that he had of himself as a wise and understanding man—no sooner does the breath of the Lord begin to blow upon the sinner's conscience, than all this wisdom is scattered before the wind; all his head knowledge, all his empty profession, all the vain confidence which he once got together, and once could build upon, are scattered and dispersed, and he stands before God a perfect fool.

His prayers which once he could repeat so collectedly, his thoughts which were so little confused, and his hearing which from time to time he could give with such attention, when the breath of the Lord begins to blow upon the heart, all become scattered. His prayers, instead of being collected forms, are now broken fragments of sighs and cries; his hearing, instead of being a matter of criticism, becomes this, 'O that the Lord would apply one word to my poor heart!' His strength which once he could bring forward to support himself against temptation, to overcome sin, and to crucify the flesh—when the breath of the Lord begins to blow upon the soul, he finds to be perfect weakness.

The vain hopes, which once he could gather together, all are scattered when the wrath of God is made known in his conscience, and the purity of Jehovah is revealed in his soul; and all his

So that the Lord's people who are brought as a present, and laid at the feet of Jesus, the Lord of hosts, are not merely a scattered people as regards their habitations, dwelling separate from the world, separate from professors, and separate from evil, as God the Spirit enables them; but in their feelings, in their experience before God are they thus scattered and divided, so as to be unable to get anything together that they can look upon with pleasure and admiration.

2. The next mark that is given of this people that are brought as a present to the Lord of hosts, is, that it is a "peeled" people. There is one text in the Scripture which I think is a key to this expression. Some of you will, perhaps, remember the promise made to Nebuchadnezzar by the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 29:18), where the Lord tells him that he would give him Egypt in recompense for the hard service he served at Tyre, when "every head was made bald, and every shoulder peeled;" that is to say, his soldiers had been so long engaged in the siege of Tyre that their very heads had become bald through the number of years, and they carried such heavy burdens upon their shoulders, they so wielded the mattock and shouldered the spade, that the very flesh of their shoulders peeled off and became raw.

This, I think, is the Scripture key to the expression in the text, "of a people being peeled." It is as if the blessed Spirit would bring before us a heavily burdened people. If you were to carry a burden a considerable distance upon your shoulder with a stick, would not your shoulder soon become raw, and the flesh peel off? Thus the expression seems to point out the burdens which the Lord's people have to carry, so heavy and so long, that their very flesh peels off through the load. For instance,

There is the burden of sin; and wherever the Lord takes a soul in hand, he makes it feel more or less of the burden of sin. There is also the burden of unbelief and infidelity, that many of

the Lord's people have so long and so much to groan under. There is the burden too of a hard heart—dark, stupid, stony, unfeeling heart, that will not relent and melt down at the footstool of mercy. There are also many temporal, as well as spiritual burdens which the Lord's people have to carry; afflictions in providence, afflictions in body, afflictions in circumstances, afflictions in family. All these make up so many burdens that they have to bear upon their shoulders.

But the word “peeled” directs us to this idea—not merely that they have burdens, for we may carry a burden upon our shoulders for a time, and that burden not peel the skin off; but it points to the length of time during which it is carried. A little burden, comparatively speaking, carried on the shoulder for a long time, will cause the skin to peel. And thus the Spirit seems to guide our thoughts to the duration of time during which the Lord's people are burdened; that they have to carry them so far, and have to carry them so long, that spiritually they are, as a man is naturally, “peeled” by the weight they endure, and the time they carry it.

How many burdens have you had to carry during the time you have made a profession of godliness? If they are heavy, and you have carried them long, they have produced a peeled shoulder. The Lord aims, by laying burdens on, to bring us to his feet.

I have thought sometimes spiritually of an old punishment, which was in force in this country. If a prisoner refused to plead guilty, he was taken to a dungeon and stripped, he was fastened down on his back, and a weight was placed upon his chest. If he still continued obstinate, the next day an additional weight was placed. If on the third day he continued perverse, and the plea of “guilty” still refused to escape from his lips, an additional burden was put upon him; until at last, if he persevered in his obduracy, burdens were added till his chest was crushed to pieces.

This may show, in a spiritual point of view, how the Lord deals with his people. He puts a burden upon them: that burden does not at first bring them down. He puts on another: that they carry

for some time in their own strength. But the Lord's purpose is to bring them down, to force the plea of ‘Guilty, guilty!’ out of their lips. And thus the Lord brings our sins to mind; lays upon our consciences, from time to time, our secret iniquities; suffers powerful temptations to seize, harass, and distress our souls; all to bring us to this point, by putting burden upon burden, at last to force the cry and plea of ‘Guilty, guilty!’ out of our lips.

When once that cry comes out of our heart, then the Lord puts forth his hand, and takes the burden off the breast. But until that cry comes out of the very depths of a broken heart—until it comes with simplicity, humility, and godly sincerity from a contrite spirit—burdens will be put on, until at last the soul cries, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner!’

Some of the Lord's people seem to require heavier burdens than others. There is in some, an unyielding spirit; in others, a self-justifying temper; in a third, a proud, rebellious, perverse disposition; in a fourth, lightness and frivolity of mind; so that, some of the Lord's people seem to require heavier burdens than others. But whether we require heavier burdens or lighter, to one spot, to one point, must every child of God come—to bow down, as a poor guilty sinner, at the footstool of mercy, there to receive the manifestations of mercy to his soul. As we read, “He brought down their heart with labour: they fell down; and there was none to help.” Now comes the effect—“then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.” (Ps. 107:12, 13.)

3. The next thing said of this people is, that it is “from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto.” The word “from” means, I think, the same thing as the word “of;” as though it ran thus: “In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and of a people terrible from their beginning hitherto.” In other words, it is a mere repetition of the preceding preposition “of.” And that this is the meaning of the expression, seems to me clear from the second verse of

the chapter—"Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto." Not a people taken out of a people, but this being the character of all that people.

But in what sense is this peculiar people, thus brought as a present to the Lord of hosts, "terrible from their beginning hitherto?" The words seem to my mind to bear this spiritual meaning—the Lord's people who have clearly a work of grace upon their souls are a terror to their neighbours. The very world can see something in them which distinguishes them from the great mass of mankind. The very professor can see something in them which distinguishes them from others. And though they hate the image of Christ in them, though they abhor to see the features of grace, yet there is that in them which makes them terrible to empty professors, because of the conviction in their conscience, that they are destitute of those things which they see in them.

Those that are dead in sin, and those that are dead in a profession, are no terror to their neighbours. A man may have the soundest doctrines in his head, but if his life be worldly, inconsistent, and ungodly, he is a terror to nobody; the Lord's people justly shun him, the world deservedly scorn him, and professors cast out his name as evil. But wherever there is a real work of grace upon the heart; wherever the blessed Spirit has touched the conscience with his almighty finger, and planted the fear of God as a living principle within; wherever there is a separation from the world buried in sin or in profession, a living in the fear of the Lord, in uprightness of heart, simplicity, and godly sincerity—every such man, be he in a town or be he in a village, is a secret terror to all, and more especially to those who have a name to live while dead.

If you can be as the great majority of professors are; if you have a Sunday religion, that you can put on when you take your Sunday clothes from the coffer, no one will be afraid of you. But if you have a religion in your heart, lip, and life, carried out in your walk and conversation, you will be one of those people who have been

"terrible from their beginning hitherto." The Lord points this out as a characteristic mark of his people, distinguishing them from those who have the form without the power—that "from their beginning," from the very first implantation of divine life in their soul, from their first convictions, from their first cry and sigh, from their first separation from the world, from their first profession of the truth in the power of it, they were a terror.

And not only so, but "hitherto," up to the very time when they are brought to the footstool of mercy as a present to the Lord. They are terrible in conviction, and they are terrible in consolation. They are terrible when under the law, and they are terrible when under the gospel. They are terrible when almost a terror to themselves, and more terrible when the image of Christ is seen more clearly and distinctly in them.

Let them speak of convictions; their very convictions carry with them a weight of evidence which is a terror to those who have never felt convictions. Let them speak of consolations; their very speech, thus "seasoned with salt," is a terror to those who have never felt any genuine consolation. Let them speak of their trials, exercises, fears, doubts, sinkings, and misgivings; they are a terror, if they are on this dark side. Let them speak of the whispers of lovingkindness and tender mercy; let them speak of smiles from the Lord, and the manifestations of his favour; they are a greater terror on the bright side than they were on the dark. And thus the Lord's people have this mark stamped upon them, that they are terrible from their beginning hitherto.

4. Another mark stamped upon them is, that they are "a nation meted out." The word "meted" means measured. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be meted to you again." (Matt. 7:3) The present brought to the Lord in the text, is a people inwardly "meted out" in their hearts. How are they measured? Is it not by the Lord himself setting up a just balance in their souls? Are not the Lord's people measured out in their own experience before God? Depend upon it, if we have never been measured up in our

feelings before God, the Lord himself has not put a just balance into our soul.

But what is this meting out? It is when the Lord is pleased to bring us to the bar of judgment; then are we measured. It is when the Lord is pleased to send home some powerful passage of his word to the heart; then there is a meting out. When we hear the experience of God's people and find our own fall short of it; then there is a meting out. When we see our deficiencies, feel our shortcomings, have a sense of our imperfections, remember our backslidings, and mourn over our continual idolatries; then there is a meting out. When we look at what the Lord does for others—the sweet smiles, the heavenly testimonies he bestows upon his people, and feel ourselves to come short in these things; then there is a meting out. When we see some of the Lord's people walking closely with God, having much of his manifested favour, living a consistent life, a life of devotedness to the Son of God, and putting us to shame by their uprightness, consistency, and inward close communion with Jesus; then there is meting out.

And this ever will be the verdict of a tender conscience. A man who has nothing but a name to live while dead—the doctrines of grace in his head without any tender feeling in his soul—is never measured up, never meted out. He has no tender conscience, no godly fear, no sense of God's purity and holiness, no trembling at God's word, no discovery of God's holy law, no knowledge of his own wickedness and sinfulness before him.

But the Lord's people carry in their bosom that fear of God which is "the beginning of wisdom." The Lord's people have in their breast a conscience made tender and alive. And this conscience that the Lord's people have, falls under the power of truth, bends before the word of God, submits to that which is commended to their heart and comes with divine weight, authority, and power attending it.

Thus the Lord's people, from time to time, are "meted out," by having their experience brought forth and tested by God's unerring

word; by having, from time to time, deep exercises whether what they hope God has done for their souls is in strict consistency with the experience of the saints, whether their hopes and expectations are really such as will meet with the divine approval.

And this is the intent, and this is the profit, of a heart-searching ministry. God from time to time send such ministers among you! The child of God, whose conscience is tender, when he hears a heart-searching ministry, does not sit in criticising judgment. He looks inward. He wants to know whether the sentence of conscience is in his favour; whether he has a sweet testimony, that he himself has passed through these vital things in his soul. Where he falls short, he desires the Lord will accomplish what he has not fully experienced. What he has experienced, he blesses God for; where he is a deficient, he cries, "What I know not, teach thou me."

Thus under a heart-searching ministry, he bares his bosom, and compares the work of God as traced out in the ministry with what God has done for him. Where it is lacking, he feels a fear; where there is a mark, he feels a sweet hope. So that the Lord's people are distinguished from all people on the face of the globe, by being thus experimentally "meted out" by the Spirit of God shining with divine light into their heart, and holding up this balance, in which are weighed up their thoughts, words, and actions, their profession and possession, in the court of conscience.

But those that are dead in sin, or dead in a profession, know nothing of this weighing up. They are offended by an honest testimony. They rise up in resentment and rebellion against those who "take forth the precious from the vile." They cannot bear to hear the teachings and operations of God the Spirit upon the heart set forth, for they are condemned thereby. One whose conscience is made tender in God's fear, desires to hear the operations of the Spirit traced out, that he may have some testimony that God is with him of a truth. And if he can find his experience sweetly unfolded, if light be cast upon his path, blessed sensations spring up in

his heart of thankfulness to God, that such feelings have passed through his soul, and he praises God, that ever he has looked upon him in mercy and love.

But all others resent it; they cannot bear to hear the life-giving power of the Spirit insisted upon, because it unmasks their hypocrisy, and shows the emptiness of their profession.

5. “And trodden under foot.” This is another mark of the Lord’s people, who are brought as a present to the Lord of hosts—they are “trodden under foot.” How scorned, despised, and contemned are the Lord’s people! This is the mark and stamp the Lord the Spirit has fixed upon them. By this they are known from others—they are “trodden under foot,” despised by men, rejected and cast out, as their Master was before them; “trodden under foot,” as too contemptible to be thought of, as though they were the very dung and off-scouring of the earth. Let a man be ever so respectable, as it is termed, in life, if he has the grace of God in his soul, he will be “trodden under foot”.

Let a minister only contend for the teachings and operations of the Spirit upon the heart, he will be “trodden under foot.” Let a child of God come forward, in simplicity and honesty of soul, to speak of the Lord’s dealings with him, he will be “trodden under foot.” All will despise him, except the people of God, who will feel sweet communion with him. All will pour contempt upon him, scorn his profession, and hate his religion, because he makes the creature nothing, and makes God all in all; because he feels and says, that he has nothing but what God gives, knows nothing but what God teaches, feels nothing but what God inspires, and brings forth nothing but what God creates.

This is a sound most irksome to human ears. They can listen with approbation to the dignity of man and the doings of the creature. But the dealings of the Holy Spirit with broken hearts and contrite souls, the riches of Christ’s grace to the poor and needy, they despise, and ever will despise; and the more a man has of the likeness and image of Christ in his soul, and the more

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he is manifested as one of God’s own family, the more will he be “trodden under foot”.

But this is not all—there is a keener stroke than this. You and I can bear the contempt of man, if we have the solemn approbation of God in our soul. We can bear the sneer, jeer, and scorn of mortal worms, who shall die, and whose breath is in their nostrils, if we have a testimony in our souls that the Lord is our God.

But to come to this painful point—to be “trodden under foot” of ourselves; not merely to be “trodden under foot” of men—that we can bear; but to be “trodden under foot” of ourselves; to see and feel ourselves to be beyond description, the vilest of the vile, the filthiest of the filthy; to feel ourselves dung indeed before God, the off-scouring of all things, everything hateful and loathsome before his pure and holy eyes—this is trying.

But it is these feelings that make us also tread upon all that nature so highly prized before. We tread upon our own wisdom, our own strength, our own attainments, our own qualifications; we tread upon them all, as mean and despicable in the eyes of a heart-searching God.

But what is more cutting still, many of the Lord’s people have to fear, deeply and painfully to fear, lest they should be also “trodden under foot” of God; feeling themselves so vile, base, abject, and despicable, as to fear lest the divine foot should trample them into hell.

Thus there is a three-fold meaning in this “trodden under foot”—“trodden under foot” of men—“trodden under foot” of ourselves—and sometimes fearing lest we should be “trodden under foot” of God—and the last the keenest and most cutting stroke of all.

6. “Whose land the rivers have spoiled.” They had a land then once, and a beautiful land it was—if not in reality, at least in imagination. Upon this land they could look, as a wealthy land-owner sometimes walks up and down the length and breadth of his estate; or as Nebuchadnezzar contemplated the city he had

built for himself with self-complacent admiration.

Who of us has not had a land that he has admired and idolized as his own estate? his property, his children, his reputation, his worldly prospects, his fancied paradise, the little Eden set up in imagination, though he never had it in possession? But this “land the rivers have spoiled”.

We cannot enter into the full force of this expression, because the rivers in our country are so different from the rivers in Palestine. There torrents rush with violence from the mountains, and carry devastation before them. The rivers in our level country rather fertilize than destroy; but in that mountainous country they come down with such force, and bring with them such a series of stones, mud, and earth, that instead of fertilizing, they spoil the land over which they rush. This, then, is the figure the Spirit has used—”whose land the rivers have spoiled”; that is, these unexpected mountain streams (for they come down suddenly) rush upon the land, and spoil its smiling produce, so laboriously and assiduously cultivated. The fields were expected to bring forth a rich harvest, but now the rivers have spoiled them.

Has it not been so with the land in which you once so delighted? When you were young, you looked forward to a life of happiness; you were to be married, and you and your family were to enjoy an imaginary paradise. But your land the rivers have spoiled. Some dear object of creature affection has been torn from your embrace; and thus the land that once smiled like the garden of Eden has been spoiled by the sudden rolling down of a mountain river.

Perhaps you had been calculating how you would get on in life, laying your plans, and drawing your schemes, expecting to be very comfortable and respectable in worldly circumstances. Alas, the river has rushed down, and spoiled and desolated the land!

When, too, you began to think about religion, you thought you would cultivate your heart, bring forth faith, hope, and love, and all the fruits of the Spirit, by due attendance on the means of grace. But this land also the rivers have spoiled. Look at your worldly

schemes now—look at your heart, and the image it presents now. The once fancied fertile land—the mountain rivers and torrents have flowed over it, and covered it with earth, dirt and stones. Has it not been so? Have you not felt that the rivers have spoiled it? that your earthly paradise, your fancied Eden, is devastated? Are you not now distressed in soul, cast down in spirit, tempted by Satan; and those very things from which you expected to reap a rich harvest of joy and consolation have now become a plague and torment to you?

Who would have thought that such a people as this should be presented to the Lord of hosts—a people that nobody else would take? Who would not have thought, viewing the subject in a natural light, that the Lord would take the rich, the noble, the learned, the respectable, the well-educated, the pious, the religious, and the holy; those who have never sinned against him, like the elder son in the ‘Prodigal’? Who would not think, that if the Lord looked upon any people at all, he would look upon such? But the Lord’s thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways. The people whom he takes as a present to himself, are a people universally despised and hated, and by none so much despised and hated as by themselves.

My friends, can any of you find these marks meeting in your soul’s experience? Here we have the inspired word of God giving us a spiritual description of the people who are to be brought as a present to the Lord of hosts. Let me read once more their character: “In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto: a nation meted out, and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled.”

As I have gone through the text, so far as the Lord has enabled me to trace out the marks the blessed Spirit has given, has there been a solemn echo in your soul? has there been a secret “Amen” in your heart’s experience that you, through mercy, are one of the people thus experimentally described?

II.—As these, then, are to be brought as a present unto the Lord of hosts, where is this present to be received?—“to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion.” There it is the present is to be brought; and this casts a light upon the reason why the Lord accepts this people. It is only in mount Zion that they can be accepted; that is, in the gospel, which mount Zion signifies.

It is out of Zion that the law was to go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; it was in Zion that the Lord commanded the blessing. Here her saints shout aloud for joy; here the great mystery is unravelled; here the enigma is solved. The holy God could not look upon this people with acceptance viewed as they are in nature’s rags and ruin. But when the blessed Spirit brings this people, with all their guilt and wretchedness to mount Zion (as the Apostle says), “But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven,”—when (Heb. 12:22) the blessed Spirit brings this people described by these characters, “scattered, peeled, meted out, and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled”—brings them all poor and needy, brings them all tatters and rags, brings them all wretchedness and ruin to mount Zion, there they receive a precious Jesus into their heart, in the sweet, unctuous teachings of the Holy Spirit.

Thus coming to mount Zion, God can receive them as a present, all broken and shattered though they are, because he receives them in the Person, love, blood, and righteousness of his dear Son. And this solves the mystery. How could you and I, all filthy and defiled as we feel ourselves to be—how could we dare to present ourselves before the footstool of omniscient purity in our native rags and creature ruin? We cannot; we dare not. But when there is a spiritual discovery to the conscience of “the Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,” faith receives the atonement; the soul feels Jesus near, dear, and precious; there is a sweet melting sensation under the dewy teachings of the blessed Spirit whereby

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he is received into the heart and affections as “of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption”.

And thus the Father indeed can smile upon this wretched people, and thus indeed can the present be acceptably brought to the feet of the Lord of hosts at mount Zion. Jesus presents them to his Father, clothed with his righteousness, washed in his blood, without spot, or blemish, or any such thing.

Thus have I, however feebly, endeavoured this evening to describe the character of the Lord’s people as a present made, and the way in which this present is received.

What are we presenting from time to time when we come before the footstool of mercy? When we visit a throne of grace, what do we lay down there? Our own righteousness? our promises? our vows? our resolutions? what we have been? what we intend to be? Can we insult the Majesty of heaven by going to his feet, and offering him this? No; we cannot; we dare not.

If we have a discovery of God’s holy character; if we have a sense of our guilt and ruin before him—as the text describes God’s people—we shall come poor and needy, having nothing and being nothing, lying low at the footstool of mercy, deserving God’s eternal displeasure, and yet looking up to the Mediator between God and man, and embracing, as the Spirit gives faith and power, the crucified Jesus, as all our salvation and all our desire.

But how different this is from the ways and works of man! “Make yourselves better, reform your lives, lop off the branches of sin, give up bad habits, forsake old companions, make yourselves new hearts.” Is not this the language of the day? Do not these words sound from a thousand pulpits? And what is the fruit of all this lip labour? To make the proud prouder, and the hard harder; to drive farther from God those who are already far from him.

The Lord the Spirit does not teach his people thus. He teaches the people of God what they are; he leads them to the hole of the pit whence they were digged, makes them feel their ruin and wretchedness, and shows them, and that effectually, what they

are—guilty, vile, lost, perishing, and undone. Thus he opens a way to receive Jesus, as of God made unto them all he is to the church.

When I feel my helplessness, it makes me come unto him on whom help is laid. When I feel my poverty, if I see his boundless riches, it makes me highly prize them. If I feel my guilt, and the blessed Spirit reveal his blood, how suitable to my guilty conscience! If I see my nakedness, how suitable is his glorious righteousness! If I feel sinking, how suitable to have the everlasting arms upholding my drooping soul! These are the qualifications that the blessed Spirit works in the hearts of God's people; which are not required once only, but are continually needful; for only so far as these qualifications are wrought and brought forth in our hearts, can we see any glory, any beauty, any preciousness, or any suitability in Jesus.

Have then you and I ever felt him precious? I hope I have at times felt him precious to my soul. But when has it been? When we have been wise, holy, righteous, religious, and doing something for him? No; not so. When we were poor and needy; when smitten with guilt and shame; when bowed down with the guilt of sin; when sunk into the ruins of self; when we had nothing and were nothing but rags and wretchedness. Then it is that the Lord of life and glory makes himself precious to the perishing sinner by opening up the riches of his dying love to the broken and contrite heart. This is the way, the only way, to grow up as he is; and this is the way, the only way, to grow up into Christ when received.

My friends, your own wisdom, your own strength, your own righteousness, your own religion—away with it! It is not worth a straw in the things of God. But the deeper you feel your need, the more suitable Jesus is. The more empty, the more room to be filled; the more stripped, the more room to be clothed; the more cast down, the more room to be raised up.

And thus, when opened up in the Spirit's light, we see what a suitable present this is for the Lord. Is it not a monarch's highest boast and prerogative to be free and bountiful? Is not this glorifying

to the regal dignity of the Son of God—to receive nothing, but to bestow everything? What! shall I give him my righteousness as an equivalent? Shall I present him my good and holy life to purchase his dying love? It is worthless. But when I come as having nothing and being nothing but a mass of depravity and rags, and he is pleased to discover to my needy, naked soul his suitability and preciousness, what a sweet union there is between a poor sinner and a complete Saviour, betwixt a broken heart and a precious Jesus, betwixt a soul in its feelings of guilt and shame and him who is mighty to save, “God over all, blessed for ever.”

Do you hope—do any of you hope—that you will one day face to face see the Lord as he is? that you are among this present which is to be brought to the Lord of hosts, to appear on mount Zion, with eternal glory on your heads, when sorrow and sighing flee away? Is this your hope? Do you look up sometimes with a good expectation that you will one day be safe before the throne? But can you find any mark I have described in your experience? To know this, is to know the whole case: for if you are received and presented on mount Zion here below, you will be presented hereafter and stand on mount Zion above.

It is a mercy to feel any marks of grace written by the finger of God upon your heart and conscience. It is not because you are very holy, very spiritual, very consistent, though these are good when they come from the work of the Holy Spirit, and are his blessed fruits and graces. But we are not to bring these things, and lay them at the footstool of mercy, as though we could exchange them for “gold tried in the fire.” No, the Lord will teach us that we are indeed poor and needy; that we are nothing and have nothing; that what we have is his gift, and what we are is his work.

Have I then had this evening a witness in some hearts, that they do know these things by vital experience? However tried, tempted, and cast down they may be, may God give them this sweet consolation that all their trials and exercises are for this one purpose—to lay them low and keep them low—to bring them a

present to the Lord of hosts, and to endear him to their hearts in his covenant grace and dying love.

115 The Northern Iron And The Steel

Preached at Trinity Chapel, Trinity Street, Borough, on Thursday Evening,
August 22, 1846

“Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?”

Jeremiah 15:12

Some persons object very much to the use of figures in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. They say that the truths of the gospel need no such illustration; that the use of natural figures tends rather to carnalize and debase such glorious subjects than to cast any light upon them; and that they are sufficiently clear in themselves not to need any such borrowed illumination. I admit that when figures are strained, or inappropriate, or too frequently employed, they may have this tendency. But that is their abuse, not their use. We are not allowed to argue against a thing because men abuse it. Thus I consider that the temperate use of appropriate figures tends much to explain and open up the word of God and the experience of the saints.

Two things, at any rate, to my mind, are clear. First, that figures cast a great light upon truths which otherwise would not be so clearly set forth; that they make an impression upon the mind, and are for the most part very retentively remembered. Secondly, it is, to my mind, perfectly clear that the blessed Spirit has made great use of figures in the word of truth. The language of the prophets is highly figurative. And need I mention the example of the blessed Lord Himself, who spake much in figures, and without a parable which is but another figure scarcely opened His lips?

We have a figure before us, and that figure in the mouth of Jehovah Himself, addressed to His servant Jeremiah under peculiar

circumstances.

In considering the words of the text I shall, with God's blessing,

I.—Endeavour, first to show their literal meaning, and their applicability to the case to which they were addressed; and,

II.—Secondly, their spiritual and experimental signification in a wider point of view, as comprehending the whole family of God. The Lord give the blessing!

I.—Jeremiah, we must bear in mind, was at this time in a state of peculiar distress. The Lord had called him to the prophetic office, had put words into his mouth, and had endued him with great faithfulness to deliver a message that He Himself had given him. The discharge, the faithful discharge, of his prophetic office brought upon him great persecution. He cries out, in the very bitterness and anguish of his soul, “Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife, and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me.” His tender feelings sank beneath the weight of this universal enmity.

But there was more than this. The Lord delayed to appear, and hid His gracious countenance from him; and thus the corruption of his heart being stirred up, the passion and rebellion of his carnal mind burst forth into that unbecoming language, “Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? Wilt Thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as the waters that fail?” His whole bosom was one troubled sea of sorrow, and here we see the heavings and boilings of its restless waves. But how does the Lord meet this case? What are the words that He makes use of in order to pour oil upon these troubled waters? He says, “Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?” As though He argued thus with him: ‘Though thy persecutions, troubles, afflictions and all the heavings of thy tempest-tossed bosom are to thee as strong,

as hard, and as invincible as iron, yet shall they break that which is stronger? Is not My almighty power, My eternal love, and My delivering hand as much stronger than the iron hand of persecution which is gone out against thee, and the iron sorrows which thou hast to endure, as the northern iron and the steel are stronger than the common metal? And that this is the spiritual meaning of the words is evident from what we read in the 20th verse Jer 15:20—”I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the Lord.” As though the Lord had said—”Yes, thou shalt have an iron yoke to bear; thou shalt have iron persecutions to suffer; they shall fight against thee as iron fights against iron; but they shall not prevail against thee. I will make thee a fenced brazen wall. I am with thee, to save thee and deliver thee, saith the Lord.” And could a more sweet and suitable promise be found? The Lord did not diminish the reality of Jeremiah’s trouble. The Lord told him plainly that the trials and exercises which he had to pass through would be to him as strong, as hard, and as invincible as iron. But at the same time, he assured him that there was a stronger power, which should be put forth in living exercise to deliver him out of these things, to conquer them in him, and conquer for him.

II.—And this leads me to the second branch of my subject, on which I shall, with God’s blessing, more particularly dwell; and I shall therefore enlarge the words by endeavouring to show, as far as the Lord shall enable me, how suitable they are not merely to Jeremiah’s case, but to the Lord’s people generally, and to those cases and states in which God’s family continually find themselves.

This, then, will be the leading feature, if God enable, of our discourse—to show, first, how the trials and exercises of the Lord’s family are to them as “iron;” and secondly, how the Lord’s power, and strength, and help, are as “the northern iron and the steel,” that effectually and invincibly overcome them.

I. The Lord’s people are an afflicted people. This is God’s own

testimony concerning them: “Chosen,” says He, “in the furnace of affliction.” Isa 48:10 A “third part” are to “pass through the fire.” Zec 13:9 He leaves in the midst of them “an afflicted and poor people” Zep 3:12; and it is they, and they only, who shall “trust in the name of the Lord.” The afflictions that the Lord’s people have to pass through are not meant to be light ones. The Lord lays no light burdens on His people’s shoulders. His purpose is to bring them to a certain point, to work a certain work in their souls—to reduce them to that helplessness, weakness and powerlessness in which His strength is made manifest.

Thus, when the Lord would select a figure aptly to describe the afflictions of His people, He fixes on the metal iron; and thus compares them with the hardest, the strongest, the firmest, the most unyielding and the most tenacious of all metals.

1. Some of the Lord’s people have to pass through deep and severe trials in providence; and these to them are often of an “iron” nature. Those trials in providence which do not weigh heavily, which do not press deeply, which are not felt to be of a nature that we cannot of ourselves overcome, are not iron trials. But those afflictions that the Lord brings upon His people, against which they find their own exertions cannot prevail, which baffle all human wisdom, laugh at creature strength, and defeat every power in man to remove or overcome, may well be compared to that hard, unbending, unyielding, tenacious metal—”iron.”

2. Others of the Lord’s people have deep and severe trials in grace. All the chosen family do not pass through the same degree of cutting afflictions in providence; but in grace none of them are exempt from trials. Are we not to suffer with Christ that we may reign with Him? to die with Him that we may live with Him? Are we not predestinated to be conformed to His likeness? And is not that likeness a suffering likeness? Are we not to be crucified with Christ here, that we may see Him as He is hereafter? Who, then, is to escape the cross? Who is to pass through life without heavy spiritual trials? Bastards—not sons.

Bastards may escape the rod,
 Sunk in earthly vain delight;
 But the true—born child of God
 Cannot, would not, if he might.

Thus the Lord's people though there are degrees, doubtless, of spiritual as there are gradations of temporal suffering have to pass through an appointed measure of spiritual griefs, exercises and sorrows. And these to them are to be as "iron." If they are but wood, which I can snap asunder with my hands, they are not such trials as the Lord Himself sends. If I have burdens, which I can myself remove; if I have trials, from which I can deliver myself; if I have temptations, out of which I can rescue my own soul, I have clear evidence that I am not walking in that path of tribulation in which the Lord's people walk. If I can exercise faith upon Christ; if I can take God at His word; if I can believe every promise; and thus shift every burden when I please and how I please, I may be sure of this, that God has never tied that burden round my shoulders—has never laid that affliction upon my heart—and that His hand is not in that trouble. But when our trials are of such a nature that to us they are as "iron;" as unable for us to bend or break as the iron pillar that supports that gallery—then we have some evidence that these trials are of the Lord's appointment, and that the blessed Spirit has traced out our case here when He compares the trials we have to pass through to this firm, yielding, and unbending metal.

Child of God, has not this been the heaviest part of your trial, the keenest edge of the cutting affliction, that you could not, by any creature exertions, remove it from you? But this very thing that so often tries your mind is the very proof that it comes from God: for when the Lord binds, none can loose; when the Lord shuts, none can open. When the Lord puts a man into a trial, none but the Lord's hand can deliver. So that the keen edge of the trial that has so often pierced your heart; the heavy burden that has so

often weighed down your shoulders—that you could not deliver yourself—this very circumstance that has caused so many sighs and cries to go up out of your heart, and filled you at times with sorrow, is a proof that the affliction is from God.

3. Some of the Lord's people have to suffer under great burdens of guilt. The law is applied to their conscience in its spirituality, breadth, condemnation, and curse; and this is to them indeed an "iron" yoke, which they cannot bend or break. Convictions that we can remove, and burdens of guilt that we can throw aside as a porter deposits his load upon a bulk—that is not the application of God's law to the conscience, that is not the opening up of the spirituality of the commandment to the soul. It is not of God if we can remove it, or any man remove it for us. But is not this one of the most keen and cutting things in the spirituality of God's law applied to the conscience, that we cannot remove the guilt, cannot take away the curse, cannot ease ourselves of the burden, though it sinks into the heart and presses the soul down? Yet this very mark proves that it is of God, because it is of the nature of "iron."

4. Some of the Lord's people have to pass through keen and cutting temptations. Satan is allowed to harass them from time to time with his fiery darts; he is permitted to work upon the evils of their fallen nature, and suffered to stir up the corruption of that depraved heart which they carry in their bosom. And these temptations they feel utterly unable to remove. When fiery darts are shot into your mind, can you remove them? When blasphemous imaginations are stirred up in your carnal heart, can you get away from them? When Satan presents to your mind everything hateful and everything horrible, can you bid him depart, or drive these thoughts away? If we could, how happy should we be. But we cannot break or bend these temptations; they are to us as "iron."

5. Again. How many of the Lord's family are entangled in secret snares known only to themselves! And how they cry, sigh and groan under these snares that Satan is laying perpetually for their feet! How often they are entangled with besetting lusts! How

often cast down by the pride of their hearts! How often overcome by the covetousness of their depraved nature! How continually entangled in one snare or another that they meet with in their path! But can they deliver themselves? It would not be an “iron” snare if they could break it. It would be such green withs as Samson told Delilah would bind him fast—mere tow, that bursts asunder when it sees the flame. If you and I are entangled in any snare, and we can break it, and escape out of it, would that be a snare to us? No: the very nature of a snare is to have a firm hold round the neck of the unhappy animal that is caught in it. It is the “iron” of the snare, the wire, that destroys the hapless animal that runs into it. And have not you and I found sometimes our snares to be as inextricable by creature power as the poor hare that is caught in the wire of the poacher? Yes, as unable to deliver ourselves, and requiring the hands of another to loose that snare from our necks.

6. Others of the Lord’s people are held in bondage because they have not clear manifestations of the Lord’s love to them. They are not able to cry, “Abba Father:” they cannot see their names in the book of life; they have not felt the testimony of the Spirit of God; they have not received the sweet sheddings abroad of dying love; they have not had the pardon of their sins clearly made manifest to their conscience. And they have a feeling sense in their own consciences that these things are indispensable to salvation; that they must have them brought into their hearts by the power of God, or die in their sins. Are not these “iron” trials to some of the Lord’s living family? Do not these things often bow their minds, burden their hearts, and distress their conscience, because they cannot come out into the liberty of the gospel, because they cannot rejoice in the Lord as their salvation, because they cannot call God with an unwavering confidence, “Father.” But if they had no trials in this matter; if there were no sharp and keen exercises connected with these feelings in their heart; if they caused no burden, brought no distress, were not some times round their necks like a yoke, it

would be no trial to them at all. But it is because these convictions of their short-comings, of their unbelief and helplessness are so keen, and so weighty, that they have in them the nature of the rigid, unyielding, unbending metal—“iron.”

7. Others of the Lord’s family have to endure sharp persecutions; the enmity of relations, the scorn of professors, the hatred of the world lying in the Wicked One. Was not this Jeremiah’s portion? Did he not say, that “every one hated” him? And every one will hate you and me, if we are as faithful as Jeremiah. A minister to escape enmity, scorn and slander! Show me the man that does; and I will show you an unfaithful man, a coward in Christ’s camp, and one who dares not open his mouth boldly in the Redeemer’s name. But show me a faithful man, one who preaches the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven—one who fears no man’s frown and courts no man’s smile—who seeks only the approbation of the blessed Spirit in his own conscience—and I will show you a man hated, despised, persecuted, opposed and slandered; a man who, in proportion to his faithfulness, knows something of Jeremiah’s outward path, and something also of his inward suffering.

We have a large assembly here this evening; and many professors of truth beneath this roof. How have you found religion? Some of you have professed it many years. What has your path been? You have come here from various parts—of the town?’ you can tell the streets through which you came, whether clean or dirty, whether wide or narrow, whether thronged with people or comparatively free. You can describe exactly the road you have come. Well; you have travelled so many years in the path of religion, and how have you found that? Has it been a very rough path? a very rugged way? an up and down road? many trials and persecutions, many temptations, many sorrows, many afflictions, and many keen and cutting convictions, that have been to you as unbending and unyielding as the metal “iron?” If so, you have some evidence that

the Lord has been leading you; that you are amongst His afflicted and poor people; that you have been in the furnace, where the Lord chooses His Zion. Thus you have some testimony that the Lord is leading you by a right way, though it be a rough and rugged way, to bring you to a city of habitation. And never expect any other path but an iron one; never anticipate any trials but iron trials; never look for any temptations but iron temptations; any snares but iron snares, any foes but iron foes, nor any sorrows but iron sorrows.

Well; and how are we to break them? As well might the condemned criminal in Newgate's cell break through those walls of stone, and gates of iron, as one of the Lord's tempted and tried people himself break to pieces the sorrows and trials that the Lord brings upon him. No: they would not be of the Lord's appointment, of His own bringing, if he could get himself free, if he could snap them asunder like a rotten stick; if he could by his own unassisted strength break through all, and proclaim light, life and liberty to his own soul.

II. But did the Lord leave Jeremiah here? What are the words of the text? Oh how suitable and expressive to his fainting spirit! "Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?"

It would appear, that the Jews made use of "northern iron" to form their cutting instruments from; and it is a singular coincidence, that this country in which we live is supplied with Swedish or "northern iron" to make all her cutting instruments from. The knives you have in your pockets, the scissors you have been using this day, are of "northern iron." The iron, which comes from Sweden is of such a pure, strong and tenacious nature, that it is selected for the purpose of making cutting instruments. You see that the Lord, when He is pointing out the trials His people are passing through, compares them to "iron." He does not diminish their weight; He does not at all lower their oppressive tendency. But then, in order to administer a suitable remedy to Jeremiah's soul, He brings forward something much stronger. "Shall iron," He says, "break the northern iron and the steel?" No, surely; the "northern

iron and the steel" shall break through that. The common iron never can break through the northern iron, which is a metal of such a far superior nature; still less prevail against that keen well-tempered steel which can cut through everything it touches.

But how is this to be explained spiritually? In the same way as we have seen that the trials, sorrows, exercises and temptations of the Lord's people are compared to "iron;" so we must look out for something that is more than a match for these trials, temptations, exercises and sorrows, if we would spiritually open up and interpret the figure.

"The northern iron and the steel" signify the power of God—the power of God put forth in the weakness of the creature. And, in several instances, we may compare what God is and does for His people's help to this "northern iron and the steel." For instance,

1. There is the eternal covenant, "ordered in all things and sure." Can this eternal covenant be broken? Can this eternal covenant pass away, and become a thing of nought? Say that you are interested in this covenant, can your trials, your temptations, your sorrows—I will add another word, your sins—break to pieces this eternal covenant which was entered into with the Three Persons of the glorious Godhead on your behalf? As well might the common iron break the "northern iron and the steel," as your trials, sorrows, griefs, exercises and temptations, break to pieces that eternal covenant which God the Father has made on your behalf with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

2. God's decrees, absolute purposes and eternal appointments, that flow out of His eternal covenant, are another branch of this "northern iron and the steel," that breaks to pieces everything before it, but which these cannot touch. I remember to have read that in our large manufactories, huge steel shears are made use of to cut to pieces plates of iron, as easily as you who have this day been employed at your needle have cut through a piece of linen, and much more easily than a child cuts through a common card. Thus, God's purposes and eternal appointments, which are here

compared to steel made from “northern iron,” can cut to pieces all your afflictions, trials and exercises, with the same facility as the steel shear, moved by steam, can cut through iron plates. But what else can touch them? Nothing but steel can cut through iron plates; and so nothing but the mighty power of God can cut through the trials, temptations, afflictions and sorrows that you are from time to time exercised with.

3. God’s promises recorded by the blessed Spirit in the unerring word of truth—are not these also part of “the northern iron and the steel?” What so firm as they? Are not these the words of Jesus Himself? “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.” Matthew 24:35 Will not God’s promises stand forever and ever? Are they not all “yea and amen unto the glory of God by us?” 2Co 1:20 Now the Lord has promised to bring the righteous out of trouble. He has promised to hear the sigh and cry of the mourners; to put their tears into His bottle; to remember them for good; to bow down His ear, and hear them when they call upon Him. He says, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” Ps 50:15 Is not this “the northern iron?” How strong! how firm! how unable to break! how impossible to bend! How it will cut through afflictions, and rend them asunder, as the steel shears cut asunder plates of iron!

4. The blood shed for a chosen people—the propitiation and sacrifice that the Son of God once offered for sin upon Calvary’s tree—is not this, too, a part of that power of God which He here compares to “the northern iron and the steel?” Say your conscience is bowed down with guilt; your sins rise up like mountains before your view; you are distressed at the evils, which are manifested to your sight. But shall these sink you to hell? Shall these iron sins and iron guilt be left round your neck to drown you in eternal perdition? Not if you are one of the chosen seed; not if the blood of Jesus was shed for you upon the cross. That is able, when applied, to remove the strongest chains that may surround you—that is able, when made known to the conscience, to purge it, however

guilty you feel, or however defiled by sin and filth.

5. The glorious righteousness of the God-Man; His spotless obedience to God’s holy law; His perfect fulfilment of it by doing and suffering, which He wrought out and brought in in the days of His flesh—is not this also a part of God’s power, and what God manifests in the hearts of His people as a justifying robe, shielding them from deserved wrath?

6. The love of Jesus, “which passeth knowledge,” which is “strong as death,” and can never fail—is not this a part too of the “northern iron and the steel?” And if you are interested personally in the blood and love of Jesus; though you may have from time to time iron sorrows, iron sins, iron temptations; yet, if you are personally interested in the glorious work of the God-Man, it shall cut them all to pieces; it shall break to shivers “the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder;” and bring your soul out of every trouble, every temptation and every sorrow.

But is it sufficient that the “iron and the steel” should be side by side? Must there not be some application of the steel to the iron before it can cut it in pieces, before it can rend it asunder? Say that you have many trials, many temptations, many sorrows, and that there is the love of God on your behalf—the eternal covenant—Christ’s atoning blood, justifying righteousness and dying love—the God-Man Mediator between inflexible justice and your soul. But are you still at a distance? Have you not yet been brought near to God, and has He not been brought near to you? What can the steel shears do unless there be an application of them to the iron? Is it not so spiritually and experimentally in a sinner’s conscience? Will the doctrine be sufficient? It would not do in a manufactory. The doctrine of steel shears cutting through iron plates would not do the work. When the master looked to see what work had been done, the workman might discuss very clearly and very learnedly what wonderful shears there were in the factory; but the employer would want to know how many iron plates they had cut asunder through the day. He would not be satisfied with the doctrine; he

would want to know what had been the experience of the effect of the steel shears. Is it not so spiritually? Will doctrines do us any good unless there be an application of those doctrines with power to our soul? I know they cannot. They can do us no more good than speculating upon the nature of steel compared with iron, without bringing the theory into experience and practice. And here the Lord's people are distinguished from those dead in profanity, and those dead in profession, with clear heads and unhumiliated hearts. These can sit by their firesides, or sometimes over the tea table, and discourse very fluently and eloquently what virtue there is in "steel;" can enter into all the branches of it, and describe most admirably what the eternal covenant is, what the decrees of God are, what the blood of Jesus is, what His glorious righteousness. But has there ever been an application to their conscience of these doctrines that they can discourse so fluently and talk so scripturally about? It will do them no good to talk about them, unless there be some application of them to their heart and conscience. This is what the Lord's people want; and this is what He gives them all.

This, then, is one of the chief reasons why the Lord brings His people into such "iron" difficulties—that He may have the glorious privilege of cutting them asunder. If you have no iron trials, no iron temptations, no iron griefs, no iron sorrows, what do you want the "northern iron and the steel" for? To look at, to play with, and to admire? as you may pass by a cutler's shop window, and admire the rows of knives and scissors you see hanging therefrom? No: if your hearts are exercised with iron sorrows, temptations, trials and perplexities, I am sure you will want the almighty power of God in your souls to cut them asunder. And God can do it. Are you a poor persecuted believer? God can cut down in a moment that enemy who is persecuting you. Are you tempted of Satan? He in a moment can cut his fiery darts asunder. Are you passing through a severe trial? By the application of some precious promise the Lord can in a moment cut the trial asunder. Are you entangled in some grievous snare that you feel and cry out under night and day, and

yet are unable to extricate yourself? The Lord can in a moment, by the application of His precious word to your soul, cut that snare asunder. He has but to bring against it "the northern iron and the steel," and it is done in a moment. And how we see here the glory of God! How the Lord brings His people into those states and cases in which He will be glorified! If I feel no sin, I want no pardon. If I have no guilt, I want no application of atoning blood. If I have no burdens, I want no sweet relief. If I have no temptations, I want no precious deliverances. If I have no trials, I want no powerful application of God's word to my soul. How was it with Jeremiah? Did not he say, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart?" Why? Because keen persecutions, sharp trials, severe temptations, had given him an appetite—that was the reason why the "word was found." He fell upon it as a hungry man upon a crust. It was sweet to his soul, because it brought with it a precious deliverance from the temptations and the sorrows his soul was groaning under.

Is there not then a need be for your being tried, tempted and distressed? Does not the apostle say "Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations?" 1Pe 1:6 Was not that Christ's way? And of the early Christians too? They followed Him in this path. And does not the Lord bid the Laodicean church buy of Him "gold tried in the fire?" Re 3:18 Does not James say, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation?" Jas 1:12 And again; "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations?" Jas 1:2 Why? Any joy in trials? any pleasure in sorrow? No, none. But in the deliverances from the Lord; in the power of God put forth to bring the soul out; there is joy there. And therefore, we have to walk in a dark path to make the light dear to our eyes; we have to pass through trials, to taste the sweetness of the promises when applied with power; we have to endure temptations, that we may enjoy the sweetness of deliverance. And this is the way, be sure of it, that God deals with His people. Is your conscience made honest? Does that monitor in your bosom speak the truth? Tell

me what it says? Does it not say, 'Few trials, few consolations; few sorrows, few joys; few difficulties, few testimonies from God; few sufferings, few discoveries of love and blood? Does not the Apostle say, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ?" 2Co 1:5 And does he not say, "Our hope of you is stedfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation?" 2Co 1:7 And does not the Apostle Paul tell us to be mindful not to forget what the Lord says, when He speaks to his people that the lot of a child is to endure chastisement? He says, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement," O solemn word! O how applicable to thousands! "whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." Heb 12:5-8

The Lord leads us, by His own blessed Spirit, into right paths! They may be, they must be, paths of trial. We must be baptized into His sufferings and death, if we are to be partakers of His glorious resurrection. We must take up the cross, and deny ourselves, and follow Him in the regeneration, if we are to see Him in glory. "Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Lu 22:28-30

Thus, we see, that in proportion as we feel the iron nature of trials and sorrows, shall we experience "the northern iron and the steel" of God's almighty power and grace to deliver. Happy are the people that are in such a case! Happy the people that have this Lord for their manifested God!

116 Living Complaints

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden St., Hampstead Rd., on

Lord's Day Morning,
August 23, 1846

"Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth: my strength faileth me; as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me."

Psa. 38:9, 10

If I were to say, that a living soul never has desires, groanings, or pantings; that his strength never fails; and that the light of his eyes is never withdrawn, (all which things are contained in the text), I should speak not only contrary to the experience of God's people, but contrary to the express word of truth. But, on the other hand, if I were to say, that the Lord's people are always filled with desires; that they are perpetually groaning after God; that their heart is ever panting after his presence; that their strength is always failing, and the light of their eyes is continually gone, I should speak just as contrary to the teachings of God's Spirit in the hearts of God's people, and contrary to the express word of inspiration.

Change and fluctuation are stamped upon everything in nature; and change and fluctuation are stamped upon everything in experience. Spring succeeds winter, summer spring, autumn summer, and winter autumn. Day follows night, rain comes after drought, and drought succeeds rain. Moons wax and wane; the tides of the ocean ebb and flow. Man is born a babe, grows up a child, becomes a youth, and finally dies. Thus, change and fluctuation are stamped universally upon nature. And so, in the kingdom of grace—change and fluctuation are perpetually going on; as we read, "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." (Psalm 45:19.)

The Psalms are a manual of Christian experience. In them we see the ebbings and flowings, the changes and fluctuations of living souls; and in them, so far as the Lord may have taught us, do we find from time to time our own experience traced out by the

finger of the Spirit.

The Lord's people are very subject to carnality and darkness, to hardness, deadness, barrenness, and lukewarmness; and sometimes there seems to be only just so much life in their souls as to feel these things, and groan under them. Under these feelings, therefore, they cry to the Lord; they cannot bear that carnality and darkness, barrenness and death, which seem to have taken possession of them. They come with these burdens to the throne of grace, beseeching the Lord to revive his work in their hearts. And how does the Lord answer their prayer? Not in the way, for the most part, which they expect. He answers them by some heavy affliction, some stroke in providence, or some stroke in grace, which falls very heavily upon them; but the effect is, to stir up their souls, to make them more earnest, and thus remove that darkness, deadness, and barrenness under which they have been previously groaning.

David, in this Psalm, is pouring out the feelings of his soul before God; he is lying under a sense of God's displeasure; his sins are brought to view; his iniquities are discovered in all their loathsome and horrible character; his heart is bowed down within him under a discovery of the corruptions of his fallen nature. He cries, "O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath; neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure: for thine arrows stick fast in me, and thine hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me." (ver. 1-4). Here we have the experience of a living soul when sin is laid upon the conscience; when its iniquities are opened up in the light and life of the Spirit's teachings, and it sinks down before God under a feeling sense of its wretchedness and ruin.

But is no other feeling there than of shame, guilt, and sorrow? Are no other sensations alive in the heart than self-loathing and self-abhorrence on account of manifested iniquity? Here is the

grand distinction between the sorrow of the world that worketh death, and the sorrow of God's people that worketh unto life. In carnal, earthly sorrow there is no crying unto the Lord, no panting after his manifested presence, no desires after the light of his countenance; no movings, no breakings, no meltings of heart at his blessed feet: but a dark cloud of sorrow takes possession of the mind, and through this dark cloud no gleam of light breaks. But it is not so where there is the light and life of God in the heart. There, however dark the cloud may be that rests over it, there is divine life in the soul, which heaves up below this superincumbent load, struggles underneath this burden that presses it down, and cannot be satisfied without some manifestation of the Lord's presence and favour.

This we see in the words of the text. We find David not merely bowed down with a sense of sin and shame, not merely troubled and distressed on account of the workings of inward corruption, and the bringing to light of the hidden evils of his heart; but in the midst of these burdens there is a cry and sigh in his soul that the Lord would appear to and for him: "Lord," he says, "all my desire is before thee," &c.

These words then, with God's blessing, I shall take up in the order that they lie before me; and endeavour from them to trace out something of the experience of a living soul in its pantings and longings after God's manifested favour.

I.—One strong mark of a quickened man is this—the deep conviction which ever dwells in his conscience, that he is living under the eye of an all-seeing God. We do not find this deep-seated conviction in the heart of any but those whom the finger of God has touched. Man may naturally recognize an overruling and all-seeing Providence; but it is not deeply rooted in his conscience; he does not live under a feeling sense that the eye of God is upon him. There is no fear of the Lord in his bosom, that "fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." But wherever the Lord shines into the soul, he there raises up, by the light of heavenly

teaching, this conviction, which he ever maintains, and which is rather a growing than a decreasing feeling, “Thou, God, seest me!” This we find in the words before us. “Lord, all my desire is before thee.” As though David thus appealed to the heart-searching God: Lord, thou canst read my heart; Lord, there is not a desire in my soul which thine eye does not behold; Lord, there is not a feeling within me that thine omniscient eye does not see. Every thought of my heart, every desire of my soul, every feeling in my conscience—all are so open before thy heart-searching eye, that I need not tell thee what I have been, what I am, and what I desire to be. Such is the feeling of every living soul in which the Spirit of God dwells. He gives to that soul such a deep sense of God’s omniscience and omnipresence, that it knows the eye of God is ever looking into the depths of the heart.

But what were these desires? “Lord,” he says, “all my desire is before thee.” There were then certain desires that were working in David’s soul, that were springing up from the bottom of his heart. These desires are such as will be found, more or less, in all living souls.

1. One desire was, for the Lord’s manifested favour. David at this time was labouring under a sense of guilt; the corruptions of his heart were laid open and bare; the Lord was manifesting his solemn displeasure against his iniquities; and he was bowed down greatly by a sense of sin upon his conscience. The blessed Spirit raised up in his soul, under these heavy loads, a desire for God’s manifested favour. And is not this the feeling of every living soul—earnest breathings after God’s manifested favour and mercy? It will not satisfy him to see these things in God’s word; it will not content him to hear them explained from the mouths of ministers; it will not satisfy him to hear them spoken of as felt in the hearts of God’s people. He desires to have a sense of this manifested favour imparted to his own bosom, that it may come powerfully into his own soul that he may receive some sweet testimony of the mercy of God by the shedding abroad of that divine favour in his own

heart. He desires thus to have God’s mercy manifested to his soul by the discovery of his personal lovingkindness to him as a guilty sinner before him. And what is all religion that does not stand in the enjoyment of this? It leaves the soul needy and naked, unless from time to time there is some discovery of God’s manifested mercy and favour. And what brings us to this point? Is it not guilt, shame, and sorrow? Is it not a feeling sense of our vileness and iniquity before God? Is it not seeing and feeling that “in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing?”

2. Another desire that was then springing up in David’s heart was, for the Lord’s manifested presence; that presence in his bosom which makes crooked things straight and rough places plain; that presence which had so often cheered his heart when drooping down in this vale of tears; that manifested presence, which, like the sun, illumines the soul into which it comes with its heavenly beams, and enables it still to press forward and hope to the end.

3. He desired also to experience the sweet revivings of God in his heart; that he might not be carnal, cold, dead, stupid, lifeless, barren, and unfeeling; but that there might be those gracious revivals in his soul, those divine refreshings, that heavenly dew and unction falling into his heart, whereby he would live under a feeling sense of God’s manifested favour, and enjoy that love which alone can cheer the down-cast spirit.

4. He desired too that the Lord would bless him from time to time with those discoveries of his interest in the love and blood of the Lamb, which alone can purge a guilty conscience; that he might receive the sprinkling of atoning blood upon his heart; feel Jesus to be his surety and sin-bearer; see his name cut deep upon his heart and worn upon his shoulder; look into his sympathizing bosom, and there see love engraved in living characters—characters never to be erased.

“Lord,” he says, “all my desire is before thee;” all the cravings of my heart, all the longings of my soul, all the heavings of my bosom; everything that passes to and fro in the secret chambers

within. "All my desire is before thee." Thou knowest it; thou seest it; for thou canst read my heart; there is not a single breath of living prayer in me, nor is there a going forth of a single desire, which thine eye does not behold.

Now many of the Lord's people cannot clearly read their names in the book of life; many are the doubts and fears that work in their bosom whether the Lord really has begun a work of grace upon their souls, and whether they truly are among the living family. But this thing they must know—whether at times and seasons they can lie in humility at the footstool of mercy, and appeal to a heart-searching God—"All my desire is before thee." They must know whether they ever fell down in humility and brokenness of heart before the divine Majesty, and felt those living desires going out of their bosom into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth; and whether they can, with honesty, uprightness, and godly sincerity, say to God in the language before us, "O Lord, all my desire is before thee.' Thou seest my heart, and knowest every thing that passes in my troubled breast." If you can say that, it is a mark of life. If that has been the feeling of your heart from time to time, you find it was the same feeling that worked in the bosom of David. And God saw fit that it should be written by the finger of the Spirit, and placed upon solemn record for the consolation and encouragement of souls in similar circumstances.

II.—"And my groaning is not hid from thee." What is implied in this expression, "My groaning!" Do we not groan under a sense of pain? It is the most natural expression of our feelings when we are under acute suffering. The woman in travail, the patient under the keen knife of the surgeon, the man afflicted with some painful internal disease, can only give vent to their distressing feelings by groaning. And is it not so spiritually? When the Lord's people groan, it shows there is some painful sensation experienced within them; and these painful feelings they can only express by groaning aloud before the footstool of mercy.

How many things there are that cause pain in a living conscience!

1. One frequent cause of pain is, backsliding from God; and when our base backslidings are laid with guilt upon our conscience, it makes us groan. When a man sees how his covetous heart, his idolatrous nature, his adulterous eye, draws him aside on the right hand and the left, it makes him groan with internal pain. When he sees and feels what a wretch he is; how, when he has been left but five minutes to himself, immediately he has turned aside into some forbidden path; and if he has not fallen into sin, has walked upon the very borders of temptation; it will make him groan through his internal sensations of guilt and shame before a heart-searching God. Those that are dead in sin, or dead in a profession, know nothing of the painful sensations that are produced by a sense of the inward backslidings, idolatries, and adulteries of our deeply fallen nature. But whenever God's monitor takes up his abode in the bosom—a conscience made honest and tender in God's fear; and when that living monitor in a man's bosom goes where he goes, stays where he stays, maintains its continual watch, keeps a check-book in which it writes down every transgression of the heart, the lip, or the hand, and brings a solemn reckoning before the eyes of a heart-searching God—it will make him groan. He will not be able to go to bed with smiles upon his face; it will so haunt him when he comes before God's footstool, that he will be compelled to sigh and groan because he has been what he has been. And thus God's monitor, whose voice never can be silenced, tells him how he has transgressed, and in how many ways he has backslidden from the Lord.

2. But persons groan who have to carry hurry burdens. The very paviers, to use a common illustration, who are engaged in the laborious occupation of paving our streets, can hardly bring their mallet down without a groan, so hard is the occupation. And those who have to labour under the corruptions of their nature and the evils of their hearts, will often have to groan on account of the heavy labour that they are thus put to.

3. Groaning also implies a desire to be relieved from the pain

endured; as a patient from the keen knife of the surgeon, or a woman in travail from the source of her distress. Thus groans not merely express a sense of inward suffering, but they also testify to a desire for deliverance. Remove the pain, and you remove the groaning; take away the cause, and the groans cease immediately. So that, the silent, or to speak more correctly, the speechless language of groans, signifies there is some deliverance looked for, wanted, or expected. And do we not find this character stamped upon living groans in the 8th chapter of Romans, where the Apostle says, "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now; and not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body?" (verse 22, 23.) And then, to shew that these groanings after deliverance are not the language of nature, the Apostle traces them up to their heavenly origin. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (ver. 26.) How he traces up every living groan to the power of God! It is, he says, the Spirit of God in a sinner's bosom, speaking in him, and for him, interceding in his heart before the footstool of mercy. Some of the Lord's people are tried because their prayers are not better put together. They have "no language," they say, "to express their wants; when they fall down upon their knees before the Lord, they cannot put sentences together in good order." It is a good thing they cannot. This dove-tailed prayer suits hypocrites, and those whose religion lies on the tip of their tongue, but who know nothing of the work of the Spirit upon the heart. When sentence is nicely fitted into sentence, it suits those whose religion never sinks below their throats. But the prayers of God's people, the sighs and groans that come out of their bosom, are living testimonies that they have something more to come to the Lord with than lip service, something more weighty to pour out before him than mere head notions and the language

of man. It is the feeling desires of their souls which they are thus obliged, from deep necessity, to pour out before the footstool of mercy in broken cries.

Now David knew, from soul experience, that these groanings were not hid from God. He knew that the Searcher of hearts, when he looked down from his sanctuary into his bosom, saw there were groans there. Do you know it? You must know if there be these groans. No man can deceive you on this point. Some of you, who are the Lord's people, may not have a clear testimony of it; you may not see your names clearly written in the book of life, and not be able to rejoice in the full assurance of faith. But no man can deceive you on this point, neither can you deceive yourself, whether there are not from time to time desires working in your bosom after God; whether there are not from time to time groanings in your soul under a sense of grief and shame; longings in your heart for the appearance of the Son of God. All the persons in the world can never beat you out of this. And if you have experienced something of this feeling you can say with David, "My groaning is not hid from thee." "Thou knowest how I groan by day, and how I groan by night! How when I get into bed I have groaned to thee! and how when I wake in the morning I have still to groan to thee! Thou knowest (I can appeal to thee, for thou art acquainted with all the feelings of my soul)," "My groanings are not hid from thee." If you can say that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, there is a mark of divine life in your soul. It was in David's heart, and it is in your heart also. And God has recorded it for the encouragement and consolation of those who know something of these things by divine teaching.

III:—"My heart panteth." There is something here which seems to require a little explanation. The Psalmist, or rather, the Holy Ghost by the Psalmist, brings forward a striking figure. "As the hart" (or stag) "panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." (Psalm 42:1.) Now, we may fancy for a moment what is intended by that figure. Here is a poor hunted stag flying

from the dogs who are fast pursuing him to tear him to pieces; he, overcome by fatigue, all gasping and panting, sees before him a river. How he longs to reach it! and how he pants with agonizing desire to lave his limbs in that cool stream, and satiate his thirst by drinking its waters! So spiritually. The Lord's people are often hunted up and down, as David was by Saul, "like a partridge upon the mountains." How often they are hunted by Satan, hunted by their sins! how often pursued by guilt, and how often haunted by shame! How these hell-hounds are perpetually dogging their heels! And those things make them pant after the refreshing streams of the "water of life." These exercises make them desire to drink of the brook of Siloam, and have some draught out of Bethlehem's well.

Thus, the very word "pant" implies that the soul is pursued by the enemies of its peace. Being all weary, all thirsty, it longs after the water of life. Is it not so with your soul sometimes? It is not when you are at ease, when you are settled upon your lees, when you can indulge in carnality and worldly pleasure; you are not then panting after God. But when something takes place that alarms and affrights your soul, something that pursues you as it were on the wings of the wind; and you are exercised, troubled, and distressed in your mind—then it is that you begin to pant after God. Say we are (where we are frequently) in carnal ease, and temptation attacks us, it seems then as though we had no more power to cope with it, than the very pavement on which we tread; so dark, so dead, so stupid, so lifeless, so weak are we then. But it is not always so with us. So far as we have the fear of God in our bosoms, there are times and seasons when there is some revival; and these revivals, for the most part, spring from the Lord bringing some affliction, trial, or temptation upon us. These things pursue us, as it were, and hunt us out of every false refuge, till, like the distracted hart, we are made to cry out and pant after those draughts of living water which alone can satiate our thirst. The effect of the painful sensations that the soul labours under is, as David says, "My heart panteth." You see a person sometimes, who has been labouring hard, how he pants, as

though he could not get his breath! Is not this so in the experience of the Lord's people? When labouring under hard and heavy burdens, how their breath seems to fail them! When temptations attack them, does it not seem as though they must altogether faint and drop down? They are so overcome with labour that they pant and gasp for breath.

But what do they pant after? They pant after the Lord's manifested presence; they pant after a sense of his lovingkindness shed abroad in their soul; they pant after some sweet testimony that the Lord is their God; they pant after some views of Christ as their Saviour; they pant after the application of his atoning blood, and some discovery of his preciousness and beauty to their hearts. Thus they "pant" after him. The word is expressive of the most earnest and intense desire—a desire that nothing can satisfy but the Lord himself. And thus the Lord's people are distinguished from all other people that dwell upon the face of the earth—that they want the Lord himself, and none but he can satisfy their longing souls. Unless the Lord himself hear their prayer, to them it is of no value; unless the Lord himself be the author of their religion, it gives them no satisfaction; unless the Lord speak to their souls, it removes no burden; unless the Lord smile upon them, their trouble and sorrow are undiminished; unless the Lord whisper, they still have to struggle with doubts and fears, and all the turmoil of their troubled bosom. So that the Lord's people are distinguished by this mark from all others—that they want the Lord himself to be all to them, and all in them; that he may have all the glory, and they all the sweet and blessed consolations. Others can be satisfied with opinions, notions, speculations, and what they are doing for the Lord. But the people of God, seeing and feeling what they are, and being deeply convinced of their lost and ruined state by nature, must have the Lord himself to be the light of their countenance, their heavenly teacher, their blessed guide, their only Saviour, their all in all here, and their all in all hereafter. After these things their hearts pant.

But is it always so? Are there no long seasons of carnality and barrenness? when there is no desire, no longing, no hungering, no thirsting, no panting? but a long tract of barrenness between these fruitful fields? There are long wastes of dreary wilderness between these sips and tastes; long seasons of spiritual hunger and thirst between these refreshments; long intervals in which the Lord does not appear as the light of their countenance. But, even then, the Lord's people are distinctly marked by this feature, that none but the Lord can satisfy their souls, none but the Lord can speak peace to their hearts, none but the Lord is still their salvation, none but the Lord is still their desire. And when they have him not, they seem to themselves to have no religion worth the name; and feel as destitute, needy, naked, and barren, as if they never had one testimony from the Lord, never known his presence, never basked in the beams of his love.

IV.—"My strength faileth." And a good thing it did. What made David's strength fail him? It was because he could not in his own strength bear up under the heavy burdens that lay upon his heart. Depend upon it, a man will bear his burdens as long as he can; he will not give up till he is forced. Man will do all that he can to merit heaven; he will never receive superabounding grace into his heart and conscience until he has known something of the aboundings of sin. No man will ever prize salvation by the merit of another, until all his own merits have been scattered like chaff before the wind. No man will ever prize the manifestations of dying love to his soul until he is completely out of love with himself. No man will ever look up to heaven to be saved by a word from heaven, until he has first seen the depths of hell. So that it is a good thing, however painful, for a man's strength to fail him. And it is the Lord's purpose that our strength should fail us, that his strength may be made perfect in our weakness. It is a very painful point to come to in our soul's experience—to have no strength at all; to be where the Lord brings his people, as set forth Psalm 107:12; "He brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none

to help." To be in that place where we must have some deliverance from God, and yet to feel unable to work it in our own souls, must needs be a painful, trying spot. To feel ourselves on the brink of hell, and to know that none but an almighty hand can pluck us thence; to sink in our minds, and know that none but God himself can raise us up and bring us safe to glory, is a very trying place. But the Lord brings all his people there, sooner or later. He thus weans them from self-strength, self-wisdom, and self-righteousness. He breaks the arm of creature strength, that he may have the honour of laying the everlasting arms underneath the soul; he strips them of everything, that he may have the glory, and we the comfort of being clothed by him from head to foot. So that, however painful it may be to say, "My strength faileth me;" it is a spot into which all the Lord's people must come, and come the more certainly and thoroughly as the corruptions of their heart are laid bare.

I doubt not there was a time with the Lord's people here, when all their strength was not completely gone, when they could make some little head against temptation, could stand against sin, could do something to put away God's displeasure and gain his approval. But what painful lessons have they learnt since then! Now they know that nothing but the power of God can keep them every moment from falling; nothing but the hand of God can hold them from running headlong into temptation; nothing but the work of God can bring forth in heart, lip, and life any one fruit or grace of the Spirit. All their strength has so completely failed them, that they have to lie as clay in the hands of the Potter that he may make them what he would have them to be; and their desire is, to feel the heavenly fingers moulding them into vessels fit for the Master's use.

"My strength faileth." I am unable to raise up one divine thought or feeling. "My strength faileth me" so completely, that I can never fight against Satan, never overcome the world, never crucify the flesh, never subdue sin, never keep my heart out of temptation,

nor temptation out of my heart. "My strength altogether faileth me." But what is the effect? It glorifies the Lord thereby; it makes this text sweet and precious to our heart; "Help is laid on One that is mighty." And when we can firmly believe that Jesus is our strength, then are we beginning to look up to the Lord to feel his strength made perfect in our weakness; and then we see the object and the blessedness of our strength failing us, that we may know the power of his resurrection, and give him all the glory of our complete and everlasting salvation.

"My strength faileth me." How does a man learn this? By having burdens put upon his back, which he cannot carry in his own power; having temptations to grapple with, which he cannot overcome; feeling corruptions working in his heart, which he cannot subdue; finding the cravings of lusts, which he cannot deny; discovering the whole body of sin and death to be perpetually running after evil, and he unable to control it one moment. He learns it also by his thorough inability to bring into his soul any testimony from God, any one whisper from the Lord's lips, any one smile from his countenance, or any one clear and certain mark that he is interested in the love and blood of the Lamb. Thus, when he says, "My strength faileth me," his strength fails him to do anything that he desires to have done in him and for him; and thus he sinks down before the footstool of mercy a ruined and helpless sinner. But is not this the very time for the Lord to appear? The Lord never appears till our strength fails. When our strength fails, he makes his strength known; when we droop, he raises; when we die, he revives; when we are cast down, he lifts up; and when all things are against us, he shews us that all are for us. Thus, it is absolutely indispensable that the Lord's people should walk in this path, that their strength should entirely fail them, that they may enter into the riches of a Saviour's love and blood, and find him suitable and precious to their soul.

V.—"As for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me." There was a time when there was light with you, and others of the

Lord's family. There was a time with you when you could see the truths in God's word, and even see they were all yours, and your name in the book of life. But have you not found the light of your eyes gone from you? You see the doctrines as plainly as ever; but cannot feel the power of those doctrines. There was a time when you could go to God's footstool, see Jesus by the eye of faith, and have the affections of your heart flowing out unto him; could take hold of his strength, believe his word, enjoy his promises, and receive him as made unto you all that your soul desires. But have you not found since with David, "as for the light of mine eyes, it is also gone from me?" It is withdrawn. You now "would see Jesus." There was a time when you saw him in every chapter; you could see him in creation, see him in providence, and see him in grace; see him in hearing; see him in prayer; see him as the Son of God standing at the right hand of the Father, interceding for your soul. But light is gone from us. Have we not had often since to walk in darkness, when there was no light, unable to see our signs, or read our evidences and testimonies?

There was a time too when you had light to see the path in which you were walking, and had no doubt you were one of the living family; you could see the track in which the Lord was leading you, and believed it would land you safe in glory. Looking also on the path of providence, you saw how the Lord had appeared in this way and that way, and believed all would end well at last. But, alas, alas! a change has come over your soul. Now you have to say, "the light of my eyes is also gone from me." You cannot see the things you once saw, believe the things you once believed, feel the things you once felt, nor enjoy the things you once enjoyed. The days of darkness are now many. "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." (Job 29:2, 3.)

Is this the case with you? But is your case singular? Is it not to be found in God's word? Is it not to be felt in the experience of

God's saints? Are you the only child of God thus? Are you the only believer who cannot see his signs, or read his testimonies? the only living soul who is walking in darkness, and without light? the only one who has lost sweet testimonies and consolations, and mourned after those things he once enjoyed, but fears he shall never enjoy again? Was not Job? was not David? was not Jeremiah? was not Hezekiah here? Here these saints of God were, looking back upon the days that were passed, and wishing those days might once more return. Yea, the Lord himself told his disciples, that they would long to see one day of the Son of Man. When they were near Jesus, they could look upon him by the eye of sense, as well as by the eye of faith; they could listen to the gracious words that fell from his lips, sit with him at the same board, and look upon his Person. But he was taken from them up to heaven; and then this was the feeling of their hearts, "O that we could see the Lord as once we saw him!" And this is the spot in which many of the Lord's people are. The dearest and most highly favoured of the family of God are often brought to this spot, where they can only say, "the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me."

Is their case, then, so bad as they think? Have they not fellow travellers who are walking in the same chequered path? fellow mourners who are shedding the same solitary tear? fellow pilgrims tacking the same thorny road, sinking in the same miry clay? If they doubt it, let them read what the Holy Ghost has here recorded, and see whether the feelings of their heart and their experience are not written here as with a ray of light, "Lord, all my desire is before thee." Are not these the very feelings of your heart, those of you who know what it is to sigh, cry, and mourn with David under a sense of the hiding of God's face, and the workings of your own wretched heart, full of guilt, sin, and shame? But with it all, there are blessed marks of the life of God at work in your soul. It is better for you to have some of these painful exercises, these perplexing things in your minds, than be at ease in Zion. The Lord might have left you, as he has left thousands of dead

professors—at the same level, never sinking, never rising—never ebbing, never flowing—never waxing, never waning. Where they were in January, there they are in December; where they were in 1836, there they are in 1846, and there they will be, if they live, in 1856. They resemble those stone images we see in the New Road. These have all the features of a man; the lips, the ears, the nose, and the eyes. Come by twenty years hence, you will see the old statue standing where it did—in all the rigidity of marble—a little more dirty and soiled; but still standing there just as it was twenty years ago. Is not this the picture of a man with a name to live while dead, with the doctrines of grace in his head, and none of the power of it in his heart? What was he twenty years ago? What he is now. Like the statue I have been describing, a little more soiled perhaps and dirty with the corruptions of the world; but just in 1846 what he was in 1826—dead then, and dead now. Is it not better to be a living man moulded by the divine fingers, though perhaps rather more dwarfish than these gigantic statues, which look down so frowningly upon us from the stone-cutter's yard? Is it not better to be little and low, but alive to God, than to be one of these tall images that have merely the outward appearance of a man?

If there be grace in our hearts, there will be more or less of these fluctuations, these movings to and fro of the divine and hidden life. But it is far better, however painful it may be, to have these perplexities and exercises, than to be settled upon our lees, and be at ease in Zion. It is these exercises that keep the soul alive. Remove them, and the man sinks into death. The water of the sea, by ebbing to and fro, is kept fresh and sweet. But shut these waters up in a dock—how stagnant they become! they lose all their freshness, and become little else than a mass of filth and corruption. So, leave you who fear God's name without these exercises, without the workings of the Spirit upon your heart, without these movings to and fro, without these ebbings and flowings of divine life in your soul, and you would soon be like the stagnant water in the dock—without any pleadings with God in prayer, any breathings of life

after him, anything that manifests you as a living monument of God's mercy. Therefore, however painful, trying, and perplexing—however contradictory to flesh and blood and reason the path may be; yet it is far better to be a living soul, with sharp exercises, cutting temptations, severe afflictions and sorrows, than to be let alone by God; to have no painful exercises, nor pleasurable emotions; no frowns from God's face, nor smiles from his loving countenance; no tears of sorrow, nor tears of joy; to have nothing from the Lord, but everything from self. To be left—to be left to ourselves—to our pride—to our carnality, to our wickedness! It is far better to be one of the Lord's poor, tried, tempted family, whom he thus takes in his hand, whom he thus mysteriously and mercifully exercises, than to live as many do, without care or any fear, and never know their state before God till they drop into the burning lake.

117 Pilgrims' Hunger and Pilgrims' Food

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening,
August 23, 1846

“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 children of Israel had been forty years wandering in the wilderness; and they were now come to the borders of the promised land. The Lord, therefore, commands Moses to set before them promises, and also threatenings; promises to the obedient, and threatenings against the disobedient. Moses from this is divinely

led to recapitulate the dealings of the Lord with them during the past forty years, and to encourage them for the future. How applicable is this to the experience of a living soul! During the time that the children of Israel were travelling in the wilderness, there were many perplexing circumstances, the meaning of which they could not then understand. But when forty years had passed over their head, then they were enabled to see clearly the reasons of the many painful trials and perplexing circumstances, which, when they took place, were completely hidden from their eyes. Is not this the case with the Lord's family while travelling through the wilderness below? How many trials and temptations—how many sharp and severe exercises have they to pass through! But while they are in them, how little they know the reason of them! how little do they feel that the hand of God is in them! how little they believe that these things are indeed for their spiritual good! But when in the unction of the Spirit's teaching, by the eye of living faith, they are enabled afterwards to look back, O what a sweet light is then cast upon those very trials which when they first came so perplexed them! and how they then see that the mysterious and invisible hand of the Lord did indeed guide them step by step in the way that they should go!

The Lord reminds Israel of this. Every step that Israel had travelled in the wilderness was under divine guidance; they never journeyed till the pillar of the cloud moved before them; they never stayed until the same pillar halted. Yet, were you and I to follow in a map the wanderings of the children of Israel, how intricate would that path tracked out on the chart appear! But this was the termination of it all—the goodly land into which the Lord had promised to bring them. And is it not so with the path that the Lord's people have to travel? so intricate, so entangled, such a maze, such a labyrinth! Yet when they lay their heads upon a dying pillow, and the Lord is about to smile them into eternity, they cannot say that the Lord has led them one wrong step; but that “goodness and mercy have followed them all the days of their

life; and now they are about to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." May such an end be our happy portion.

In looking at these words, I shall endeavour to point out what the Lord here chiefly, if I may use the expression, puts his finger upon, and desires more particularly to impress upon their minds. These leading points will come out as, with God's blessing, we travel through the text.

I.—The first point which the Lord impresses upon their conscience is, to remember. "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness." But some may say, 'How can I remember? I have a treacherous memory; I cannot exactly recollect every circumstance.' No more could they. But is there not a blessed Remembrancer? Is there not a promised Guide and Comforter, of whom the Lord said, "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance?" (John 14:26.) And is it not so in soul experience? Why, sometimes the path that we have trodden seems almost blotted out of our memory; or, if we remember the leading circumstances, all is so dark, that we can make nothing of it. Nay, we can scarcely believe that what we considered Ebenezers were memorials of the Lord's goodness at all. But, on the other hand, are there not times and seasons when the Lord sweetly brings to mind his leadings and dealings with us in providence and grace, and raises up living faith in our heart to believe that he did this and did that? that he appeared on this and that occasion? If I may use a figure, it is something like the country spread before our eyes on a very dark and gloomy day. There the objects are. But the gloom, mist, and clouds that hang upon them hide all or pretty nearly all from our sight. The trees, the church spires, the villages, the towns, the parks, and the rivers that run amongst them, are all there; but the darkness rests upon them, and obscures them from our view. But let us travel the same road on a sun-shiny morn, when the cloudless orb of day casts his beams upon every surrounding object—how visible then is every spot which before was enveloped in darkness! The church

spires, the villages, the trees, the parks; how they shine forth! And why? Because they are illuminated by the rays of the sun. And yet they were all there just as much in the cloudy day as they are now in the bright sunshine. Is it not so in Christian experience? Our Ebenezers, our testimonies, our tokens, our evidences—they are the same in the cloudy as in the bright day. When the Sun shines into your soul, then you can see them. But when clouds, darkness, and mists rest upon them, though they are there exactly the same, yet are they hidden from view.

Thus, when the Lord said, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness," he does not enforce it as a legal precept. I look upon Deuteronomy as the gospel of the Pentateuch; it is so full of spiritual blessings. When therefore he says, "Thou shalt remember," it does not come with the peals of Sinai; it does not blaze, as it were, from that burning mount, as a precept to be fulfilled under the penalty of a curse. But "thou shalt remember," when the divine Remembrancer brings it to thy recollection: when that heavenly Teacher shines upon thy path, and brings it to thy memory. And thus, in true Christian experience, it may be said to a child of God, 'Remember that the Lord appeared for thee on this occasion, and that he appeared for thee on that occasion; that he met thee in prayer; that he blessed thee in hearing; that he gave thee a visit upon thy bed; that he shone into thy breast in thy chimney corner; that he applied his promises to thy heart; that some sweet passage of his word broke in upon and melted thy soul.'

"Thou shalt remember all the way." The dark parts of the path as well as the bright; the crooked paths as well as the straight; the rough passages as well as the smooth; the narrow alleys as well as the broad streets. "Thou shalt remember all the way," from the first to the last, "which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness."

How sweet and refreshing it is to look back upon the way by which we believe the Lord has led us! But how different are

our feelings at different times! Sometimes we cannot bear to look back. There are so many things in every man's bosom; there are so many things in every man's life, that sometimes he cannot, he dare not, look back upon the path that he has trodden. Our very experience itself is so much connected with nature's depravity: there are so many things in self to humble us, though there are so many things at the same time in grace to bless us, that there are times and seasons when we cannot look back upon the path we have trodden, and wish it were altogether buried and forgotten. But when the grace of God begins to manifest itself, and we see it superabounding over the aboundings of our sin, we can look even at the darkest spots, and see the mercies of God superabounding over them. And thus, when the Lord takes us by the hand, we can walk into those paths where we could not walk by ourselves. It is like a child in this vast metropolis. The tender child is afraid to walk out by itself in the dark alleys and narrow lanes; but let the child have hold of its father's hand, and it treads those dark places courageously and boldly which it would fear to do unaccompanied by such protection. And so, when the Lord has hold of his people's hand, as the angels of Lot's, they can walk boldly forward, and look boldly backward, because they lean upon an all-gracious as well as almighty hand.

II.—But the Lord tells his people why it was he led them these forty years in the wilderness. His grand object was—to humble them. If nothing that we have met with in our pilgrimage has humbled us; if our religion instead of laying us low has exalted us high; if instead of breaking us into humility and self-loathing, it has puffed us up with pride and presumption, depend upon it, it bears not the mark and stamp of God. Where shall we go to find the proudest man in England? In the park on a Sunday, rolling in his carriage? or sitting at a gaming-table in one of the hells [halls?] of the metropolis? No; but to some chapel: and there you may see him in a man puffed up by the devil as an angel of light, thinking himself something when he is nothing. And where shall we go to

find a man that is really humble? Into some convent? within the walls of a Popish chapel? or in the cell of a hermit? We shall not find him there. But if we would find such an one, we must look for him in the man in whose heart the grace of God dwells, who knows something of self by divine teachings. And sure am I if our religion has never humbled us, it has done nothing for us—it has left us where it found us, in nature's pride and nature's ignorance.

But how was it that they were humbled by walking forty years in the wilderness? Must there not have taken place many things to humble them? We cannot have the effect without the cause; we cannot have the fruit without the root. If, therefore, they were humbled, there must have been something to humble them. We never really can have the grace of humility unless we have had something of a very powerful and deep nature to work that grace in our soul. We cannot walk in our garden on a summer's eve, and pluck the lowly flower, humility, from the border to stick in our button-hole. It grows indeed in the garden of God's word; but we cannot crop it thence to adorn our souls with. There must be some teachings of God the Spirit in the heart to produce that heavenly grace.

Now, what are the two things—for all the dealings and teachings of God to produce humility may be summed up under two things—what are the two things that produce this gospel grace?

1. One is, a deep discovery of what we are; an opening up of the corruption, weakness, and wickedness of our fallen nature. How? By merely shining into our hearts to discover them? That is not enough. How did the Lord discover and bring to light the corruptions of Israel in the wilderness? Was it not by circumstances? Was it not by events? And did not circumstances and events make them manifest? For instance, the Lord left them three days without water. What did that produce? Why, it stirred up their rebellion and peevishness. They were quiet enough when they had wells of water to drink at, and the palm trees of Elim

over their head. But when they had to go three days without water, then the unbelief and rebellion of their hearts began to work. So it is with the Lord's people. The Lord brings about circumstances and events, and by circumstances and events their corruptions are made manifest. The Israelites were a rebellious people; but their rebellion lay buried until circumstances brought it out. They were an idolatrous people; but their idolatry lay hidden in their bosom until Aaron set up the golden calf. They were a people that longed after Egypt; but it was not manifested till they said, "Let us make to ourselves a captain." They were a gross people; but it was not evidenced until they began to lust after the flesh. Thus it was circumstances and events taking place in the wilderness, that one after another opened up their secret sins, and brought to light their hidden corruptions. Is it not so with you? We do not like to learn humility in this way. We should be glad to learn humility, by its being gently put upon us as a garment, without having to learn it through painful circumstances and distressing events. But the Lord's way of teaching his people humility is, by placing them first in one trying spot, and then in another; by suffering some temptation to arise, some stumbling block to be in their path; some besetting sin to work upon their corrupt affections; some idol to be embraced by their idolatrous heart; something to take place to draw out what was there before, and thus make it as manifest to their sight as before it was manifest to God's sight. I do not mean to say, that we must fall into sin to learn what sin is; but, as a general rule, we learn humility, not by hearing ministers tell us what wicked creatures we are, nor by merely looking into our bosoms and seeing a whole swarm of evils working there; but from being compelled by painful necessity to believe that we are vile, through circumstances and events time after time bringing to light those hidden evils in our heart, which once we thought ourselves pretty free from.

Now, had Israel been very obedient and submissive in the desert, never bowed down to idols, never lusted after Egypt, they

would not have been humbled; but when these wretched evils were brought upon their consciences, they were clothed with humility, because they were thus made to see and feel that indeed they were altogether vile.

2. But there is another way in which humility is taught us, and that is, by having some discovery of the goodness, mercy, and grace of God in Jesus Christ. Was it not so with the children of Israel? Was it all wrath towards them? Was it all judgment? Was it all frowns? Was it all threatenings? Was it all stripes? Was there not mercy mingled with the wrath? Were there not smiles blended with the frowns? Were there not the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of their abominable, aggravated sins? Did not the Lord appear for them, by giving them water out of the rock; by causing the manna to fall from heaven; by defeating their enemies whenever they appeared; by giving them a pillar of cloud to guide them by day, and a pillar of fire to light them by night? Were there not thousands of instances in which the Lord's favour, his especial favour, was manifested towards them? And so it is with the Lord's people now. They learn humility, not merely by a discovery of what they are, but also by a discovery of what Jesus is. When they get a glimpse of Jesus, of his love, of his grace, of his blood; and the blessed Spirit bears a secret testimony in their consciences, that all these are for them; these two feelings meeting together in their bosom—their shame and the Lord's goodness—their guilt and his forgiveness—their wickedness and baseness, and his superabounding mercy; these two feelings meeting together in their bosoms, break them, humble them, and lay them, dissolved in tears of godly sorrow and contrition, at the footstool of mercy. And thus they learn humility, that sweet grace, that blessed fruit of the Spirit in real, vital soul experience.

III.—But there was another lesson which they had to be taught. The Lord had another purpose to make manifest by leading them about those forty years in the wilderness—to prove them, and make manifest what they were. Are not the Lord's dealings continually

going on to manifest and prove what his people are? Wherever the Lord implants his grace in a sinner's heart, he will manifest it, he will bring it to light; and wherever there is nothing but nature, the form without the power, profession without reality, he will bring that to light too. We read, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." (Mal. 3:3.) The Lord tries the heart and searches the reins; and thus he brings to light and makes manifest the counsels of all hearts. Is a man sincere? Is the grace of God in his heart? Is divine life implanted? Does the fear of the Lord dwell in his bosom? That man shall be proved to be one of the Lord's family. On the other hand, has a man taken up religion? Has he begun with God, instead of God beginning with him? Has he a mere name to live among men, while his soul is dead before God? Is hypocrisy, superstition, and self-righteousness the sum and substance of his religion? It shall be made manifest; it shall be proved. The Lord will place the real child of God in those circumstances which shall manifest him; and he will place the hypocrite in those circumstances which shall manifest him. The Lord's dealings with his people in the wilderness are very much to this purpose and to this end—to prove them, and to know what is in their hearts. Has the Lord implanted life in your soul? Has he touched your conscience with his finger? Has he begun a work of grace upon your heart? If so, in your travels through this wilderness there will be things from time to time to prove the reality of this work upon your soul. You will have temptations. Now, when temptation comes, it will prove whether you have the fear of God in your soul to stand against the temptation, or whether you fall under the temptation; or, if you fall under the temptation, whether you are ever recovered out of it. Or you shall be placed in those circumstances of life that shall prove whether the grace of God be in you or not. The Lord shall give you worldly prosperity, and shall open for you doors in providence in all directions. Your heart shall be caught by it, if not one of God's

people; you shall be drawn away from the Lord's saints, and it shall be manifested by these things that the root of the matter was never in your heart. But on the other hand, if you are a living soul, the Lord will keep bringing circumstance upon circumstance, event upon event, one thing after another; and all these things, as they come upon you, shall be made to prove whether the fear of God be in your soul or not. Now, if the fear of God be not in a man's heart, he must decline, he must fall away. Satan will be more than a match for every one except God's own family; sin will overcome and destroy every one but those whose sins are pardoned through atoning blood and dying love; and the world, sooner or later, will overcome every one who has not the faith of God's elect, whereby alone the world is overcome. Thus the Lord, in his mysterious dealings (and how mysterious his dealings are!) proves the reality of the work of grace in every heart where that work is begun, and proves the hypocrisy of all who have but a name to live while their soul is dead before God.

But more especially, in the case of the Lord's people, are they called upon to look back, and see all the way the Lord has led them these many years in the wilderness, that everything was a means to an end—to prove them, that the Lord might know whether they would keep his commandments or not. Look back. Do you not see, that so many years or months ago, there was a snare spread for you? and do you not see how the Lord delivered you from that snare? By that the Lord proved you, and saw what was in your heart. Look back, and see some strong temptation—temptation to covetousness, to adultery, to fall under the power of some sin. Do you see, or do you not see, how the Lord delivered you from that besetment, and broke to pieces that temptation, which well-nigh had you in its grasp? Or look back, and see if there was not some sacrifice to be made to pursue the right way of the Lord; by acting up to your profession you must have brought down some persecution upon your head; or greatly have offended some of those to whom you were much beholden; you must have cut off

some right hand, plucked out some right eye. Or again, did you, or did you not, overcome that peculiar besetment which conscience at this very moment is speaking of in your bosom? Now, by these things does the Lord continually make manifest what is in your heart. Is sincerity there? It shall be proved and manifested. Is hypocrisy there? It shall be proved and manifested. Is the grace of God there? Circumstances shall bring it to light. Is nothing but delusion, deceit, self-righteousness, and lies there? They shall be all made manifest; they may be cloaked for a time, but they shall all come to light, for the Lord's purpose is to bring all things to light. Thus, when you look back upon the way the Lord has led you these many years in the wilderness, can you not see how circumstance after circumstance, and event after event arose, to prove what was in you; whether godly fear, whether simplicity and sincerity, whether a desire to fear God, whether a dread to offend him, whether the life and power of vital godliness, or whether little else than an empty profession without the life-giving power of God in the soul? What a mercy for you to be able to look back and see how the Lord appeared for you, when without him you must have sunk; when you can feel, to your soul's comfort, that the Lord did uphold you in the trying hour, did appear for you in distressing circumstances, did make bare his right arm when you had no strength of your own, did guide you when you had lost all clue, did bring you safe through all when, without his help, you must have been utterly lost. What a mercy it is to be able, by the actings of living faith (and sure I am, there must be faith in exercise), to look back upon the way, and believe that indeed the grace of God was in your heart, that the Lord proved it, and showed it to be genuine by every circumstance that has taken place.

IV.—"Whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no;" which thou lovedst most, God or the world; which thy heart clave to in earnest, the things of Christ, or the things of time and sense; whether the word of God was thy rule, or of man; whether the fear of God was thy motive, or the good opinion of the creature;

whether to serve God in sincerity and godly simplicity, to obey God's precepts, to keep God's word, was the desire of thy heart; or whether a little outside religion, just to please man, was your object, whilst within there was little else but dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

V.—"And suffered thee to hunger." What is this? Another memorial of the forty years' pilgrimage. It is true literally of some of the Lord's pilgrims. While the wicked in this world eat their full, so that their eyes stand out with fatness and they have more than heart can wish, how many of the Lord's poor are suffered to hunger, even in a literal sense! But it is true of all spiritually, though not true of all literally, "he suffered them to hunger." What is it to suffer a soul to hunger? Is it not the denial of food to it? It is so literally, is it not? If a man has food denied him, he must hunger. And so it is with God's people. There is in them an appetite after food, a desire after living bread. There is that in their souls which God himself alone can supply. There is a guilty conscience, which nothing but blood can appease; a dark heart, which nothing but light can cure; a dead, unfeeling soul, which nothing but the sweet revivings of the Lord can restore and comfort. There are trials that need deliverances, sorrows that need consolations, castings down that need liftings up, griefs that need the healing balm. Thus there is in their hearts an appetite, a desire, a hungering after living food, such as the Lord himself alone can supply.

But "he suffered them to hunger." How keen must be the feelings of a parent to hear his child cry for bread! And yet the Lord often leaves his children to cry for the bread of heaven, leaves them hungry. When perhaps you could not bear that your child should be hungry half an hour, the Lord allows his people to be hungry for days. Why is this? It is to give them a keener relish for food; to wean their appetite from worldly victuals; to bring them off that gross feeding of which they have contracted a habit, and make them long after heavenly food. Was it not so with the children of Israel? They came out of Egypt fat and surfeited with

Egyptian food, the leeks, the onions, the garlick, and the flesh, when they sat by the flesh-pots. They had then to be cleansed from the gross humours which infected their body. Egyptian air and Egyptian diet had made them so gross, that they needed a course of fasting to remove out of their bodies the corrupt humours. The Lord therefore suffered them to hunger, that there might be a keener appetite for spiritual food; that they might be brought down to the fasting point, a healthy appetite, which nothing could appease or allay but a shower of bread from heaven.

Is it not so with God's people? What gross appetites we have by nature, swallowing sin by mouthfuls! No thirsty horse ever plunged his throat into a bucket of water with more eagerness than we, in times past, have plunged headlong into every sin. Was there not some need to be brought off this gross feeding? How could we relish heavenly manna, the love and blood of Jesus, sweet love visits from his heavenly presence, pure love tokens from his precious hands, without being well purged from this Egyptian food on which we had been nurtured from our very cradle? And therefore the Lord suffers his people to hunger, that they may have an appetite for something more than what nature can give, that they may long for those supplies of heavenly food which the Lord alone can supply.

Is it not this keen hunger which creates an appetite for heavenly food? Surely. But after the Lord has given his people a taste for heavenly food, they still have to hunger, that they may relish it the more. There are times and seasons when, like the children of Israel, after we have tasted manna, we want quails, we long for flesh; and the Lord, perhaps, answers our request, as he did theirs, but sends leanness withal into our souls. The quails came, and fell round about the camp three days' journey; but whilst the meat was in their mouth, the anger of God was manifested, and they loathed the very flesh for which they had so idolatrously longed. Is it not so with you? There is some sin that you are longing to enjoy, some lust you want to gratify. The Lord may permit you to go great lengths in this matter; but what would be the consequence? Why,

no sooner would the meat be in your mouth, than the wrath of God would come into your conscience; and you would loathe the very meat that your wicked heart has been lusting after. Thus we are suffered to hunger, in order that this great Egyptian habit may be purged away, and there may be given a pure appetite for pure food, a heavenly appetite for heavenly provision; that hungering, that thirsting, that inward desire, which nothing but the love and blood of the Lamb can supply.

Now, can you not look upon the path the Lord has led you in the wilderness, and see how you were suffered to hunger? Perhaps you went months without a testimony. You come to hear the word Sunday after Sunday, but nothing for you. You went down upon your knees time after time, but no testimony, no whispers, no smiles. You read chapters, and turn the leaves of the Bible over and over; but nothing for you! nothing for you! nothing to touch your heart, nothing to meet your case, nothing to dissolve, to break, to melt you. So you went on, moping and moaning, and fearing your case was altogether desperate. Is not this suffering you to hunger? Can you not look back and see how, again and again, the Lord thus suffered you to hunger? You could not, as hundreds do, feed upon ashes, satisfy yourselves with forms. Sermons and doctrines did not content you. You must have feeling and power, the smiles of God, and the whispers of his love, or you are not satisfied. And therefore you can see (at least, I can) how good it is that the Lord should sometimes suffer us to hunger. It is a very painful thing; but how sweet it makes food when the food comes! How it weans a man from going after those things which never can profit, which never have profited us.

VI.—"And fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know." How this follows their suffering from hunger! See the connection. Here are the three steps—first of all, Egyptian food; then, wilderness hunger; then, heavenly manna. Egyptian onions and heavenly manna did not meet together; they were separated by an interval, and that interval was hunger. Is it

not so experimentally? When your heart is going out after idols, when you spiritually are travelling the same path as the children of Israel in the wilderness, lusting in your affections after Egypt, have you any appetite for spiritual food? None, none! The shop, the business, the wife, the husband, the child, the world—these are all you care about. But when the Lord begins to deal with your conscience more powerfully, is not this the effect that, like the prodigal of old, you feel an aching void in the very bottom of your heart, which neither farm, nor shop, nor house, nor business, nor family, nor the things of time and sense, can satisfy? Then, you begin to long after something from God, dropped down from the Lord's own lips into your heart.

“And fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know.” What is this manna? Is it not the bread from heaven, of which the Lord has given us an explanation in the sixth chapter of John's gospel?—“I am the bread of life.” This manna, spiritually, is the flesh and blood of Jesus—embracing him in the arms of living faith, as a crucified Saviour; feeling the application of his atoning blood to the conscience; enjoying the manifestations of his dying love to the heart; and receiving him as a blessed Mediator between God and our souls. And when the Lord is pleased to unfold his glory, to bring a sense of his dying love into our hearts, and give us to look upon him as the crucified Man of Sorrows—this is manna, such as the children of Israel never tasted—this is the bread of life, that fits the soul for heaven, and takes the soul to heaven.

But who are to eat this manna? Who can come unto a bleeding Jesus? Who can look unto a crucified Man of Sorrows? Who can feel the application of atoning blood to the conscience? Who can feed upon the sufferings of Jesus by living faith? The unexercised, the untried, the unperplexed, the undistressed? They cannot, they cannot. They must have Egyptian diet purged off by painful exercises, by wandering in the wilderness, by sharp temptations, by keen and cutting sorrows, before they have an appetite for heavenly

food. But when the Lord is pleased to give them this appetite, and then begins to drop a little sensation of his goodness, mercy, and love into their soul—this is heavenly manna, which neither they nor their fathers knew.

VII.—And why is all this? The Lord sums it all up in those words—“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.” What a spiritual light these words cast upon the whole! “Man doth not live by bread alone.” There is heavenly food to support his soul, as well as natural food to support his body. If man is supported spiritually by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, if this be the only food the Lord's people enjoy, how little they have! How strong and striking these words are!—“Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Now, if you have no more food than that which proceedeth out of the mouth of God into your heart, how much have you? If you take away all your religion that does not stand in this, into what a small compass is it all crushed up! It takes your religion, which, in your vain thoughts sometimes might almost fill this chapel, and screws it up into a nutshell. If you and I have no more religion than that which comes from what God has spoken into our soul; if that be the bread we are to live upon: if that be the strength of our heart; if that be our living portion and our dying sufficiency;—how it narrows up our religion into so small a compass, that sometimes we seem to require a microscope to see whether we have any or not. But thus we learn this lesson, “that man liveth not by bread alone.” He cannot live by doctrines in the head. He cannot live by bodily gestures. He cannot live by rites and forms and ceremonies. He cannot live by anything that springs from the creature. His life is first given by God, and his life is maintained by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. What the Lord teaches, he knows; what the Lord works, he feels; what the Lord gives, he possesses; what the Lord speaks to his heart, he has in his soul, as from the lips of the sovereign

Majesty himself.

But into what a narrow spot this brings the living family! In your trials, can you take any comfort (I cannot) except from what the Lord speaks to your soul? Can you believe anything that the Lord does not bring with power into your heart? Can you take any promise that does not come accompanied by divine unction to your conscience? Can you believe your own interest in the love and blood of the Lamb, except God tell you so with his own mouth? You cannot, you cannot, if the fear of God is in exercise. But how this cuts to pieces all man-made religion! and the sooner and more completely it is cut to pieces, the better. Why need I deceive myself by thinking I have a religion, which will not stand the trying hour, which will not give me comfort on a death-bed, nor land me safe in eternity? Now, the only religion that will give my soul comfort on a death-bed, and that will take my soul into eternity, is what God is pleased to work in my heart with his own almighty hand, the word he is pleased to speak with his own lips to my soul, and the manifestations of his mercy and love which he alone can bring down with convincing power into my heart. But what a narrow path is this! How it cuts up all creature righteousness! How it lays the creature low in the dust of abasement! With all your religion, you have none but what God gives, nor can you procure a grain; for you have to live, not by bread alone, in your natural life, but on every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. How then are you spiritually to live, except from time to time the Lord speak a word to your soul?

Now, this is a mark of the Lord's family. When they come to hear the word, they do not come in a criticising mood, as though they were great people, and would pass some very decisive judgment on those who stand up in the Lord's name. Not but what they will have their discernment, not but what they will have their judgment. But thus—'O that the Lord would speak a word to my soul! O that the Lord would apply his precious truth to my heart! O that the Lord would shine upon me, and give me some testimony that I

am safe for eternity!' Why are these prayers going up out of their bosom? Why, as they come to chapel, are they looking down upon the pavement, and their heart going up from time to time that the Lord would bless them? Because they feel that nothing but the Lord's blessing can stand their soul in any stead; and that nothing but the Lord's own words, proceeding from the Lord's own mouth into their heart, can raise up in their soul that faith, hope, and love, and those sweet testimonies and blessed evidences, which alone can satisfy them.

Now, if you can do with any religion short of this, I cannot. I tell you honestly, I cannot. I have seen an end of all other. No other will ease a guilty conscience; no other speak peace to a troubled heart; no other banish doubt and fear; no other bless me here, nor take me safe to glory hereafter. But I am sure that that religion which is God's gift and God's work, which stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God—that will bless me here, and take me to glory hereafter. I am sure that what God speaks to my soul, will stand when the world is in a blaze. What man may speak, will be driven away by the first gust of wind. The smoke out of the chimney, the chaff out of the threshing-floor, are not more transitory than the mere word of man. So that the Lord's people stand distinguished by this one mark, if they have no more—that they must have those testimonies which the Lord alone can give them, those words which the Lord alone can speak, and those smiles which the Lord alone can bestow. But what a mercy if the Lord has humbled you thus, to raise you up; if the Lord has made you hunger thus, to feed your soul with heavenly manna; if the Lord has raised up this cry and sigh in your heart, that he himself would speak with power to your soul, and you can listen to no other voice but that of the good Shepherd. You have a mark and testimony that the Lord's hand is at work in your soul, and that he is dealing with you as his child.

May this be our religion. I want no more; and I would sooner have none at all, if not this. I would sooner on a Sunday take a

walk in the park, or go to Hampton Court, and be a worldly man altogether, than come to chapel, and never feel life and power in my soul. To put on religion, and yet be devoid of that in which the very life of God consists!—O what a wretched state to be in! to be a professor, to go amongst God’s people, to hear God’s truth, to listen to the most heart-searching appeals, and then to be dead in sin or dead in a profession, and cloak over all your wickedness with the mask of hypocrisy! I, for my part, would sooner be a worldly man altogether, than have a religion that does not stand in the power of God. Though I may have my doubts and fears (as no doubt you have sometimes) and am often plagued and pestered with sin morning, noon, and night; yet this is my deliberate opinion—I would sooner be a worldly man altogether, making no profession, but living like other men in the world, than have a name to live while dead, the form without the power. Such is the feeling of my heart, and such the verdict of my conscience.

118 Faith, Hope, and Love

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Tuesday Evening,
August 25, 1846

“Your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope.”

1 Thessalonians 1:3

I cannot but admire the affection and tenderness that breathe through the epistles of the Apostle Paul; and especially in those to the church of God at Thessalonica. Largely had “the God of all grace” bestowed the gift of love on his servant Paul; and largely do we see this grace manifested in every epistle that flowed from his inspired pen. But what drew this affection and tenderness forth? It lay in his bosom as the gift of God; but it was drawn forth by the grace that he saw manifested in the Lord’s people. This is the case

wherever love to the brethren dwells in the heart. Immediately that the image of Christ is seen in another, love spontaneously flows forth. Immediately that we believe there is grace in any person with whom we are brought into contact, a union is felt which love cements. It was so with the Apostle Paul. What drew out of his bosom the affectionate expressions to the church of God at Thessalonica, which we read in these epistles? He himself shall tell us: “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” (1 Thess. 1:4.) He knew in his soul that they belonged to the election of grace. And what gave him that knowledge? Had he been up into heaven, and there seen their names recorded in the Book of Life? Had a bright messenger from the Lord of hosts appeared, and told him that the parties to whom he was writing were among God’s elect family? It was by no such supernatural revelation that he knew those to whom he was writing to be the children of God. He himself, in this epistle, tells us whence his knowledge sprang: “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” The Lord had sent him to preach the gospel among them; they had received the word from his lips, “not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in them that believe.” (2:13.) They “had turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” (1:9, 10) They had “received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost,” (1:6); and became “followers of the churches of God, which in Judea were in Christ Jesus.” (2:14.)

It was these things which drew forth the tender affection of his bosom towards them. It was because they were thus taught and blessed that he felt soul union to, and soul communion with them. And it was a feeling persuasion of what God had done for their souls, that drew forth these tender and affectionate expressions of his love to them. In consequence of this love, he tells them that he “gave thanks to God always for them all, making mention of

them in his prayers.” No sooner did he bow his knee before the Lord, than the churches among whom he had gone ministering came before his eyes, and fell warm upon his heart; and thus he was led—not as a matter of duty or privilege, but by the blessed Spirit laying them upon his conscience, and drawing forth the tender affections of his heart toward them—to make mention of them in his prayers before the throne of grace. And this is the only prayer for others that the Lord really indites. Persons have said to me sometimes, ‘Remember me in your prayers.’ I have answered, or could have answered them, ‘I often cannot pray for myself, and how am I to pray for you?’ But as when the Lord lays our personal wants upon our conscience, we lay them before his footstool, so when the Lord brings those whom we love in the Spirit upon our heart, and raises up in our souls a feeling of affection toward them, we pray also for them—not as a matter of duty, nor because they have asked us to pray for them; but it springs up out of our souls, as the spontaneous presentation of our petitions on their behalf. And no other prayer but this, for ourselves or for others, will bring an answer.

There were three things mentioned in the text, which the apostle specially remembered; three things that dwelt more particularly upon his mind, and were laid more specially upon his heart: “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.”

You will observe, it was not their faith, nor their love, nor their hope, which rested upon the apostle’s mind; but it was the work of their faith, the labour of their love, and the patience of their hope; these being the operations of these three Christian graces, as well as their outward marks, and their inward fruits.

With God’s blessing, then, this evening, I shall endeavour, as the Lord may enable me, to trace out these three distinct things in the experience of God’s living family—the work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope. And sure I am, if the Lord has

bestowed upon us these three graces—faith, hope, and love—we shall find that faith has a work, love a labour, and hope a patience. And if we can find faith, and its attendant work—love, and its accompanying labour—and hope, and its handmaid, patience—we shall have some testimony that indeed we are possessed, spiritually and experimentally, of these three Christian graces.

I.—Until the Lord is pleased to begin a work of grace upon a sinner’s conscience, he has no faith. This is the express testimony of God. “Children in whom is no faith.” (Deut. 32:20.) “Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.” (John 12:39, 40.) So that, whilst man is in nature’s darkness and in nature’s death, he has not one grain of living faith in his soul.

But when the soul is divinely quickened, faith is communicated. The blessed Spirit moves upon the heart, and raises up his heavenly fruits and graces. They may be, and indeed usually are, very weak, and perhaps, to the eye of a person himself, scarcely perceptible. But just as a child is born perfect in all its limbs, though weak and infantile; and when the child becomes a man, there is no additional number, yet each has gained strength and grown up into maturity; so also is it in the kingdom of grace. There is no subsequent addition to the gifts and graces of God’s Spirit. The “new man” is perfect in all its parts and all its members; but there is a growth of them—a going on to adult manhood, to Christian maturity. Thus, in the first work of grace upon the soul, the blessed Spirit raises up spiritual faith; as we read, “It is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. 2:8, 9.) It springs out of the express operation of God the Spirit upon the heart. It is altogether a spiritual, supernatural gift. It dwells in the hearts of God’s family alone. But no sooner does faith spring up, under the operation of God the Spirit, in the heart of a sinner, than there is a “work” for that faith to do; immediately that faith is created,

it begins to work. Just as when a child comes into the world, it begins to breathe; and the breathing of the child is not only the first mark of life, but it goes on breathing through life, till with life breath ceases; so whenever there is living faith raised up in the soul, immediately faith begins to work, and that faith never ceases to work till it is changed into the blissful vision of the Son of God as he is.

But what work does faith perform? The “work of faith” is, to believe God’s word. But what part of God’s word? The whole Bible? the complete revelation of divine truth? No; faith does not that. Faith only believes what God is pleased to communicate with his own divine power to the soul. If you have faith, you do not at once receive all God’s truth; you cannot take your Bible, and read chapter after chapter, and exercise faith upon all that meets your eye. If you could, it would prove your faith to be the faith of nature, and of the flesh. But the faith which is God’s gift, and springs from divine operation, only believes, credits, acts upon, and works towards that which God himself is pleased to drop with power into the heart. We see this exemplified in the case of Abraham. Abraham is called in Scripture, “the father of all them that believe” (Rom. 4:11); and his faith is recorded in the word of God as a pattern to which all true faith must be conformed. But did not Abraham’s faith act only upon that which God spoke to his soul? The Lord gave him a promise that he should have a son. This word was spoken by the Lord’s own mouth to Abraham’s heart; and upon that Abraham’s faith fixed. It did not roam up and down I know not where. It did not rove here, there, and everywhere, ‘taking God at his word’ (as it is called) here, and ‘taking God at his word’ there, which, in fact, is not taking God at his word at all. But it fixed upon a definite promise; it acted upon a word which God himself had spoken with his own mouth into Abraham’s soul. And you will find, if you watch the actings of faith in your conscience, so far as you are possessed of that grace, that the “work of your faith” is, to believe what is made manifest in the light of the Spirit’s

teaching and the life of the Spirit’s operations in your soul. The experience of every child of God gives the lie to that doctrine, that faith takes God generally at his word; for if faith could take God at his word, whence arise doubts and fears? What makes the poor soul sink under legal terrors? Why does he grope for the wall like the blind, and grope as if he had no eyes? Whence come castings down? Whence springs the burden of guilt upon the conscience? Whence arise secret troubles? Why does he not believe the promises? Why does he not take Christ at his word? Why does he not apply his atoning blood to his conscience, and embrace his Person in the arms of living faith? He cannot do it; and the reason is, because faith is fixed—if I may use the expression, it is pinned down to what God himself is pleased to unfold to the heart in the light and life of the Spirit’s teachings. Thus, there is faith in the heart of the trembling sinner, when the Lord is first pleased to arraign him at the bar of justice. There is faith then in his heart; and that faith firmly credits those truths which the Spirit bears witness to in his conscience. God’s justice, that can “by no means clear the guilty;” the holiness and purity of his character that must needs hate and punish iniquity; the certainty of eternal torment against those that die in their sins; the necessity of a living faith in the Redeemer to save the soul from wrath and hell—many of the Lord’s people are deeply convinced of these eternal truths, and their faith fixes upon and holds them with firm grasp, because they see them in the light of the Spirit’s operation. This is a part of “the work of faith.” By this you may try whether you have faith. If you can take God at his word, believe everything you read, lay hold of every promise, credit every truth, and claim everything God has pledged himself to give to his people, yours is a dead faith; it does not spring from divine operation; it is natural faith, which merely credits what God has said in his word, and believes in Christ as a man believes in Caesar. But if the Lord has created, by a powerful work upon your conscience, living faith, you can only believe just what shines into your soul in the light of the Spirit’s teachings,

and is experienced in the life of the Spirit's operation. This may at present be very little, but then your faith will work upon that little and will be kept believing it, feeling it, and falling under the power of it, as being firmly convinced it is God's truth. All your feelings will work round this centre, and all the desires of your heart, so far as they are spiritual, will run in this one definite channel.

But after a time the Lord is pleased to enlarge his people's faith. We read, "Your faith groweth exceedingly." (2 Thess. 1:3.) There is then a growth of faith. Just as in nature, the babe's hand is not of the same strength, or of the same dimensions as the hand of the man; yet there is every finger and every nail the same; and as the babe grows, the hand grows and expands till with manly strength it grasps larger objects; and not only lays hold of them strongly, but retains them firmly; so with the grace of faith in the man's heart; it enlarges and grows till it lays hold of larger objects, and retains them with a firmer grasp. Thus, when the Lord has seen fit to exercise his people sufficiently with convictions of sin, a sense of guilt, with burdens that lie heavily upon a tender conscience, with fears of death and hell, with sinkings of soul in the prospect of eternity, and all those terrors that more or less alarm God's people, he is pleased to bring a blessed Saviour before their eyes, and give them some heavenly shinings-in of the glorious Person, atoning blood, and justifying righteousness of this Mediator at God's right hand. The eyes of the understanding are now enlightened to see his glorious Person; the affections of the heart are drawn forth to love him as the "altogether lovely;" and thus faith is strengthened by the power of God to receive this precious Saviour, as "of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." The work of faith is the same as before; but it acts upon different objects. But even here there are differences. Some may have the pardon of sin manifested very conspicuously; others may have "the blood of sprinkling" applied very powerfully; and others shall hear the voice of God speaking to their souls with sweet unction and savour. But these manifestations shall not be equally strong

in every case. Some shall have glimpses, whilst others have a fuller view; some shall have glances, whilst others enjoy a clear manifestation; some shall have a sight of the glory of Christ as a risen Saviour, and others shall have a view of the grace of Christ as a suffering Saviour. It shall in some cases last a few moments, in another a few hours, in another a few days, in another with more or less power a few weeks, or even months. But in all it springs out of the blessed Spirit fulfilling his covenant office, in taking of the things of Christ, manifesting and unfolding them to the soul, and raising up living faith, whereby a precious Jesus is laid hold of, and brought into the heart with divine unction and power.

But no sooner has faith thus embraced a living Lord than it has "a work" to do. And what is this work? Why, immediately it begins to find opposition, contradiction, difficulties, exercises, and perplexities; and it is the work of faith to struggle against these oppositions, difficulties, and perplexities—to "live and labour" under them. For instance: no sooner is faith divinely raised up in the heart, than unbelief will begin to manifest itself. You did not know what an unbelieving heart you had, before the Lord was pleased to bring light and life into your soul. It was there—in fact, there was nothing but one mass of it; but its lustings, its heavings, its actings, and all those subtle workings which you have since found, were then hidden from your view. But no sooner does living faith begin to work in a sinner's conscience than unbelief is brought to light, and its tumultuous heavings are clearly seen and painfully felt. In many cases too, infidelity is stirred up. Those who never before doubted the inspiration of the Scriptures are troubled with doubts about it now. Those who never doubted the being of God, the deity of Christ, the mystery of the Trinity, or any of the glorious doctrines of the gospel, are often tried and exercised with infidel suspicions now. But where the Lord has implanted faith in the soul, "the work of faith" is to struggle against them, and by God's help and strength finally to get the victory over them.

By this we may know whether we have living faith in our souls.

Dead faith never breathes, never moves, brings nothing in, carries nothing out. Dead faith has no work accompanying it. It is like a toy watch that we sometimes see given to a child, which it hangs round its neck, and fancies to be real. There is the painted dial and the gilded hands; but there are no works within the case. Such is the faith of the dead professor. There is the dial; there are the hours clearly marked; there are the hands plainly pointing; but they never turn round, never show the time of day. And why? Because there are no works within. There is no secret spring in their heart, no wheel within wheel to cause the hands to turn. But wherever there is living faith in the soul, there will be the “work of faith” in the conscience—the strugglings, heavings, actings, and breathings of the believing heart Godward.

But, besides this, Satan will ever tempt a living soul. This restless enemy will ever try to seduce or harass the mind where he sees living faith in exercise. But the “work of faith” is to resist and oppose him, and finally, in God’s strength, to get the victory over him.

Sin, too, will be continually tempting, lusts perpetually alluring, self-righteousness constantly exalting, pride unceasingly puffing, and hypocrisy from time to time entangling. But “the work of faith” is, in God’s strength, to labour and struggle against them all. “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” (Heb. 12:4.)

And then, there is the world, sometimes with its anxieties and cares, and at others with its charms, all seeking to draw the soul away from the strait and narrow path. But the “work of faith” is to struggle and fight, and in God’s strength to overcome them all. “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4, 5.)

But what so perplexes many of God’s people is, to feel these intense struggles. They think that faith, if it were of the right kind, would be always looking to Jesus, always believing God’s word,

always enjoying sweet communion with the “Man of sorrows,” always maintaining a firm, unyielding superiority over the world, the flesh, and the devil. And there are many professors, yea, ministers, who tell them it is, or it should be so. Thus, when the child of God feels in his soul such strugglings to and fro, such heavings, such workings, such contradictions, such perplexities, such mysterious paradoxes, he often concludes against himself that he is not possessed of the living faith of God’s elect. For he argues, ‘If I were possessed of true faith, I should not be thus.’ But just as when the twins struggled in the womb of Rebekah, it was a proof that she had living children within her; so the very strugglings, heavings, gaspings, and breathings which living souls experience afford a plain proof that the work of God is going on in their hearts; that they are possessed of that living faith which will bring them safe through all, and land them in eternal glory.

II.—“And labour of love.” What the apostle fixed his eye upon was, not the profession nor the pretension of love, but the “labour” by which love is accompanied. Wherever there is faith there will be a proportionate measure of love, for faith works by it. The Lord’s people in their early days have a measure of heavenly love. Though perhaps they cannot say that Jesus is theirs; though they dare not declare they shall certainly go to heaven when they die; though they sometimes cannot even assert that the work of grace is really begun upon their souls; yet there is love manifested in them to God’s word, God’s people, God’s servants, and God’s truth. There is in them, in their weakest and tenderest days, a separation from the world, a casting-in of their lot amongst the people of God, a going-out in the tenderness of their heart and affection towards them. We see this in Ruth: though she was a poor heathen idolatress, no sooner was her heart touched by the finger of God, than she clave to Naomi.

But divine love can only spring from the teachings and operations of God upon the heart. Our “carnal mind is enmity against God”—nothing but implacable, irreconcilable enmity. But

when the Lord is pleased to make himself in some measure known to the soul; when he is pleased, in some degree, to unveil his lovely face, and to give a discovery of his grace and glory—immediately love springs up. He is so lovely an object! As the Bride says, he is “altogether lovely.” His beauty is so surpassing, his grace so rich, his mercy so free—all that he is and has is so unspeakably glorious—that no sooner does he unveil his lovely face, than he wins over all the love of the heart, takes possession of the bosom, and draws every affection of the soul to centre wholly and solely in himself.

But no sooner is love felt towards a precious Redeemer, towards his people, and towards his truth, than this love has “a labour” to perform. Like the grace of faith, it does not lie idle in the bosom. It is not merely upon the lips, and upon the tongue, but it has an abiding place in the heart; and it is this labour which manifests its reality, and proves its genuine possession.

Just, then, in the same way as faith was tried by unbelief, its opposite—so is love tried by enmity, its opposite. Love is of spiritual birth, of divine origin, a citizen of a heavenly country; and it comes down from the Father of lights, the God of love, to dwell in a sinner’s breast. But what does it meet there? It meets there with the enmity of the carnal mind—enmity against God and his Christ, enmity against everything that love delights to embrace. Can these two antagonists meet in a sinner’s heart without mortal combat? Christ, on the one hand, communicates love; Belial, on the other, stirs up enmity. Can love, then, heaven’s gift—and enmity, hell’s flame—meet together in a sinner’s breast, without engaging hand to hand in deadly strife? He that knows something of the wretched enmity of his heart against God and godliness, knows what a painful combat there is within. Is it not surprising to you sometimes to feel the enmity of the carnal mind against God—to find the most infernal blasphemies sometimes shoot through your mind, as with a flash of lightning? And have not these darts from hell sometimes so horrified you, that you would desire to plunge your thoughts into anything to get them out of your mind?

Upon your knees they have rushed in, and they have stopped your prayer; in the pew, as you sat to hear God’s word, in they came, and stopped everything you were hearing to your soul’s profit; at the very table of the Lord, they have flooded in, and destroyed all the comfort that you longed to experience. Yet there was that in your bosom which laboured against them; there was that in your breast which struggled, as burdened by an intolerable load; there was that in your soul which resisted them, and hated them, and cried unto God, “O wretched man that I am!” This was the “labour of love.” There was that divine principle struggling against this infernal enmity—the pure water of life seeking to quench the very flame of hell in your carnal mind.

Love will sometimes seem to lie dormant in the heart. And this often tries the Lord’s people, that their love is as if asleep. But let anything be spoken against God—how this love is then drawn forth! The wife, sometimes, may not think of her husband for hours; but let him be spoken against, and at once her love becomes manifest. The child may be for hours asleep in the cradle, and the mother be so engaged in her occupation as scarcely even to think of her babe; but let the infant cry, instantaneously maternal love flows forth. We may have lost sight of a dear friend for weeks, and may scarcely even think of him; but let him come into our presence, let our hearts burn with mutual interest in talking of Jesus and his precious truth, and our love is instantaneously kindled. So the grace of love often seems to lie dormant in the bosom; but let something arise to draw it out, and instantaneously it bursts forth.

But love has its “labour.” It has to maintain its hold; it has to keep its position in spite of all the enmity that dwells in the carnal mind.

So it is, also, with love to God’s people. If the Lord has really begotten your soul unto eternal life, you love the Lord’s family; you have a real affection for his saints; and sometimes they are laid upon your heart, and you feel the goings-out of kindness and sympathy towards them. But is it never interrupted? Are there

never envious feelings? Is there no jealousy ever at work? Are there no suspicions? Is there no infernal enmity felt? Are there not in your breast, at times, suspicion and dislike toward your nearest and dearest friends, whom you love for the Lord's sake? Now, these call forth the "labour of love." Love has to labour under and against this jealousy, this enmity, these suspicions, these surmises, these hard thoughts and inward dislike. If there be true love to God's people, it will not be quenched by the enmity, jealousy, and carnality of our heart. It will spring up again and again; it will "live and labour" under this and every other load.

If it were not so, love would soon be altogether lost. If the Lord did not, from day to day, revive our love to him and to his saints, our hearts, like a hot iron taken from the fire, would grow gradually colder and colder, till at last every sensation of warmth would be completely extinct. But the Lord in mercy revives the soul. He in mercy rekindles the flame of affection towards himself, towards his people, and towards his truth. But when love is rekindled, the "labour of love" begins. It is in grace as in nature. Man labours all day, and goes home to his bed at night, and there he is refreshed with sleep: but in the morning he rises, and goes out to labour again until the evening. While he is asleep, he is not labouring; but no sooner is he awake, than labour commences. So with love. There are seasons when love lies asleep in the breast; and when love is asleep, there is no labour for the hands of love to perform. But when love is awakened out of its sleep, it goes once more forth to labour until the evening. It has to labour with those things that struggle against it; and by the fruits of this labour it is clearly manifested as the work of God upon the soul.

Has not your mind sometimes been tried whether you have any love to Jesus at all? Has not your heart at times become so cold, so lifeless, so stupid, so unfeeling, as though there were not one spark remaining? And has not your love to God's people, and your love to God's truth, sometimes sunk to so low an ebb, that you feared you never had any real love at all? But yet it came again. There

was some communication of grace to your soul to draw forth the goings-out of affection towards a living Lord, and some breathings of love towards the Lord's living people; as the apostle says, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity." (Phil. 4:10.)

Thus love has its labour. And what a mercy it is that love has such a labour to perform! If you and I, and the people of God, were to know nothing of this inward opposition, these inward strugglings, these inward perplexities, these inward exercises, we might appear to have much love to God's people, when in reality there was not one grain of it. It is thus that the Lord's people are distinguished from mere professors of religion. They are all love in pretension, all love in lip, but there is no "labour of love" in their hearts; there are no changes, no exercises, no fluctuations, no strugglings of love in their bosom to maintain its hold upon God and his truth: all outside, all pretence, all profession—no inward love labouring, panting, and gasping for breath.

III.—"And patience of hope." The grace of hope is that third grace in living union with faith and love in the heart of God's people—"the anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." But what does hope take its rise from? Testimonies from God; evidences of interest in the love and blood of the Lamb; manifestations of mercy to the soul; promises applied with power; the witness of the Spirit to our spirit that we are born of God; believing and feeling the work of grace has been begun, and is going on in the heart; the revivings of God's presence, and refreshing dew and unction of his grace, the meltings of the soul at his feet, and the breakings in of the Lord of life and glory upon the heart—these things lie at the foundation of a "good hope through grace." Not because you are members of a gospel church; not because you worship at a certain chapel; not because you have received certain doctrines; not because your life is outwardly consistent with the word of God; not because you pray, and read

the Bible, and perform a number of duties;—such never can be the foundations of “a hope that maketh not ashamed.” The only solid foundation of a gospel hope is, testimonies from God, marks of his favour, the application of blood to the conscience, meltings of spirit under the sweet whisperings of divine love, and a well-grounded persuasion that the work of grace with power has been begun in the conscience.

But wherever this hope is, there will be “patience” attending it. Love has its labour, faith has its work, hope has its patience. But what is meant by the expression “patience?” It means endurance; as though hope had to endure, faith to work, and love to labour. Hope stays at home, patiently enduring. If I may use the figure—faith is the active husband who goes out to work with his hands; hope is the suffering wife, who lies upon the bed patiently enduring pain. By this patience, hope in the sinner’s soul is manifested. Just in the same way as faith has to work against unbelief, and love to labour against enmity, so hope has to endure every thing that contradicts it, and that would, but for the grace of God, effectually crush it. Would unbelief, without the power of God, effectually crush faith? Would enmity, without the power of God, utterly extinguish love? So would despair strangle hope in its very cradle, unless sustained by the mighty power of God. Each of these graces in the soul has then its separate antagonist. Unbelief fights hand to hand with faith; enmity foot to foot with love; and despair front to front with hope. And as the strength of faith is manifested by the power with which it fights against unbelief, and the strength of love is manifested by the power with which it labours against enmity; so the strength of hope is manifested by the power with which it endures the contest with despair.

But what causes despair or despondency in the sinner’s soul? Is it not because he finds so much in himself that is utterly opposed to God and godliness? If there were no inward adulteries, no secret idolatries, no darkness of mind, no deadness of soul, no hardness of heart, no tempting devil, no alluring world, no body of sin and

death—you would not feel despondency set in upon you as a flood. But this is it which causes despondency in a feeling soul—to find in himself so much of everything that is opposite to the work of God upon the heart; so much of everything that is the very opposite to what a saint desires to be, and what he believes every saint should be. But as long as he can see his signs, as long as he can feel the power of God’s testimonies, as long as he can believe he is treading in the footsteps of the flock, hope maintains its hold. But no sooner does the Lord hide his face, testimonies sink out of sight, evidences give way, and the evils of his fallen nature manifest themselves, than despondency begins to work. It must be so. If I had no sinful heart, no unbelief, no infidelity, no inward adultery or idolatry, no pride, no hypocrisy, no covetousness, no powerful lusts, no boiling corruptions, no harassing enemy, no alluring world, no wicked heart, why need I despond? But it is because there is such opposition to vital godliness in the sinner’s heart, because there is so much in him that he knows and feels to be contrary to grace, and the work of grace, that makes him doubt.

But these very things call forth hope’s peculiar work—to endure. It is the “patience of hope” that proves its reality and genuineness. Hope does not go forward fighting and cutting its way. Hope is like a quiet sufferer, patiently bearing what comes upon it. Hope is manifested in enduring, as faith is manifested in acting. For instance: when the Lord hides his face, when testimonies sink out of sight, when signs are not seen, when Satan tempts, when the work of grace upon the soul seems to be all obscured, and in consequence a feeling despondency begins to set in, then the “patience of hope” is needed to endure all things—not to give way, but to maintain its hold. It acts in the same way, according to the beautiful figure of Paul, as the anchor holds the ship. What is the main value, the chief requisite in the cable that holds the anchor? Is it not endurance? The cable does nothing: it simply endures. It does not make a great ado in the water; its only good quality (the only quality wanted in it) is strength to endure, not

to break. When the waves rise, the billows beat, the storm blows, and the tide runs strongly, then the work of the cable is not to part from the anchor, not to break, but firmly to maintain the hold it has once taken. And thus with the anchor too. It does nothing, and is wanted to do nothing. To hold fast is all its work and all its excellence. Thus it is with a hope in a sinner's breast. Has the Lord ever shown himself gracious unto him? Has the Lord ever made himself precious to his soul? ever dropped a testimony into his conscience? ever spoken with power to his heart? Has his soul ever felt the Spirit inwardly testifying that he is one of God's people? Then his hope is manifested by enduring patiently everything that is brought against it to crush it, and, if God did not keep, utterly to destroy it.

If this be the mark and stamp which the Holy Ghost has put upon "hope," what shall we say of the hope that knows no changes, endures no trials, passes through no exercises, suffers no strains?

Have I this evening found out any case? put my fingers into any heart? touched any secret spring in a sinner's conscience? There may be those here who are ever doubting, doubting, doubting, whether a work of grace is yet begun upon their souls. They know they must have faith, hope, and love, if ever they are to be with Christ in glory. But they are exercised in their minds whether they are in possession of these three graces. And this chiefly tries them, that their faith is not ever in exercise, that their love is not ever flowing forth, that their hope is not continually anchoring within the veil, and bringing out therefrom sweet manifestations into their conscience. But you perhaps have mistaken its nature. If you expect to have faith, hope, and love at your pleasure, and always stationary, and at one point, you have mistaken the matter; this is not the faith of God's giving, the love of God's shedding abroad, nor the hope of God's communicating. Wherever there is true faith, there will be a work for it to do; wherever there is heavenly love, there will be labour accompanying it; wherever genuine hope, there will be patience waiting upon it.

Thus, in the heart of a poor broken down sinner, there is more true faith, more real hope, and more genuine love, than in all the dead professors, with all their assurance, put together. They have faith, such as it is, but it has no work; they have love, such as it is, but it has no labour; they have hope, such as it is, but it has no patience. But the Lord's family, in whose hearts these three sister graces dwell, and round whose souls the Lord has entwined this threefold cord that shall not be quickly broken, will find, that in proportion to faith, will be its work; in proportion to love, will be its labour; and in proportion to hope, will be its patience. So that my friends, you are not to expect to arrive at a state where faith has no work, love no labour, hope no patience. Could you or I get there, it would prove that our faith, love, and hope were a delusion. Rather expect the contrary. Is your faith to grow? You will have work growing in correspondence with it. Is your love to be enlarged? You will have more labour accompanying it. Is your hope to be strengthened? You will have more to endure than before. It is in grace as in nature. The child, the boy, the youth, does not perform the work of a strong healthy man. The boy does his work, the youth his work, and the man his work; and the work of each is proportioned to the strength of each. Who would think of setting a boy or a youth to do the work of a man? He has not power to do it if set him. So it is spiritually, with respect to faith in a sinner's bosom. Weak faith cannot do strong faith's work; weak love cannot labour as strong love labours; and weak hope has not the endurance and patience of strong hope. So that, if you desire the Lord to carry on his work in your heart with power, and bring forth these blessed graces in your soul, never expect that you will be brought into a state where your faith will be so easy, so pleasant, and so delightful as to have no work to do; your love so heavenly, so full, and so glorious, as to have no labour; and your hope so strong and so vigorous as to have no patience. No rather, the more faith you have, the more opposition, the more difficulty, the more struggling against it, and the more faith will have to work against

them; the more love you have, the more manifestation of the inward evil of your heart, the more workings of internal enmity, and the more labour of love against these opposing evils; and the stronger your hope is, the more you will have need of patience and endurance to bear the opposition that will rise up against it.

Is not this true in experience? I know it is contrary to all that we once thought of as religion. I know it is contrary to all that is generally considered as religion. Such faith as this will never meet with acceptance, except amongst the tried family of God; such love as this will never be hailed with universal approbation; such hope as this will never be received with a shout of applause by dead professors. But the Lord's own people, who have no more vital religion than God is pleased to work with divine power in their souls, know from experience—sometimes painful, sometimes pleasurable—that they never had a grain of faith without an accompanying work for faith to perform; never a spark of love, without love having a labour and never a grain of hope, without that hope having much to endure. It is “the work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope,” which prove the genuineness of these graces. And the Lord who has given them, will one day crown their happy possessor with eternal glory.

119 Heavenly Gifts To Victorious Saints

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on Lord's Day Evening,
August 30, 1846

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

Revelation 2:17

I do not know a more striking or more deeply important portion of God's Word than that which is contained in the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation. What a solemn vision

was John favoured with, when the Lord of life and glory appeared unto him in the manner described in the first chapter! “And in the midst of the seven candlesticks I saw one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow,” (evidencing his eternity,) “and his eyes were as a flame of fire” (to shew how he looks into the heart, and searches the reins); “and his feet were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.”

Though John was the beloved disciple, and had even lain in the Lord's bosom while upon earth, yet this glorious vision took such an effect upon him, that he “fell at his feet as dead.” This vision was preparatory to the messages which the Lord gave him to the seven churches of Asia Minor. It is worthy of remark, that in every message there are three things repeated to each church. To all of them the Lord says, “I know thy works;” to all of them he declares, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;” and to all of them a promise is made, though to each of a different nature, “to him that overcometh.”

What do we learn from these three features which are thus stamped upon every message to the churches? We learn, first, that the Redeemer looks into all hearts, and searches all reins. We learn, secondly, the deep importance of the message he delivers; and yet that none will hear and attend to it, save those to whom the Lord has given an ear to hear. And we learn, thirdly, what sweet promises the Lord gives to him that overcometh in the spiritual conflict.

I shall this evening, with God's blessing, dwell chiefly upon two features which strike my mind as flowing out of the words before us; and shall endeavour to describe, in the first place, the character pointed out under the words “him that overcometh;” and in the

second place, as the Lord may enable, to enter more fully into the promise which the Lord gives to him that overcometh, containing three distinct blessings

1. that he shall “eat of the hidden manna;”
2. that the Lord “will give him a white stone;” and
3. “in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

The Lord’s purpose and object in his dealings with the souls of his people is, to glorify himself. The glory of God must ever be the end of all his works; the glory of man therefore must give way. The glory of God and the glory of man can never stand upon the same pedestal. Man therefore must sink, and be reduced to a sense of his real state and character, that the glory of a Three-One God may shine forth brightly and conspicuously.

I.—The Lord in the text speaks of a character that bears this designation: “he that overcometh.” The promise is therefore limited to that character; it is his alone; and in his case alone will the Lord fulfil it to the uttermost.

But who is this character? Where shall we find the man to whom this promise is made—“him that overcometh?” Let us see if we can find such a one. When the Lord is first pleased to begin a work of grace upon the soul, he convinces a man of his lost state by nature. He sets before him eternal life as an object to be obtained: and without which, he convinces him, he must be of all men the most miserable here, and the most miserable hereafter. But in early days, the veil of ignorance remaining much upon the heart, having imbibed many superstitions and ignorant ideas from our very cradles, and not being illuminated by the Spirit’s teaching, to know Jesus to be “the way, the truth, and the life,” we make many efforts to win the prize by nature’s strength, and to reach the goal

by creature righteousness.

Now the Lord’s purpose is to make us “overcome;” for the promise is only “to him that overcometh.” But he purposes to make us “overcome” in His strength alone, and not in our own: and this for the most part we learn very slowly. We set before us the commandments; and we think if we keep them diligently, we shall at last obtain God’s favour, and arrive safely in heaven. But as in this obedience we continually fail, yet not knowing the strictness of God’s commandments, the spirituality of the law, nor the breadth of the precept, we think the fault must surely be in ourselves—that we have not watched enough, nor kept a sufficient look-out upon the avenues of our heart, nor done what we really might have done.

Not knowing at this time that the inherent depravity of man is such that he never can keep God’s law; not knowing that the Lord intends by these means to teach us our weakness, like a person who falls down, we get up again, and try to run the race anew. But to our surprise we find ourselves continually defeated; that we cannot be what we would. We would be righteous: we would be holy; we would not sin: we would watch our eyes, our ears, our hearts; we would not break out on the right hand, we would not break out on the left. The Lord may suffer us for a season to go on in these labour-in-vain paths; but after a time there shall be some outbreak; some temptation may take us unawares, which is so sweet and suitable, that we are entangled in a moment, and down goes all our strength; our resolutions for the future are broken in an instant; and we slowly begin to learn how very weak we are against any one temptation.

But again. We are not at first fully alive to the breadth and spirituality of God’s law. But as the Lord begins to shew us more and more clearly what we are, makes us to feel more and more our helplessness and weakness against temptation, he also unfolds more and more clearly the breadth and spirituality of his law: he shews how it reaches to the very thoughts and intents of the heart;

and not only so, but that it is connected with a curse to every soul which is found under it, and that it gendereth to bondage.

Who would think that this is the way to “overcome?” When a man is continually being overcome; when sometimes his lusts surprise him; sometimes despair overtakes him; sometimes pride breaks forth; sometimes covetousness and carnality manifest themselves; sometimes one evil displays itself, at other times another, and anon a third monster lifts up its hateful head—who would think that this is the man who is to gain the victory, when he is so continually vanquished and so perpetually defeated? But there is one portion in God’s word which shews us wherein the secret of their overcoming lies: “And they overcame”—How? By their own strength? by their own wisdom? by their own righteousness? by their own resolutions? No. “They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of his testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” So that when a poor sinner, feeling deeply and daily that he has nothing but sin and has entirely given up all hopes whatever of being any better, sinks down at the footstool of mercy as a lost, guilty, condemned wretch; if indulged then with a glimpse of “the blood of the Lamb,” which speaketh pardon and peace to the guilty conscience, and the “word of God’s testimony” comes into his heart with divine power, then he “overcomes,” not by his own strength, his own wisdom, or his own righteousness, but by the blood of the Lamb being applied to his conscience, and by the word of God’s testimony being applied with divine power to his heart. This is the only way to “overcome.”

1. But if we are to “overcome,” we must have enemies. Among these the things of time and sense will be one. How many of God’s family find the world to be continually entangling them, sometimes with its cares and anxieties, sometimes with its vain company and its pleasures, falsely so called, for really there is no pleasure in them. Thus they are drawn aside by a multitude of vain things that only leave sorrow and vexation behind them. How then are they to overcome the world? Only by faith in the blood of the

Lamb; as we read, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5). “And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” When the Lamb of God is pleased to manifest himself to the conscience of the sinner, and to raise up in his heart living faith whereby he is looked unto and embraced, this faith will give him the victory over the world which he never could obtain by any strength or resolutions of his own.

2. Again, there is a whole army of doubts and fears rising up against God’s family; a whole array of apprehensions whether the work of grace is begun upon their heart; a whole host of alarms whether they are anything more than hypocrites. And this company of doubts and fears wars against every testimony that God has dropped into their soul. How, then, are they to “overcome” this company of doubts and fears? By arguing against them? Satan laughs at their arguments. By trying to persuade themselves they are children of God? Satan is a better logician than they; he can soon pour contempt upon all their attempts to persuade themselves they are interested in atoning blood and dying love. But when “the blood of the Lamb” is applied to their conscience, and the “word of God’s testimony” is spoken by God’s own lips to their heart, realizing to them that they are interested in his eternal favour—then they overcome this company of doubts and fears; not by any arguments they bring from nature or reason, but by the sweet unctuous teachings of the Spirit in the court of conscience, and by that blood of sprinkling “which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.”

3. Sin, again, is an enemy. How many of the Lord’s people are continually under bondage to evil! What power the lusts of the flesh have over some! How perpetually they are entangled with everything sensual and carnal! What power the pride of the heart has over another! and what strength covetousness exercises over a third! What power the love of the world and the things of time and sense exercise over a fourth! How then are they to overcome sin?

By making resolutions? by endeavouring to overcome it in their own strength? No; sin will always break through man's strength; it will ever be stronger than any resolution we can make not to be overcome by it. But when the blood of the Lamb is applied to the sinner's conscience, and the word of God's testimony comes with power into his soul, it gives him the victory over those lusts with which he was before entangled, it brings him out of the world that had so allured him. and breaks to pieces the dominion of sin under which he had been so long labouring. "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14).

"To him that overcometh." A man must be overcome, then, in this battle before he can shout victory; and therefore the Lord suffers his people to be so long and often entangled, perplexed, exercised, and distressed, that they may learn this secret, which is hidden from all but God's living family—that the strength of Christ is made perfect in their weakness. Have not some of you had to learn this lesson very painfully? There was a time when you thought you should get better and better, holier and holier; that you would not only not walk in open sin as before, but would not be entangled by temptation, overcome by besetting lusts, or cast down by hidden snares. There was a time when you thought you were going forward, attaining some more strength, some better wisdom than you believed you once possessed. How has it been with you? Have these expectations ever been realized? Have you ever attained these fond hopes? Has sin become weaker? Has the world become less alluring? Have your lusts become tamer? Has your temper become milder? Have the corruptions of your heart become feebler and feebler? No.

If I can read the heart of some poor tried, tempted soul here present, he would say, "No; to my shame and sorrow be it spoken, I find on the contrary that sin is stronger and stronger, that the evils of my heart are more and more powerful than ever I knew them in my life; and as to my own endeavours to overcome them, I find

indeed that they are fainter and fainter, and weaker and weaker. This it is," says the soul, "that casts me down. If I could have more strength against sin; if I could stand more boldly against Satan; if I could overcome my besetting lusts; live more to God's glory, and be holier and holier, then, then," says some poor distressed child of God, "I could have some comfort; but to feel myself so continually baffled, so perpetually disconcerted, so incessantly cast down by the workings of my corrupt nature, it is this, it is this that cuts so keenly; it is this, it is this that tries me so deeply." My friend, you are on the high road to victory. This is the very way by which you are to overcome.

If you, on the other hand, were sailing upon this tack—getting better and better, sin weaker and weaker, and your heart holier and holier, by and by you would look forward to a complete victory. But depend upon it, you would be then sailing upon the wrong tack altogether. But, on the other hand, when you feel weaker and weaker, poorer and poorer, guiltier and guiltier, viler and viler, so that really through painful experience you are compelled to call yourself, not in the language of mock humility, but in the language of self-abhorrence, the chief of sinners, then you are on the high road to victory. Thus when the Lord is pleased to bring a sense of his atoning blood with power into his conscience, and to speak a word with his own lips to the poor child of God, then he overcomes, not by his own strength, his own wisdom, or his own righteousness, but by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of his testimony, revealed to his heart by the power of God himself. Be certain, if we overcome in any way but this, we do not overcome so as to gain a real and spiritual victory.

II.—Now to such the Lord gives a special promise; or rather, three distinct promises. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

1. The first promise is, "I will give to him to eat of the hidden

“manna.” What is this hidden manna? Is it not God’s word applied with power to the heart? What says Jeremiah? “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer. 5:16). When the Lord is pleased to drop a word into the heart from his own lips; to apply some promise; to open up some precious portion of his word; to whisper softly some blessed Scripture into the heart—is not this manna? Whence did the manna flow? Was it cultivated by the hand of man? Was it gathered, as infidels tell us, from the ash trees that grew in the wilderness? No; it fell from heaven. And is not this true of the word of the Lord applied with power to the heart? It is not our searching the Scriptures, though it is good to search the Scriptures; it is not our comparing passage with passage; but it is the Lord himself being pleased to apply some precious portion of truth to our hearts; and when this takes place, it is “manna;” it is sweet, refreshing, strengthening, comforting, encouraging; yea, it is angels’ food; the very flesh and blood of the Lamb with which the Lord is pleased from time to time to feed and favour hungry souls.

But, in the text it is called “hidden.” Why “hidden?” Because hidden from the eyes of the wise and prudent, as the Lord says, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Luke 10:21). Hidden from the eyes of self-righteous pharisees; hidden from those that fight in their own strength, and seek to gain the victory by their own brawny arm; hidden from all but God’s tried and tempted family; hidden from all but those who know the plague of their own hearts; hidden from all but those who have learnt the secret of overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of his testimony.

Say, that you have been entangled in some snare; say, you have been cast down by some of Satan’s temptations; was there not some hidden manna for you? Did not the Lord apply some portion of his

word to your heart with sweetness? There was conviction indeed, cutting conviction; there was guilt, deep, black guilt; there was shame, for you were covered with it; there was confusion, for your heart could say, “I am full of confusion.” But was there not some sweet promise? Was there not a portion of Scripture opened up with divine power to your soul? Was there not some testimony of the Spirit of God to your spirit that you were one of his people? Was there no word, like hidden manna, dropped with power and sweetness into your heart? There was no manna, and never will be, while guilt remains upon the conscience, whilst sin has dominion, whilst we are entangled in and cast down by Satan’s snares, whilst we are overcome with the lusts of the flesh, whilst pride and covetousness and every evil bear the sway.

But when the Lord leads us into this path—to sink down into weakness, and in weakness to find his strength made perfect; to fall down all guilt, and then to feel the application of atoning blood; to tremble under the weight of doubts and fears, and then to have the precious word of his testimony dropped into the heart—this is manna. The children of Israel had to endure hunger in the wilderness before manna fell; and thus the Lord’s people learn the value of the hidden manna, the sweet communications from above, by hungering and thirsting in a waste howling wilderness.

But there is something more implied by the word “manna” than this. The Lord Jesus Christ himself tells us that he is “the true bread that came from heaven;” and that the manna represented his flesh which he gave for the life of the (elect) world. Now, when we are in bondage to sin, when our lusts and passions get the victory over us, when guilt lies hard and heavy upon the conscience, when little is experienced but darkness and confusion—then there is no feeding upon the flesh of Jesus, no tasting how sweet and precious he is, no embracing him in the arms of faith, no enjoying glimpses and glances of his surpassing beauty. But, on the other hand, when the Lord is pleased to give power to the soul to overcome by “the

blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony,” then his flesh and blood become sweet to him who thus overcometh. When do I value a discovery to my heart of redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ? When I am strong? When I am wise? When I am holy? When I am righteous? These things set me far from Jesus. But when I am bowed down with guilt, cut up by temptations, tried and exercised with a whole company of doubts and fears—then if the Lord be pleased to draw me to his footstool; then if he open up what he has done and suffered upon the cross; then if he raise up faith in my soul to look to him, believe in his name, and receive him as the crucified Son of God—then there is a feeding upon the manna; his flesh becomes meat indeed, and his blood becomes drink indeed. But this is hidden from all eyes except those that are anointed by the Spirit to see it, and hidden from all hearts except those that are prepared to receive and feed upon it.

2. The next promise is, “And I will give him a white stone.” In ancient times, they used to decide cases by white and black stones. The judges (for they were rather judges than jury) did not give their verdict upon the prisoner by oral testimony, “Guilty,” or “Not Guilty,” as in our country, but by dropping into a urn a white stone to express their opinion that the prisoner was innocent, or a black stone to declare their judgment that the prisoner was guilty. The Lord has made use of this figure. He says, “To him that overcometh I will give a white stone;” that is—I will give into his conscience a sentence of acquittal. As the white stone was dropped into the urn, so peace and pardon are dropped into the sinner’s bosom; and just as the judge, when he deposited the white stone in the urn, declared thereby the prisoner’s innocence; so when the Lord is pleased to speak peace to the soul, he drops into the heart a white stone, to proclaim him discharged from the law’s accusations, and interested in his love and blood.

But how is this figure applicable? Why, he that overcometh treads the same path whereby the poor guilty criminal came to receive the white stone. The promise is made to him that

overcometh. Should not we think that this is setting a task before him which he is to perform? that he has to fast, to pray, to attend sacraments, to offer up so many prayers, and thus by degrees overcome sin and gain the prize? Would not that be nature’s interpretation? But it is not grace’s interpretation. This is grace’s blessed interpretation, consistent with the experience of the saints and with divine teaching in their souls—that he overcomes by being overcome, for this opens a way for the Lord to bring a sense of his blood into the conscience, and speak a word of testimony to his heart. Then he receives “a white stone,” deposited by the Lord himself in his bosom, whereby he declares that all his sins are forgiven: peace is sealed upon his conscience, and he goes free, walking in that liberty which the gospel proclaims to those that are in the prison-house.

But we may say, that every testimony from the Lord is “a white stone.” Every token that the Lord ever bestowed upon you that you are a child of his, every promise that has ever come into your heart, every answer to prayer that you have ever received from his lips, every deliverance that you have ever experienced from his hand, is “a white stone.”

Every application of truth with divine savour and unction to your soul, every reviving or refreshing season, every sweet manifestation, every breaking down or softening of heart, every melting of spirit at the Redeemer’s footstool, is “a white stone.” Every time that you felt Jesus precious to your heart—every time that you washed his feet with your tears, and wiped them with the hairs of your head—every time that you embraced him in the arms of faith and affection, and could say, “Dear Lord, how precious thou art to my soul!”—was “a white stone.” The Lord has given you “a white stone” with every visit of his gracious presence, with every communication of his eternal and never-ceasing love.

And what a mercy it is for the child of God to have even one white stone! Suppose to revert to the custom from which the figure is borrowed, there was any doubt as to whether a prisoner had

been acquitted, could he not point to the white stones that were in the urn? And if he could produce them in his hand, and say to the judges, “Here are the white stones that you have put into the urn; you yourselves have acquitted me;” would not the production of them declare him vindicated from the charges brought against him? And what a mercy it is for a child of God to have a white stone that he can present before a throne of mercy! to have some testimony, some token for good, some promise brought into his heart with power, some sweet visit from the Lord! to have realized his presence, to have had faith in his blood, to have known his love! so that when doubts and fears, difficulties and perplexities beset him, he can, as the Lord the Spirit enables, look back to those times when “a white stone” was given as a proof on the Lord’s part of his soul’s entire acquittal from law charges, and a sure testimony that his name is in the book of life.

And how many doubts and fears, dark seasons, distressing moments, what sharp convictions, heavy burdens, hard bondage the soul must labour under from the want of “a white stone!” To be accused, accused, accused, and often not to find one “white stone!”—does not this try you sometimes? Perhaps some illness seizes you. or you feel some symptoms of disease; you are afraid that fever or cholera will lay hold of you, or that you are going into a decline, and your tabernacle is about to be taken down. You have been a professor some years; but doubts and fears now arise in your mind, convictions of guilt seize you, and you begin to quake and tremble—to fear that you never had pardon proclaimed or peace manifested, never had a visit from the Lord, never had an answer to prayer, never had a manifestation of God’s presence, never felt his dying love, never had his word applied with power to your heart. If you have a tender conscience, made alive in God’s fear, it must bring bondage and distress into your soul to have all these doubts and fears working in your mind, and not have one “white stone” to produce, not one testimony, not one clear evidence that the Lord has visited your soul, and begotten you unto eternal life. But does

that prove you are not a quickened soul? Nay, nay: it is a proof that you are a quickened soul. If you were a rotten professor, you would not want “a white stone;” but it is because you are a poor guilty, trembling sinner that you feel you want “a white stone.”

Suppose we were in some ancient court, where cases were decided by these black and white stones dropped into the urn. Would the bystanders want them? No; only one would want them—the guilty criminal trembling at the bar. He would anxiously watch the hands of the judges, to see whether they dropped the white or the black stones into the urn. So you, who doubt and fear, who are distressed in your minds, cut up in your feelings, and harassed by convictions—all for the want of a sweet manifestation, all for the want of a clear testimony, all for the want of pardon and peace being sealed upon your heart; these very exercises, these very trials of mind, all prove that you have the life of God in your soul: for having the life of God, you are anxious after manifestations from the Lord; and nothing else can satisfy you. Now you are upon the high road to victory. Your doubts and fears, your cutting convictions, your sharp exercises, your numerous temptations, your many perplexities—what is their effect? To beat you down, to defeat, to overcome you, to prove stronger than all your attempts to master them.

But these things are to bring you to the foot of the cross. They are to cut up creature righteousness root and branch; they are to strip you of every rag of fleshly holiness, and bring you to that safe spot where you will one day “overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony”—the blood of the Lamb applied to your conscience, and the word of God’s testimony spoken with sweet delivering power to your heart. And the Lord’s family want these white stones. They want the Lord to give something to them, and to do something in them: to speak something to them and in them. It is not what this man may say, or the other man may say, that satisfies a conscience made tender in God’s fear. It is what the Lord does in, and speaks to him. This, and this alone, can satisfy

one that has the life of God ebbing and flowing in his heart.

3. “And in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” Here is another custom alluded to. In ancient times it was customary to write upon a stone the name of the candidate for whom they intended to vote. If there were two, three, four, or ten candidates for an office, when a person would express his opinion that such a candidate should be chosen; in other words, when he would give a vote for a particular candidate, he wrote the name of the candidate upon a stone, and put that stone into a urn; and he whose name appeared most frequent was considered chosen by the majority of the people. The Lord alludes to this in the text, where he says, “In the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

What is this new name? Is it not a new heart, a new nature—Christ in the soul the hope of glory? This is the “new name which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” New affections flowing towards the precious Lord, new breathings of a heart made tender in his fear, new enjoyments of his manifested presence, new sensations from the work of the Spirit upon the soul; in other words, a new heart, a new nature, made new by him that sits upon the throne. When the Lord’s people are exercised with doubts and fears, and cast down by many temptations, what are their two greatest trials? The workings of the old man of sin, and the few communications that they have of power from the Lord. Does not this sometimes trouble your mind? There is a sad darkness in your soul. You go to a throne of grace; you plead with the Lord; you ask him to give you a word. But there is no answer, no manifestation, no sweet whisper, no discovery of Jesus to your soul. You go away worse than you came. Or, you are tempted with some sin; some snare is spread for your feet; some besetment holds you fast: you are cut up with guilt, and distressed in your mind. “O wretched man that I am!” is your constant cry. But you cannot break the snare, cannot deliver your own soul, cannot overcome the besetment that works so powerfully in your carnal mind. Under these feelings you

have no communication from God, no sweet testimony, no answer to prayer, no divine light nor liberty, nothing to strengthen, nothing to comfort, nothing to encourage your soul; darkness, guilt, bondage, lay hold of you, and press you down into the deep and dark dungeon.

Now, at this time there is no new name. When you pray, it is with sighs and groans; if you read, you can find nothing but what condemns you; if you hear, your conscience fastens upon everything that describes hypocrites in a profession, but can take nothing that seems to strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. At this time there is the old man of sin, an accusing guilty conscience, a troubled mind, a tempting devil, but alas! no “white stone,” no “new name.” But after a time, when the Lord brings you a weeping sinner to the cross, a poor guilty criminal to his feet, and then begins to open up in your soul salvation through the blood of the Lamb, and to apply the word of his testimony with power in your heart, then no sooner is the “white stone” given, than the “new name” is given with it, “which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” There are new sensations, new feelings, new affections, new thoughts, new desires, and everything is made new in a man’s soul.

But “no man knoweth this, saving he that receiveth it.” New thoughts of Jesus; new openings up of Scripture, new meltings of heart, new softenings of spirit, every thing made new by Him who renews us “in the renewing of our mind”—no man knows these things saving he who receives them. It is all betwixt the Lord and the soul: it is all betwixt a pardoning God and a pardoned sinner; it is all mercy, all grace, all love, from first to last. Grace began, grace carries on, and grace finishes it; grace must have all the glory, and grace must crown the work with eternal victory.

But what says the Lord in the context? “He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.” Have you an ear? Do you hear these things? I do not mean with the outward ear; we all have that. But do you hear with the ear of the heart?

with the ears of a conscience that falls under the power of truth? with an ear that receives God's truth into it, "mixed with faith in them that hear it?" sometimes trembling, sometimes hoping, sometimes sinking, sometimes rising. You cannot put away these things, and say, 'It is all lies.' There is that inward voice, that living witness in your conscience that knows it is the solemn truth of God. You have ears to hear. The Lord has unstopped the deaf ears; he has given you a conscience to feel, and has raised up faith in your heart, which mixes with the word which comes from his own mouth to hear what the Spirit saith to the churches, to hear what the Spirit saith to those who fear his name, to hear the promises that drop from his gracious lips—these have ears to hear.

The Lord fulfil these things in your experience. Did you ever eat of the hidden manna? Was Christ ever precious to your soul? Have you ever had "a white stone" given you that you could look upon, and believe the Lord had dropped a testimony into your heart? With that "white stone" was there given you "a new name," a new heart, a new nature, new affections, new feelings, new desires; in a word, all things new? 'Yes,' says one, 'I have through mercy experienced all this.' Well, to whom is the promise made? "To him that overcometh." Are you that character? And if you are, how did you overcome? Was it according to the Scripture description, by "the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony?" There is no other way. It is not because you have embraced certain tenets, or are a sound Calvinist, or approve of these things when you hear them with the ear. A man may do all that, and yet know nothing feelingly of the work of grace upon the conscience. But this is the question, whether you have overcome, or are in the way to overcome? If you have never overcome, nor are striving to do so, all your knowledge of these things is but in the brain; it is not vital, it is not spiritual, it is not experimentally wrought in your heart by the power of God.

But perhaps there are some here whose conscience bears a secret testimony—"I know I have never eaten of the hidden manna, never

had a white stone, never had a new name." Well, where are you? "O," say they, "if I could tell you my heart, I would say, it was full of doubts and fears whether I ever should get to heaven; I would tell you, it was full of carnality, wickedness, and sin; overcome by Satan, easily mastered by temptation, weak and worthless, poor and needy, filthy and polluted—such is a faint description of my heart!" Well, but what is the effect of all these feelings that are passing in the chambers within? Are they emptying you of creature strength? Are they stripping you of creature righteousness? In a word, are they bringing you to the footstool of mercy, to the cross of Jesus, to the throne of grace, as a poor guilty sinner, that there you may receive the sweet communications of his love and blood to your soul? Mercy is in store for you. The Lord is leading you to overcome. You are learning a great lesson by doubts and fears. You are getting very salutary instructions by knowing the corruptions of your heart, and the snares of the flesh, the world, and the devil. Your guilty conscience, often plunged in seas of guilt, is thus being prepared for the sweet reception of the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. The voice of conscience in your bosom, continually crying, 'Guilty, guilty!' is but the prelude and harbinger of another voice that will one day speak to your inward heart, and be as marrow and oil to your bones—"Son, or daughter, thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace." Then you will know something of the "hidden manna," of the "white stone," and of the "new name" written in the white stone, "which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

These are solemn realities. This is a religion which no man can get for himself, and which no man can communicate to another. This is a religion wholly dependent upon the power of the Holy Ghost: and no other religion is worth a straw. All other teachings but God's teachings will leave our souls needy, naked, and undone. All other coverings but the covering of God's Spirit will leave the soul under the wrath of an avenging Jehovah. All other knowledge, except spiritual experimental knowledge, wrought in our heart by

the power of the Holy Ghost, will leave us in the hands of Him who "is a consuming fire." I would not drop a word to cast down any of God's poor family, to disquiet the troubled, to burden the sinking, to add weights to those whose feet are in the stocks, or stumbling in the mire. But I would not hold out any encouragement to those who think to gain the victory by their own strength, wisdom, or righteousness. I know that such are not under the teachings of the Spirit, such are not in the high road to victory.

But you that are really the people of God, you that doubt and fear, you that are exercised in your souls, and that sharply and strongly—grace and truth are yours. These trials and temptations are to empty you, strip you, and lay you low. They are meant to bring you to the footstool of mercy, there to overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of his testimony; there to have hidden manna dropped into your heart; there to have a white stone lodged in your conscience; there to experience the sweetness and blessedness of the new name, "which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

Do you approve of this religion? Are you sure in your souls it will stand the trying hour? And is this the feeling of your heart!—"Lord, let me have thy grace, mercy, and truth experienced in my soul!" Depend upon it, those whom the Lord thus leads, he will enable to overcome in his strength; and He who has given the promise will fulfil it in their hearts and consciences, to his own glory and their unspeakable joy.

120 The Word Of God's Grace

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on Tuesday Evening,
September 4, 1846

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

Acts 20:32

I do not know a more affecting portion of God's word than that which is contained in Ac 20:17-38. There are two verses especially which one of tender feelings can scarcely read without the tears stealing to his eyes: "And they all wept sore, and fell upon Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more." What tender affection is displayed on both sides! what sincerity shines through the whole address of Paul! what noble simplicity! what zeal for God's glory! what real desires for the spiritual welfare of those with whom he was parting! Surely if crimson shame could ever cover her cheek, Infidelity must be put to the blush, if she could but read this striking portion of God's word, and then deny there is stamped upon it every mark of genuineness, and an indescribable truthfulness and reality, which so conspicuously shine through every line.

But there is something far deeper in Paul's address to the elders of the church at Ephesus than natural pathos, or even the noble disinterestedness which forms in it so prominent a feature, that we should think even a natural man with tender feelings could scarcely read his parting words without some emotion in his heart. Apart from all this, though in itself unspeakably beautiful, when we read it in the light of the Spirit, we see contained in it a fund of spiritual and experimental truth, and especially in the verses which form my text.

In this way, then, with God's blessing, I shall consider the words before us this evening; not making any formal divisions, but taking them up as they lie before me, and looking up to the Lord that he would be to me mouth and wisdom, and enable me so to speak from them, that God may have the glory, and his people the profit and comfort.

I.—For the space of three years had the apostle Paul laboured at Ephesus: and during that time he had warned the disciples night and day with tears. He thus clearly manifested that their spiritual interests lay very close to his heart: that he was bound to them by

the strongest ties of union and affection. Carrying. Then, in his own breast, a deep sense of his weakness and depravity: but at the same time experimentally knowing the rich supplies of God's grace, and how the strength of Christ is made perfect in weakness—while he sorrowed, in seeing beforehand the snares, trials, afflictions, and temptations that lay in their path, yet was he encouraged by knowing the rich provisions of covenant mercy and love.

Arriving therefore at Miletus on his way to Jerusalem, he sends to Ephesus about thirty miles distant, and calls the elders of the church, wishing to lay before them the things of God. These elders were the pastors, or ministers, whom “the Holy Ghost had made overseers” literally, “bishops” over the flock, “to feed the church of God which he had purchased with his own blood.” But Paul looked forward with prophetic eye into the future, and saw that “after his departing grievous wolves would enter in among them, not sparing the flock.” He saw the cloud of persecution which was about to burst upon them; he heard the distant howlings of “grievous wolves,” which should soon “enter in among them,” those wolves that for a time had been kept back by a divine hand, but were ready to spring upon the flock, and, if God did not interpose, tear them to pieces.

But there was something that lay still closer to his heart. Not merely did he see the external dangers awaiting them; his prophetic eye not only descried the dim form of ravening wolves on the distant mountains, but it looked into the very centre, the very body of the church itself. And what a sight there met his eye! He saw that even out of this little body—out of this feeble flock, most cutting stroke of all! out “of their own selves men would arise speaking perverse things:” and their object being to set themselves at the head of part would “draw away disciples after them.”

Looking thus at the church of Ephesus, and seeing external and internal dangers drawing near, he knew and felt that nothing but the power of God could keep them. Feeling, then their interest so warm upon his heart, he says. “Therefore watch, and remember,

that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.” But this feeling, doubtless, was in his mind. ‘Of what use are my exhortations? Can you keep them? Are you able to watch? Can you preserve yourselves? Can you protect the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers? No.’ Deeply acquainted with the helplessness of the creature, he turned away as it were from them, and as if despairing of all human strength or wisdom, he took them up in his arms, and laid them down at the feet of God himself. When he had warned them to the utmost of his power: after the tears had flowed in copious streams down his cheeks; after he had exhausted every topic of exhortation: then, feeling the nullity of all without God's special blessing, he tenderly adds, “Now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

The apostle was well acquainted with the sinfulness of the creature. He knew by painful and personal experience the fountain of evil that dwells in a sinner's bosom, and how that evil fountain perpetually sends forth its corrupt streams. He knew, therefore, that this inward stream of evil, but for the grace of God, would break forth and sweep away every dam that could be formed against it in their own strength. And is not this our feeling too, if we have any knowledge of the fountain of wickedness that we carry within? Has it not broken through all resolutions, all tears, all sighs, all vows, all promises? Has not sin been so strong in our carnal mind as effectually to break through every wall that nature could build, and flow over every dam that human arm could set up? Knowing, then, their sinfulness as depraved creatures, he lays them down at the footstool of sovereign grace.

He also knew their complete helplessness: not only that they were sinful, deeply sinful: wicked, desperately wicked: but helpless,

thoroughly helpless. He knew that he might warn them night and day with tears: that he might spend his breath and life in exhorting them to live to God's glory, and to watch against every inward and outward enemy. But he was well convinced, from personal experience, of the helplessness of the creature; and therefore, as the tender mother takes her helpless babe, and puts it into the cradle out of which it cannot fall, so he takes them up in his arms, and lays them in the cradle of mercy, in the ark of the covenant—as safe as the ark of Noah, when “the Lord had shut him in.”

He knew also, that they were, for the most part little acquainted with the deceit of the enemy; that they had too little experience of the snares that Satan was laying for their feet; too little knowledge of the power and prevalence of besetting sins. Knowing, therefore, by his own experience the perils of the spiritual campaign; not being “ignorant of Satan's devices,” he commends them in an especial manner to the eyes and heart of the great Captain of their salvation, putting them as it were into his tent and under his banner.

But, leaving this figurative language, we may enquire, how he commends them to God?

1. First, as to a kind Parent. Where should the child be taken but to the father's arms? Is not the father its natural guardian, bound to it by the closest, strongest ties? The father's eye, the father's heart, the father's arm, all concur in its protection. The earthly tie of parent and child, with all its tender affectionate love, is but a representation of the heavenly tie between God and his people. He is their Father and their God. And thus the Lord sent to comfort his mourning disciples: “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” Joh 20:17.

2. He would commend them also to his omniscient eye. We know little of ourselves, and less of one another. We know not our own wants, what is for our good, what snares to avoid, what dangers to shun. Our path is bestrewed with difficulties, beset with temptations, surrounded with foes, encompassed with perils. At

every step there is a snare, at every turn an enemy in wait. Pride digs the pit, carelessness bandages the eyes, carnality drugs and intoxicates the senses, the lust of the flesh seduces, the love of the world allures, unbelief and infidelity paralyse the fighting hand and the praying knee, sin entangles the feet, guilt defiles the conscience, and Satan accuses the soul. Who under these circumstances can come alive out of the battle? Who can “stand every storm, and live at last?” Only he who walks under that all-seeing eye which never slumbers nor sleeps, “the Lord do keep it: I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” “Kept by the mighty power of God.” “The Lord is thy keeper.” “He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”

3. He commended them further to his all-powerful hand. The eye to watch, the hand to guide and protect. “I taught Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms.” “When I said my foot slippeth, thy mercy held me up.” “Underneath are the everlasting arms.” We cannot stand alone. Not a right step can we take except as held up and guided by almighty power. This made the saints of old cry, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.” “Keep me as the apple of thine eye.” “Leave not my soul destitute.” In commending them therefore to God, he commends them not only to the eye that never slumbers, but to the hand that never droops.

4. But, above all, he would commend them to the affectionate, loving heart of God. Thence comes the watchful eye, thence the protecting hand. Love, eternal love, unchangeable love, is the fountain whence all the streams of mercy and grace flow down to the church, and every individual member of it. “I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” “Love never faileth.” Paul might depart, wolves might arise, heresies might prevail, apostates might fall away, thick clouds might cover the church, all might be confusion without and within. But one thing would not fail the elect of God—the love that embraced them from eternity to eternity. In commending them to God he would commend them therefore to that love which knows

neither beginning nor end, increase, decay, or variation.

Thus did Paul commend them to God; and in this should every minister of the gospel imitate him. Every rightly-taught servant of the Lord, when he comes amongst, or leaves a people, never dares for a moment entertain the thought, that anything he can say can profit their souls. He comes, if he comes rightly, depending on God for a blessing to follow the word; and he leaves, if he leaves rightly, beseeching the Lord that a blessing may follow what has been spoken in weakness. Thus, no rightly-taught servant of the Lord can dare to go amongst the people of God trusting in his own wisdom or ability: but desires to bear them up in his arms before the Almighty, and look up with an eye of faith that the Lord would bless the word. In his inward thoughts he would "commend" them to God as alone able to work in them that which is well-pleasing in his sight.

II.—But not only did Paul thus "commend" them "to God" he commended them also in an especial manner "to the word of his grace." There is a difference between "grace," and "the word of his grace." Nothing but grace can save the soul: nothing but superabounding grace can blot out and hide from the view of justice our aggravated iniquities. But "the word of his grace" is that word which brings this grace into the heart—which communicates life and power to the soul—which the Spirit by his inward teaching and testimony seals on the conscience—and by which he reveals and sheds abroad that favour of which he testifies. This is what the Lord's people want. It is "the word of grace" that reaches their soul. It is not reading of grace in God's word that brings peace into their hearts; it is "the word of his grace," when he is pleased to speak that word with a divine power to their souls, that brings salvation with it.

Now, the Lord's people are continually in those trying states and circumstances, out of which nothing can deliver them but "the word of God's grace." If the soul has to pass through severe trials, it is not hearing of grace that can deliver it out of them. If it be beset

with powerful temptations, it is not reading about grace that can break them to pieces. But "the word of his grace," when the Lord himself is pleased to speak with his own blessed lips, and apply some promise with his own divine power, supports under trial, delivers from temptation, breaks snares to pieces, makes crooked things straight and rough places plain, brings the prisoner out of the prison-house, and takes off the yoke by reason of the anointing.

Thus, when the apostle had said, "I commend you to God," he does not leave them there; but he takes them on to the spot where they would have some communication of God's grace to their heart, where there would be some manifestation of his favour to their souls, some special dealings with their consciences. It is as though he was not satisfied with laying them at God's feet. He commends them to his "grace," and specially to "the word of his grace" in their souls. If I may use such a figure, we may fancy a mother in distressed circumstances I condemn the deed, though I use the illustration, who is not able to sustain her infant: she takes it. therefore, and lays it at a rich man's gate: she watches the door to see it open, and the infant taken in. She has no relief till she sees the servant come and take the babe safely in. As long as the child is lying outside, anxiety fills her bosom; but when the door is opened, and the child safely housed, the object of her maternal solicitude is accomplished. So the apostle takes the church, as the mother might take her babe, and lays it at the Lord's feet. But "the word of his grace" takes the child up into his house and heart, opens the door of his bosom, and spreads the skirt of love over the infant cast out in the open field in the day that it was born. Ye trembling ones at the footstool of mercy, is not this what your souls are longing after? To be merely brought to the footstool of mercy does not satisfy you. To be merely commended in prayer to God does not ease your anxious heart. But when "a door of hope" is opened in the valley of Achor; when the Lord speaks a word of peace to your soul, applies his gracious promises to your heart; through the word of life communicates grace, and blesses

the soul with a taste of his favour and mercy, then your desire is accomplished.

III.—But speaking of this “word of his grace,” the apostle says, it is “able to build you up.” A foundation had been laid in their hearts; they had been brought off the sandy bottom of self; their Babel righteousness had been dashed to pieces, and its brick and slime scattered to the four winds of heaven. Christ had been laid, by the blessed Spirit, as a foundation in their souls. To him they had come as poor wretched sinners: on him they had laid hold; his Person they had viewed by the eye of living faith; his blood they had felt to be exceedingly precious; under his righteousness they had sheltered themselves; a measure of his dying love had been shed abroad in their hearts. This placed them upon a solid foundation—the Rock of Ages! On him therefore they stood, and “out of his fulness received grace for grace.”

They were then to be built up upon this. And there was but one thing which could so build them up—“the word of God's grace.” Why? Because we really have nothing in our hearts from first to last spiritually good, but what “the word of God's grace” communicates. It is by “the word of God's grace” we are first brought off the sandy foundation: it is by “the word of God's grace” we are laid upon the Rock of Ages; it is by “the word of God's grace” that every stone is fixed in the spiritual building; and it is by “the word of God's grace” that the headstone is at last brought forth with shoutings of “Grace, grace unto it!”

Now, this is a lesson, which usually we have to learn very painfully. We are very eager to put our hands to work. Like Uzzah, we must needs prop up the ark when we see it stumbling; when faith totters, we must come to bear a helping hand. But this is prejudicial to the work of God upon the soul. If the whole is to be a spiritual building; if we are “living stones” built upon a living head, every stone in that spiritual temple must be laid by God the Spirit. And if so, everything of nature, of creature, of self, must be effectually laid low, that Christ may be all—that Christ, and Christ alone may be

formed in our heart, the hope of glory. How many trials some of you have passed through! how many sharp and cutting exercises! how many harassing temptations! how many sinkings of heart! how many fiery darts from hell! how many doubts and fears! how much hard bondage! how many galling chains! how often has the very iron entered into your soul! Why? That you may be prevented from adding one stone by your own hands to the spiritual building.

The apostle tells us, that “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid,” even Jesus Christ. He then speaks of those who build “wood, hay, and stubble,” as well as of those who used “gold, silver, and precious stones;” and that the “wood, hay, and stubble” must be burned with fire. It is after the Lord has laid a foundation in the sinner's conscience, brought him near to himself, made Jesus precious to his soul, raised up hope and love in his heart, that he is so apt to take materials God never recognises, “wood, hay, stubble,” and rear thereby a flimsy superstructure of his own. But this gives way in the trying hour: it cannot stand one gust of temptation. One spark of the wrath to come, one discovery of God's dread majesty, will burn up this “wood, hay, and stubble,” like straw in the oven. The Lord's people, therefore, have to pass through troubles, trials, exercises, and temptations, doubts and fears, and all that harassing path that they usually walk in, that they may be prevented from erecting a superstructure of nature upon the foundation of grace—“wood, hay and stubble” upon the glorious mystery of an incarnate God.

But “the word of God's grace” is “able” to build them up. Have you suffered from temptation, and been delivered out of it? It was “the word of God's grace” that built you up. Have you been in severe trial, and the Lord has blessed you in it, and brought you out of it? It was “the word of God's grace” that built you up. Have you been entangled in some error, and the Lord snatched you out of that error by applying some portion of his truth to your soul? It was “the word of God's grace” that built you up. Have you been entangled in the lusts of the flesh, cast down by some snare

of the devil, and the Lord has delivered you out of it? It was “the word of his grace” that built you up. We are not built up by fleshly holiness, by creature piety, by long and loud prayers, by the doings and duties of the flesh; no, nor even by sound doctrines floating in our brain; but by “the word of God’s grace” applied with a divine power to the heart.

But that very “word of grace” is made suitable to our souls, for the most part, only as we are brought into those circumstances to which it is adapted. Is not grace free favour? and is not “the word of God’s grace” the instrument through which this free favour is manifested? Can I then learn the heights, the depths, the superboundings, the freeness, the sovereignty, the almighty power of grace, except by wading into those circumstances to which it is suitable? Must I not feel a guilty sinner before grace can be sweet? Must I not know the aboundings of internal sin before the superaboundings of God’s grace can be precious? Must I not know something of that fountain of evil, which I carry within, and have my breast laid bare with its hidden abominations before I can know the grace that covers, pardons, and heals? And this grace I can only know by “the word of God’s grace;” in other words, by the sweet manifestation, unctuous application, and divine revelation of the gospel of the grace of God.

Thus the apostle did not lead them to rest upon their own strength and wisdom, but to live upon the fountain-fulness of the great and glorious risen Mediator. This is the only way to know anything of grace. I may hear of grace all my days, and yet die ignorant of it. I may sit under ministers who preach nothing but grace, and yet be as devoid of it in my heart as Satan himself. But if “the word of God’s grace” drop into my heart: if the Lord the Spirit be pleased to send his own precious truth into my soul, and through that word to communicate a sense of his superabounding grace—then, and then only, is it mine. Nor is there any other way of being spiritually built up. Doctrines cannot build you up: corruptions cannot build you up: doubts and fears cannot build you

up: trials and exercises cannot build you up: temptations cannot build you up: heavy losses in providence, and cutting afflictions in grace, cannot build you up. They pull down: they lay low: they disperse the “wood, hay, and stubble” to the winds: they leave you in a wild, naked desert, in a waste howling wilderness. But it is “the word of God’s grace,” communicated to the soul out of Christ’s inexhaustible and divine fulness, that alone builds up. All other building is a baseless fabric, a house of cards, a castle in the air, a mist driven before the wind.

IV.—But there was something still further: “And to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” There is a people, then, that are sanctified, that is,

1. set apart in the covenant, in God’s eternal decrees: and

2. sanctified by the work of the blessed Spirit upon their hearts, whereby they are made meet for “the inheritance of the saints in light.” By the first they were separated by the original decree and purpose of God. This made them “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.” To “sanctify” is to set apart as the special property of God. So God says to Moses, “Sanctify unto me all the firstborn” Ex 13:2, which he explains Ex 13:12 as “a setting apart unto the Lord.” So God sanctified the seventh day by setting it apart from the other days of the week as the Sabbath. This is the only original root and spring of holiness. Men do not make themselves holy by an act of their own free choice, and by that holiness recommend themselves to God and obtain heaven. That is popery.

Holiness does not consist in a certain amount of duties to be performed, prayers to be said, sacraments and ordinances to be attended, alms to be given, passions to be subdued, garb to be worn, tears to be shed. Fruit to be fruit must grow upon a tree, be fed by sap, be ripened by sun, be refreshed with showers, be a living product elaborated by a divine mechanism. Flowers

and fruit may be modelled from wax, and so beautifully as to be scarcely distinguishable from genuine. But they want scent, sap, and taste. Such is human holiness—a modelled, painted, artificial imitation of “camphire and spikenard, calamus and cinnamon, and the pleasant fruits” that grow in the Beloved’s garden. Christ is the Holy One of Israel. The head of the church is holy, intrinsically, eternally such; the members are holy because united to that head. A holy head cannot have unholy members. Thus Christ is the church’s sanctification, she being holy in his holiness, as well as righteous in his righteousness. This is the root. Thence comes personal, inward sanctification by the regenerating work of the Holy Ghost. He gives the new heart and new spirit: communicates holy desires, affections, breathings, enjoyments, with every gracious fruit, working repentance and godly sorrow for sin, brokenness of heart, and contrition of spirit, tenderness of conscience, faith, hope, and love, meekness, resignation, humility, prayerfulness, watchfulness, departing from evil, cleaving to all good; and all those outward fruits of righteousness, which are to the glory of God. This is gospel holiness, holiness as the especial gift and work of the Holy Spirit, the only true and acceptable holiness, and without which no man shall see the Lord. These that are thus sanctified have an eternal inheritance, being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. All other holiness is the holiness of the cowl and the cloister, a monkish pharisaism, of which superstition is the root, ignorance the prop, pride the fruit, and the curse of God the end.

How different is that divine work and operation which melts your heart and breaks it, dissolves it, lays it low in adoration at his feet who loved you and gave himself for you. This is “an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” Those who were set apart in God’s eternal purpose were chosen unto the enjoyment of this inheritance. These have the first-fruits of the Spirit, which “the word of God’s grace” dropping into the heart, communicates. For this brings light, life, liberty, love, conformity to the image of Jesus, a renewal in the spirit of the mind, a separation from the world and

all its perishing vanities and charms, and stamps upon the heart a measure of Christ’s blessedness. And all this wholly, solely, by “the word of God’s grace.” Does not this suit the sinner?

Supposing it were God forbid it should be so for a moment! that I must by my own exertions, in the first instance, bring grace into my heart, and thus lay the foundation; and that I, by my own exertions, must carry on the work, and so raise the superstructure; must I not fail, utterly fail? But when grace does all from first to last; when it is grace which wrote the names of God’s people in the book of life; when grace gave them to Jesus to redeem; when grace in God’s appointed time quickened their souls; when grace manifested the cleansing efficacy of Christ’s blood to their conscience: when grace will bring them safely through all their trials and temptations; will perfect that which concerneth them, and must and will reign through righteousness unto eternal life; how suitable, how more than suitable is this to a poor, guilty sinner, who has nothing, and feels he has nothing in himself but rags and ruin! “The word of God’s grace,” in the hands of the Spirit, lays the foundation. “The word of God’s grace” makes Jesus known in the everlasting gospel, and thus raises the superstructure; “the word of God’s grace” bears through the arms of death, and thus puts on the coping-stone; and heaven’s arches will eternally sound the praise of the glory of that grace which made them “accepted in the Beloved.” Every living desire after the Lord; every realising sense of his grace and glory; every melting affection towards his lovely Person; every reception of him into the heart as the Christ of God; every act of faith, hope, or love; every breathing out of the soul into his bosom, is a sign, and more than a sign, an undeniable evidence of the grace of God being in a sinner’s breast. And if the grace of God is in a sinner’s breast, he is in Christ, one with Christ; and “the word of his grace” will build him up more and more, and give him deeper draughts of his eternal “inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

There may be here some poor, tried, exercised, tempted

children of God to whom this news seems almost too good to be true.

But whence proceed, what is the main subject of their trials and exercises? Is it not this? The evil heart that they carry in their bosom. Is it not the pride, unbelief, infidelity, darkness, temptations, doubts and fears, sins and iniquities, and the many burdens and difficulties which they have to encounter at every step? Hampered and burdened with so many inward and outward trials, they seem unable to realise either the grace that is in them, or the glory that awaits them. Their hands hang down, and their knees totter. But how suitable to such is "the word of God's grace"! Is not grace the very thing for them? Is there not a fountain-fulness of grace in the bosom of the Redeemer everflowing and overflowing? And does not this flow fully and freely through "the word of his grace," which they have in their hearts and hands? How else should it come to them but freely? Have they no grace but what they work for? And is grace dealt out cautiously, niggardly, stingily, like money from a miser's purse? No; God "giveth liberally, and upbraideth not: the grace of God, and the gift by grace, hath abounded unto many."

Jesus gives, as a King, "of his royal bounty," as Solomon to the Queen of Sheba. Be honest to yourselves; be honest to what God has given you. Have you never felt Jesus precious? Have you never poured out your heart at his feet? Have you never had a glimpse by faith of his lovely Person? Have you never felt anything of the efficacy of his atoning blood? never seen his suitability? never felt him near and dear to your soul? never tasted that spiritual-mindedness which is life and peace? If you have, you have an "inheritance among all them which are sanctified." For how are we "sanctified"? Is it not by the word of truth? as the Lord said, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." And have you not at times felt the word of truth to produce holy, heavenly sensations and emotions in your heart? Is not this sanctification?

But you say, 'I cannot deny that I have experienced this;' but "if so, why am I thus? why so dark for weeks and months together?

why so cold in my affections? why so dead in my frame? why so often shut up in bondage? why so harassed by Satan? why so plagued by an army of doubts and fears? why is the Lord so absent? why sin so present? why does he shut out my prayer? why does he leave me to stumble in darkness like those that long for the morning?" To these complaints may we not too often reply, "Hast thou not procured this to thyself? The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save. nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear: but our iniquities separate between us and God, and our sins make him hide his face from us." Are there no Achans in the camp? no golden wedge, nor Babylonish garment under the tent? no secret sin indulged, no idol set up in the heart? But if matters are straight here. it may be to shew you your weakness: to burn up your "wood, hay, and stubble?" to bring you more needy and naked to his feet: to cut up your self righteousness and carnal wisdom: and break to pieces the right arm of creature strength.

Those very exercises, doubts, fears, temptations, difficulties, and burdens that your soul is so harassed by, are to empty, that God may fill; to strip, that he may clothe; to bring down, that he may raise up; to make you nothing, that Christ may be all in all. Have you never had something in your soul that felt like this—that the lower you sank in self, the more suitable and precious the Saviour appeared? Have there been no moments when, amidst your exercises, there was that coming in of light and life, liberty and love, that you were able to clasp Jesus in the arms of a living faith, and felt that you could die in peace under such feelings? You have had the inheritance. What is this but the inheritance—the very kingdom of God in the soul, which "is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost?" And what brought it to you? Your promises, vows, resolutions, exertions, doings, duties? No; it was "the word of God's grace:" some sweet promise just suitable to your case; some portion of scripture opened up to your heart; something which you almost put away, because you felt how undeserved it was for God even to

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look upon such a wretch as you. Yet this “word of God’s grace” it was that brought this foretaste, this pledge of the inheritance above into your soul below.

If, then, you can find in your soul’s experience any of these divine marks, these “white stones,” love tokens, betrothment pledges, it is well with you for life and death, time and eternity! Let me hold up again these tokens of espousal, these bridal rings, and compare them with your experience. If, then, Jesus was ever precious to you; if you ever felt the efficacy of his atoning blood in your conscience: if ever your soul was melted down in sweet affection at his feet; if ever he blessed you with one word of grace from his own lips, he has given you “an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” If you have had heaven here, you will have heaven hereafter. If you have ever seen Jesus by the eye of faith below, you will see Jesus hereafter by the eye of sight above.

With what better words can I, then, leave you at the close of my present visit than what the apostle used upon an almost similar occasion? Not that I dare for a moment compare myself with him: or indeed you with them: yet, in our feeble way, with what better words can I take my leave of you than to “commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified”? And may this be our increasing experience—to hang more simply, more fervently on the God of all grace, and to receive from time to time sweet communications of “the word of his grace” into our heart. And then, as we have met here around the throne of grace, we shall meet hereafter around the throne of glory; as we have rejoiced in “the word of his grace” here, and felt a measure of the “inheritance of the saints” below, it is a prelude, an earnest, a foretaste of the eternal weight of glory above. There may the Lord bring us for his own glorious and precious Name’s sake.

121 The Gift Of Redemption And The Grace Of Adoption

THE GIFT OF REDEMPTION AND THE GRACE OF ADOPTION 265
Preached on Lord’s Day Morning, at Oakham
December 6th, 1846,

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

Galatians 4:4, 5

There is a striking resemblance, what is called an analogy, between the two dispensations and the different experiences of God’s people. I will endeavour to explain my meaning more clearly and distinctly. The old dispensation, that is, the dispensation given by Moses, was to a certain extent a carnal one. Christ had not then appeared, and was therefore foreshadowed by sacrifices, types, rites, and ceremonies, which were to a certain extent, carnal. In consequence, those who were under this Old Testament dispensation partook, in a measure, of its spirit. They breathed a legal spirit because they were under a legal dispensation. And this you will find very much running through the experience of the Old Testament saints. But when, in God’s own appointed time, Christ came into the world, He brought in a new dispensation—what is called in Scripture “a new covenant.” This new dispensation, or covenant, is entirely of a spiritual nature; there is nothing in it legal, but it is altogether heavenly and divine. If you will read carefully the Epistles to the Hebrews and to the Galatians, you will see how the Apostle treats this subject, and how he shows the distinction between the old dispensation or covenant, with its legal rites and ceremonies, and the new dispensation or covenant, which is of grace and grace alone. In the Epistle to the Galatians, the Apostle speaks very particularly of the distinction between these two dispensations. For instance, in the chapter before us he says, “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world” (Gal. 4:3). The Apostle is here speaking of the dispensation; he is not speaking so much of the

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experience of God's people, though, as I have observed, there is a striking analogy between the two. But he is not speaking strictly of the experience of God's people so much as of the dispensation—the Old Testament dispensation under which the ancient fathers lived. Speaking, therefore, of them, and including himself amongst them—for he was born under that dispensation—he says, “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.” By “the elements of the world,” he means the law; not merely the moral law, but the whole dispensation given at Mount Sinai, including what is commonly called the ceremonial as well as the moral law. This he calls “the elements of the world.” It is called elements, or rudiments, because it was, as it were, the primary instruction which God bestowed upon the Church. Just as a child learns the elements or rudiments before it proceeds further, so God saw fit to deal with His people. He put them under an elementary or rudimental dispensation before He introduced His gospel. The Apostle calls that old dispensation the elements of the world, because, to a certain extent, there were worldly things connected with it. Thus we find him speaking to the Hebrews, “Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary,” by which he means, not worldly in our usual sense of the term, but a worldly sanctuary as distinct from that spiritual sanctuary which God built and not man. Thus, by “a worldly sanctuary,” he intends that ancient tabernacle which the hands of man erected, which the eyes of the world could see, as contra-distinguished from that spiritual sanctuary, the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is at the right hand of God, invisible to the human eye. It is for these reasons that he calls the Old Testament dispensation, “the elements of the world,” and says of those who are under it that they were “in bondage,” and because the gospel had not then appeared in all its glorious fulness, and liberty had not been proclaimed to captives through the atonement of Jesus Christ. To this points Isaiah (61:1, 2), which the Lord Himself read in the synagogue at Nazareth, and told the people,

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“This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” “The acceptable year of the Lord,” was that year when the Lord came into the world, and that year will last until Christ comes a second time without sin unto salvation. Therefore the Apostle, speaking of “the acceptable year” (2 Cor. 6:2), says, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” The acceptable year, then, extends through the whole dispensation till closed by the appearing a second time of the Son of God. These preliminary observations may cast some light upon the words of our text: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

Three things seem to strike my mind as especially connected with and flowing out of our text.

I. The sending forth of God's dear Son.

II. What God's dear Son did when He was thus sent forth.

III. The effects and blessed fruits that spring out of God's sending forth His dear Son.

But the first word that will demand some little explanation is the expression which stands upon the very threshold of our subject: “When the fulness of the time was come.” What is meant by this expression? “The fulness of the time” seems to signify the full completion and entire accomplishment of that time which had been designed in God's own mind from all eternity. Why the

Lord fixed upon a certain season for Christ to appear, and why that season was so late in the world's history, we know not. It is hid in God's eternal mind, and is a part of His infinite and inscrutable wisdom. But this we know, that it was just such a season as God saw most suitable for that glorious event to be fulfilled in. It is therefore called, "the fulness of the time"—the time that God designed being then fully accomplished. And indeed, even with our limited views, with our imperfect knowledge of that season, we may see that there were some striking instances of God's wisdom displayed in it. First, when Christ came the world was at peace. Almost the only time for many, many years, was there then a general peace throughout the world. Secondly, through the providence of God, all nations had been subdued under one yoke; and thus became, more or less, one people. And thirdly, in God's providence, one language—the Greek tongue—was then spoken universally. So that, were there no other reasons, these three seem sufficient to show that this was a suitable time for the Son of God to appear, for His gospel to run and be glorified, and His salvation to be made known to the ends of the earth. In this fulness of time, the predictions concerning the Messiah were to be accomplished, and the sacrifices were to be fulfilled in that one sacrifice—the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world.

When the fulness of the time, then, was come, God sent forth His Son. What a clear, what a striking, what an unanswerable demonstration this is of two grand points! First, of the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Is not the Son the image of the Father? Has not the Son the nature of the Father? So the Lord Jesus Christ is declared in God's Word to be "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person." The very expression, then, "His Son," is an unanswerable demonstration of the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Could a man be God's Son? could an angel be God's Son? Could the highest seraph or brightest archangel be God's Son? Nothing short of Deity could be the Son of Deity. But it also proves secondly, and to my mind this is a very important

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point, that the Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ is one by nature, and not only by office. "He sent forth His Son." Then He was His Son before He sent Him forth. Is not this plain to a demonstration? Say that an earthly father has a son living with him. He sends this son to execute some commission, or upon some errand. Does his doing that errand, or executing that commission, make him a son? Why, he was a son before, and because he is a son, the father has that confidence in him, and that affection towards him, that he sends him to transact that business, which the father, for various reasons, might be unable or unwilling to do himself. Thus the very expression, "God sent forth His Son," plainly proves that the Lord Jesus Christ is one with the Father and blessed Spirit in the glorious Godhead, and shows also that He is not, as many say, a Son merely by office, but a Son also by nature, "God's only begotten Son," "the Son of the Father in truth and love." If it were not so, we lose all the beauty of this declaration in Scripture, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." How this touches every feeling of a father's heart! But if the Lord Jesus Christ be not a Son by nature, and only a Son by office, the force and beauty of that text are destroyed. Say that I consented to be called your son, and you consented to call yourself my father. Would that make you my father, or would that make me your son? But when that relationship already exists, in itself it is a relationship peculiar and indissoluble, and therefore, in the case of God's dear Son, invested with everything beautiful, blessed and glorious.

But again, God sent forth His Son. Did the Lord Jesus Christ, then, come unwillingly? No. What read we in the records of God's inspired Word? "Then said I, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). Or, as it is in the psalm whence the Apostle quotes, "Mine ears hast Thou opened" (Ps. 40:6). There seems something very sweet in the expression. Do you recollect what we read in the Old Testament, that if a servant had become attached to his master and his master's house, that when the year of jubilee came,

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if he still loved his master, and consented for ever to be his servant, his master was to bring him to the door, and bore his ear through with an awl, that was to be a testimony that he should ever be his servant. The Lord Jesus Christ therefore, in allusion to this, said, "Mine ears hast Thou opened," or "dugged," as it is in the margin, that is, Thou hast made Me Thy servant for ever. "Behold, My servant, whom I have chosen" (Matt. 12:18). "Behold Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth" (Isa. 42:1). And thus He is not only God's Son, but God's Servant, by virtue of a special contract of the eternal covenant ordered in all things and sure. He therefore came willingly because "the law of God was in His heart," though He came to be a servant, to be sold at a servant's price, and to die a servant's death. God therefore sent forth His Son, parted with Him, though He lay in His bosom from all eternity, the Object of His eternal delight.

But the Holy Ghost by the pen of Paul tells us in what way this dear Son of God came. Oh, what wondrous depths of eternal wisdom have we here set forth! "Made of a woman." It was necessary that the Lord Jesus Christ in being made the Surety of His Church and people, should be a partaker of their nature. The Apostle Paul points this out very clearly, where he draws the distinction between angelic and human nature. "For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). Had it been God's purpose to redeem devils, Christ would have taken an angelic nature. It was not God's purpose so to do. But it was God's purpose to redeem man, fallen man; it therefore was needful for the Lord Jesus Christ to take human nature, that in that nature He might be a Substitute and Surety for man. Thus we read in the second chapter of Hebrews (v. 11), "Both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one," that is, of one nature. The Lord Jesus Christ is "He that sanctifieth" the people by His blood and grace. And "they who are sanctified" are the elect of God. He is, therefore, not ashamed to call them brethren.

Again, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh

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and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." He is therefore declared to have taken upon Him the seed of Abraham, that is, flesh and blood of Abraham, from whom Mary sprang. But it might be said, "Would not that involve original sin? Was not our nature tainted by the Fall? Had not the sin of Adam entered into it and defiled it? How then could the Lord Jesus Christ take that nature without taking, at the same time, its taint and corruption?" Here we see the wonderful wisdom of God; how He interposed in a supernatural, miraculous way to bring it about that though the Lord Jesus took upon Him the seed of Abraham, He should take it without taint, spot, or defilement. He was made of a woman, it is true, and of a sinful woman; for if He had not been made of a woman, He could not have had the actual flesh and blood of the children. But He was not made of a man and a woman, as we were made. This mystery we find unveiled in the gospel of Luke. The angel Gabriel comes to the Virgin Mary, and tells her, "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus." Mary puts this modest inquiry, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:34, 35). Here is the mystery explained. And what reason we have to bless the Holy Spirit for preserving on record the speech of the angel to the Virgin Mary, showing us the supernatural generation of the Lord Jesus Christ by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost in her womb. Observe the expression, "holy thing." The human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a person. It is a holy thing; a spotless human nature, which in the moment of its conception was taken into indissoluble union with the divine nature of the Son of God, so as to make Him Immanuel, God with us. Thus, though He was "made of a woman," there was no taint of sin in Him, for He was

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holy, harmless, separate from sinners and undefiled, and made higher than the heavens. The lamb that was slain, morning and evening, was to be without blemish, and the Paschal lamb was to be without spot, each prefiguring that the Lamb of God was to be without spot or blemish, taint or defilement. If he were not so, He could not have been a sacrifice for sin. We are defiled, polluted, stained within and without by sin and crime; we cannot therefore appear before God in our own righteousness. But the Lord Jesus came down from heaven to be our Surety and Substitute. If He, then, had had a polluted nature, God could no more accept Him than us, for He cannot look upon sin. Here is a double mystery. If the Lord Jesus Christ had not a perfect human nature, He could not have been accepted as a sacrifice. If He had not partaken of the flesh and blood of the children, He could not have been a sacrifice for them. So that we have to admire, in a twofold way, the wisdom and mercy of God in providing such a sacrifice. This is the Lamb which God Himself has provided for a burnt-offering, the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.

But He was also “made under the law.” What depths of wisdom do we also see in that! Where were the children? Where was His beloved Hephzibah? Was she not under the law? Yes. But oh! what a state she was in as being under the law! Cursed and condemned by it; every thought of her heart, word of her lips, action of her hands, under the curse unceasingly and perpetually. But see here the wisdom of God. He sends forth His Son. Do we not see the voluntary act of this on the part of God? Did man want it? Did man beg God for it? Did His beloved Hephzibah, cast and condemned as she was, even dream of it? She was too deeply sunk, too awfully fallen, to think of such a remedy as that; she was too deeply buried in the world, too blind and ignorant, too bent upon backsliding, too contented with her lost condition, even to feel her ruined state. But if she had felt her dreadful condition, could she ever have ventured to make such a petition—that God should send His dear Son to die for her? If such a thought could have glanced

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across her mind, would she have had the presumption to breathe it forth? But moved by a regard to His own eternal glory, and moved by love and pity to the Church so deeply fallen, He sends forth His Son. Made of a woman, He is made under the law, and thus comes into the place and stead of the Church for whom He died. Being made under the law, He falls under the curse of the law, as we read, “He was made a curse for us.” By His obedience to the law He worked out a perfect righteousness, and at last closes a life of perfect obedience by dying under its curse. He was under the law from the first moment that He was conceived till the last moment when He cried, “It is finished!” He was under the law in life. He was under the law in death. There was not a single point or part of His life upon earth when He was not under the law, either doing what the law demanded, or suffering what the law required.

II. This leads us to the second point, which is to show why God sent forth His Son into the world; why He was made of a woman, and made under the law, viz., to redeem them that were under the law. This describes God’s family. They, as sinners, are under the law. And oh! what it is to be under the law! Must not the law condemn every one under it? Look at this point, first, naturally. Here is a man who has committed some crime—robbery, murder, or some other evil deed, for which he is amenable to the laws of the land. He is arrested, tried, and found guilty. Is he not “under the law” when the jury re-enter the court, and their foreman pronounces him guilty? Is he not “under the law” when the judge passes sentence? In every court of justice, is not the judge seated upon a high raised tribunal, and is not the prisoner placed at the bar in a lower spot to show that he is under the law, which law issues from the mouth of the judge, who is the interpreter and expounder of the laws of the land? So it is spiritually. If you and I had never come into this world tainted with Adam’s sin, if we had never sinned in thought, in word, in action, the law could not touch us. The law against murder cannot touch me if I have murdered no man. But if I were to murder, or rob, the law would lay hold of me

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immediately. If you have never sinned, you are free from the law; but if you have committed even one sin, and that in heart only, you are under the law, and the law can take you by the throat, and say, "Pay me that thou owest!" It will not do for a murderer to say, "I have only murdered once," or for a robber to say, "I have only robbed once." Hast thou murdered at all? Hast thou robbed at all? If thou hast done it but once, the law of the country lays hold of thee by the throat. So with the law of God. Have you committed one sin, given one adulterous look, said one wicked word, or done one sinful action—and who has not committed millions of such sins? Then are you cursed by the law, and by it condemned. The law takes you by the throat and says, "Pay me that thou owest! and if thou do not pay me, to hell thou must go, until thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."

The Lord Jesus Christ saw His bride in this pitiable condition, and the bowels of His compassion were moved for her. He therefore came down into this lower world to save her from this curse, and was made under the law to redeem them that were under the law. But what is it to redeem? To redeem signifies to purchase from death or imprisonment. It is always used in this sense in the Old Testament. For instance, every firstborn male was to be "redeemed." How? By a price set upon it. So the firstling of an animal, if unclean, was to be redeemed at a certain price; if clean, was to be sacrificed. So if a house had gone into captivity, in other words, had become mortgaged or sold away from its original possession, it might be redeemed. All these expressions point out that redeem meant purchase out of death or imprisonment. It is summed up in the words of the Apostle, "Ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20). Thus the Lord Jesus Christ came to redeem them that were under the law by paying a price for them. "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18, 19). By this they were

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completely redeemed; the captives fully set free, for their price was virtually and actually paid to God. Look at the worth and value of the offering. It was not an offering made by man, but by God-Man. All the dignity, therefore, all the virtue and validity of the Godhead were stamped upon that redemption act. Thus by His own precious blood the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed them that were under the law.

But this precious redemption can only be experimentally entered into by those who know what it is to have been under the law. Those only can really value such a redemption as this who have been, or are under the law, in bondage through it, condemned by it, and fearing lest its sentence should burst forth on their heads and hurl them to a deserved hell. Others may receive the doctrine, but these only can receive the power of this precious truth as the Lord is pleased to open up the way of salvation through a Saviour's blood, and apply it warm to the heart. Oh! the value of an interest in Christ; for if not redeemed from under the law by the blood and obedience of God's dear Son, under that law they must live, under that law they must die, and by that law they must be eternally cursed.

III. And this leads us to our last point, which was to show some of the benefits and blessings which spring out of this glorious work of redemption, "that we might receive the adoption of sons."

There was a bar that previously stood in the way. God, so to speak, was willing to receive us as sinners, but there was a barrier in the path to prevent it. I will endeavour to illustrate this by a figure. Suppose that you were childless, and wished to adopt a child to bear your name, and to succeed to your property. Having looked round, at last you fix your eye on a child you think will do for the purpose. Now, nobody can dictate to you what child you intend to adopt. It is an act of perfectly free choice on your part, whether you choose this one or that, and at last you fix on one. But just as you are going to adopt that child into your family by some formal act, someone says to you, "That child has an incurable

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disease, he comes from parents tainted with scrofula;" or, "His father and mother are loose, vile characters, and all their children have turned out such thieves and rogues, I would not have you take that child into your family. If you do, you will certainly repent it." "Well," you would say, "until I can find some cure or remedy, I cannot adopt that child." Take this spiritually. Here is the Lord God Almighty looking down from heaven intending to adopt a certain number of men and women to be His children. But there is a bar in the way. The law comes in and says, "No, no. It cannot be. They cannot be adopted. God is holy; they are unholy; God is pure; they are impure. The law demands perfect obedience, and they are breakers of it in every point, and at every moment. Their father Adam was diseased from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, and all his sons and daughters are as diseased as he. They cannot, therefore, be taken into the family of a holy God. The holy angels would be ashamed to have them taken into co-sonship with them; those holy beings who never sinned nor fell would blush to have foul diseased sinners with them in heaven." The bar, then, must be removed. Now see how it is removed. "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Whilst the law stood in the way cursing and condemning, there was no receiving the adoption of sons, because the law forbade it. When Adam was turned out of Eden, if he wished to return he could not, for there was a flaming sword turning every way at the gates of Paradise. So the flaming sword of divine justice would shut a sinner out unless it were sheathed. But how? O wonderful way! It was sheathed in the body of Jesus Christ. That flaming sword which turned every way to guard the tree of life, being sheathed in the heart and bowels of the Redeemer, was removed, so that the way to the tree of life was opened. Yes, a new and living way was made through the flesh of God's dear Son. Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ having redeemed them that were under the law, there was a way laid open for them to receive the adoption of sons. The Lord

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Jesus Christ having redeemed His people by His own blood, has removed the bar, and opened a channel for the Spirit of God to flow into their souls, and make manifest to them that they are God's adopted sons. Therefore the Apostle adds, "Because ye are sons (that is, adopted into God's family), God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." We receive the adoption of sons when God is pleased to send forth His Spirit into the heart, and never fully know it till that spirit of adoption comes, though sons before. I will endeavour to explain this by a figure. When a child is able to say "Father," is that the first time it is a child? "No," say you, "surely not, it is a child long before it can claim that tender relationship." Or take another case, which is more strictly to the point. Suppose that, as I before intimated, you have adopted a child from infancy. It may be a long time before this child can call you father, and even some time before it feels privileged to call you so, though you have adopted it. Still from the moment of adoption, from the time you first took the child into your house, laid it in the cradle, gave it a name, and called it yours, it was your child. But it might be long before it could say father, or know you as such. So spiritually; the moment the Spirit of God quickens a soul into spiritual life, and begins that good work, which He will never leave unfinished, it is a son, because adopted into the family. Therefore the Apostle adds, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts." But it is only when they know and feel they are sons that they can cry "Abba, Father."

It is, then, necessary first to fall under the law; its bondage, condemnation, and sentence bringing the soul in guilty before God. But when the Lord is pleased to open up some sweet views of Jesus and His glorious gospel, to shed abroad His love in the heart, to reveal Christ to the soul and make Him experimentally known, then His living child receives the adoption of a son, and becomes adopted experimentally into God's ransomed family, the Spirit bearing witness with his spirit that he is a child of God, an

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heir of God, a joint-heir with Christ.

But whence do all these blessings flow? The Holy Ghost by the pen of Paul puts them on a right foundation. Does the Apostle say, "Because ye have been so virtuous, so pious, so charitable, so obedient, and so excellent in all your conduct, therefore God has given you the adoption of sons"? And yet is not that doctrine openly or tacitly proclaimed from a thousand pulpits? Is not this the usual strain, though sometimes cautiously and delicately wrapped up? If you will be obedient, if you will serve God, if you will be religious, then He will adopt you into His family. But does the Apostle Paul use such language? See on what a different foundation he puts the adoption of children: "When the fulness of time was come." Man could not delay it, man could not hasten it; no man asked Him, no man dared to dream of such a thing. "He sent forth His Son." And what reception did His Son meet with? Was not the sword of Herod drawn against Him almost as soon as He lay in His cradle-manger? Was He not hated and despised through life, and at last did not His blood-thirsty enemies in fulfilling God's Word, nail Him to the accursed tree? As the Lord spoke in the parable, when the lord of the vineyard sent his son, this was the language of the vine-dressers, "This is the heir, let us kill him," and they cast him out of the vineyard, and put him to death. But God, unmoved by human entreaties, and undeterred by human wickedness, for His own name's sake, and the salvation of His Church and people, "sent forth His Son to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Not because we are holy, religious, and pious, but because God hath sent forth His dear Son we receive the adoption. There it all rests. Christ is the fountain whence the streams of grace flow, and from no other source can they or do they ever flow into a sinner's heart. Have you not found it so by experience? What have all your good deeds produced? Did they ever bring you near to God? When the Lord was first pleased to open your eyes, and you began to work hard at the mill for life, did it not rather increase your burden, because you began to find

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sin was mixed with all you did? But when the Lord was pleased to open your eyes, and show you a precious Saviour at God's right hand, to reveal Him in your heart, and cause His blessed gospel to make sweet music in your ears, when He was pleased to raise up faith in your soul, whereby this blessed Jesus was looked up to, and received into your heart as the very Christ of God, did not this give you some springing of hope and love upward, some spirituality of mind, some heavenly breathings of affection into His bosom, some liberty from the curse of the law, some deliverance from guilt and misery? If ever your soul and mine have been revived out of darkness and bondage, it has been by the opening up of this way of salvation through Jesus Christ. Our own doings, if rested in, only set us farther from God. But the moment we look to Him, and Him alone, there is an opening up of the truth of God to the soul; the new and living way through the flesh of Jesus spangles before the eyes, and the soul finds access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ under the teaching of the blessed Comforter. We shall never have any filial feeling towards Him in any other way, or from any other source.

It is by believing the testimony that God has given of His dear Son, that we truly live and love. "He that liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." "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" (1 John 5:11, 12). By receiving this testimony, or record (the word is the same), we become manifested as children of God. We shall never get any better any other way; we shall only get worse. We shall never be able to overcome sin, and live a life of faith and prayer, except as the Lord is pleased to open up the blessedness of the gospel. All right motives, all right feelings, all right endeavours, all right works, all right words, only proceed from a knowledge of the glorious gospel. The reception of the gospel into our hearts always gives a measure of peace and joy in believing. But, poor dark creatures that we are, we often get so blinded by the smoke of Sinai, and we turn our eyes

away from the clear light of the gospel, and so look at Moses' angry face, as to lose sight of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And dark we ever shall be, whilst we continue within the sound of the thunders and within sight of the flames of that burning mount. But when we can enter experimentally into these words, "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest... But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and unto an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the Firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:18-24)—then we begin to enter into the gospel feast, and enjoy a measure of peace and joy in believing. O see what an encouragement this is for poor burdened sinners who are condemned by the law! God hath sent His dear Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. Are you under the law? Do you feel to be there? Does the law condemn you? Is sin your plague? Are you trembling at the wrath to come? God hath sent forth His Son to redeem such as you from under the law, that you might receive the adoption of sons. When you are enabled to believe in Jesus Christ to the salvation of your soul, every blessed feeling will be raised up in your heart. The Lord will send forth the Spirit of His Son with power into your soul, enabling you to cry, "Abba, Father!" He will own the divine relationship of His own creating and bestowing, His Spirit will bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God, and you will be sealed an heir with God, a joint-heir with Christ; and all this flowing out of, and to the praise of, that superabounding grace which, as where sin hath abounded, doth much more abound, to the glory of God, and the salvation of His people.

121 Encouragement To Prayer

The place where this sermon was preached is not recorded.
December 20th, 1846.

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"

Hebrews 4:14-16

It appears from several passages scattered up and down this epistle, that the Hebrews (that is, the believing Jews) to whom it was written, were undergoing many severe trials and persecutions. In fact, the brunt of persecution seemed especially to fall upon them, and this chiefly from their unbelieving brethren. A profession, therefore, in those days could not, as in ours, be taken up at very little cost, and carried on with very little personal sacrifice. It began in difficulty; it was carried on in difficulty; and it often ended in the death of the person who made it. The apostle in our text seems to have an eye to this, and to encourage those to whom he is writing to maintain their profession firmly and unwaveringly. But on what ground does he put the encouragement? Does he put it upon this ground, "Summon up all your strength; call up every motive power you possess; put your shoulder to the wheel?" He does not thus appeal to any power that they possessed in themselves; he puts it entirely upon other ground. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." And in order to encourage them still more to hold fast their profession, he points out some marks and characteristics of this great High Priest, that he is not unfeeling and insensible of what takes place in regard to his people upon earth. "For we have not an high priest which cannot

be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;” he knows what it is to be touched with a feeling of our helplessness, weaknesses, and infirmities, and this not from a theoretical knowledge, “but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” But it might be said, “This is very blessed and true, but how are we to derive any comfort from it? “There is,” he says, “a throne of grace set up, a throne of mercy erected and appointed; and to it you must come with your wants, trials, temptations, and difficulties.” “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Thus we may see, if God enable us, the connection betwixt these three verses before us, and how applicable they are to every tried and tempted child of God.

The apostle then gives us:

I. An exhortation: “Let us hold fast our profession.”

II. The ground why we should do so. That we have (1) “a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God;” and (2) One who can be “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” III. An Invitation that we should “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

I. Though we have not in our day open persecution, nor fire and sword to encounter, such as made a profession so difficult in primitive times, yet we have trials, temptations, and difficulties as perplexing in their measure as ever the first Christians had. It is true that the outward face of things is changed; but the inward face of things is not. Besides, we have reason to believe that the Lord in those days bestowed more abundant consolations, clearer manifestations, brighter testimonies, more immediate answers to prayer, more discoveries of his goodness and love, than he favours the church of God with, for the most part, now. Had they more

outward suffering? They had more inward consolation. Did they risk their lives with their profession? The Lord supported them under all their sufferings and tribulations. Did they maintain their profession at the risk of everything dear to the flesh? The Lord enabled them cheerfully to part with all, through the sweet manifestations of his love towards them.

But a true, genuine profession of religion will be always accompanied with difficulties. None but God himself, I am well convinced, can ever keep us alive unto his glory, and enable us to hold fast that profession with a good conscience. For instance, look, 1st. At our backsliding hearts. Our nature is bent upon backsliding; it is ever prone to evil; it goes as naturally after idols as a stone falls to the ground, or as a flame ascends into the air. Where then this backsliding heart is perpetually drawing a man aside, how hard it is to maintain an upright, sincere, honest, and gracious profession of vital godliness! 2nd. Again, Satan is continually thrusting at God’s people. Sometimes he works upon their unbelief, sometimes he stirs up the infidelity of their fallen nature, sometimes hurls fiery darts into their minds, sometimes he spreads snares to entangle their feet, sometimes he works upon the passions and lusts of their fallen nature, sometimes he attempts to deceive them as an angel of light, and sometimes he so confuses their minds and perplexes their thoughts that they hardly know where they are, or what they are. They cannot “see their signs,” nor read their evidences clearly. 3rd. Sometimes a man’s very desire to be honest and sincere before God will almost make him say, “I can make a profession no more, for I have so few evidences and so few marks of God’s grace; there are so few fruits of the Spirit in me that it seems mocking God to go on in a profession any longer.” So that what with the inward evils of our hearts, the temptations of Satan, and the numerous perplexities the mind gets entangled in, the deadness, darkness, coldness, and unbelief we are continually assailed with, it seems now almost as hard as it was in primitive days to keep up a consistent profession of vital godliness, or even

to drag one spiritual limb after another.

II. But how does the apostle meet this difficulty? What ground does he give for holding fast our profession? This! (1) "Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." As though he should say, "There is an ample supply for you laid up in the fulness of the Son of God. It is true that it is very difficult to maintain your profession. It is true that there are times and seasons when it appears as though you must abandon it and give all up. But," he says, "look at the secret supply, at the hidden source of all your strength." "We have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God." But why should this be the ground for holding fast our profession? Because, if it is a true profession, Jesus is the Author and Jesus is the Finisher of it. What read we? "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession" (or profession, the word is the same) "is made unto salvation" (Rom.10:10). What is the root, then, of all sound profession? Is it not faith? What was the root of the profession that the eunuch made when he was solemnly baptised in the name of the Lord? What did Philip say to him? "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). Faith in Christ as the Son of God was the ground of his profession; and it must be the ground of ours, if it be genuine. Now, Jesus is declared in the Scripture to be "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb.12:2). It is from him our faith comes, if we have a grain; and that faith he will finish, because "he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil.1:6).

Here, then, is encouragement. Did Jesus look upon you when you were in your blood? When you were a rebel, did he cast an eye of pity and compassion upon you? Did he separate you from the world? Did he constrain you to call upon his name? Did he bring you to his footstool, and afterwards reveal himself? Did he endear himself to your heart? He is then the Author of living faith

in your soul, and he will be the Finisher. And what is the pledge? The priesthood of Christ. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens."

The priesthood of Christ is one of the grand fundamental doctrines of the gospel. You will find it is blessedly set forth in the Epistle to the Hebrews. But what were the offices of the High Priest? I will just mention two. One was to offer sacrifice, another to offer prayer and supplication. When Jesus was upon earth he offered a sacrifice; his own spotless body and soul. That was the propitiation which he made as great High Priest, when he offered himself as the Lamb of God without spot or blemish. But he has passed into heaven; he is risen from the dead; he is ascended up where he was before. He sits now at God's right hand as the Mediator, Intercessor, and Advocate of God's church and people. There he performs the second part of the priestly office, that of prayer; for the court of heaven is filled with the incense of his blood and obedience, and thus by his intercession there is the perpetual rising up of the incense of his sacrifice before the throne of God.

But how is this connected with the holding fast of our profession? It is connected with it thus. God has accepted the sacrifice of Christ. It is the propitiation for sin whereby God hath reconciled his church and people to himself, and by virtue of that sacrifice he sends down his blessed Spirit into their hearts to make Jesus known. Nay more; Jesus himself lives and intercedes within the veil, and says, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). So that the holding fast of our profession is put not upon what we are, have been, or ever can be, but upon this, that we have a great High Priest, the Son of God, in our own nature, at the right hand of the Father, perpetually interceding for us. In other words, we have a friend at court; and because we have a friend there, we shall have the ear of the King. Jesus is this Friend, "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov.18:24). He has the ear of the Father, for it is said the Father continually hears him, and grants him all the desires of his soul. "The God of Israel grant thee thy petition"

(1 Sam.1:17). This suits well one who from day to day is tempted to cast aside his profession, and to say, "It is of no use going on any longer. I am such a sinner, live so little to God's glory, and am so little inwardly what I seem to be outwardly." How suitable then is this truth: "Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God," on this ground, "let us hold fast our profession." His blood still cleanseth from all sin; his righteousness is still from everlasting to everlasting; his love is still unceasing, and he himself "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb.13:8). You fluctuate; you change; the weather is not more unstable than you are; but he changes not. In him there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas.1:17). Then what an encouragement is here for a poor, tempted, tried child of God still to hold fast his profession that he has a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens, there to be his Surety and Advocate at the right hand of the Majesty on high!

(2). But the apostle adds a sweet encouragement as a still further motive to hold fast our profession: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." What is the main thing that makes you at times afraid about your profession? Is it not because you feel so much sin working in you; because you are not what you wish to be; because so many evils are perpetually discovering themselves; because you seem to live so little to God's glory? Now the apostle thus meets this feeling: "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." This great High Priest is not for men who are righteous, holy, and pure in themselves. Such are not the subjects of his kingdom. He makes his subjects indeed perfect by clothing them in his perfections, and sanctifies them by making them partakers of his holiness. But as to their own feelings, as to the confessions of their hearts, it is far otherwise with them. If then we are to wait until we are perfect, until we are holy, for Jesus to have pity upon us, we shall never have him to look upon us with

compassion at all. The apostle therefore tells us, "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;" as though he would say, "He is a sympathising High Priest; he carries a tender heart in his bosom; he is not one who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, he knows what we are; he reads our hearts, and sees their every movement, for all things are naked and open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do." O he looks on our infirmities as touched with the feeling of them, tender, sympathising, and compassionate!

How often we mistake the character of the Lord Jesus Christ! We know that he is holy, a Lamb without blemish and without spot, and therefore this feeling works in our minds, "He cannot look upon me, for I am unholy." We measure him by a human standard. "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou" (Isa.65:5). But the Lord Jesus Christ, though he is perfect, spotless, and holy, yet when he looks down from the throne of his mercy upon all the infirmities of his people, is touched with sympathising feelings; for his heart is full of compassion and loving-kindness. Let us carry this out from an illustration of what he was in the days of his flesh. He had not a spot of disease in his body. Bear that in mind, he was not like us. Some people talk about the mortal body of the Lord Jesus Christ. His body was not mortal. It is true it was capable of dying; but there was no mortality in it, nor disease. We never read in the Word of God that the Lord had anything like human sickness. Human sickness is the result of sin; and the Lord being perfectly free from every taint of sin, his body was therefore free from every taint of sickness or disease. Yet he could pity and cure human disease. When he saw Peter's wife's mother lying in a fever, he could come and rebuke that fever. When he saw a leper, he could cleanse him. Whatever disease a man was afflicted with, with a look, with a word, he could chase that disease away. So in a higher sense, though the Lord Jesus Christ has no sin in him, not a speck, not a spot, not a stain, not a blemish; yet he can look upon those who are all sin, a mass of iniquity from the crown of the

head to the soles of the feet, diseased and defiled throughout, and pity and cure them. Now is not this an encouragement for a poor sinner to look to this blessed Lord? We have not a stoical High Priest, one wrapped up in a monkish holiness, that says, "Come not near to me; for I am holier than thou" (Isa.65:5). No; we have not a High Priest who is so wrapped up in his sanctity that he has no eye to look off himself.

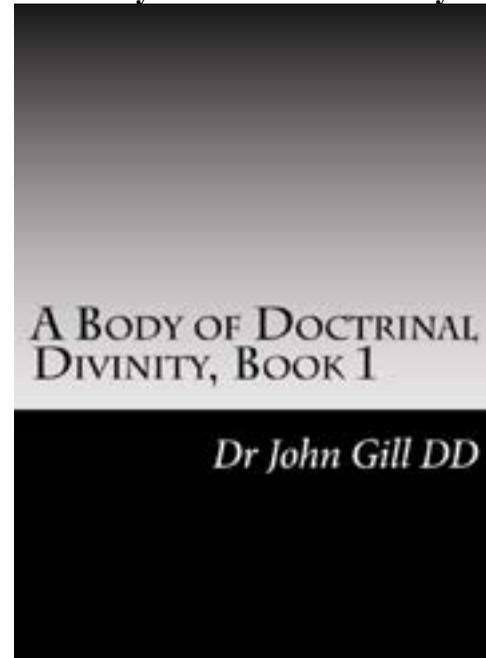
Such is a Hindu god, wrapped up in the contemplation of his own holiness. But the Lord Jesus Christ, though so glorious in majesty and holiness, yet has bowels of compassion, love, and infinite mercy towards those who are full of sin and infirmity. What would become of us if it were otherwise? Damnation would be our lot if this great High Priest were not "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Your coldness, deadness, barrenness, hardness, darkness, unbelief, infidelity, and all the workings of a corrupt nature often cause piteous lamentations and complaints to go up out of your bosom. O you have a great High Priest, one that is touched with the feeling of your infirmities. As a tender mother, who when her child cries in the cradle feels it because she is touched with pity and compassion for her offspring, so our great High Priest is touched and his heart melts with a sense of sympathising pity for the infirmities of his poor, needy ones. But some might say, "Yes, we believe all that, but Jesus cannot have had the experience of these things as we have them." O, but the apostle adds, "But was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He has not a mere theoretical acquaintance with temptations; but he himself has passed through the like sufferings. That is plain from the text: "In all points tempted like as we are." And in all temptations he was "without sin." Now I consider this a very deep and mysterious subject, which we can scarcely speak upon, lest we darken counsel by words without knowledge. This is the mystery, how he could be "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." How could this be? I will tell you as far as I can understand it. When you and I are tempted of Satan, we have a carnal principle

in our hearts that falls in with his temptation; and it is this falling in with temptation that constitutes sin. I will show you this in the Word of God. What says James? "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (ch.1:14,15). You see, in order that sin may be brought forth, there must be a conception. Temptation from Satan alone is not our sin. But when his temptation and our lust meet together, sin is their miserable progeny. Now the Lord Jesus Christ was tempted. We find this wonderfully set forth in Matthew 4:10. But temptation dropped off him as an arrow from a shield of steel; there is no dent made by it. The arrow may be very sharp, and may be drawn by a powerful hand: it touches the shield of steel, and drops down powerless. Some then may say, "If this be the case, how could the Lord sympathise with us?" What is it in you that feels temptation? It is not your carnal mind; that loves sin. Is it not then your spiritual mind? Is not that grieved? Does not that groan under, and is it not distressed by sin? But look at the Lord Jesus Christ. How his holy nature, how his pure and spotless soul must have been beyond measure grieved and distressed; yes, inexpressibly distressed by the temptations which the artillery of hell shot against him! So, though the Lord Jesus Christ never sinned in thought, word, or deed, yet he was tempted in all points like as we are. So that whatever be our temptations and trials, the Lord Jesus Christ has passed through the like; and therefore, being touched with the feeling of our infirmities, can help, and save, and bless us to the uttermost. What an encouragement this is to the Lord's poor, tempted, and tried people!

III. And this brings the apostle to hold forth the encouraging invitation: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." There is then a throne of grace. But what is the throne of grace? It is said, "A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary" (Jer.17:12). It is the Person of Christ, where

grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life; where grace superabounds over the aboundings of sin; where grace sways its triumphant sceptre over sin, death, and hell. He is the throne of grace to which the Lord's people are invited to come: the mercy-seat from which the Lord communes with them. He invites, nay, bids them to come, and spread all their wants before his footstool. And the text says, "Let us therefore come boldly." Why boldly? Because we have this great High Priest over the house of God, not one who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. "Therefore let us come boldly." Observe the "Therefore." Not because I am holy and righteous, have lived to God's honour, walked very consistently, subdued all my evil passions, and overcome all my besetting sins. O what a miserable ground would that be! It might do for Pharisees, and for them only, to stand on. The apostle does not put that as the ground for coming boldly. But because we have a High Priest who has opened up a way to the throne of grace, that we may come boldly. But what does coming boldly mean? It means coming with sweet liberty; not to stay away, kept back by Satan; not driven off by doubts and fears, full of apprehensions lest the Lord should not hear our prayer. It is to come with sweet liberty in our consciences, and open our mouths before the throne undaunted by sin and Satan, unterrified by the accusations of a fiery law, and not driven back by the many doubts and fears that press upon a tender conscience. "Let us therefore," he says, "come boldly unto the throne of grace." But some may say, "I have sinned; I have backslidden; I am full off exercises, and am sadly tried and tempted." "O," he says, "let not these things keep you back." They often, you know, do keep us back. We dare not go, because we have sinned against God; confusion covers our faces; guilt is contracted; we dare not pray. But says the apostle, "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace;" for we have a great High Priest who has been tempted in all points like as we are.

But what shall we get when we come there? Mercy. "That we may obtain mercy," the sweet manifestations of God's mercy, the discovery of his pardoning love, the shedding abroad of his infinite and eternal favour; that we may have all our sins blotted out, our backslidings healed, and our transgressions cast behind God's back. Nay more, that we may find there all our support, strength, wisdom, consolation, everything our souls may desire: "And find grace to help in time of need," when Satan harasses, when sin distresses, when guilt burdens. O he says, "let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy" from the hand of a kind and loving God, and find grace to help, and strength to support and comfort us in every time of need. But what is the "time of need?" The time of temptation, the time of affliction, and chiefly the time of death, when we have to lay our heads upon a dying pillow. "O," he says, "there is a throne of grace; shall we not go there to obtain mercy, which alone can sweetly comfort our souls in every time of need?" Here is encouragement. What a door the Lord here lays open before us, to encourage us to come to his throne of mercy! And does he lay one atom of weight upon any goodness in the creature, to encourage us to come boldly? Not an atom. May I not then appeal to your consciences whether the testimony of the Spirit here, that we have such a great High Priest, is not an encouragement to a poor soul to come boldly to the throne of grace, who finds nothing in himself but sin, confusion, and misery? We shall never suffer loss by coming there. O may we come often! O may we come boldly, may we come believingly! The Lord will never send any empty away who hang upon him, depending wholly and solely upon his mercy and grace; for in his faithfulness he has promised it. He will not, he cannot deny himself. Though heaven and earth pass away, his Word shall never pass away.

Other Publications**A Body Of Doctrinal Divinity Book 1****A System of Practical Truths**

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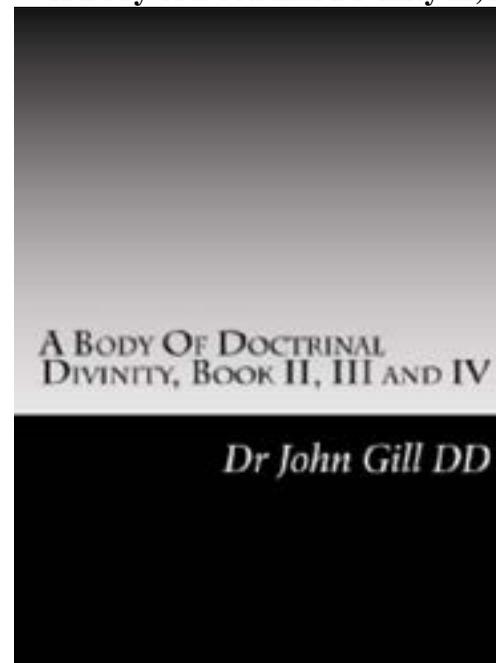
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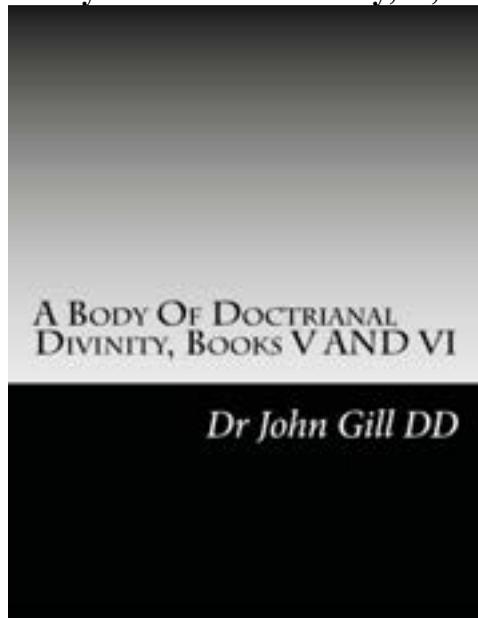
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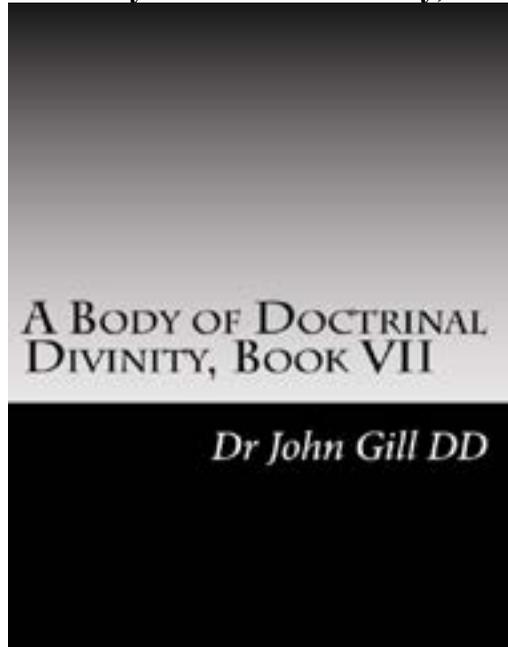
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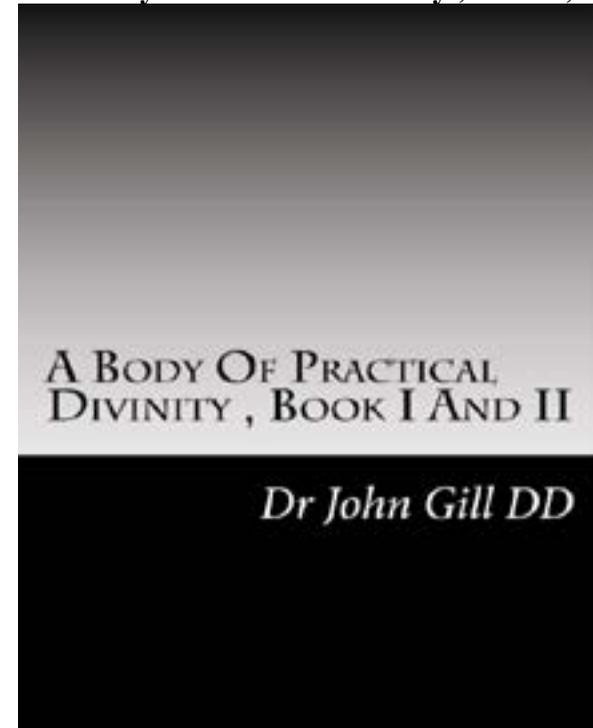
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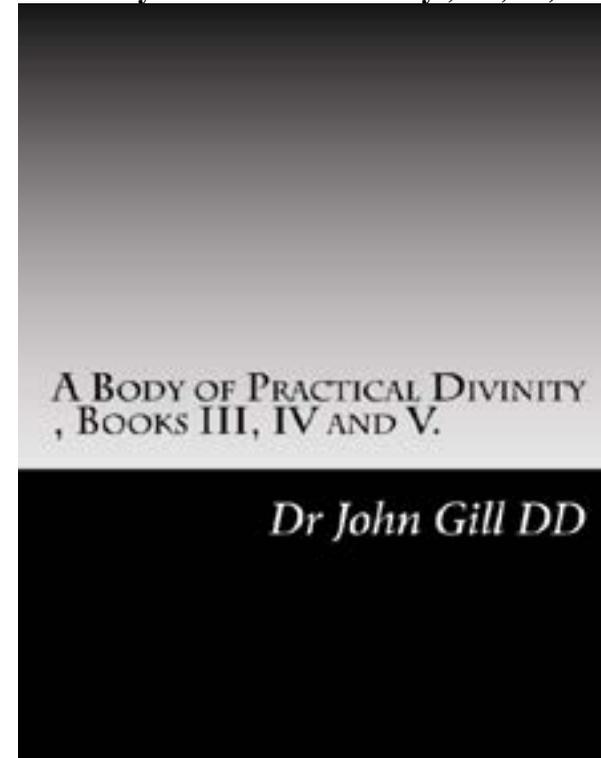
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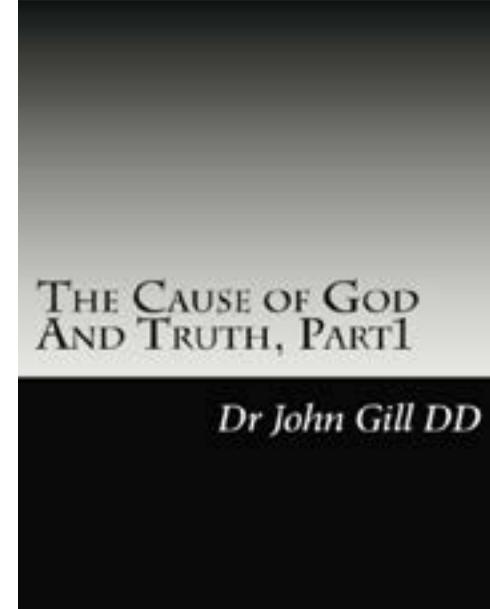
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The following work was undertaken and begun about the year 1733 or 1734, at which time Dr. Whitby's Discourse on the Five Points was reprinting, judged to be a masterpiece on the subject,

in the English tongue, and accounted an unanswerable one ; and it was almost in the mouth of every one, as an objection to the Calvinists, Why do not ye answer Dr. Whitby ? Induced hereby, I determined to give it another reading, and found myself inclined to answer it, and thought this was a very proper and seasonable time to engage in such a work.

In the year 1735, the First Part of this work was published, in which are considered the several passages of Scripture made use of by Dr. Whitby and others in favour of the Universal Scheme, and against the Calvinistical Scheme, in which their arguments and objections are answered, and the several passages set in a just and proper light. These, and what are contained in the following Part in favour of the Particular Scheme, are extracted from Sermons delivered in a Wednesday evening's lecture.

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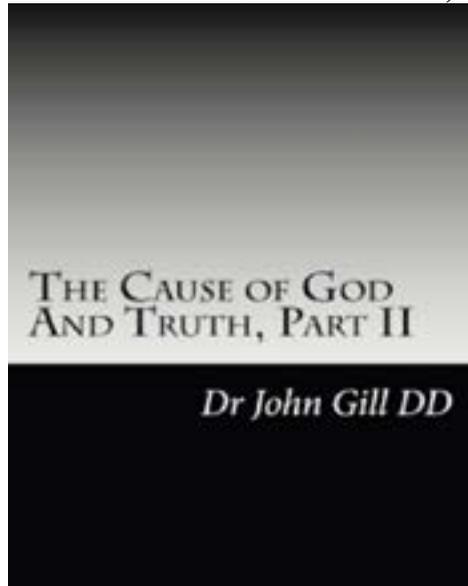
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BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

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.

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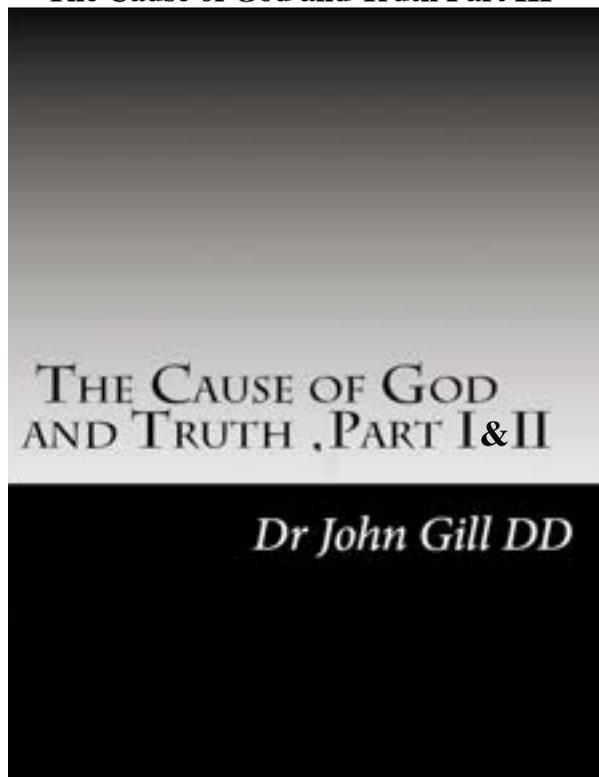
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The Cause of God and Truth Part III

The Doctrines of Grace

Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Authored by David Clarke

CetEd

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This book contains John Gill's answers to Dr Whitby objections to The Doctrines of Grace under the following heads.

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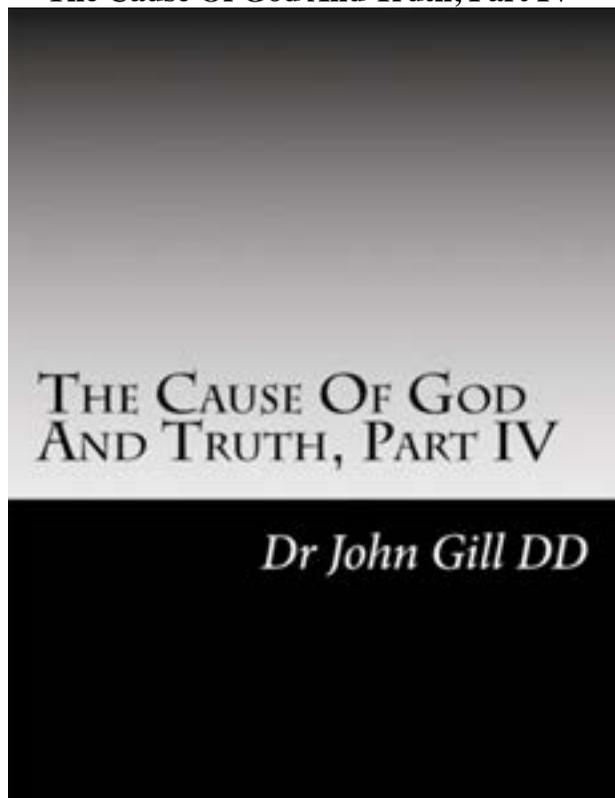
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The Third Part was published in 1737.

The Cause Of God And Truth, Part IV

Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Created by David Clarke CertEd

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The Third Part was published in 1737, and is a confutation of the arguments from reason used by the Arminians, and particularly by Dr. Whitby, against the above doctrines ; and a vindication of such as proceed on rational accounts in favour of them, in which it appears that they are no more disagreeable to right reason than to divine revelation ; to the latter of which the greatest deference should be paid, though the Rationalists of our age too much neglect it, and have almost quitted it ; but to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them.

In this part of the work is considered the agreement of the sentiments of Mr. Hobbes and the Stoic philosophers with those of the Calvinists, in which the difference between them is observed, and the calumny removed ; to which is added, a Defence of the Objections to the Universal Scheme, taken from the prescience and the providence of God, and the case of the Heathens.

The Fourth Part was published in 1738, in which the sense

of the ancient writers of the Christian Church, before the times of Austin, is given ; the importance and consequence of which is shown, and that the Arminians have very little reason to triumph on that account.

This work was published at a time when the nation was greatly alarmed with the growth of Popery, and several learned gentlemen were employed in preaching against some particular points of it ; but the author of this work was of opinion, that the increase of Popery was greatly owing to the Pelagianism, Arminianism, and other supposed rational schemes men run into, contrary to divine revelation, This was the sense of our fathers in the last century, and therefore joined these and Popery together in their religious grievances they were desirous of having redressed ; and indeed, instead of lopping off the branches of Popery, the axe should be laid to the root of the tree, Arminianism and Pelagianism, the very life and soul of Popery.

This is Part 4 of 4 parts, and a new edition, with some alterations and improvements, is now published by request.

This work contains:

Chapter 1 Of Predestination

Chapter 2 Of Redemption

Chapter 3 Or Original Sin

Chapter 4 Of Efficacious Grace

Chapter 5 Of Perseverance

Chapter 6 Of The Heathens

A Vindication of The Cause of God and Truth

This work contains:

Chapter 1 Of Predestination

Chapter 2 Of Redemption

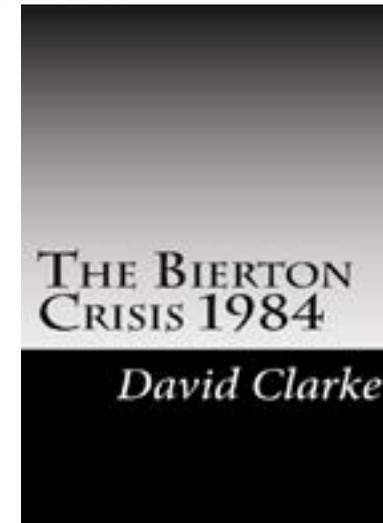
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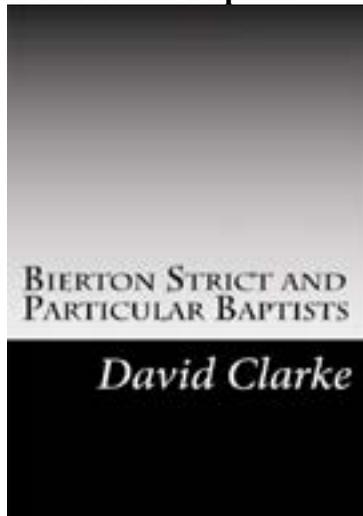
Chapter 5 Of Perseverance

Chapter 6 Of The Heathens

The Berton Crisis 1984



The following pages contain a collection of recorded events, which seek to explain the reason for my secession from the Berton Strict and Particular Baptist Church. Berton is a village near Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire. The Berton 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 Berton 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 his 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.

