

J.C. Philpot

Sermons

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March 1847 to July 1950

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.

122 The Seed Of Israel, Justified In Christ

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March 31st, 1847

“Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the LORD, shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory”

Isa. 45:24,25

123 The Prayer of Moses

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July 4, 1847

“Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.”

Psalm 90:15-17

124 The Performer of All Things

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July 11, 1847

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Psa. 57:2, 3

125 The Mighty Watcher, and His Twofold Work

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July 11, 1847

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shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.”

Hosea 14:1, 2, 3

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July 24, 1849.

“Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law; That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked.”

Psalms 94:12, 13

136 The Work Of Faith With Power 228

July 31, 1849

“Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2 Thess. 1:11, 12

137 Patience And Her Perfect Work 244

Jan. 9, 1850

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

James 1:2-4

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April 30th, 1850

“O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones”

Isaiah 54:11,12

139 A Waiting Soul and a Gracious Lord 285

July 21, 1850

“Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee.”

Isaiah 26:8

140 The Wilderness and its Fruits 298

July 28, 1850

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

Hosea 2:14, 15

141 Reconciliation by Death, and Salvation by Life 314

July 30, 1850

“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

Romans 5:10

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122 The Seed Of Israel, Justified In Christ

Preached at Zion Baptist Chapel, Bedworth on Wednesday evening,
March 31st, 1847

“Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the LORD, shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory”

Isa.45:24,25

The Scripture abounds with testimonies to the essential deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of these testimonies are expressed, as for instance: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever” (Heb.1:8). “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim.3:16). There we have the express testimony of the Holy Ghost to the essential divinity, and eternal Godhead, of the Lord Jesus Christ; but there are other testimonies of the Scripture, rather implied than expressed, as, for instance, all those passages that speak of certain acts peculiar to the Godhead ascribe these to the Lord Jesus Christ, such as the act of creation: “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth.” “Upholding all things by the word of his power.” The Lord told his disciples that to him were committed all things in heaven and earth.

Again, passages in the Old Testament which speak of Jehovah, are quoted in the New Testament as referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus our text, in the connection, we find certain things said of “the LORD,” that is Jehovah, the word being printed in capitals, certain things are said of “the LORD,” which, in the New Testament, are applied to Jesus Christ. For instance, the 23rd verse, “I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee

shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” We find the apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Philippians, quotes this testimony as referring to the Lord Jesus Christ: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (chap.2:9-11). We find the apostle Paul quoting, also, the same testimony in the Epistle to the Romans: “For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (chap.14:11). He having said, in the preceding verse, “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” So, again, with respect to the words before us, “In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.” We find the apostle Paul quoting these words in the first chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, referring to Jesus Christ: “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (verses 30,31).

Thus we have the testimony of the inspired apostle Paul, that the words before us are applicable to the Lord Jesus Christ, “Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.” In considering these verses, I shall, as the Lord shall enable me, I. First, Speak of the solemn determination and declaration of Jehovah, that, “In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.”

II. Secondly, The result and fruit of this solemn determination and declaration of Jehovah, “Even to him shall men come,” saying, “surely in the LORD have I righteousness and strength.”

III. Thirdly, The fate of those that are incensed against Jesus Christ, who are not of the seed of Israel, therefore not justified,

and never shall glory in him: “And all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.”

I. The solemn determination and declaration of Jehovah, that, “In the LORD Jehovah shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.” The Lord, here, has clearly determined who it is, and who it is alone, that shall be justified. Who it is, and who it is alone, that shall glory in the Lord, he has not left this matter to chance, nor the will of man, nor of flesh; he has declared by his own lips of unerring truth, that it is the seed of Israel only who shall be justified in the Lord, and shall glory in his name. Who are we to understand by the seed of Israel? The apostle tells us, “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.” (Rom.9:6) It is not professing Israel that come in for the blessing; but those chosen out of professing Israel; the objects of God’s electing choice, eternal love, and distinguished favour: these only are justified in the Lord; and these, and these only will be brought in God’s time and way to glory in him, and him alone.

But how comes it to pass, that the seed of Israel are said only to be justified in the Lord? Because they never can be justified by anything in self. How can God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, look on sin? He cannot! What can God accept, in the matter of justification, except that which is pure, spotless, and undefiled? Man being a fallen creature, a depraved monster of iniquity, every thought, every imagination, every word, and every action is tainted throughout with inherent and indwelling sin. How can man with his present nature approach Jehovah, gain access to, or bring before him a righteousness that will satisfy the demand of infinite justice, and be acceptable to a God of spotless holiness and unimpeachable veracity? How can he bring before Jehovah, as the Jehovah of Israel, such a righteousness that God can be well pleased with? Man being such a depraved creature, such a vile wretch, so utterly sunk in filth, carnality and wickedness, that unless God provide a way of justification, independent of the creature, there could be no justification; therefore no salvation. God cannot save

man consistent with his holy law and righteous attributes, without his being righteous; without his having a righteousness with which his holy and pure eyes are well pleased.

If God had not been pleased in his infinite mind to have devised such a plan, and in his own time and way executed what he had devised, that all the seed of Israel should be justified in the Lord, not a seed would have been saved, but the whole human race must have perished in the flames of eternal perdition, under the wrath of him who is a consuming fire: but there is a seed of Israel, an elect remnant, a blessed seed, loved of God, and chosen from all eternity in the Son of his love. He has determined that, in the Lord, all this seed shall be justified, that they shall stand complete in Jesus; that his obedience shall be theirs; that there shall not be found a flaw, a spot, a wrinkle, or speck upon them, because they stand clothed in the spotless obedience of the God-man.

The very expression, “In the LORD,” requires some explanation; we may gather several things therefrom: First, The seed of Israel is in eternal union with the Lord, the God-man Mediator. If you observe, the text declares, the seed of Israel is justified “in the LORD,” not by the Lord, though they are so justified by the Lord, and through the Lord, yet it is “in the LORD,” leading up our thoughts and fixing our eyes on that eternal union, which existed before all worlds, whereby the church had her standing in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by virtue of this eternal union; it is through this unalterable standing in him, she finds she stands acquitted and accepted in the beloved, as the Word declares, justified in him, his obedience being imputed to her, all that he has, has been sovereignly computed and put to her account, just the same way that a wife has possession of what is her husband’s, coming into possession of his name and property, taking all that he has; so the church, by eternal union to her Covenant Head, has all that his loving heart can bestow; all he has is truly hers, as we read, “All things are your’s... And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1 Cor.3:21 and 23).

But the words, “in the LORD,” admit of farther meaning, they imply, also, belief in the Lord. It is by faith in Jesus that we are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:39) The seed of Israel is not only justified in the Lord, by virtue of eternal union with him, but is justified, also, by faith in his name, by believing him to be the true God and eternal life: by receiving him as the gift of God; having a living faith flowing out towards him, whereby he is embraced in the heart and conscience, revealed, made known, and set up in the soul as the hope of glory: not only so, but the words, “in the LORD,” lead our minds and thoughts into communion with him. Thus the soul is not only justified by eternal union, but by faith in his name; that from this faith flows communion with him, the sweet refreshings of his presence, and the flowings in of his eternal love, the sprinkling of his atoning blood, the manifestation, and revelation of his glorious spotless righteousness. In this sense, by virtue of eternal union to him, by virtue of living faith, by virtue of sweet communion flowing out of this into their heart, all the seed of Israel are justified in the Lord. What a complete answer to all law charges; how it sets the sinner free from every accusation that can be brought against him. As Paul says, “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died” (Rom.8:34).

As though it were a sufficient answer for all, when this glorious truth is received into the heart, under the direction of the Spirit of God, the soul enjoys a measure of Christ’s sweetness, glory, and power; then it is, and then alone, he has a taste of real happiness, solid enjoyment, and true peace. It is God’s eternal purpose, that the seed of Israel shall not only be justified in the Lord, acquitted from all charge, and stand complete in him, but that they should, also, glory in the Lord. In order that the seed of Israel should glory in the Lord, it is absolutely necessary that they should cease to glory in self. By nature, we are all prone to glory in self, few but what love to glory through that cursed principle of self-esteem and self-exaltation. Nothing but the mighty power of God can put

down those cursed principles. We are prone to this pride, and it is strengthened and matured in a fallen sinner's heart. It is the work of the Spirit in the sinner's conscience to pour contempt on all the pride of man, to open up the depth of the fall, to bring to light all his hidden corruptions, to unbosom and lay bare all the evils of his heart, to upturn the deep corruptions of his fallen nature before his astonished eyes, that he may learn with true humility of soul, brokenness of heart, and contrition of spirit before God, to loathe and abhor himself in dust and ashes, as a monster of iniquity. If a man has not been taught by the strong hand of God in his soul to abhor, loathe, and cry out against himself as one of the vilest wretches that crawls on God's earth, he has never learned to glory in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When the Lord Jesus Christ reveals to his soul a sense of his love, unfolds a sight of his glory before his astonished eyes, and a measure of his love and blood is received into the soul, he is brought to look out of himself, and from all he has, to the Lord Jesus Christ. "Lord," he says, "I never dare rely on any one thing or glory therein, only in thee."

II. This leads me to the second branch of our subject, to shew in what way the seed of Israel is brought and justified experimentally in the Lord, and to glory in him. It seems to me they are appointed to trust in the Lord: "Even to him shall men come." Who are these men? Are they not men of the seed of Israel; regenerated men and women; redeemed of the Lord, regenerated by the Holy Ghost, and made alive to God, by his special teaching in the conscience? These men belong to the seed of Israel, God's own blessed, redeemed, regenerated family. Now the Lord's solemn declaration, and determination is, "To him," that is the Lord Jesus Christ, "shall men come." It does not rest in the will of the creature. It is God's solemn determination, his eternal declaration, that all the seed of Israel shall be justified in the Lord, and shall glory in him. It is, also, God's solemn, unalterable declaration, that "to him shall men come." It does not rest, therefore, in the will of the creature:

it hangs wholly and solely on the sovereign determination of God himself.

How does he bring it about? By a special work of grace in the heart. How do these men come? Under the teaching, drawing, and leading of the blessed Spirit of God in their soul. Where does the blessed Spirit find them? Does he find them willing to come, willing to leave all those things that men, by nature, love, and to which they cleave? No! It must be the special work of God himself in the heart and conscience, to bring about this solemn declaration: "To him shall men come." He brings it about by shewing us plainly, in ourselves, we are lost. Until a man feels in himself lost and undone, he will never come to Jesus Christ: for he is the Saviour of the lost. Until we feel lost he is no Saviour to us. When we feel lost, cut up by God's holy law, all our righteousness opened up as filthy rags, see no way of escape from the horrible pit; and the Lord is pleased to open up to us the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, his atoning blood, his perfect obedience, his justifying righteousness, and dying love; laying these things with some degree of sweetness and power on the soul, we come.

Why do we come? Because the blessed Spirit works in us to will and do of his good pleasure; he enables us to come, under his blessed teachings, leadings, and actings. In what character do we come? "Even to him shall men come." Under what character do we come? As having any goodness, any righteousness, or holiness, of our own? If we come with any goodness, holiness, piety, or religion of our own, we do not come aright; the Lord will not receive this, look upon, or accept it at our hands. We must come, having no righteousness of our own; all our righteousness opened to our eyes, and laid on our conscience as filthy rags. We must come guilty; with the burden of guilt on our conscience that we cannot remove; guilt enough to sink our souls to hell. We must come, feeling the burden of our transgressions; that we have exceeded, that our sins are innumerable as the stars in the sky, that they are of an aggravated nature, and nothing short of God's mercy can

pardon such wretches. We must come persuaded, and feeling that none else in heaven and earth can do our souls good. We must come as Esther, when she went to the king: "If I perish, I perish" (chap.4:16). I must go to him if I die. This is the state of those who come, not having anything to lay before him; they come receiving out of his fulness that which he is pleased to bestow.

The Lord's people come to him tempted with a thousand doubts and fears, whether they shall be accepted by him; whether such a holy, righteous, and blessed Jesus can cast an eye of pity on them: if they were better, holier, or to amend their lives; to present something worthy of his acceptance; they think then they might be received: but to go to him, full of everything hateful in his holy and pure eyes, nature seems to revolt from it; yet they are compelled by the necessity of the case, having nowhere else to go, no one else to look to.

They come to him because he is their only hope, the only resource for guilty, sin-burdened souls. They come to him also sorely tempted; feeling the power of sin working in them continually. They come, feeling the aboundings of iniquity in their carnal minds, the vilest lusts, and filthiest corruptions. They come, assaulted by Satan's blasphemies poured into their carnal minds, with all sorts of wicked thoughts against God and godliness, all vile suggestions, with their heart and mind at times full of confusion, nothing in themselves but misery and wretchedness, yet they come, and they see and feel, as the Lord is pleased to open up to their view, such a suitability, a sweetness, sanctifying, glorifying, and creative grace in the Lord Jesus Christ, that they feel if he will but receive them, look on, and smile on their souls; if he will but whisper some soft word of encouragement in their heart, thus: Fear not, I have loved thee. "Fear not I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine;" (Isa.43:1) they feel, in a moment, every crooked thing made straight, and every rough place plain. Their hearts rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory. They come, not merely compelled to come through the necessities

of their case, not merely with a heavy load of guilt; they come, seeing in him riches unspeakable; these riches, unspeakable, are exactly adapted to all their wants. Their eyes are illuminated by the Spirit of God; they see in him beauty unspeakable, a suitability they cannot describe, yet felt in every corner of their heart. These come to him, feeling he alone can do their souls spiritual good.

How do they come? With cries, groans, and tears rolling down their cheeks; heart-breaking sobs gushing from their breasts. They come to him pleading with him his own promise. They come to him by night and by day as he is pleased to work these supplications in their souls. They come to him fixing their eyes on him, feeling well nigh spent, that he will be pleased to apply his smile in their behalf to their souls, that he will be pleased to manifest his presence, shed abroad his love in their heart, and assure them they are eternally his. Now, if you find these things going on in your soul, you have a scriptural testimony that you belong to the seed of Israel, of whom it is said, "In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."

There may be those here, who cannot believe they are justified in the Lord; they have not the assurance of faith to believe their sins are pardoned, that they stand complete in Christ by faith; neither can they glory in him. Now, I may have some poor soul here who has not seen or enjoyed these refreshing communications of Christ, that lead the soul to glory in his name. Have we not a scriptural evidence in this one feature, they come to him? Does not the Lord say none come to him except the Father draw him? Is not this like what Peter says: "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious" (1 Pet.2:4)? This is the Spirit's work in the conscience of a sinner, no man ever has, ever will come, except he is drawn of God, made willing in the day of his power; and does not the Lord Jesus Christ say, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37)? Does he not say, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt.11:28)? How

encouraging these promises, these invitations are to all poor sin-burdened creatures, who are feelingly encouraged, invited, and sometimes enabled to come to him, to lay themselves at his feet, to wrestle with him, and supplicate his majesty, to pour out their hearts before him, telling him with tears, sighs, fervent groans, and heartbreaking sobs, that nothing but his love can satisfy them, and nothing but his blood purge their conscience. His love brings heaven into their souls.

Depend upon it, empty professors of religion know nothing in their souls feelingly, of coming to the Lord in this way. It is peculiar to the quickened family of God, wrought in their hearts by the power of his Spirit. The fulfilment of this gracious word, from God's own lips, of unerring truth, "Even to him shall men come," and then, when they have come, the Lord is pleased to draw them nearer to himself, to bless their soul with some discoveries of his goodness, mercy, and love. Then they can say, "In the LORD have I righteousness, and strength." Here we have three steps: First, God's solemn declaration, his unalterable determination, that "in the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." The second step, the result and fruit of this solemn determination on the part of God, that they shall come unto him; and the third step, springing out of that, is the language which they are enabled, as the Lord gives it into their hearts, to take into their lips, "In the LORD have I righteousness and strength."

None can say this, except those that come to him; none can say this, except those into whose hearts he has spoken it, to whose soul the Lord has appeared, to whom he has afforded, a manifestation of his grace and favour, "In the LORD," surely, shall one say, "have I righteousness and strength." That one whom the Lord himself has been pleased thus to teach, the Lord draws, surely, it is God's "Amen!" his eternal verity. These people, whom the Lord thus leads, draws, and teaches, shall say in the Spirit, in the assurance of faith, as the Lord enables them, "In the Lord alone have I, guilty, wretched, miserable, fallen, wicked, vile, I, righteousness and

strength."

Now, no man will be able to say, "In the LORD have I righteousness and strength," until he has seen a complete end of his own misery, his trials, his temptations, and perplexities; a man shall have to wait there, before he can say, feelingly say, "In the LORD have I righteousness and strength." So, again, if we are so conceited, have such lofty ideas of ourselves, are such self-righteous Pharisees, so unwilling to part with our own supposed goodness, depend upon it, that where the grace of God in the heart is in exercise, there will be such deep discoveries in the man that he will loathe himself, such a thorough turning over and up, that he shall see what a creature he is in the eyes of a holy God; then, before he can feelingly say "In the LORD have I righteousness and strength," he must be led to see all his own righteousness is as filthy rags, that he can trample it under his feet with a solemn determination to look on, and rest only in the Lord, saying, "In the LORD have I righteousness and strength."

Nothing is more easy, nothing more common than for men to talk of being justified in Christ, they use boasting language, that in the Lord they have this righteousness; yet, if we look at their lives, and watch their conversation, how little is seen of godly sorrow for sin, how little they know of brokenness of heart and contrition of spirit, how little do we see in them of a deep acquaintance with the corruptions of nature, what little slight appearance of holy awe, or tendency even to godly fear; there is little fruit, very little desire to produce fruit: it is evident there is very little circumspection in their walk: they are not living as under the eye of him who searches the heart and trieth the reins. These fruits of the Spirit always appear where there is a work of grace in the soul.

A man may say "in the LORD, I have righteousness;" but he must give me better evidence than saying it, else we are not bound to take that man at his word. We may rest assured he cannot say feelingly, and experimentally, "In the LORD have I righteousness and strength," till he is put out of conceit of his own. When, by

the eye of faith, he sees a glory and beauty in Jesus as made over to him, by the hand of a good and living faith, the blessed Spirit is pleased to engage our soul, to bring into our heart some sweet discoveries of his perfect obedience, and in the language of living faith, then we say "In the LORD have I righteousness." Depend upon this, we can do nothing, can have righteousness in no other, and from no other source, that will do our souls any good. But suppose a person says, I have righteousness and strength in the Lord; as long as he has any strength of his own, he will never have any strength in the Lord, for the strength of Jesus is made perfect in our weakness. Therefore, it implies, that the individual that uses these words aright has all his strength completely brought into weakness. Oh, what a painful lesson we have to learn, in order to find all our strength is weakness.

There was a time when some of us thought we had strength, and could resist Satan, and overcome the world; endure persecution, bear the reproach of man, mortify and keep down pride, and the evils of our heart. Have we found ourselves able to carry out this fancied strength? Have we been able to accomplish this resolution? What has been our experience in this matter? That we have discovered more and more our own weakness; that we cannot stand against one temptation. The least gust blows us down: our besetting lusts, our vile passions, and the wicked desires of our hearts, so inveigle our eyes and thoughts, so intertwine themselves round our affections, that we are gone in a moment, except God himself holds us up. Have we not found we have no power to believe, hope, love, pray or bring forth any one spiritual act, except God himself so far work in us to will and to do of his good pleasure?

Thus we learn our weakness, not doctrinally, or in our judgment; but surely and experimentally feeling ourselves the very weakest of the weak, so we are taught to feel ourselves the very vilest of the vile. There is a growing acquaintance with these things; as the Lord leads a man deeper down into the knowledge of his corruptions it makes him more and more out of conceit with his righteous,

pious, holy self, the more the Lord leads a man into the knowledge of temptation, his besetting sin, the power of his corruptions, the workings of his vile nature; in all this work, he knows and learns more deeply, and painfully, what a poor, helpless, weak, powerless wretch he is; and, as the Lord is pleased to unfold before his eyes, the strength, power, and fulness lodged in Jesus Christ; draws him, leads him, brings him, encourages him, and enables him to come to this fulness, pleading with the Lord to make his strength perfect in his weakness; by the hand of faith he draws supplies out of that fulness which is in Jesus Christ; he learns in the Lord that he not only has righteousness but strength.

I believe we learn in the Lord we have righteousness, before we learn that in the Lord we have strength. We learn our vileness before our weakness; our sinfulness before our emptiness. We learn we are lost, utterly lost, before we learn we cannot stand against sin; that truly our heart is as weak as water. As the Lord enables the soul to look to Jesus, hang on his name, his fame, his Word, his promise, from time to time, his blessed strength is communicated, breathed into his soul; so the Lord works in him to will and do of his good pleasure; then the poor worm Jacob threshes the mountains, beats the hills, and makes them fly before him as chaff.

When the Lord strengthens him, he can stand against temptation, overcome sin, bear persecution, subdue the evils of his heart, and fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil. When the Lord leaves him, he is like Samson with his locks cut, sinks into all evil, and feels the helplessness of his fallen nature. Whatever he might have felt before; whatever light, power, and love may have flowed into his soul, let the Lord remove his gracious presence, and the strong man sinks down into a babe; and he that in the strength of the Lord could thresh the mountains, falls down before the Lord as weak and helpless as a little child. Thus the Lord teaches us even painfully, and solemnly, that in him alone have we righteousness and strength. Thus he teaches us to look to him, hang on him, centre all the hope of our soul in him alone, who is mighty to save;

who is able and willing to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

III. But there are those that have different thoughts concerning Jesus. We have read, for all who are incensed against him they shall be ashamed. Thirdly, the fate of those who are incensed against Christ. Let us just look at the solemn determination and declaration of God. That there is a seed, an elect seed, called the seed of Israel, of whom God has said that in the Lord they shall be justified, acquitted from all law charges, and presented before God without spot or blemish, or any such thing. God has said, "In the LORD [alone] shall all the seed ... glory." If they boast, rejoice, pray, or speak, it shall be in him; all that they have or are comes from, and centres in him. They come by prayer, supplication, ardent cries, longing desires, and fervent pleadings; they come to him to satisfy the desire of their soul, that he would love them, bless them, and speak to their heart. Such as these he enables to say, in the Lord have I, poor I, lost I, guilty I, righteousness and strength.

Then there are those characters who are very different: there are those that see no beauty in Jesus that they should desire him, they feel no need of him, never see his suitability, never stimulated with his love, never behold his glory, taste of his favour, or enjoy his presence; on the contrary, their heart is filled with infernal enmity against him, and all that are his. Of these, we read, without exception, they shall be ashamed. As far as we are brought, by the Spirit's strong hand in our soul, to look to, and come to Jesus, and at times feel him precious, just so far we have the mind of Christ, just so far God's thoughts are our thoughts, and his ways our ways. Here, while we are cast into the mould of God, what God says is pleasing to us, and what we do is pleasing to God, there is a union and communion between God and the believing soul who is brought to look to Jesus, feel him precious, glory in him, and in him alone.

But there are others, who are rebels to God and godliness, who are even incensed against him: their infernal pride and devilish

enmity of their carnal mind is stirred up by the very thing that is sweet and suitable to God's redeemed family. Many are incensed against him because he is God; against his deity, because he is the eternal God. It seems to stir up the infernal enmity of some because they cannot bear that Jesus should be Jehovah. They are incensed against him because he is God over all, blessed for ever. They "shall be ashamed." Some are incensed at his sovereignty: because he died for the sheep and not for the goats; because he laid down his life for his friends, and not for his enemies. It is true, they dare not altogether use their blasphemous, scurrilous language against him; but they are incensed against those that contend for these discriminating doctrines of God's grace.

Others are incensed against him because he will be glorified in the hearts of his willing people; because he will not suffer their righteousness to stand on a level with his own: that he will not accept of creature righteousness; but hold it open, all mangled and marred before the eyes of angels. Others are incensed against him because he does not take into glory their marred, mangled, and filthy rags; others because he will shed abroad his love in the hearts of, and will manifest himself unto the sheep of his pasture, as he does not unto the world. When the Lord's people hear speak of the manifestation of the love of Christ to the souls of sinners, they are not incensed against it; they long for it themselves, and think those people happy that have it, and covet more of these smiles, and long to drink of the same cup. Those enemies that are incensed against him cannot bear to hear the Lord Jesus Christ visits these souls with the sprinklings of his blood, and the smiles of his love shed abroad in their heart: these discriminating favours, these tender mercies, these gifts that he sends, stir up the enmity of their ungodly heart.

The work of grace in the soul is so humbling in its teaching, whereby it makes the creature nothing, brings to nought and stains the pride of all human righteousness, that they are incensed against it. He relieves himself by speaking a word in secret against the poor and needy. Another is incensed against him because he thus deals

with the heart and conscience of those that fear his name. How many are incensed against the ordinance of baptism? It stirs up the mind, because the Lord Jesus Christ appointed this way as his ordinance. Those, then, that despise it, despise him; those that are incensed against it, are incensed against him. All that I can say is, it provokes the enmity of their carnal mind, that, whatever men may say, he will be justified in the hearts of them that believe; that he will take whom he pleases, leave whom he pleases, save whom he pleases, will work in the heart of his own people when and where he pleases.

This incenses many that cannot bear the sovereign dealing of the Lord Jesus Christ. All that are incensed against him shall be ashamed and confounded with confusion of face, and everlasting contempt, when God bids them depart from his presence as evil doers; the Lord Jesus Christ will say, "I never knew you: depart from me" (Matt.7:23). All those shall then be ashamed, because they have been incensed against him. Thus we see what a difference there is between those the Lord leads, and brings to fear and love his great name, and those that are left under natural, infernal, and bitter enmity.

There is a people the Lord loves: these people he has determined shall be justified in him; none shall be able to say anything against them; he has acquitted them, none shall find anything to bring to their charge when they stand before the bar of his righteous judgment; the Lord has determined they shall glory in the Lord all the day long; all their boast, joy, thanksgiving, they shall say, and they speak from the feelings of their heart, is in the Lord, and in him alone. The Lord leads these people; he has special dealings in their conscience; they come to Jesus, and receive these favours at his almighty hand, when he pleases to bestow them; then they say, and then only, in this glorious Jesus, this God-man, Immanuel, God with us, have I righteousness and strength. Others, who on account of these things, proud professors, are incensed against him they may cover their enmity with great swelling words; but, in

their hearts, they have enmity against this Man of Sorrows, they have an infernal dislike against his people and his ways; against his teaching and his readings in the hearts of his saints, their infernal enmity is ever going out.

The same God that has declared, "In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory;" the same lip of unerring truth, has declared, that all, without exception, however great, noble or dignified, religious, or irreligious, professors or profane; the Lord God Almighty has declared, with the lips of unerring truth, that, "All that are incensed against him shall be ashamed" and put to eternal confusion. The question is, on which side you stand? Whether incensed against him, hating, despising, abhorring him, or going out in tender affection towards him. Whether God's Spirit, by his almighty grace, and power has mercifully set us on the other side of the line, brought us to come to him, to believe on his name, to look to him, to know him in the power of his resurrection, and to glory in him?

I have only mentioned these different classes and characters; there are some, perhaps, who are just beginning to learn their need of Christ, in whose heart and conscience there are some convictions, to whom he is just beginning to reveal himself, not having clear views of Jesus, or the sweet manifestations of his love to their souls, yet have enough sin working in them to put them out of conceit of themselves; others have deeper discoveries of the evils of their heart, are brought to loathe themselves, on account of their corruptions, and their sin before God, in their heart, through the blessed Spirit's teaching, are brought to Jesus, some Scriptures are opened up, some sudden coming in of the Lord their righteousness, seeing a precious suitability in Jesus to all their wants, coming to him sometimes by night and sometimes by day, sometimes in earnest desires of soul, sometimes in cries, sighs, and longings, sometimes in groanings, sobbings, and broken and contrite hearts.

There may be here, others who have come: he has received

them, blessed their souls, shone into their hearts, and given them some testimonies that they are his, eternally his; they can say, and only say, as the Lord enables them, “In the LORD have I righteousness and strength;” this humbles them, and makes them little, low in their own eyes, and makes Jesus precious to their souls. So the others, doubtless, those who are incensed against him, dare not show their enmity, their thoughts are full of enmity, they cannot see any beauty in him, they despise him secretly; but all whom the Lord teaches, he brings to Jesus, they believe and trust in Jesus, these belong to the seed of Israel. Some have weak faith, some stronger. Some well nigh eaten up with doubts and fears, tried and tempted all day long; yet, with all their labouring, sighing, seeking, groaning, and humbling, they come to the Lord of life and glory, feeling

“None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good.”

These seed of Israel, the Lord, in due time, will remove all their doubts and fears, comfort their troubled conscience, and enable them to boast and glory in the Lord, and on him alone depend. As far as the Lord teaches us, this will be more or less our daily experience, being nothing in ourselves, feeling our weakness, helplessness, and wretchedness. The Lord enables us to come, looking to Jesus Christ, that we may receive out of his fulness. None of these will be sent empty away.

The Lord will bestow grace and mercy; he has all treasures of mercy for those that see and feel their need. He has said, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). Woe to those incensed against him, that cover over their enmity with swelling words, with lying tales, who despise his ordinances, his people, and his ways. Woe to those who whet their tongue like a sword, utter swelling words against the Lord Jesus Christ; who bend their arrows in their quiver that they may shoot against the Lord’s tried

and tempted people. Woe to those who exalt the creature, set up man’s goodness, and man’s free will, instead of the righteousness of Christ. Woe to all those who are incensed against him, however covered up and hiding their enmity. The same lips, of unerring truth, that said, “All the seed of Israel shall be justified,” has also said, “All that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.”

123 The Prayer of Moses

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

July 4, 1847

“Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.”

Psalm 90:15-17

The title of the Psalm is, “The Prayer of Moses, the man of God.” The Holy Ghost, therefore, used the pen of Moses to give this inspired production for the benefit of the church of God. But, bear in mind who Moses was. He is called emphatically here “the man of God;” being the man whom God raised up in an especial manner to do his work. He is also called God’s “servant,” and declared to be “faithful in all his house.” (Heb. 3:5.) The Lord especially favoured him, too, by taking him up into the mount, and there communing with him for the space of forty days; so that when he came down from the mount his face shone with such resplendent glory that the children of Israel could not bear to look upon it. But did the work which the Lord gave Moses to do, or did the glorious manifestation of the Lord’s presence and power set Moses upon some lofty pinnacle, far out of sight, and far out of the reach of God’s family? It did not. He was a man of like infirmities

and failings with ourselves. And I say it with all reverence, had Moses by the favour of God manifested to him been set upon some lofty pinnacle, out of reach of the infirmities, sins, and exercises that God's people are tried with, the productions of Moses' pen would have been of little service to them. But we have him here, though so highly favoured, and so blessedly enriched with the lovingkindness and mercy of the Lord, in the same exercised spot that the Lord's family are ever to be found in. "We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." And thus, though he had been so highly favoured, he had not got beyond the reach of God's anger made manifest in his conscience when he sinned, nor beyond the reach of his secret sins being set in the light of Jehovah's countenance. Nor again, had he got beyond a cry after God's manifested mercy. "O satisfy us," he cries from the bottom of his heart (for nothing else can satisfy us), "O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." And then follow the words of our text. "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

There are four petitions in the words before us. God grant us to consider them in the light of the Spirit; and the Lord enable me to speak out of the fulness of a feeling, believing heart, what I see and feel in them!

I. The first petition runs thus: "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil."

What is the Lord's testimony concerning his family? Is it not this? "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord." (Zeph. 3:12.) Is it not the Lord's own solemn declaration, that "In the world ye

shall have tribulation?" (John 16:33.) Did not the Apostle Paul confirm the souls of the disciples by exhorting them "to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God?" (Acts 14:22.) Do we not read also, 2 Timothy 2:12, "If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him?" And when John, the beloved disciple, saw a glorious company before the throne, and enquiry was made who they were, was not this the reply, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb?" (Rev. 7:14.) If this be the case, then, to be out of the way of tribulation is to be out of the way altogether. And not to know anything of "the sufferings of Christ" is not to be with him hereafter, and see and partake of his eternal glory. Thus afflictions, tribulations, exercises, trials, and temptations, lie in the path of every child of God. If, then, we have them not, it is a mark against us; but if we have, it is so far a token in our favour.

Now, what is that which I may call the substratum, the foundation of this prayer of Moses? It is, that the Lord would "make them glad according to the days wherein he had afflicted them, and the years wherein they had seen evil." He could ask to be gladdened in no other way. It was only in proportion to "their days of affliction, and their years of evil," he could ask the Lord to gladden their hearts. He could not come to the throne of mercy to ask the Lord to gladden them, except as being partakers of affliction, and being tried with evil. And thus we cannot with any consistency come to a throne of mercy, and ask the Lord to gladden, comfort, cheer, and bless our souls, except we are walking in a similar path. Affliction, then, in its varied shapes and forms, is the very basis upon which all consolation must stand; and an acquaintance with the evil of our hearts by daily exercise, must be the foundation upon which we come, to beg of the Lord that he would speak peace and comfort to our souls. If, then, we come in any other way, surely we cannot come in simplicity and godly sincerity.

There are, then, days wherein God sees fit to afflict his children; and there are years wherein he is pleased to show them evil. The Lord enable us to look at some of the afflictions wherewith he chastens his Zion.

1. Affliction is the lot of all the children of men; for “Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” (Job. 5:7.) But more especially is affliction the lot of God’s people. How few of the living family are exempt from providential and temporal troubles! How many of the Lord’s family are afflicted, deeply afflicted, in body! How many carry about with them a tottering tabernacle, a poor diseased frame, from which pain and suffering seem scarcely a day absent! And this they know by painful experience to be a severe trial, a painful, providential affliction. How many of the Lord’s people are deeply tried in circumstances! God hath chosen the poor of this world to be “rich in faith;” and he hath seen fit, in his infinite wisdom, that by far the greater proportion of his redeemed family should have to wade through many troubles arising from natural poverty and scanty circumstances. How many of the Lord’s family are pained and grieved with domestic trials! The very natural sources of affection become sources of grief and sorrow. The partner of their bosom, the children upon whom they have fixed their affections, often prove sources of trial to God’s family.

But though these are trials (and ever must be trials as God makes them so), yet how little are they in real magnitude compared with spiritual sufferings, with those afflictions in grace that the Lord sees fit to exercise his people with. For instance,

2. A sense of guilt, from sin being laid as a heavy burden upon the conscience—is not this one of the afflictions which the Lord’s people are from time to time deeply tried with? What cuts so deeply as guilt? What penetrates and pierces like God’s anger felt in the conscience? What burden is more hard to be borne than a sense of God’s wrath against transgression, when that wrath is let down into the soul? Is not this one of the afflictions spoken of in the

verse preceding our text? “We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.” Whenever God sets our iniquities before himself, and our secret sins in the light of his countenance, it must be a day of affliction to the soul thus deeply exercised.

3. The hidings and withdrawings of God’s gracious countenance; the soul hanging in doubt and fear; despondency working in the heart; inability to get near the throne of mercy; accusations of conscience; the fiery darts of Satan hurled into the carnal mind—are not all these afflictions which fall to the lot of Zion?

Nothing can cut so deep as spiritual affliction. Let us have temporal afflictions in all their magnitude; if the Lord is pleased to be with us and manifest his love, supporting us by his presence, and speaking peace to our souls, we can bear them contentedly, if not cheerfully. But when, added to these temporal trials and providential afflictions, there is guilt upon the soul, hidings of God’s face, darkness of mind, accusations of conscience, suggestions of Satan, and a thousand desponding feelings passing through the mind—how close it cuts, how it penetrates into the very depths of the heart!

But, besides these “days of affliction,” there are “years of evil.” “Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.” Affliction comes by days; evil comes by years. Affliction comes time after time, as God sends it; but there are many of the Lord’s people who have had years of profession (and of a gracious profession too), yet who in all these years have seen little else but evil—the evils of their heart brought to light; the workings of their corrupt nature; the pride, presumption, self-righteousness, sensuality, worldly mindedness, and desperate wickedness of their carnal mind made manifest, held up before their eyes, and laid with weight and power upon their consciences.

Thus, when they look back, perhaps through years of evil,

how few, how rare, how scantily dispersed are the marks and testimonies of God's love and favour to their souls! But O, how thick, how numerous, yea, how innumerable are the evils, the horrid evils, that are spread through that long course of years! Not perhaps absolute falls; but O, the backslidings of heart, the internal adulteries, idolatries, and departures from the living God! O, the carnality, sensuality, filth, guilt, and pollution of our fallen nature! O, the evils of every shape and name that all come trooping to view when God sets our iniquities before him, and our secret sins in the light of his countenance!

But who would think that these things were needful to be experienced; that "years of evil" were absolutely necessary to bring down the heart with labour, and to crush us into that spot where mercy and love are to be manifested? Yet it is the way, let men fight against it as long as they may; it is the way; and thus only so far as we are brought into this spot by "days of affliction, and years wherein we have seen evil"—perhaps little else but evil—can we cry from the bottom of our hearts with simplicity and godly sincerity, "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil."

Observe the word "according." It is the key-stone of the text; it is the pivot upon which the petition turns: "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil." Have our afflictions been great? Have the years of evil been long? Make us glad in due proportion to the "days of affliction, and to the years of evil!" Days of long, deep, heavy affliction, need gladness in due proportion; and years of evil, deep evil, dreadful evil, mourned over evil, abhorred evil, instrumentally qualify the soul to be made glad in due and equal proportion.

Are you one who knows nothing of inward grief and affliction? Are you one whose years have never been years of evil? The prayer is not for you; the petition does not suit your heart, though it may come from your lips. It was not written for you. When Moses under

divine inspiration took the pen in hand, and traced out in living characters the feelings of his soul, he wrote not this for you. But, on the other hand, if you are one of the Lord's tried, tempted family, who know, painfully know, daily know evil, temporal and spiritual (it is not strictly defined which), yea, long and many "years of evil," it is for you that this petition was written.

Does not the prayer fit into the very feelings of your heart? Is it not the very desire that seems most suitable to the exercises of your soul? "Make us glad." How is God to make us glad? What read we in the preceding verse? "O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." It is mercy, then, felt in the soul; mercy revealed to the heart and sealed with divine testimony upon the conscience, that can alone make us glad. Thus we see how spiritual afflictions that cut deep into the heart, and an experience of years of evil, fit and prepare the soul for being gladdened with mercy. Is not mercy for criminals? For none else. Is not mercy for guilty wretches? None else. Is not mercy for those who without mercy must perish under God's manifested wrath? For none others. And none else can be gladdened by mercy, except those who know the weight of spiritual affliction, and have been exercised, deeply exercised, with years of felt evil. Others may be gladdened by the opinions of men; by their wine, corn, and oil being increased; by such toys and baubles as poor, perishing worms delight in. But the tried, exercised family of God, who know what "days of affliction, and years of evil" are, cannot be gladdened except by the manifestations of God's mercy and love to their souls.

The pardoning mercy of God made manifest to them, and his eternal love shed abroad in their heart; the application of some precious promise to their fainting spirit; whispers from God's own mouth; smiles from the Lord's own countenance; teachings and testimonies from the blessed Spirit in the court of conscience; the "fear nots" that the Lord himself alone can speak to the soul; the being embraced in the arms of Jesus, and being satisfied, like Naphtali, with the favour of the Lord—these are the things that

alone can make a child of God glad. But do see how necessary, how indispensably necessary, “the days of affliction, and years of evil” are to prepare their hearts! Mercy, pardon, love, blood, salvation, eternal favour—what are all these to a man who knows nothing of the evils of his heart, and never moaned beneath the corruptions of his fallen nature? He may use the words, he may bandy them backwards and forwards, he may see them revealed in God’s book; but a vital, internal, and experimental knowledge of them—can he have them? can he desire to have them? He cannot, except in exact proportion to his experience of the “days of affliction, and years of evil.”

II.—“Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.” Creature works we here read nothing of. They had been long ago cut to the very ground. And what had been their death-blow? What had driven the dagger into their very heart? “Days of affliction, and years of evil.” These had been their destruction; creature righteousness they had stabbed to the very heart, and let out the life-blood of human merit. There is no petition, then, ‘Let our works appear!’ No. These were buried in the grave of corruption; these were swallowed up and lost in “days of affliction and years of evil.” But “Let thy work,” the finished work of the Son of God; the obedience of Jesus to the law; the atoning blood which he shed upon Calvary’s tree; the work which he undertook, went through, and completed—‘O,’ breathes forth the man of God in earnest cry, (and our hearts if they have been taught by the same Spirit, will unite in the same strain), “Let thy work appear unto thy servants.” What! can we not see that work in the word of God?—is not that sufficient? Can we not hear that work set forth by good men?—is not that sufficient? Can we not read it as opened up by the pen of ready writers?—is not that sufficient? Yes; for those who have never seen “days of affliction, and years of evil”—amply sufficient: but not for God’s exercised children; they have other thoughts and other feelings upon these matters. They know what darkness of mind is, the power of unbelief, and

creature helplessness; and they know that nothing short of the light of God’s countenance, the manifestation of God mercy, and the teaching and witness of God the Spirit, can make the work of Jesus appear in all its beauty, suitability, and glory; and therefore, they can say, “Let thy work appear unto thy servants.” ‘Give me, Lord, a sight by living faith of the atonement of Jesus. “Show me,” (the soul would cry, in the language of Moses,) “Show me thy glory;” reveal in my heart the finished work of Jesus; sprinkle my conscience with his atoning blood; discover him to me, and thus give me a sweet manifestation of his Person, love, blood, and complete salvation. Let it, Lord, appear before mine eyes, and in my heart, and seal it with divine power upon my conscience.’

But we may perhaps give another turn to the words. There is not only the work of the Son of God upon the cross, which we cannot see except in the light of God’s countenance, except in the manifestation of the Spirit to our soul; but there is the work also of the Holy Ghost upon the conscience; and that work, though it is an inward work, we can no more see, except as the Lord shows it unto us, than we can see the work of Christ upon the cross. O, the darkness, the thick darkness that often envelopes our mind, when we cannot read one mark of God’s dealings upon our soul; as the church complained of old, “We see not our signs.” (Ps. 74:9.) Can there be faith? we ask, where we feel perhaps little else but unbelief? Can there be life? when there is such deadness, coldness, and carnality? Can there be hope? when doubts and fears seem to take such strong possession? Can there be the work of God? when there is so much evil, horrid evil, painfully, daily felt? We need, therefore, that God should shine upon his own inward work; for then, and then only, can we see it.

“Let thy work appear unto thy servants.” ‘Lord,’ the soul cries, ‘make it plain that there is a work going on within: that my soul is taught of thee; that I am a partaker of thy grace; that the blessed Spirit is dealing with my conscience.’ Surely we may, without pressing our text too hard, give this turn to it.

“Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.” Children were especially included in the old covenant. We have no such special promise in the new; and therefore giving a New Testament turn to these words, we may speak of ourselves rather than of our children: ‘Let thy glory appear before our eyes and in our hearts.’ And is not this what at times we are earnestly longing to behold? What did the Lord Jesus Christ pray for his disciples? Was it not, that they might behold his glory, and see him as he is? as he says, “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24.) And what was it, when he was tabernacling upon the earth, that caught the eyes, and ravished the affections of his beloved disciples? “We behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14.) And have not our eyes sometimes seen this glory—the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? The glory of his Person; the glory of his love! that glory which delights the eyes, and touches the affections of the soul! But often we cannot see it; it is hidden from our eyes. We often walk in darkness. “We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noon-day as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men.” (Isa. 59:10.) Yet we want to see the glory, and to say with David, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen them in the sanctuary.” (Ps. 63:1, 2.)

III.—“Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.” What is this beauty? “The beauty of the Lord our God.” It is, therefore, the beauty of the God-Man; the comeliness, the holiness, the perfection, and glory that ever dwell in the Son of God. Now, “days of affliction, and years of evil” have marred all creature comeliness. There was a time, perhaps, when we could take some pleasure and delight in what we were, or what we vainly fancied we should be.

Our own righteousness had a beauty and comeliness to us; and our religion was amiable and pleasing in our own sight. But what has become of it? Marred, marred; effectually marred. By what? “Days of affliction, and years of evil.” These have effectually ruined, defaced, and polluted all creature comeliness. In a word, we were once deeply in love with self; but self has been shown to us such a hideous monster, in so vile and despicable a light, that we have fallen out of love with him altogether; and we have seen, at times, such beauty, glory, loveliness, and suitability in the Son of God—that as we have fallen out of love with self, we have fallen in love with him. Thus as all our own beauty and our own comeliness have been marred and defaced, the beauty and comeliness of the Lord have risen in due proportion. So that this has become the desire of our soul, “Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.” ‘Let us stand accepted in it; let it be put upon us by the imputation of God himself; let us be clothed with it manifestly before the eyes of a heart-searching Jehovah. Let the beauty of Jesus’ atoning blood, the beauty of his perfect righteousness, the beauty of his dying love, the beauty and holiness of his glorious Person be upon us, covering all our filth, guilt, and shame—spreading itself over all our nakedness, sin, and pollution—that when God looks upon us, he may not see us as we are, marred, defaced, and full of wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; but may see us standing accepted in the Beloved, with “the beauty of the Lord our God” upon us.’ Is there not something very sweet, very expressive, and very suitable in this petition? But what makes it so? I must still come to my old spot, “Days of affliction, and years of evil.” These have marred creature comeliness; these have spoiled creature beauty.

Now, feeling your guilt, filth, and shame, nothing can satisfy your longing soul but “the beauty of the Lord our God” being upon and imputed to you; so that he who searcheth Jerusalem as with candles, and whose eyes are as a flame of fire, may not see you standing in filthy, guilty, and polluted self; but may see the beauty of Jesus spread over you; and thus behold you holy in his holiness,

beautiful in his beauty, and comely in his comeliness; “accepted in the Beloved.” O what a matchless robe is this! It outshines angels’: for it is the righteousness of God’s only begotten Son! And if we stand with “the beauty of the Lord our God” upon us, we can bid defiance to all law-charges, to all the accusations of a guilty conscience, and to all the darts from hell.

IV.—“And establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.” The work of our hands—that is, what we do in God’s name and for God’s glory. Not the work of our hands in nature; but the work of our hands in grace. Does not this want establishing? See how he doubles the petition, “Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.” Are we not sometimes tried and exercised about the work of our hands?—what we have done, or tried to do for God’s glory and his great name. How marred it is! Can we preach without sin? Can we hear without sin? Can we pray without sin? Can we meet together without sin? Can we sit down at the table of the Lord without sin? Is not sin deeply engrained in our very constitution? Is not the warp and weft of sin so a part of the web of our fallen nature that we sin with every breath that we draw? And does not this mar the work of our hands? Does not this at times fill us with anxious questionings whether we have ever done a single thing to the glory of God? Self is so mingled with all we do, that it may well raise up the anxious enquiry whether we have ever done anything really right at all?

If these be our anxious thoughts, we shall want God to “establish the work of our hands upon us,” and thus make it plain and clear in our conscience, that what we do we do to his glory. God forbid, we should have any other motive. If we give of our substance what the Lord may enable, may it be for his glory. If we take any movement in divine things, may it be to his glory. If we speak, may it be to his glory. Now when we find sin and self so mingled with all we think, and say, and do, we want, “the work of our hands” established, that the Lord may make it plain and clear

in our conscience that our hearts be right before him, and our eye is single to his glory; that what we do for the honour of his name is accepted in his sight.

And is not this connected, too, with the grand basis which I endeavoured in God’s strength to lay as the foundation of all these petitions?—“Days of affliction, and years of evil.” It is the “days of affliction, and the years of evil,” that make us see the imperfections and deficiencies of everything done in the Lord’s name so that we want God himself “to establish the work of our hands upon us.”

Bear with me for a few moments while we rapidly run through the thread of our text. God in mercy leave some impression of its truth upon our conscience! Look first, then, at the grand foundation of all. See if you are right there. Do not leap over the threshold. See whether this corner-stone be laid in your heart. Have you,—have I, let me ask my soul solemnly—seen “Days of affliction, and years of evil?” And if so, what have been their fruit and effect? We may have seen both, passed through both, and yet have derived no profit from either. It is not the seed committed to the ground that gladdens the heart of the agriculturist; it is the crop which the seed bears; so it is with respect to affliction; for “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.” (Ps. 97:11.) It is not affliction as it is in itself; it is the fruit of the affliction. It is not having seen evil, but it is the effect produced thereby that we have chiefly to look at.

Now, have these “Days of affliction, and years of evil” brought you down, humbled your pride, laid you in the dust, worked in your soul humility, simplicity, and godly sincerity, given you a sight and sense of your real state and condition before God? If they have, well and good; it is your mercy if such have been their result. God keep you and me from being deceived in this matter.

But we will pass on to ask, whether we can say from a feeling heart what God taught Moses here to write, “Make us glad.” Does your heart long to be made glad? Then there must be some kind of sorrow; for to give gladness to a heart that is not sorrowful, is a

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contradiction in terms. Do we want then to be made glad? What can gladden us? Ask your conscience what can gladden it. Money, health, strength, and worldly happiness, gratified prospects, or flourishing children? Can they? can they? Fatal mark; fatal mark, if they can. But are the longings of your anxious bosom, the pantings of your groaning heart after the manifestations of God's mercy and love? And are there times, in the dead seasons of the night, when your soul pants after God, "as the hart panteth after the water-brooks?" If so, nothing can satisfy, nothing can gladden you, but the mercy and love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost. I should write myself dead in sin, had I not such feelings as these.

And do you long for the work of Jesus to appear, and his glory to be felt and seen in your heart? Are you fairly out of conceit with self, but see such beauty and preciousness in the Lord Jesus, that you long to have his beauty spread upon you, that you may shine in his beauty, and not in your own? And are you sometimes exercised as to the work of your hands, feeling yourself to be such a poor, guilty, filthy wretch, that you cannot see one good thought in your heart, nor one good action performed by you? You, then, want the Lord to establish it firmly in your conscience, that there is a work going on there, which was begun and is being carried on by his own powerful hand.

Have I, then, faintly and feebly traced out some of the workings and experience of your soul? Are they, or are they not, in accordance with God's inspired word? I believe they are. Do you believe so? Upon what does our belief rest? On the inspired word of God. That is true; for "let God be true, and every man a liar." And if, with all simplicity and godly sincerity, as I hope this evening, I have endeavoured to open up the mind and meaning of God the Spirit in the words before us, all the men in the world united together can never overthrow God's truth; that will stand when the world is in a blaze. If the Lord has raised up these things in your heart, let men say what they will; let Satan harass as he

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may; or your heart at times suggest what it can; the truth of God stands unaltered; and by that truth we stand, or by that truth we fall.

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Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning,
July 11, 1847

"I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me. He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. God shall send forth his mercy and his truth."

Psa. 57:2, 3

Few days, I think I may say, pass over my head without bringing trials and exercises in their train. Weak health, dejected spirits, opposition from without and from within; and, above all, darkness of mind, strong temptations, snares spread for my feet, a daily sense of backsliding and departing from the living God, a continual conflict with the horrid evils of my desperately wicked and depraved nature; all combine, more or less, to bring a daily exercise into my mind. And yet I would fain hope that these painful things are for my spiritual profit. I would fain hope, that by them the Lord is showing me more and more what I am in myself, and that the things of time and sense are but a shadow which is passing away. I feel too, the spirit of prayer stirred up by them in my bosom, and my heart's affections more drawn up to centre in the Lord himself. And I would fain hope too, that these trials and exercises are not only for my own spiritual profit; but that they are mercifully over-ruled for the good of the people of God among whom I may labour. I am well convinced, both in my judgment and in my conscience, that however my coward flesh may shrink from exercises and trials, an unexercised and untried minister is rather a plague than a profit, a burden more than a benefit to God's

tried and tempted family.

But what a mercy it is for us, that when we come to the word of God, we find that the blessed Spirit there sets forth trial, temptation, and exercise as the footsteps of the flock, as the path of the redeemed, as the way in which the Lord leads his beloved church and people.

Above all, what a mercy it is for the church of God, that there is one book especially in the inspired record, I mean the Book of Psalms, that puts forth so minutely, describes so accurately, and traces out so vividly, the exercises, trials, and temptations which the Lord's people have to pass through: so that therein, as the Lord the Spirit enables, they can read their spiritual features, and have from time to time some testimony from God himself, that they are walking in a right way, though it be a rugged way, "to a city of habitation."

The title of our Psalm is worth noticing, as it throws light upon the Psalm itself, and more especially upon the words of our text. "To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David, (which in the margin is, "Destroy not; a golden psalm,") when he fled from Saul in the cave." Thus, the Psalm was written under peculiar circumstances. It was when David fled from the face of Saul, and hid himself in a cave from his apprehended wrath. And, under the trials and exercises brought into his mind through the fear of Saul, knowing (or rather fearing) there was but one step between him and death if Saul's angry spear should overtake him, he vented the feelings of his soul in the Psalm before us.

With God's blessing this morning I shall make no regular divisions; but, to borrow a remark once made by a good man, I shall first 'take the text to pieces, and then put it together again.' May the Lord enable me to bring forth the mind and meaning of the Spirit in it, that it may be some spiritual food for those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness."

I.—"I will cry unto God Most High." Observe (it is worth observing) what a man of prayer David was! There is an expression

of the Psalmist which has often struck my mind; he says, "For love they were my enemies, but I give myself unto prayer;" it is, I believe, literally, "I, prayer;" as though he spoke thus, 'I am a man of prayer; I am prayer; prayer is so incorporated into my very being; it is so a part and parcel of my spiritual self, that I and prayer are one.' And what a mercy it would be for you and me, if we had the same spirit of prayer in us which we find from the Psalms was in David, I mean, as to its intensity, its earnestness, and its frequency. If we have not the same spirit of prayer in our breasts that he had in his, we are dead in a profession altogether. But O that we had—(O that I had! let me speak for myself)—that fervent, that earnest, that unwearied, that persevering, that importunate, and I must add that prevailing spirit of prayer which burnt as a holy flame upon the altar of the broken heart of the sweet singer of Israel! O what blessed answers should we then from time to time be favoured with!

But observe this too, (it is worthy of observation,) that if David was highly favoured with the spirit of prayer, and blessedly indulged with answers to his prayers, he was led in a very trying path. He had to pass through deep waters, painful and powerful exercises. And it is in these deep waters, in these powerful exercises, that true prayer flourishes. If you would have a tree to spread its branches abroad, and carry up its boughs high to heaven, you must have a soil proportionably deep. And thus, would we have prayer in our souls spreading far and wide, and lifting itself up high, there must be the deep soil of trial and exercise for it to spread its strong roots in.

But what forced this prayer out of David's bosom? It was being in the cave, where he fled from the face of Saul. It was whilst lodged in that gloomy, desolate, and dark abode that he said, "I will cry unto God Most High." What is indispensable before we can use the same words?

1. Before we are cast into the same mould of Divine experience, we must first have this conviction deeply wrought in and established

in our hearts, that there is a God above. For our hearts (at least, my heart), is so full of infidelity, atheism, and scepticism, that I need divine demonstration to convince me there is a God at all. I think I am not very far from the word of truth, when I say, that we need divine faith to credit the very being of God, for the inspired writer tells us, that “without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is.” (Heb. 11:6.)

2. But again. We need also to believe that God has power to deliver us out of the evils felt and feared. For, if we doubt about his power, our prayers will fall short; there will be an inherent weakness in them; they will be like an arrow shot from a broken bow, or when the string snaps as the arrow flies forth. So if, when prayer is aimed upward, there is some doubt in our minds, the string of our bow is broken in twain, and the arrow of prayer falls short upon the ground.

3. But again. There must be a persuasion (and this is the hardest part to get) that God has not only the power, but the will also. Not merely ability to deliver; but inclination.

Now when we get these three things wrought with divine power in our conscience; 1. that there is a God that hears prayer; 2. that there is a God who is able to save to the uttermost all who call upon his name; and 3. that he has a heart touched by sympathy, compassion, lovingkindness, and tender mercy, and is therefore willing to give everything that our heart is moved to request at his hand—then the arrow of prayer falls not short; it is aimed at a certain mark, and enters into the mark at which it is aimed.

But there is something to notice in the word “Most High,” which I must also enter into, as I promised to take the text to pieces. “I will cry unto God Most High.” It is as though he was surrounded with difficulties; and, like a swimmer attempting to swim through a mighty flood, but fearful lest every wave might drown him in the overwhelming gulph, he casts his eyes upwards “unto God Most High;” as though on him, and him alone, he would fix his look. Thus, we read, “The Lord sitteth upon the waterflood” (Psa.

29:10); He “dwelleth between the cherubims.” (Psa. 99:1.) And the prophet Isaiah in vision, saw “the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up”—exalted above all the poor things (I can call them no other) that engross our minds; and “lifted up,” that the eyes of waiting sinners might look unto him from “the end of the earth.” (Isa. 6:1.)

But in the word, “Most High,” there is also something to my mind very expressive. It is to “God Most High” that prayers go up from broken hearts, in all parts of the world where the Lord has a quickened people. “Unto God Most High” every eye is pointed, every heart is fixed, and every breath of living prayer flows. Jesus sits in glory as “God Most High,” hearing the sighs and cries of his broken-hearted family, where they dwell in the utmost corners of the earth and he is not only sitting on high to hear their cries, but also to bestow upon them the blessings which he sees suitable to their case and state.

Now when shall we thus come “unto God Most High?” When we are pleased and satisfied in self? when the world smiles? when all things are easy without and within? when we are in circumstances for which our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness are amply sufficient? We may, under such circumstances, appease our conscience by prayer, or rather its form; but there is no cry “unto God Most High.” Before there is a real, spiritual cry raised up, we must be brought to that spot, “Refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.” (Psa. 142:4.) Here all the saints of old were brought; Job upon his dunghill, Hezekiah upon his bed, Hannah by the temple gate. All were hopeless, helpless, houseless, refugeless, before they cried unto “God Most High.” And we must be equally refugeless and houseless before we can utter the same cry, or our prayers find entrance into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

II.—“Unto God that performeth all things for me.” Did not David, then, expect to receive something from God? What a mockery to pray unto him, and not want to receive anything from his hand! It is an insult to man to go as though we had some

favour to obtain from him; and when our business is asked, not to know the errand for which we came. And in a much higher sense, spiritually, is it an insult and mockery to the Majesty of heaven to go upon the bended knees, with lowly face or uplifted hands, to ask for what we neither know nor care about, or for which we have no earnest desire, and do not need, deeply need, the blessing for which we pretend (for it is a pretence) to beseech God to bestow.

“Unto God that performeth all things for me.” If God did not perform something for us; nay more, if God did not perform all things for us, it would be a mockery, a delusion to pray to him at all. “The Hope of Israel” would then be to us a dumb idol, like Ashtaroth or Baal, who could not hear the cries of his lancet-cutting worshippers, because he was hunting or asleep, and needed to be awakened. But the God of Israel is not like these dumb idols, these dunghill gods, the work of men’s hands, the figments of superstition and ignorance; but the eternal Jehovah, who ever lives to hear and answer the prayers that his people offer up.

“That performeth all things for me.” What! all things? May I, then, go to God, and ask him for all things? No; there must be some limitation—God’s revealed will. I might ask; for instance, to be perfect in the flesh! Has God promised it? I might ask for the conversion of the whole world! Has God promised that? I might ask for health, for strength, for riches, for prosperity, for freedom from trial and exercise, for a smooth and pleasant path! Has God promised that? No. Though God “performeth all things” for his praying family, it is only those things which he has promised in his inspired record. There is the limit. It is indeed a limit; but how wide, how great, how extensive, I might almost say, how boundless the limit (if not a contradiction in terms) that God has put to what he has promised to give to them that ask him! But this is not all; there is another limit still, and that is, our present wants. There are a great many things you may, in words, ask the Lord to give; and yet you may not feel your need of them! Is that honesty? is that sincerity? is that uprightness? is that godly fear? is that the work of

the Spirit upon the heart? I say, no.

Then there are two limitations; first, what the Lord is pleased especially to lay upon our consciences; and secondly, what the Lord has promised in his revealed word to give to those that ask him. Carry this into your experience. The children of God are all exercised, but differently exercised; and therefore, though they are brought from time to time to cry unto God to “perform all things” for them, they do not all, and at all times, go to a throne of grace with the same or similar petitions; yet all, as the Lord works in their conscience, “cry unto God Most High, unto God that performeth all things” for them. For instance,

1. There may be some here whose chief desire is, that the Lord would manifest the pardon of sin to their conscience. Have not these a full warrant to go “unto God most High, unto God that performeth all things” for them with this petition? Is sin their burden? Does guilt lie with weight and power upon their heart? Are the terrors of the Almighty within, and fear, lest death and hell should swallow them up? Has God promised “to pardon the sins of those whom he reserves?” Is forgiveness of sins revealed in the everlasting gospel of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Then are they warranted—nay more, they are enabled—nay more, they are encouraged without and within: without, by God’s testimony; within, by the Spirit’s intercession—to go with these desires that the Lord would manifest his pardoning love to their souls.

2. Others again may have backslidden from God. ‘O surely,’ replies some one, ‘those must be very awful characters!’ “Thou art the man!” Hast thou never backslidden from God? The Lord in mercy may have kept thee from backsliding openly, or bringing a reproach upon his cause; but backslidings are not limited to open sins. Are there no heart idolatries? no eye adulteries? no departing from the living God? no hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water? no cleaving to the world? no delighting in the things of time and sense? no hugging in thy bosom that huge, that deformed, that ugly idol, more ugly than the hand of Hindoo

ever framed—thyself, that monster self—which thou so lovest, admirest, and almost adorest? Feel this, and thou wilt feel soon in thy conscience that thou art a backslider; for self, that ugly monster, will be perpetually drawing away thine eyes and affections from the living God to centre in that worthless and abominable idol. Now, when we feel, deeply and daily feel, our inward idolatries, backslidings, adulteries, and departings from the living God, has not the Lord given a gracious promise that these backslidings shall be healed? He says, “I will heal their backslidings; I will love them freely.” (Hosea 14:4.) Does not the Lord give a gracious invitation to his poor, backsliding children? he says, “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you.” (Jer. 3:14.) How the Lord sets forth the espousals of their souls unto himself, though they have departed from him and gone after idols! Now God can “perform all things;” he can heal their backslidings, and love the backslider freely; drop a sense of forgiveness into his conscience, and manifest restoring mercy and love to his soul.

3. There may be others of the Lord’s family who are suffering under powerful temptations. There is some temptation which has taken you, continually haunting and entangling your thoughts, creeping in upon your affections; and as the crafty spider twines its slimy thread round the fly, so there is some snare twining its slimy thread round your heart. You are as helpless in the temptation as the poor fly is helpless in the web of the cruel spider. But has not the Lord declared, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it?” (1 Cor. 10:13.) If, then, we feel we are in a temptation, and that none but the Lord can deliver us out of the temptation, have we not a warrant to cry unto him? Does not the Lord sometimes—I know from personal experience he does—bring us with sighs, cries, and earnest desires, that he would break the temptation to pieces, and deliver our souls out of the snare of the fowler?

4. But you may feel, deeply feel, the power of sin. Who knows it? who knows it? No man can know it, but the man exercised with temptations. He knows it; but even he cannot fully know the power of sin. Sin is like a powder magazine; it lies still and harmless till temptation comes; but one electric spark of temptation, if God do not quench the train, will set the whole magazine on fire; A look, a word, a thought, an injection of Satan—these electric sparks can in a moment kindle all these combustibles into a flame. Thus we find, deeply find, the mighty power of sin, and yet though it makes us groan and sigh and lament before the Lord, we feel we have no power over this monster. But the Lord has said, “Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” (Rom. 6:14.) And he has said also, “The elder shall serve the younger.” (9:12.) These are two certain things that God will perform, and which he does perform for those that come to him for deliverance in good earnest.

5. Or, you may be longing after some sweet manifestation of your interest in Christ. This conviction lies very deeply lodged in your soul, that your profession of Christ, however numerous the years may be that are passed away, all avails nothing without an interest in Christ, and a manifestation of that interest to your soul. And this perhaps lies as a canker at the very root of all your fears, gnaws as a worm at the very heart of the bud, as if it would eat up all your hope—because you have not the sweet testimonies of God’s mercy to your soul, and that clear sense of your interest in Christ that your heart is longing to enjoy. Doubts, therefore, and fears, and despondency all make such solemn head because you have not that in your bosom which you can hold forth as an answer to the accusations of Satan. Now has not the Lord promised to shed abroad his love in the seeking heart, and reveal his mercy and truth to the waiting soul?

Time will not suffice, and it might not be profitable to run through the various things that a living soul may be exercised with. But this I say, whatever be your peculiar trials, exercises, or

sorrows, here is the warrant in God's word, that you should "cry unto God Most High, unto God that performeth all things" for those that are his. Nay, I will add another word; it will not be a matter of choice whether you will go unto God or not; you will go under compulsion, and yet not under compulsion, for you will go under the sweet drawings of the Spirit; you will go under the peculiar power that we feel, but cannot describe, a power that carries and bears us along to a throne of mercy, and brings us there to pour out our complaints and desires into the ear of God that performeth all things for us.

III.—"He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up." David, I intimated, was at this time lying under a peculiar trial; the Psalm was penned when he fled from Saul, and hid himself in the cave—perhaps hourly expecting that Saul would overtake him and thrust his spear into his heart. Now, under these feelings he cried "unto God Most High, unto God that performeth all things" for him, to "send from heaven, and save him from the reproach of him that would swallow him up."

We may not be under precisely similar circumstances, though I believe if we fear God, and are honest and faithful in our day and generation, we shall have those (professor and profane), who will thirst for our life's blood, as Saul for David's. But I say, we may not be under his peculiar trial. I shall waive that therefore, and point out three things, of which we may justly say, that they are such as threaten to swallow up God's children.

1. Look at the power of sin. Is not that a mighty whirlpool, an all-devouring gulph, that has swallowed up thousands, and sometimes seems as though it would swallow us up too? And is there not "a reproach" in sin? And is it not this reproach brought upon the cause of God by sin that the Lord's people dread as well as sin itself?

2. But again. Is not Satan continually on the watch to swallow up God's people? What but body and soul can satiate his infernal

maw? But that one, after a profession of many years should be swallowed up by Satan—would not this bring a reproach upon the name and cause of God with which he has been connected?

3. And is not despair another vortex, an insatiable whirlpool which has swallowed up thousands? And are there not moments, many moments perhaps with us, when we may fear lest that whirlpool should swallow us up too? Are you sure that when you come to die you will have a peaceful end? Do not doubt and fear sometimes work in your mind lest at that solemn moment despair might swallow you up? Are you altogether delivered from the fear of death?

Has not death swallowed up his thousands? and must not death swallow up you and me? And if we do not die with a sweet testimony in our conscience, and blessed manifestation to the Lord's people around us, will there not be some reproach in it? And is not hell, too, an awful whirlpool, that has swallowed up millions? And are there no fears in our minds ever working, when Satan is tempting and harassing us, lest hell should swallow up our guilty souls?

Well, if you are free from these fears, it is your mercy. But then you cannot enter into the experience of David in this Psalm, nor can you say with a feeling heart, "He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up." But, on the other hand, if there are these fears working from time to time in your minds, and you tremble lest things should swallow you up, and by swallowing you up cast a reproach on your profession, and perhaps add bitterness to the draught, then you will be able to join earnestly in the words, "He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up."

You may observe here that David spoke with some degree of confidence. Perhaps you and I cannot always feel the same confidence. No; we are not blessed with as strong faith as he was; and we are not exercised with as strong trials as he was exercised with. Our blessings and our faith fall short of his blessings and

of his faith, because our exercises and trials fall short of his; for these two things will always be proportionate. We may not be able always to believe (though there are times, blessed times, sweet seasons, when faith springs up and actually believes) that the Lord will do this or that; nor speak with the language of confidence. All the Lord's people cannot use these words of David; nor can any of them at all times: but they all can turn it into the language of prayer, and say, "Send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up."

Look into your conscience; take a review (it will take but a few moments) of the things which the mind is more or less daily exercised with—I mean, spiritual things. Have you feared lest you should be swallowed up by them? 'Yes, yes,' is the reply from some troubled heart, 'I do fear lest the things you have mentioned, or some of them, should swallow me up.' Whence, then, do you expect your relief? where are you looking "to be saved from the reproach of him that would swallow you up?" To self or to God? To man or to your Maker? To the creature or to the Creator? If you are looking to self, you are wrong—altogether wrong; you are deceiving yourself; there is no help there. But if you are looking to God and to him you must look, and you will look too, if he is working with power in your heart—this I well know is the feeling of your soul: 'God must send from heaven a word into my soul,' "to save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up;" for every thing short of what God sends down from heaven, leaves me where it finds me—unsatisfied, dejected, unbelieving. It does not bring me out of that which I am labouring under, but leaves me (vile creature that I am!) a prey to sin, Satan, and self: but one word from the living God dropped into my soul, one smile from his most lovely countenance, sent from heaven with divine power into my heart, will save me, amply save me, eternally save me, "from the reproach of him that would swallow me up!" Are these your feelings? I am sure they are, from my own, if, indeed, I know anything of those exercises that living souls are experimentally

acquainted with.

IV.—But what did he expect "from heaven?" A vision in the sky? a dream by night? an audible voice? some wonderful appearance? a light beyond the rays of the sun? No; these would not reach his case. Here was his malady—at the heart. He wanted something, not addressed to the outward eye, nor audible to the outward ear; but something that would drop into the very depth of his bosom, and touch the whole inward malady under which he was suffering. Therefore, he adds, "God shall send forth his mercy and truth;" not dreams, not visions, not ecstasies, not trances! but "God shall send forth his mercy." And where is God's mercy revealed? Outwardly in the word of God; inwardly in the heart. And it is by sending his mercy into the conscience, shedding abroad his love in the soul, manifesting his pardoning favour within, that God "saves from the reproach of him that would swallow us up." Man may say, 'I do not doubt your religion; surely you have marks and testimonies of being a child of God!' Ministers may come and endeavour to soothe you, and often by their soothing make more mischief than they mend: 'O, no doubt, if you are exercised with those things, you are a child of God;' as though a man could be satisfied with exercises, and because he is hungering and thirsting after the Lord, could be contented with his famine and his drought. No; these things do not touch the secret malady, do not go far enough, nor deep enough, nor come with divine power as from the mouth of the Lord himself. All short of this leaves the poor patient afflicted, desolate, and dejected; and does not remove that under which his soul labours. But mercy, sweet mercy, sent from heaven, and dropped from above into his spirit, applied to his conscience, revealed to his heart, and brought warm into his very soul by the Spirit of God—that saves him from the reproach of every enemy that would swallow him up. For if he can lean, confidently lean upon the arms of mercy, what can man do, what can Satan do, what can sin do, what can death do, what can hell itself do to hurt him? If the mercy of God is upon his side, revealed to his heart,

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and sent from heaven into his soul, who or what shall swallow him up?

But he adds, “and his truth.” Not lies, not errors, not falsehoods—these cannot save the soul from the “reproach of him that would swallow it up.” Hypocrisies, vanities, delusions, putting pillows under armholes, plastering walls with untempered mortar; canting and whining people into religion—these cannot heal a wounded conscience, nor pour the balm of Gilead into bleeding hearts. Nothing can do this but truth, the truth of God, the “truth as it is in Jesus.” And mercy and truth are never separated; for we read, that “mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” (Psa. 85:10.) Wherever God sends forth his mercy, he sends forth his truth; and wherever he sends forth his truth, he sends forth his mercy. And it is God’s truth, and God’s truth alone, that can make us free; for “ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32.)

I have taken my text to pieces, as I promised, so far as the Lord has enabled me. Now let me put it together again, and present it before your minds as one complete whole. It may, with God’s blessing, then leave a more distinct and clear impression.

Under what circumstances were these words poured forth? When David was in the cave. You and I may be, spiritually, where David was literally—in a cave—the cave of your own bosom. Aye, we may be in the midst of busy London, in the streets of the city, in bustling Cheapside, and yet be in a cave; a very hermit, surrounded by trade and bustle, or even walking in the very haunts of men. Yes, a man may still have a cave in his bosom, and into that cave he may retreat as the hermit into his hollow cell, the cave of his own thoughts; his own distressed and dejected mind, his own deep and solemn reflections and exercises upon eternal things. We may flee into this cave, the cave of a man’s own bosom, as David fled into the cave from Saul. Every outward opposition and internal temptation will be sure to drive a living saint into the cave of his own bosom; and there he will seek to hide himself from the face

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of man, and commune with his own heart and God upon his bed.

Now when David was in the cave, where you and I may be sometimes, nothing could satisfy him. He might read the Scriptures, but those unapplied could not comfort him. He was compelled, therefore to pour, out his heart “unto God Most High,” who he knew was able to deliver him. He was convinced that the Lord, to whom he cried in the lonely cave, could perform all things for him; that there was not a spiritual desire in his bosom, not an exercise under which he laboured, not a sorrow that wrung forth the scalding tears, for which God had not an ear to hear, and which he was not able to perform for him.

And does not the history of David prove this to be true? Can a single promise be found that God made to him which he did not perform in his own time and way?

But though the anointing oil had touched the brow of David, here he was in the cave, with only a step between him and death, full of anxious care, listening to the footsteps of Saul. Yet still, at the very last point, God performs his word, and shews himself faithful to the promise which he had given him, and sets him upon the royal throne. But, while in the cave, at the gloomiest hour, when all things seemed about to fail, and after being hunted up and down, as he says, “like a partridge upon the mountains;” yet, in his greatest extremity, he cried unto God the strength of his heart, even “unto God that performeth all things for him;” and he felt sweetly persuaded in his own soul that he would save him. He could not tell when, how, or where; but he felt assured that God would “send from heaven, and save him from the reproach of him that would swallow him up;” and that the way in which he would accomplish it was by sending forth his “mercy and truth.”

Can you find any of these exercises, any of these trials, or any of this confidence going on within? If you can, you have some testimony in the conscience that the Lord is at work with your soul. You may be very low, very dejected, and very cast down; and you will be, more or less, if the Lord is leading you about and dealing

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with your conscience; but the same “God of all grace” who heard the cry of David, brought him out of the lowly cave, and set him upon the throne of Israel, is able and willing to bring your soul and mine out of the gloomy cave in which we may often dwell, and set us upon a throne of glory. “He lifteth the beggar from the dung-hill, that he may set him among princes, and make him to inherit the throne of glory.”

May God, who “performeth all things,” in mercy perform this for us!

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Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord’s Day Evening,
July 11, 1847

“And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the Lord.”

Jeremiah 31:28

True religion,—vital godliness, (the words with me are synonymous), has two sides to it. And by this mark it is distinguished from all pretension without actual possession.

If, for instance, we cast a glance at the profession of some, it is all upon the bright side of things. Constant, unwavering assurance, continually triumphing in Christ, complete victory over doubt, fear, sin, and Satan, is the staple of their religion. And they would fain have you believe, that they are actually and experimentally before God what they profess to be before men. But when we come with near and jealous eye to watch the fruits, internal and external, that spring from this splendid profession, how little do they correspond with the profession itself! Pride, covetousness, worldly-mindedness, levity, frivolity, a hard, contentious spirit, irreverence in divine things, bitter and contemptuous speeches

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against God’s tried and tempted family, intermingling with politics, and, in many cases, love of strong drink, running heedlessly into debt, and general looseness of conduct—how often are these dark marks stamped upon this bright profession of ‘always triumphing in Christ!’

But again. We may cast a glance at others who are always upon the dark side; who never seem to rise beyond a knowledge of the evils of their heart, and the power of temptation; who are continually falling into open sin, and seem to know nothing of faith in Christ, of hope in his mercy, of love to his name, nor any deliverance from time to time by the hand of God from besetting lusts; nor again, anything of sighs, cries, groans, holy mourning, godly sorrow, or self-loathing for their vileness and baseness. The staple of their religion, as well as the warp and weft in the web of their conversation, is man’s fallen condition by nature, and his helplessness and weakness; and yet this seems more expressed than felt, as sin never appears their grief and burden.

Thus of these two classes in the religious world, one is all upon the malady, the other all upon the remedy; both hold truth doctrinally, but each only a part of truth; and the work of the Spirit upon the heart seems to both alike unknown.

From these two extremes, true religion, vital godliness, is distinguished by having two sides, and these as intimately and closely connected as the mortice and the tenon. It is not all light, it is not all darkness; it is not all faith, it is not all unbelief; it is not all joy, it is not all sorrow; it is not all life and holiness, it is not all death and devilism. And I think, if God enable us to see the mind of the Spirit in the words before us, we shall discover something of these two sides in our text; and then it will be found not a dream of the brain, not a fiction of mine or of any other man’s imagination, not a crafty substitution of mere natural feelings and nervous impressions for the work of the Holy Ghost upon the heart—in a word, not “a cunningly devised fable,” but a spiritual reality, and one which God himself has stamped with his own divine testimony.

Two things we may observe, then, in the words before us. First, the watching of God to pull down; and secondly, the watching of God to build up. And these two things, corresponding to the two clauses of our text, I shall, as the Lord may give strength, wisdom, and utterance, endeavour to set before you this evening.

I.—"And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict." Every expression here demands a separate examination. Gods word cannot be lightly passed over. Every syllable dictated by the Holy Ghost is pregnant with instruction; and if we cannot dig deep into this mine of spiritual and experimental truth, the fault is not in the mine, but in the miner. The vein of spiritual ore is deep and inexhaustible. We indeed may not have wisdom or experience to penetrate beyond the surface; but let us not complain of the thinness of the vein when we should rather complain of our ignorance how to reach the treasure that coucheth beneath.

i. "And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them." Is there not something very expressive in this word?—the Lord watching over his people to bring about a certain work before designed in his own eternal mind? To my mind, the word contains much worthy of our closest enquiry and deepest observation. Several things may be gathered from the expression.

1. The all-seeing eye, and the all-accomplishing hand of God. Does he leave anything here for the creature to perform? Is one iota of the work put into the hands of man? No; God claims it to Himself as his own inviolable prerogative to watch over his Zion for a peculiar purpose.

2. Mark, too, a certain tenderness connected with God's spiritual watching over his people to bring about in them the secret purposes of his good pleasure. The fond mother watches over the cradle of her child; so the Lord, challenging a comparison with the tenderest mother that ever breathed, says, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the

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son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." (Isa. 49:15.) Thus as the fond mother watches her sleeping child till it awakes, so does the Lord tenderly watch over his Zion till his sleeping purposes awake on her behalf.

3. But the word "watch" points also to a fixed time in God's own bosom when a certain predetermined work is to be brought forth. He is watching (if I may use the word with all reverence) for a time to expire which was before purposed in his own eternal mind—"the set time to favour Zion."

4. It also points out how every circumstance is fore-arranged—that no event comes by chance, or springs out of the dust; that they are not the fruit of human wisdom, or the product of human industry; but are so foreappointed in the eternal mind that it is as if God has "watched" for every circumstance to arise whereby he means to bring his purpose to pass.

5. The word also points out (for we have not yet exhausted all that is lodged in the expression) the means, ways, and instruments which God designs to make use of in order to execute his own purposes.

6. And, not to draw too much out of the word, it also points to this, that God will never cease to watch until his work is fully accomplished.

Carry, or endeavour to carry these things in your mind, while I attempt, in the Lord's help and strength, to open up what he is watching to do.

"And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the Lord."

What a repetition of apparently almost synonymous expressions is here, all pointing to one work! But dare any say, a needless repetition? Dare any one charge God with that which he forbids in us, to think to be heard on account of much speaking? Has God forbidden us to speak to him with "vain repetitions;" and

will he use vain repetitions when he speaks to us? We may not indeed be able to enter into the fulness of every word here; yet doubtless, these varied expressions have each their separate and distinct meaning. As God may enable, then, let us endeavour to bring something spiritual and experimental out of each. I feel my ignorance and inability. The Lord teach and enable me to open up his own blessed mind out of the text.

ii. The first thing the Lord “watches” to do, is “to pluck up.” What is the idea contained in that expression? Carry your mind to a field covered with noxious weeds, overspread with thorns, thistles, and briars—is not “plucking up” an operation needed there? Take your eyes into your own bosom; look at that field by nature! Does not a field covered with thorns, thistles, weeds, and briars, represent in some measure what your heart is by nature? It was once the garden of the Lord, a smiling Eden; but sin came in; and through the entrance of sin, these briars and thistles have sprung up. Must they not be plucked up? “Ye are God’s husbandry.” (1 Cor. 3:9.) “My Father is the husbandman.” (John 15:1.) God here takes to himself the name, title, and prerogative of cultivating the soil, the barren soil, of the human heart. And his first operation is, to “pluck up” the weeds he finds there. Does not the Lord himself say, “Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up?” (Matt. 15:13.) And is not this true of the elect inwardly as well as of the ungodly outwardly?

One of the first weeds which the divine Husbandman plucks up is—our own righteousness! O that weed! how thickly it is spread over the surface of the soil! Sometimes, as we journey through the country, we see whole fields covered with weeds; some blazing with the scarlet poppy, others yellow with the blossoms of the charlock. Our eye tells us in a moment that the weeds, the noxious weeds must be plucked up before good corn can grow there. And our own righteousness!—is not our heart by nature overspread with it, as the field before alluded to blazes with the poppy, or is all yellow with charlock? It must, then, be plucked up. And will plucking up

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be very easy and pleasant work? When the husbandman sets to his hand to “pluck up” by the roots our own righteousness, must not pain attend the operation? Could the earth feel, and speak as well as feel, would she not groan and shriek as the plough tore open her bosom? And as the plough of God’s holy law enters into the conscience of a guilty sinner to turn beneath the soil the weeds of nature, shall his bosom be like a nether millstone, and feel no inward pang? It cannot be, it cannot be; pain must attend the operation.

And O how many things, did time suffice to enumerate them here, have to be “plucked up.” What prejudices! what secret love to sin! what cleaving to the things of time and sense! what embracing in the arms of our carnal affection things that God hates! O how spread, how overspread our carnal mind is with everything hateful and horrible, noxious and loathsome in the eyes of infinite Purity!

But God, in the case of his Zion, “watches” over her to “pluck up.” Time, circumstances, means—all are in God’s hands. Time cannot be hastened; circumstances cannot be created; causes cannot be produced, except as God “watches” over his Zion to bring about the purposes of his heart. But as sure as God has foreordained to “pluck up” self by the roots—be it righteous self or unrighteous self, profane self or professing self—the time will come, circumstances will arise, and causes will appear, all in the hands of God, and do his work. It may be under a sermon; it may be by reading the experience of gracious men; it maybe in conversation with a godly person; it may be upon a bed of sickness; it may be upon a bed of death! All these things are in the hand of God; for he “watches” over his Zion to do a certain work; and as sure as you belong to his Zion, will he “watch” over you to “pluck up” your weeds and briars, if that operation has not yet taken place.

iii. “And to break down.” What is the idea contained in this expression? View a city built in, as Jerusalem was, with towers and bulwarks, and almost impregnable. Shall that be broken down? It shall; and not one stone left upon the other shall mark the place

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where the temple stood. Is not this true spiritually? What towers, what bulwarks, what walls are in our heart!—like the cities of the Canaanites, “walls built up to heaven.” What enmity against God’s truth! what obstinacy of mind! what determination to have our own will and way! what perverseness! what self-esteem! what self-conceit! what deceitfulness! what delusion in all its shapes and forms!—walls, towers, bulwarks, these all built up against the entrance of God into the soul! And can the King of Zion find entrance into our breast when every gate bristles with battlements against him, and the very walls of our heart are armed to resist him? But forth he must come, conquering and to conquer; for the ancient word to him is, “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride on prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of the king’s enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.” (Psa. 45:5, 6.) Thus the Lord goes forth, and “watches” over Zion to break her down.

And what a mercy it is to be broken down! To have our prejudices against God’s truth broken down; to have the carnal enmity of our mind against God in some measure broken down; to have the obstinacy, waywardness, and wilfulness of our heart in any degree broken down; to have unbelief, infidelity, and all the suggestions of our evil nature against God and godliness broken down! The conquerors of old did not enter the city through the gates; the walls were broken down for the triumphant chariot to enter in. So with King Jesus. The walls of prejudice, unbelief, carnal security, and enmity against God, like those of Jericho, must fall before the ark; the battlements of wilfulness, waywardness, and perverseness must all be broken down that Christ may “come into the heart, and take possession of the soul.

iv. “And to throw down.” What is this idea? Something lofty. To “break down,” embraces the low as well as the high; it takes a general sweep against all that stands in the way of the Almighty:

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but to “throw down,” points to those lofty buildings which are violently hurled down, as if by an earthquake. And is not this the case spiritually and experimentally in God’s Zion? O what airy castles have we in time past built up, their very tops lost in the heavens! And have not some of these airy castles been thrown down? O youth, youth! what pleasing prospects danced before our entranced eye in youth! What future happiness in a long vista of coming years! What daydreams did buoyant youth and cheerful spirits picture forth!—days, alas! that never came. And it is our mercy they never did come. To picture days of happiness, prosperity, and joy for ourselves, and not one thought of God in them!—does the Lord approve of these airy castles thus built up? No. How can he approve of them? Were they not, like the Babel of old, built up in defiance of God? Was not this the secret language which every one of these airy castle builders uttered? ‘I can be happy without God; I can have pleasure without those pleasures which are at God’s right hand for evermore; I want not the Lord to make me happy; let me have what my carnal heart desires, it is enough.’ Treason, treason against the Majesty of heaven! The Lord cannot, then, consistently with his own perfections and purposes, allow these castles to stand. Throw them down; level these proud pinnacles in the dust; hurl them into deserved ruin. But O how painful to have these airy castles dissolved like the clouds of a summer’s evening! When the sun was dipping beneath the horizon, how they shone gilded with his expiring rays and beams, but when he sunk, they were turned into pitchy darkness! And O, how many clouds, springing from youth and cheerful spirits, and once gilded by the unclouded sun of health and strength, instead of proving substantial realities, have dissolved into thin air, or burst in storms over our heads! Throw them down.

And is there not in our hearts what I alluded to this morning— an idol worse than Juggernaut? Self! self! And must that idol stand where God in Christ deigns to dwell, and make it his temple? for “God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will

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be their God, and they shall be my people.” (2 Cor. 6:16.) Shall this Juggernaut self, then, stand in the place where God himself means to dwell? It cannot be. For “Christ hath no communion with Belial.” It must be thrown down. Worldly self, righteous self, professing self, profane self, holy self—down they must go into the dust that the Lord alone may reign supreme.

v. “And to destroy.” This word is of stronger import than any of the preceding. To “pluck up” weeds, to “break down” walls, to “throw down” towers, fall short of the expression “destroy.” We may explain perhaps its import by the words of the Apostle—“a removing of those things that are shaken;” (Heb. 12:27)—or by God’s command with respect to the abominations of Canaan, “Ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire.” (Deut. 7:5.) Our hearts are by nature full of Canaanitish idols and heathenish abominations, which must be destroyed. Lusts after evil things, adulterous images, idolatrous desires, strong hankerings after sin, besides evils which have the impudence to wear a religious garb, such as towering thoughts of our own ability; pleasing dreams of creature holiness; vain conceits of what we mean to do for God; swellings up of pride and presumption, trussed out and painted in all the tawdy colours of Satanic delusion—how can these abominations be allowed to remain rampant in the human heart? The altars and religious rites of Canaanites were to be destroyed as much as their idols; and thus we may say of that religion, very religious being—man, that his false worship and heathenish notions of God must be destroyed as well as his more flagrant, though not more dangerous, lusts and abominations. The sentence against both is, “Destroy them.” They must not, they cannot stand consistently with the honour of Immanuel, who is to have the preeminence in all things, and who is “the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.” And O what a mercy it is to have our fleshly and religious abominations alike destroyed; for I am sure that God and self never can rule in the same heart, that Christ and Belial can never reign in the same bosom, each

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claiming the supremacy.

vi. “And to afflict.” And is this what God is “watching” over you also to do? ‘How cruel! how cruel!’ at once whispers a voice in the secret bosom. Recall that thought; it is unworthy of a moment’s lodgment in your breast. It may sometimes even escape our lips; but self-pity is at the root. Reflect for a moment in your mind upon what I endeavoured to bring forward to point out what the word “watching” means. Does it not imply the deepest tenderness, the most anxious care, the most sacred affection? Yes; it does. If, then, the Lord “watches” over Zion “to afflict,” the afflictions that you now may be passing through are not by chance; your heavenly Father is “watching” over you, and bringing these afflictions upon you. Are you afflicted in body, in circumstances, in family, in mind, or by any of the various troubles that each heart knows and suffers most bitterly from? O could we believe it is the gift of God! O could we believe that the hand of God is in every affliction, in every trial, in every exercise, in every dispensation, however dark, however mysterious! And not only so, but that he is “watching” over the soul with the utmost tenderness, and yet with the utmost wisdom. The affliction must not go beyond its work; it would then cease to be such an affliction as God is bringing about. He “watches” over you. He sees that the affliction which you are suffering under is the affliction, the very affliction that you need. No other would suit you now; it is exactly adapted to your case and circumstances. Any other affliction at this moment would not be profitable; but this affliction, whatever it be that you are now suffering under, is exactly suitable to your present case.

God, then, “watches” over you who are his Zion “to afflict.” It shall not be too long; it shall not be too deep; it shall not be too heavy; it shall not be too overwhelming. Why? Because he who “holds the winds in his fist,” “watches” over his Zion “to afflict.” And can he afflict her too long? can he afflict her too much? can he afflict her (shall I use the word?) with an unfeeling heart? He cannot; for he loves her with an everlasting love. Love moves him

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“to afflict” her for her good and his own glory.

Now, how many of you have been thus passing under the hand of God? Take a review; cast a glance at the dealings of God with your soul. Let them not be unheeded, or cloaked in mystery. God give us eyes to see his dealings! And O, can you not see the truth of these words, that God has “watched” over every plucking up, every throwing down, every destroying, every affliction, for the abasement of your pride, of your self-esteem, of your self-righteousness, of your self-conceit? Can we not at times see how God has “watched” over every thing that he has thus brought upon us? But we may not now see it. No; unbelief may hold our eyes. When the disciples were journeying to Emmaus, they knew not they were walking side by side with their adorable Lord; yet their eyes being “holden” was no hindrance to Jesus being there! When broken-hearted Mary Magdalene saw the gardener as she thought, she knew not the Person of Jesus till he spake to her: yet ignorance of who he was did not prevent him being Jesus, nor prevent his being before her. The horses and chariots of fire surrounded the mountain where Elisha stood; yet the servant could not see them till his eyes were opened. But did his eyes being opened place the chariots there? They were there all bright and glorious, when his eyes were sealed in darkness.

Is it not so spiritually and experimentally? The afflictions under which you are suffering have a voice in them; but you cannot hear it. You cannot see the hand of God in the exercises under which you are labouring. No; seeing eyes are the special gift of God. Still, though it is the gift of God by which we see his hand in every thing we pass through, our not seeing it does not put the hand of God away. If so, the infidel, who says, “there is no God,” has annihilated Jehovah, if a word can do it. Our unbelieving, infidel heart indeed may say, ‘Can good spring from these afflictions? Can a blessing to my soul come out of these trials? Does this come from God? Does that come from God?’ Our unbelieving heart, I say, may mutter these things as much as the unbelieving lord, who said,

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“If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might such a thing be?” (2 Kings 7:19.) But he was punished for his unbelief. And we, though not trampled down into hell like him, as we justly deserve for it, yet may be chastened. Still, our unbelief does not alter the truth; God forbid. Shall the suggestions of Satan; or the infirmities, unbelief, infidelity, questionings, and suspicions of our heart alter the eternal truths of God! “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself.” (2 Tim. 2:13.) He is the same, unchanging and unchangeable and he “watches” over his Zion for her spiritual benefit, whether it be to afflict or to comfort, to throw down or to build up.

II.—But we pass on to consider the other side of our subject. “So will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the Lord.” May we not, must we not, carry with us still the same idea? Yes. What does “watching” here imply? That all is fore-appointed in the mind of God; all designed to be brought about at a certain time, and in a certain way, by certain means to perform certain purposes, and to effect a certain work. In all these the eye, the heart, and the hand of God are intimately concerned.

1. “So will I watch over them to build.” But what comes first? Does not plucking up, breaking down, and throwing down precede building? It must in nature, much more in grace. What? if there is a hovel, a filthy hovel, standing upon the site designed for a palace, shall that hovel stand to be an eye-sore to the sovereign, or occupy the ground on which a noble edifice is to be erected? Common sense would answer, ‘Sweep it off the face of the earth; let not one vestige remain. It must not, it cannot occupy the ground that the palace is to stand upon.’ So, if my righteousness, my prejudices, my pride, my hypocrisy, my carnal nature in all its shapes and forms, is to stand up in all its native arrogance, can the lowly Jesus come and take up his abode in my bosom? No; these things must first be broken down; I must be a poor broken-hearted sinner. My pride, my self-righteousness, my self-conceit, my vain hopes and false confidence must all be broken down, laid low, and swept away; not

a vestige must remain when the temple of mercy is to be built up in all its fair proportions. I do not mean to carry the figure fully out. I am well aware, (no man better, if I may speak with all humility,) of the rubbish, the legal, the carnal rubbish, that seems at times to choke up the heart. Still there must be “a breaking down” before there can be “a building up.”

But what does God build up? His own work in the soul. Nothing more, nothing less. He does not rebuild the old ruined temple with stones taken out of nature’s quarry; but he builds up his own temple, springing up in harmonious proportions, as the temple of old, under his constructive hands. He builds up true hopes instead of false hopes; faith instead of unbelief; divine love instead of creature affection; Christ’s righteousness instead of our righteousness; true holiness instead of fleshly holiness. Thus he builds up the soul upon its most holy faith; builds up the temple of mercy in the heart. And this springs up instantaneously. When the Lord appears, the temple rises to receive him; the building springs up in a moment to receive the heavenly Builder. So when the Lord of glory appears, the temple is prepared to receive him; and those words sound, or may sound (though not wholly applicable) in the depths within, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in.” (Psa. 24:7.)

2. But the Lord “watches” over his Zion, not merely “to build” but “to plant.” I endeavoured to show, that by the figure “plucking up,” there seemed to be some allusion to the human heart as a field—the Lord’s husbandry. Now, in that field, once overrun with thorns, thistles, and briars, he “watches to plant” his fear in the heart, his blessed graces in the soul. But let us enter into a few of these graces thus divinely implanted. Humility, for instance, never grew in nature’s soil; it must, therefore, be planted in our souls by a divine hand. Sincerity and godly simplicity are not to be found among the charlock and the poppy of natural growth. They must be planted in our souls by the hand of the Lord himself. Faith in Jesus to the saving of the soul; a good hope through grace in his mercy; a

love to his precious name; tender affections, holy desires, heavenly breathings, sweet sensations, divine enjoyments, manifestations of mercy, and discoveries of God’s love to the soul—all these trees of paradise are to be found in this heavenly plantation.

These are some of the blessed fruits which this divine hand plants in the field (the garden, we may rather say) of the human heart; “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse.” (Song 4:12.) “I am come into my garden,” he says. (5:1.) “Awake, O north wind; and come thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.” (4:16.) “My Beloved is gone down into his garden,” is the language of the church. (6:12.) The Lord watches to plant. When he has plucked up our righteousness, he plants his own. When he has plucked up our pride, prejudices, ignorance, and carnality, he plants his own image—brokenness, tenderness, humility, and godly fear. When he has plucked up the thoughts of our heart that rise up against his divine Majesty, he plants those graces and fruits in the soul that spring up to his praise. And thus he plants every grace of the Spirit, and causes each and all to bear fruit to the honour and glory of his great Name.

And he brings forth outward fruits too. Consistency of life, separation from the world, honesty before men, integrity of lip and integrity of hand, uprightness of conduct, honourable principles and honourable actions; “whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report;” the Lord causes to spring up in the garden that he himself plants and waters with his own hand. God give us these fruits; and where given, grant us a blessed increase of them!

But let us for a few moments recapitulate and run over the things spoken, that I may succeed, if the Lord enable, in leaving some definite and solid impression upon your hearts. What brought you here at this time? Was it merely to while away an idle hour upon a Sunday evening, or to listen to the breath of the preacher? God forbid his dear family should come here with such a motive! In their right mind, they hear for eternity; that something

may be communicated to their souls which may not pass away like the morning cloud and the early dew, be dissipated by the world, “or prove like the hasty fruit before the summer; which, when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up.” (Isa. 28:4.) And my desire is, that the Lord would cause some abiding fruit to spring out of what may fall from my lips; that it may not be spoken to amuse, entertain, interest, or please you; no, but to profit you; and that not for an hour, a day, a week, or a month; but that some lasting fruit may be sown in your soul to all eternity. And this is why, as the Lord enables me, I desire to bring forth his truth and his words, not mine, that he may seal his own truth with power upon our hearts, and rivet it with his own divine hand in our conscience. What I have been laying before you are solemn realities and eternal truths, whether we believe and feel them or not. God grant that we may increasingly believe and feel them! They are of the deepest importance; God lay them with greater weight and power upon our souls!

Bear with me, then, for a few moments; and let us endeavour to look into our hearts (it is there where God works—it is to our conscience that God speaks.) What has been the experience of your soul? Can you look back, and see how there has been this plucking up, breaking down, throwing down, destroying, and afflicting work in your soul? ‘Yes,’ says one, ‘my life, my spiritual life has consisted of little else. But two things try me: one is, I do not see the hand of God plainly in these exercises; my mind is so obscured; my judgment so dark; I want faith to believe that the hand of God is in them. And the other thing that tries my mind is, it seems so much with me affliction and trial, breaking and throwing down, and so little building and planting.’ Well; but has there been this work carried on in your conscience? Has there been this plucking up, breaking down, throwing down, destroying, and afflicting? If you cannot see God’s hand, can you see the fruit? What is your case? A poor broken-hearted sinner at the footstool of mercy? a beggar, a bankrupt? a poor and needy, lost, and undone wretch?

The Lord has done all this. If this be the genuine feeling of your soul before his heart-searching eye, he has “watched” over you in tenderness. You may not see it. The sleeping babe does not see the watchful eye of the tender mother; but the mother watches still, though the babe perceive it not. You may not have perceived, and may not now perceive, the hand of God in your affliction; but the hand and the eye of the Lord are there though you see them not. And be sure of this (the Lord assure us of it, we cannot be sure of anything of ourselves!) that as the Lord has “watched” over you in the dispensations of his providence and grace, in plucking up, breaking down, throwing down, destroying, and afflicting; so, also, the Lord will “watch” over you “to build” and “to plant.”

The time will come which God has designed; circumstances will arise, causes shall work, and the Lord himself will effect his own purposes. The promise stands fast; the word is sure to be accomplished. As he has “watched” over you to do the one, so also will he “watch” over you to do the other. As he has “watched” over every circumstance, the very minutest circumstance, of your soul adversity; so will he “watch” to bring about every, the minutest circumstance, of your soul prosperity.

126 Peace, Tribulation, Victory

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on
Tuesday Evening,
July 13, 1847

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world.”

John 15:33

There is one feature in the discourses of the Lord with his sorrowing disciples (as recorded John 14-16.) which has struck my mind; and which I may perhaps best characterize by one short sentence—the entire absence of self. Let us, for a few moments,

consider the circumstances under which these discourses fell from the Lord's lips. It was upon that gloomy night when he himself was to be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, upon the very eve of those horrors of soul which he was to endure in the garden of Gethsemane, and immediately preceding those agonies of body and soul combined which he was to suffer on the cross. Should we not have expected that his soul would have been so occupied with what lay before him, that he could have had no thought upon any other subject? But we find the blessed Lord in these discourses with his mourning followers laying aside, as it were, all consideration of himself, and of what he was about to endure, and devoting all his thoughts and words—and, I may add, all his heart, to comfort and encourage them; as he speaks, "Hereafter I will not talk much with you" (John 14:30); as though he would say, 'Now I devote myself entirely to you; now I lose all thoughts of myself that I may speak all my heart to you! But when this is done, other work lies before me.'

Now, after the Lord had laid before his disciples what he saw fit in his own infinite and all-wise mind as suited to their encouragement and consolation; and not to theirs only, but that of the whole church of God in all future time, he concentrates, so to speak, the whole in the words of our text, as if that were the substance of all he had said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Three divisions of our text seem to occur to my mind, corresponding with its three clauses; and these we may briefly characterize as peace, tribulation, and victory—peace in Jesus, tribulation in the world, and victory through Jesus over the world.

I.—"these things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace." What are "these things?" Are they not what he had just laid before them? Every word, then, contained in the preceding chapter, I may say, is comprehended in the expression, "these things." We cannot indeed recapitulate everything which the Lord

spoke unto them in these three chapters. It would require not one sermon, but a long series of sermons to enter but a little into those holy topics of divine consolation. And yet, we must glance at a few of them; or we cannot enter into the meaning and fulness of our text. We shall, therefore, with God's blessing, endeavour to take a hasty glance at some of those things which the Lord spoke in their ears, that receiving them into their heart, and enjoying the sweet consolations that should distil out of there into their souls, "in him they might have peace." In so doing, I shall not follow the exact order in which the Lord spoke them; but take them up as they occur to my mind, yet preserving, as the Lord may enable, some thread of connection.

1. One thing which the Lord laid before them, that "in him they might have peace," was, the doctrine, or truth rather, (I prefer the latter word) of their union with him—their eternal, indissoluble union with his divine Person, as set forth in that parable, "I am the Vine, ye are the branches." (John 15:5.)

Now out of this eternal union with Christ flows every blessing. Only so far as we have an eternal union with Jesus have we any living union, or any spiritual communion with him. Only so far as we have a standing in Christ from before all worlds have we any interest in, or any title to, his atoning blood, justifying righteousness, all-sufficient grace, manifested presence, shed abroad love, and communicated favour. We receive nothing, we can receive nothing of a spiritual nature except by virtue of an eternal union with the Lord of life and glory. For as the branches receive their sap out of the stem only by virtue of their union with the stem; so can we receive blessings out of Christ only by virtue of union with Christ.

Now is not this divine truth blessedly adapted to bring peace and comfort into the soul? If we can in any way realize a union with Christ; if we have faith given to us to believe in his name, and through faith to "receive out of his fulness, and grace for grace," and find him from time to time supplying our wants, and communicating his presence, mercy, and love to our souls—it is,

it must be, the foundation of all true spiritual peace and comfort.

2. But the Lord also told his beloved disciples that he had chosen them in himself. He says, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” (15:16.) He assures them in these words of their eternal election in him; that he had loved them before all worlds, and had chosen them that they might be partakers of his grace here, and see his glory face to face hereafter. Now when we can believe (God must give us this faith) that we were chosen in Christ before all worlds, what can bring sweeter consolation to the soul? What can distil more solid joy and peace into the heart?

3. Further. He assured them that he would lay down his life for them. He says, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” (15:13, 14.) In these words he assures them that he was about to lay down his precious life for them; that his love for their souls was so great that he did not refuse to shed his own blood, that they might be washed in that holy fountain, and set free from all the guilt, filth, and shame of sin and iniquity.

4. He assured them further, that they were not “servants,” but “friends” (15:15); that the tie betwixt them was no longer, as it had been, of master and servant; but a far nearer, a far dearer, a far closer, a far more intimate relation—that of friend; that, therefore, as a friend opens his heart’s counsels to his brother friend, and they are thus knit together by the closest tie and most tender relationship; so to them, as to his friends, he would open the very secrets of his heart. He therefore was to them, not a harsh master exacting obedience as from servants, and marking every transgression to punish it; but a kind and tender-hearted friend, who could bear with their infirmities; yea, a friend who would stick closer than any earthly brother.

5. Again. He tells them that he was “the Way” whereby access was to be found to God; “the Truth,” so that by following him they should be fully secured from all error; “and the Life,” so that by believing in his name, life might flow into their souls, and revive

them in every hour of drooping and bondage. He assured them, too, that there was no other way of access to God, for that no man could come to the Father but by him. (14:6.)

6. He told them also, that he would not leave them comfortless (14:18); but that he would send the Comforter, who should comfort, by his holy influences and sacred anointings, their sorrowful and mourning hearts; that this Comforter should lead them into all truth, should take of the things that were his, and reveal them to their souls; should guide them also, and be with them even to the end. (16:13, 14.)

7. He tells them also, that because he lived, they should live also (14:19); that they should never be in that drooping state of soul out of which he could not or would not revive them by that life which they lived in him.

8. He assured them further, that he was going before them to prepare mansions for them, and would come again and take them unto himself, that where he was they might be also. (14:2, 3.)

These indeed are but a few gleanings of the ample harvest of consolation which is stored up in these blessed chapters. But the Lord, having laid before them these sweet and encouraging topics, tells them for what purpose he had spoken these things to them—“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.”

But will the mere speaking of these things bring peace? How often have we read these chapters, and yet found no peace flowing from them! But when the Lord himself, all whose words are spirit and life (John 6:63)—when the Lord himself is pleased to speak any of these gracious promises with power to the heart, then his words bring with them peace. And what more blessed legacy, what sweeter or more suitable inheritance could the Lord leave behind him for his sorrowing family than peace? Peace with God through the great atoning Sacrifice; peace in the court of conscience through the application of the blood of the Lamb; holy calm, divine tranquillity, produced by the blessed Dove brooding with

his heavenly wings upon the soul. How far peace surpasses in soul feeling every other blessing! The child of God is not looking for ecstasies, visions, dreams, or wonderful discoveries to the bodily eye or bodily ear. Such things as these, visionaries, enthusiasts, and wild fanatics make their boast in. But to have peace dropped into the soul from the mouth of the Lord; to have peace proclaimed in the conscience by that blood which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel; to feel that serenity in his soul whereby he can rest upon the bosom of Jesus, and find anxious cares and troubled thoughts all lulled within—can he desire, can he enjoy a more heavenly legacy, a richer portion than this?

But the Lord says, “These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.” Here lies the force of the whole. Peace in self! That never can be found. Peace in the world! That never can be had. Peace in sin! God forbid any of his children should dream of peace there for a moment. Peace in the things of time and sense! Are they not all polluted—all baubles, toys, passing shadows, smoke out of the chimney, chaff out of the summer threshing floor? Can an exercised soul—one tried, tempted, dejected, cast down with the difficulties of the way—can he find any peace in these things? His carnal mind may, to his shame, for a while be drawn aside by them; his wicked lusts and passions may be entangled in them; his fallen nature may grovel amidst these poor perishing day-dreams. But peace! there is no peace in these things; for God has said, “There is no peace to the wicked.” And so long as our wicked hearts are going out after wicked things, if the conscience is really tender and alive in God’s fear, there will be no true, solid peace within.

But how often are the souls of the Lord’s people like the troubled sea, which casts up mire and dirt! How often are they far from peace! How many anxious thoughts, painful suspicions, trying doubts and fears, assail and harass their souls! In these temptations do they find peace? Does the Lord mean they should find peace in them? Are not these things intended to be to them what the floating carcasses were to Noah’s dove—to drive them back to the ark? The

raven, that foul bird of prey, could rest and fatten upon the floating carcasses, and never returned to the ark more; but the pure dove, that clean bird, could find no rest for the sole of her foot, but in, or upon the ark. So while carnal professors can find peace in self, in the things of time and sense, in empty notions, in a graceless profession, in dry doctrines, in a name to live while dead—there is that in the heart of a child of God which, like the dove, can find no solid rest—except in the ark, the Lord Jesus Christ; as he says, “In me ye shall have peace.”

But what is the import of the words “in me?” Do they not point, first, to the truth of eternal union with Christ? for out of this eternal union flows every blessing in time. Do not the words also point to faith in Christ? for it is only by faith in Christ that we can have peace in him; as the Scripture speaks, “peace and joy in believing.” But is not the crowning point of “in me,” and that whence solid peace flows, communion with Christ? Not merely eternal union, not merely living union, but divine communion under the sacred influences and operations of the blessed Comforter.

Now the Lord designs that all his dear family should have peace in him; he therefore drives them out of every refuge of lies that they may find no peace in self. He brings them out of the world, that they may find no peace there. He hunts them out of sin, that they may find no peace there. He sees fit also to exercise their minds, and to try them again and again, that finding no peace in anything else, they may come as poor broken-hearted sinners to the footstool of mercy, look unto Jesus, trust in his name, and find peace in believing.

II.—And therefore it is that peace and tribulation are so closely connected. “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” The Lord knows what our hearts are. He knows what a close affinity there is between our nature and a tempting, alluring world. And he knows that each one carries a little world in his own bosom. He therefore declares, that “in the world we shall have tribulation;” a promise as sure as that “in him we shall have peace.” How glad we should

be to separate these two things! How pleased we should be to have no tribulation in the world, and yet to have peace in Christ? How our coward flesh shrinks from tribulation! The very thought of it at times makes us tremble. Yet the Lord has so joined together these two things—peace in himself, and tribulation in the world, that they never can be put asunder; and so far from a possibility of their being severed, we may add, they bear to each other the closest and nearest relation.

The Lord, then, has promised, that “in the world we shall have tribulation.” But how this staggers a child of God! He can understand, or seem to understand, what it is to have peace in Christ; but that his allotted path should be tribulation in the world, how it seems to cut deep, as it were, into the very fibres of his heart! And yet how needful, how indispensably needful it is, to have tribulation in the world; for how closely bound up our heart is in it. How glued and fettered our carnal heart is to the things of time and sense! What proneness, what daily; hourly proneness there is to go after idols; to amuse our vain mind with passing shows; to take an interest in the veriest trifles which surround us; and thus forsake the Fountain of living waters, and hew out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water. What a veil of enchantment, too, is often over our eyes; and therefore, what a series of troubles—what days, and weeks, and months, and years of trial does it take to convince us that the world is not our home, not our rest, not our enduring habitation. We live in a fallen world; and, therefore, in this fallen world tribulation of some kind or another must be our lot. We are born into a sinful world, and carry about with us a sinful nature, which is intimately and closely connected with the world, and therefore all the evils which are entailed upon a sinful world are entailed upon us by rightful inheritance. The wrath of God rests upon the world, because it lieth in the “Wicked One;” and we therefore, as sojourners in this vale of tears, come under his chastening hand. But the Lord mercifully and graciously makes use of tribulation, in various shapes and forms, to bring us out of

the world, that we may not be condemned with it, nor make it our rest and home. Thus he draws us to his blessed feet, that in him we may find that peace which we never have found, which we never can find anywhere else.

But what various sources of tribulation there are! If you and I could lay our hearts bare to each other; if we could compare our various sources of tribulation—how different they might be; yet each has his own suffering path; and each, perhaps, might think his tribulation the hardest to be endured. For instance,

1. Our very connection with the world is sure to entail with it tribulation. If a man has a business in the world, the very calling by which he lives will be connected with tribulation. There will be anxious cares, blighted prospects, disappointed hopes, bad debts, and a thousand painful circumstances so connected with the very business that he follows, so intimately blended with the worldly calling whereby he earns his daily bread, that he cannot escape tribulation from the very source of his natural subsistence.

2. How, too, the closest family ties prove sources of tribulation! If we have beloved children, they may be taken away, or grow up to grieve us. If we have loving partners, they may be snatched from our fond bosom. Our keenest sorrows may spring from our dearest and nearest social ties. And from these things there is no escape. No wisdom or contrivance of ours can prevent them. They are so appointed by the Lord, they are so laid in our path, they are so fastened round our neck, they are so a part of our allotted portion, that escape them we cannot.

3. Again. Whilst in the world we are continually entangled in some evil. Well nigh every look is a means of conceiving sin in the heart. We can scarcely open our ears without hearing something to defile and pollute the imagination. We can scarcely think without that thought being a sinful one. We can hardly speak without something sinful, worldly, or selfish mingling itself with the speech. And out of these things tribulation comes. The sin of the eye, or the sin of the ear, or the sin of the heart, or the sin of the tongue, each

brings tribulation in its train, for with a child of God sorrow ever follows sin, as the shadow follows the sun.

4. Again. If we are faithful followers of the Lamb, we are sure to suffer persecution. It may not come in those shapes and forms which prevailed in times of old. The law has extinguished fire and faggot; but “the scourge of the tongue,” slander, calumny, detraction, are not silenced; and we may suffer inward martyrdom from the scourge of the tongue, as the blessed martyrs endured outward martyrdom when their backs were scourged with whips, or their bodies burned in the flame.

5. But again; our very intimate ties with the church of Christ—if we come out of the world, as we are bound to do, and come into close connection with the family of God—this very uniting ourselves to God’s people may be a source of tribulation. If we belong to a church, there may be divisions in it, and those often of a very painful nature. If we have spiritual friends, from them some of our sharpest sorrows may spring. If we have walked in close and intimate union even with the people of God, circumstances may arise to sever us from them, and we may rue the day when we first became acquainted with them.

Thus, on every side, without and within, there are sources of tribulation.

6. Nay, the very bodies in which our souls are lodged, what a little thing may make those earthly tabernacles the source of keenest tribulation! One tender fibre of the brain unstrung—what a source of tribulation may that be to a man all his life! How the Lord too has planted the seeds of disease and death in the very tabernacles of clay that we carry about with us! So that, from without and from within, from the church and from the world, from body and from soul, from friend and from foe, from sinner and from saint—from every source and quarter troubles and tribulations are all upon the watch to seize upon the children of God. Thus each has his appointed portion; for the most part as much as he can bear; for the most part enough to make him live a

life of sorrow and anxiety—enough for the most part to weigh him heavily down, and to convince him that in the world he never can have, he never will have, anything but tribulation and trial.

But is not all this for wise purposes? Dare we say, dare we even think, that the Lord is unwise or unkind in ordaining these tribulations? Was it not the will of God that his dear Son should endure suffering before us? Did he not drink the cup of sorrow to the very dregs? Was he not baptized with a baptism of suffering? And was he not the Forerunner, that in all things he might have the preeminence? If, we then, are to walk in his footsteps, and to be conformed to his image, must we not suffer with him? The word of God declares that we must suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. It is therefore necessary, indispensably necessary, that we also should pass through tribulation; for if we are out of the way of tribulation, most certainly we are out of the way altogether.

But what is the effect, the merciful effect, of these troubles? Is there not a voice with them? When the ear is opened, tribulation speaks. Are there not fruits and effects of a most salutary kind that flow out of tribulation? For instance. Is not our heart by nature very much glued to the world? Do we not naturally love and cleave to it? As we watch the varied movements of our hearts, are they not perpetually going out after something idolatrous—something to gratify and amuse, to interest, occupy, and please our carnal mind? Can we walk the length of the street without the carnal mind going out after some food? It is in order, then, to sever this union, to bring us out of the world, and make us feel it is not our abiding place, and that no happiness is to be found in it, that the Lord sees necessary to lay tribulation upon us; and tribulation of that peculiar nature which will separate us from the world in good earnest. When we are passing through tribulation, what a poor vain thing the world appears to us! We want inward consolation; the world cannot give it. We want balm to our conscience; the world, instead of pouring in that balm, rather tears the lips of the wound asunder. We want

an assurance of the love of God to our souls; the world, so far from helping forward that assurance, interposes to shut out the manifested lovingkindness of God. We want sacred, internal peace spoken to our souls by the voice of the blood of sprinkling; the world intrudes betwixt that blood and us. So that we need—aye, and sometimes feel that we need, tribulation after tribulation, trial upon trial, affliction upon affliction, stroke upon stroke, grief upon grief, sorrow upon sorrow, to cut asunder that close union which there is betwixt us and the world, and to convince us in our very heart and conscience that there is no rest, no peace, no happiness, no consolation to be found in anything that the world presents.

Now when we are thus exercised with tribulation in various shapes and forms, the Lord is often pleased to lead us into himself, and from time to time to bring us with earnest desires and breathings that he would speak that peace to our souls, which the world can neither give nor take away. We are for instance, made to feel that we live in a dying world. We see men dropping down as it were before our eyes upon every side. We see the scythe of death mowing down thousands and tens of thousands; and we fear, perhaps, lest we carry the seeds of death in our own body. Now under these exercises, we look round. We see nothing in the world that can give us a moment's peace; all, all is marred, polluted, defiled; nothing there that our eyes see, or that our ears hear, which can bring one moment's solid peace into our hearts. But when we behold, as the Lord is pleased to give us a view by faith, who Jesus is, and what Jesus is, and his words begin to drop with a measure of sweetness and power into the soul, and we can believe what he says to be unalterably true; and as we come to his feet, and cast ourselves before him, if he is but pleased to apply his precious word to our heart, then there is peace—peace in him, though tribulation in the world.

But these two things ever go together. Directly we are out of tribulation, directly affliction is taken off our necks, directly trial and temptation cease—what becomes of us? Away we go into

the world. No stone let loose ever rolled more rapidly down a mountain's side, than we run headlong into the world, headlong into evil, headlong into carnality, headlong into security and fleshly ease, when the hand of God, through affliction, trial, or temptation, ceases to hold us back. Such is the bias of our hearts, such the corruption of our fallen nature—sin, dreadful sin—evil, horrid evil, being its very food, its very breath, its very life. Our carnal minds are altogether one mass of sin: the very moment, therefore, that God ceases to restrain us, our carnal mind hurries off into the things of time and sense. There it grovels, there it buries itself, there it seeks to lie down and wallow as the sow in the mire. But this never can be. There is that tenderness of conscience in the child of God, that godly fear of his sacred name, that anxious desire to be right, that trembling fear to be wrong; there is that aching void, that crying and sighing after the living God; and blended with all this, that dissatisfaction with self, that though the carnal mind may for a time be amused and interested, there is that in his bosom which speaks a different language, and tells a different tale. The first breath, therefore, of tribulation—the first angry stroke, the first thread of the scourge, (for “the rod is made for the fool's back;”) makes him feel how guilty he has been in lusting after the flesh-pots of Egypt, in plunging his affections into the world, in being so engrossed and taken up with its business and anxieties. He is thus made to feel what a wretched backslider, what a filthy idolater he has been, in suffering the world to get so fast a hold upon his affections. He comes, therefore, full of guilt and shame, once more to the footstool of mercy, begging the Lord to reveal himself to his soul, to speak peace to his conscience, to seal home his pardoning love and atoning blood, and so give him that peace which passeth all understanding.

Thus we find there is so close, so intimate a relation betwixt tribulation and peace, that they never can be severed or dissociated. I am sure that we should go, I know not where, were it not for tribulation. Some of us would go headlong into the world, and be

swallowed up in its cares and anxieties; some would rush headlong into the lusts and pleasures that everywhere surround them; some would be satisfied with an empty, graceless profession, or a form of sound doctrines in the head; some would take the chair of the scorner, and be filled with pride and self-righteousness. But trials, exercises, troubles, sorrows, in a word, “tribulations,” in various shapes and of various kinds, drive us home, and bring us, in the hands of the Lord, to that only safe spot—the feet of Jesus, the footstool of mercy, the throne of grace, that we may there find and feel that peace which his blood alone can impart.

But the Lord has said to his disciples, “These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.” It is, then, by believing “these things,” by receiving “these things” into our hearts, and feeling the blessed power of “these things” in our soul, that peace is communicated. If I can believe that I am a branch of the living vine; that I am a friend of Jesus; that he shed his precious blood for my redemption; that he has given me his blessed Spirit to guide me into all truth; that because he lives, I shall live also; that he will come and manifest himself unto me; that he is “the way, the truth, and the life,” and that through him I find access unto the Father; that he has gone before to prepare a mansion for me, and will come again and receive me unto himself—if I can believe “these things,” and feel the sweet fruits of faith flowing forth, must I not, shall I not, find peace in him?

But how often are we in a kind of middle state! No peace in the world, and little peace in Christ! The world a blank, little else but tribulation and sorrow without and within; and yet, through the workings of unbelief and infidelity, through the weakness of our faith, through the carnality of our minds, through the temptations of Satan, through various inward suggestions, through barrenness and darkness of soul, though we come to Jesus, call upon his name, endeavour to believe what he has revealed in his word, yet we do not find that peace which he has promised. But does not the Lord thus teach us that he himself must create peace in our

consciences by himself speaking peace to our souls, and mercifully and graciously shedding abroad his love in our hearts? Of one thing I am very sure; if ever I have found one moment’s peace, it has been “in him.” It may have been very transitory, very fleeting; but while it lasted, it was peace, and that peace was “in him;” not in self, not in sin, not in the world, but “in him”—by union to him, by communion with him, by receiving out of his fulness grace for grace; and through some manifestation of his mercy, goodness, and love.

But when we compare these two things together, how long are the seasons of tribulation! how short are the seasons of peace! How enduring the affliction, how transient the joy! How many rolling waves and billows of tribulation! how few moments of real solid, enduring calm! Yet enough to shew us that peace is to be found nowhere else but in Jesus, enough to give us something of a foretaste of eternal peace, and make us desire to receive it more substantially, more fully, more feelingly, that our hearts may be wholly bathed with it, and our peace, according to his gracious promise, may flow like a river.

III.—But the Lord adds—“Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Does not this show that the world is an enemy to the Lord, and to the Lord’s people? and never so much an enemy, never to be so much dreaded, as when it comes in the guise of a friend. When it steals upon your heart, engrosses your thoughts; wins your affections, draws away your mind from God—then it is to be dreaded. When we can see the world in its true colours; when we can pass through the world as in it, but not of it; when we can be sweetly lifting up our hearts to the Lord, meditating upon his word, or sighing and crying unto him—there is little fear then of the world getting the conquest. But, when our eyes begin to drink it in; when our ears begin to listen to its voice; when our hearts become entangled in its fascinations; when our minds get filled with its anxieties; when our affections depart from the Lord, and cleave to the things of time and sense—then the world is to be dreaded.

When it smites us as an enemy, its blows are not to be feared: it is when it smiles upon us as a friend it is most to be dreaded. But the Lord has said, "I have overcome the world." You may be much entangled in the cares of business; the very vocation, the necessary vocation, whereby you earn your daily bread, may occupy much of your thoughts; but the Lord has said for you, "I have overcome the world." The anxieties of business, the cares of this life, shall not be your master, if you are one of the Lord's; he has overcome the world for you. But you shall have such tribulation in business, such cares and anxieties in the very calling whereby you live, that you shall not idolize it, nor have your affections wholly glued to it. You shall not have a path of prosperity; it would not suit you; you would embrace the world with both arms, and your affections would depart from the living God. Therefore, though the Lord will give you business enough to provide you sufficiently with the bread that perisheth, there shall be mingled with that business so many anxieties and cares, so many distracting thoughts, so many troubles from every quarter, that you shall not idolize it; you shall see it in its true colours, as the means of passing through this life—nothing more; you shall see that you are not to rest in it, and not to worship it, but to use it thankfully for the short time you are in this vale of tears. So, too, with all our domestic ties. We are such sad idolaters, and these very domestic ties so steal upon our hearts, that the Lord may suffer them to be sources of pain and grief that our affections may not be drawn away from him, and altogether fixed upon the things we naturally love. And so with what are called the pleasures of the world—"the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life,"—those things that are continually enticing us and drawing us aside. But the Lord says, "I have overcome the world:" it shall not overcome you. We may be drawn aside, we may be entangled, we may go out after the most vile and abominable things; but we shall have so many painful feelings, so many cutting convictions, so many distressing sensations, that we shall say with Ephraim, "What have I any more to do with idols?" (Hosea 14:8.) There shall be a coming

to the Lord, and a cleaving to him once more with full purpose of heart. We may have to undergo much opposition and persecution, or be under the power of masters and superiors, and dread their frown. Yet the Lord has said, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." He has subdued it by his cross. It shall never become the conqueror or master of his disciples.

Do look at these words. Are they not the words of Truth himself? And do we not in some measure find there is a divine reality in them? What has been your path? Has not this been your path, more or less, since the Lord was first pleased to turn your feet into the narrow way? Tribulation in the world; sometimes opposition and persecution from ungodly men; sometimes troubles connected with our various stations in life; sometimes the scourge of the tongue; and much more often the inward sufferings produced by a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. The sources of tribulation may have been very various, very different, very multiplied; yet no one child of God here present has been free from tribulation in the world, nor will be free as long as he lives in it.

But let us pass on. Have we found, do we ever find, peace in Jesus? Do we desire to find peace there? Do we look for peace, do we expect to enjoy peace, from any other quarter? Dare we think, for a single moment, of peace in self, peace in the world, or peace in sin? Is our heart so fixed upon Jesus, our eyes so up unto him, the desires of our soul so after the manifestations of his mercy and love, that we are sure there is no peace worth the name except what is found in him? Our seasons of peace may not have been long—they may have been transient, very transient; yet sweet while they lasted, sufficient to shew what true peace is, sufficient to give us longings after a clearer manifestation of it, and make us desire a fuller enjoyment of it. And yet the Lord winds it all up with the solemn and blessed declaration, that though our appointed path, our allotted path, is one of tribulation in the world, yet he has overcome it; sin shall not be our master, the world shall not be our

conqueror, the things of time and sense shall not gain a victory over us. May he give us a sweet assurance that he will fight our battles, and bring us off more than conquerors.

127 The Narrow Way

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, Hampstead Road, London, on Lord's Day Morning,
July 18th, 1847

“And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”

Isaiah 30:21

It is an infinite mercy for the church of God that the religion of Jesus Christ is not a religion of uncertainties. The way to heaven is not built upon peradventures. All has been designed by infinite wisdom, infinite mercy, and infinite love; and what has been thus designed will be executed by infinite power. We indeed are ever fluctuating, as restless as the sea, as fickle as the wind, as changeable as the weather. But God changes not; He is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8); “the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). O what an inestimable mercy, so far as we are the children of God, that though we change, He changeth not!

And His promises are as unchangeable as Himself. He is a God that cannot lie. “All the promises of God in Him” (Christ Jesus) “are yea and in Him Amen unto the glory of God by us” (2 Cor. 1: 20). One of these promises—as firm as the everlasting hills, as stable as the throne of the Almighty itself—is in the words before us, a promise blessedly adapted to our changeable and fickle minds: “And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”

Two things seem prominent in the words before us, which

we may thus simply characterise: first, man's weakness and waywardness; and secondly, God's heavenly and infallible tuition. Man's weakness and waywardness we find pointed out by the expression, “When ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left;” implying that there is in the people of God a continual proneness to turn aside to the one hand or to the other. And God's heavenly and infallible tuition is pointed out in the words, “Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it.”

I. God knows what is in the heart of man. It is said of the Lord Jesus Christ, He “needed not that any should testify of man; for He knew what was in man” (John 2:25). We read too, “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:12). Thus, the Lord foresaw and foreknew all our weakness and all our waywardness. He knew, and that perfectly, that left to ourselves, we could do nothing but sin; and short of His divine tuition, we could do nothing but err.

But let us, as the Lord may enable, enter a little more closely and deeply into man's weakness and waywardness as here set forth; for I am sure that a true knowledge and just appreciation of the malady is indispensable to a true knowledge and just appreciation of the remedy. If we are so ignorant of our own hearts as not to know that there is that in us which continually turns us aside “to the right hand” or “to the left,” we may prize, or seem to prize, such a promise as this, but it will be only with our lips. There will be no inward value set upon such a promise in our hearts, unless we are acquainted, deeply acquainted with our own waywardness, backslidings, and continual departings in heart, in lip, and in life from the living God.

“When ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.” What do these words imply? To my mind they imply this: that the way in which God would have us to walk is perfectly straight, without a single crook, or the slightest deviation from a right line.

But when we, poor, fallen, feeble, ignorant, guilty, sinful wretches; when we would make some essays and feeble attempts, like a child learning to walk, in the straight and narrow path, we turn aside from the right line. And this turning aside is sometimes “to the right hand,” and sometimes “to the left.”

I cannot, I shall not attempt to define accurately what the blessed Spirit meant by “the right hand,” in contradistinction “to the left.” There may be a particular mystical meaning in it which my weak mind cannot enter into. I shall, therefore, merely lay before you what I know and feel on the matter as distinct from any mere fanciful or mystical interpretation.

“The right hand” is opposed “to the left.” By the words, therefore, we have two extremes marked out as distinct from a narrow straight line. If you look at professors generally, and if you look at what far more deeply and nearly concerns you, the movements of your own heart, you will find there is a perpetual deviation to the one side or the other; and you will observe that these deviations are, generally speaking, contrary and opposed to each other. Let me instance this in a few examples.

1. Sometimes there is a turning aside to self-righteousness. Pharisaism is bound up in our hearts. It is born with us, grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength. There is, therefore, in our minds an inward propensity to self-righteousness, in some men’s minds certainly more so than in others; but the same propensity exists, in a greater or less degree, in every man to self-righteousness, pharisaism, a leaning upon something to be done by the creature in contradistinction to the finished work of Jehovah Jesus. But there is an extreme on “the left hand” into which we are just as prone to run—an antinomian licentiousness. Sometimes we think too highly of works, and lean upon them, as though actually there were some merit in them, on “the right hand”; and then, on “the left hand,” we indulge in our minds—I do not say in outward action—but slip away in our thoughts into antinomian licentiousness, as though it did not matter whether

there were any works at all; as though the fruits of the Spirit in the outward life were of no consequence; as though so long as we had experience in our souls, it did not signify what works attended it. Now, there is a turning “to the left,” just as much as pharisaism and self-righteousness is a turning “to the right.”

2. Again. There is in many professors, and to go no farther, within ourselves (for before our eyes let the mirror be held up; we have work enough to look at home), there is a tendency to turn aside after dead assurance, carnal ease, a resting upon the doctrines of God’s Word without a vital experience of their life and power. In this snare how many hundreds are caught! O what a blast it is over the church of the living God! I have long marked, and do still mark and grieve over the effects of this dead, empty, notional carnal assurance, sweeping as it were over the land; and I see in it the death of all good. It so hardens the conscience; it makes sin so little cared for and thought of; it is such a bar against everything tender, humble, broken and contrite; that I say again, wherever it comes it seems to be the death of all good. Yet we find it, I doubt not, in our hearts; a leaning to carnal security, a resting upon doctrines, a getting into an easy state, when the Lord is pleased to leave us unchastened, unafflicted. But then there is a “left hand” in the matter, which is to be in that state where there is a resting in doubts and fears; where there are no deliverances, no bright prospects, no cheering words, no heavenly glimpses, no divine testimonies, nor any desires after them. Now this is a turning “to the left hand,” as much as dead assurance is a turning “to the right.”

3. Again. There is a turning aside “to the right hand” in making too much of God’s precepts, as though nothing else were worth attending to. There are ministers who deal them out from the pulpit week after week, as though obeying the precepts and keeping the precepts were the all in all of religion; while the work of the Spirit on the soul, His inward teachings and enlightenings, are thought little or nothing of. Precept! precept! precept! Sunday after Sunday, as though keeping God’s precepts were the sure way

to glory. But again, there is a turning aside “to the left”; a neglect of the precepts, a despising of them, a saying, “What have we to do with the precepts? It is all legality and self-righteousness. Let us have experience. Away with the precepts! we care nothing for them.” Now this is just as much a turning aside “to the left hand” as making too much of the precepts is a turning aside “to the right.”

4. But, further, there is a turning aside “to the right hand” by an undue setting up of ordinances, as though there were something in prayer, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper apart from what God makes them to be; and as if the sum and substance of all true religion were “to walk in the ordinances of the Lord’s house blameless.” But there is also a turning aside “to the left” in despising the ordinances, in pouring contempt upon baptism and the Lord’s Supper, neglecting prayer and the preaching of the Word, and counting these divine appointments legal.

5. Again. An observing and reproving of the faults of the children of God and an overlooking of their good qualities, having the eye continually fixed on their defects and infirmities; this is a turning aside on “the right hand.” But then, on the other hand, to make light of sin, justify transgression, and consider it immaterial how the child of God acts or walks, is a turning aside “to the left.”

Time would scarcely suffice to run through the various extremes into which we thus are from time to time continually driven. Our nature left to itself can never do anything but sin. We may say, perhaps, and think ourselves very sincere in saying it, “I will never turn aside ‘to the right’ hand; I will never turn aside ‘to the left’; I will keep the straight and narrow path.” But how this shows our ignorance of self! If left to ourselves, without God’s heavenly teaching in our soul, I am well convinced we can do nothing but sin and go astray. It is, therefore, an unspeakable mercy that God has recorded this special promise in the Word of life: “Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”

II. This leads me to enter upon the second part of our subject,

to shew the heavenly and infallible tuition which preserves the soul, or brings it back when it turns aside “to the right hand” or “to the left.”

i. God does all things by His word. It was by His word, in the first instance, that He created all things. He had but to say, “Let there be light,” and there was light. It is by His word that God is pleased to beget souls into spiritual life: “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth” (James 1:18). It is by His word He is pleased, from time to time, to speak conviction to the soul; and it is by His word He is pleased to bring peace and consolation to the heart.

Now, referring to this power of God’s word, the text declares: “Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it.” But God has various ways of speaking to the soul “when we turn to the right hand, and when we turn to the left.”

1. Sometimes God speaks by His providence. God’s providences have a voice in them where there is an ear to hear; but if there be no ear to hear, they are unmarked. Those to whom the promise is made have ears to hear; for the text declares, “Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee.” God often, then, speaks in His providence. For instance, if we have turned aside “to the right hand,” or “to the left,” and our conscience begins to reproach us for getting out of the path, when God’s providential hand in any measure goes out against us, it has a voice from the Lord reproving, rebuking, and sharply correcting us for having turned aside. When our conscience is made and kept alive and tender in God’s fear, and begins to bleed under a sense of imputed guilt, God’s providence will speak very loudly; and if we see the hand of God going out against us in providence, it will cut very deep. The voice within will re-echo the voice without, and conscience will so fall beneath the stroke of God in providence, that we shall see His chastening hand in circumstances where otherwise we should not have seen it at all.

2. But especially does God speak by the word of His grace in the court of conscience. It is not what God speaks in the Scriptures;

for unless He apply it, what He speaks there is for the most part unnoticed by us. Nor is it what God may speak from the pulpit, because unless our ears are opened by the blessed Spirit, and our conscience made alive and tender in His fear, the most heart-searching ministry may leave us untouched. But it is what God speaks from the Scripture in the court of conscience; for what He speaks there, that we must hear; that will ever be deeply attended to, because it comes into our conscience as from the mouth of God Himself.

3. Sometimes the Lord speaks in rebukes and reproofs. For instance, we may be fallen into a state of carnal ease; we may be imbued, as I have known children of God to be, with the spirit of dead assurance, and be resting upon doctrines more than upon the manifestations of God's mercy to the soul. When we are in a smooth path, and all things are prosperous and easy, this dead assurance does very well. But when sickness and death begin to stare us in the face, when convictions of our sins begin powerfully to work, and when the Lord is pleased in a more special manner to deal with the conscience, what becomes of all this dead assurance? It fails us at the very moment when we want it most. We feel that it cannot take us safe into eternity, cannot give us peace with God, cannot remove the guilt of sin, cannot bring the smile of divine love into the soul; it is useless, absolutely useless, at the very time we want it most. This is the rebuke of God in our conscience to bring us out of, and bring us off, this dead assurance into which our souls may have been secretly slipping. We begin to fall down as guilty sinners at the footstool of mercy, and beg of God to pardon our sins, and speak a word of peace to our poor guilty conscience. Here is the "word behind" us, when we have turned aside from the right way, to bring us, once more into the straight and narrow path which leads to eternal life.

Or say, we may have got, as I have described, into a dark and gloomy state of despondency and dejection, eaten up with doubts and fears, and well-nigh swallowed up in the depths of despair.

All our past experience seems swept out of sight; not a single token remains, and we are full of everything that sinks the mind in gloom and fear. Now when the Lord is pleased to speak a word of promise to the soul, and His voice begins to sound once more in the heart, "This is the way;" "not your poor, guilty, miserable self, but Jesus is the way, His blood, His righteousness, and His love;" when our hearts begin to receive these glad tidings, and the blessed Spirit seals them home with divine unction, savour and power, there is a turning out of this "left hand" path in which our poor souls have been groping, and coming once more into the King's highway, the way of holiness, the way of atoning blood and justifying righteousness.

4. So again. We may have been drawn aside to see nothing but sin and imperfection in other men, and yet at the same time see nothing wrong in ourselves. But by and by the Lord begins to open up the depths of our wicked nature, or perhaps lets us slip and fall, not into outward sin to bring reproach upon the cause, but to walk upon the very brink of evil, and so withholds His preserving hand, that there is but one step between us and open disgrace. Now we see what we have been doing, finding fault with this man, and finding fault with that man; seeing nothing but infirmities and sins in all the Christians we have known. We begin then to see such horrid evils in ourselves, and feel such living witnesses to our own sinfulness and wickedness, that the stones fall out of our hands, our mouth is put in the dust, and we have not a word to say against the sins and infirmities of our fellow Christians; but fall down before God, with Job's language, "Behold, I am vile!"

5. Or again, as I said before, we may have been thinking too highly of the precepts, setting them up in such a wonderful way, as if nothing else were worth attending to. But, after a time, we find how lean our souls become! how little we are indulged with the manifestations of the Lord's mercy and love! and how barren, how cold, how legal, how dry our frame has become by setting up the precepts as the all in all of religion. Now we begin to long

after heavenly visits and divine consolations, and to find there is something that we fall short of; that there is the life, love, and enjoyment of God; and that these are as valuable as the precepts themselves. Or, we may have turned aside “to the left hand,” and thought very little of God’s precepts; and so long as we had a good experience it did not matter about anything else. But, perhaps, we have been entangled in some sin, and broken some of God’s precepts; then, when conscience begins to lash, and the divine rebukes are felt within, we see what blessed things the precepts are, and desire with all our heart and soul to obey them, and be found in the way of them.

6. Or, we may have been among those who despise the Lord’s ordinances, treat baptism and the Lord’s Supper with the greatest contempt, and call them poor legal observances. But another time may have come when we have seen such a solemnity and glory in baptism, as opening up the sufferings of the Lord; and seen such beauty in the Lord’s Supper; that all our objections were removed in a moment, and the ordinances have risen in the estimation and affection of our souls. Or, on the other hand, we may have thought too highly of God’s ordinances, and esteemed them beyond their due position; but we may have come again and again to the ordinances, and felt our heart as hard as adamant, as cold and lifeless as winter’s snow. Now we begin to see how we have been putting the ordinances above the Lord of the ordinances, and looking at the sign instead of the thing signified by it.

In all these various ways will the Lord’s people “hear a word behind them.” As they are walking along the road, their poor, wicked, carnal nature is continually turning them aside. Some darling idol, some besetting sin, some prevailing lust, some acting of pride draws them aside “to the right” hand or “to the left.” But they “hear a word behind them;” the word sinks into their souls; the admonition falls into their heart; they are obliged to take heed to it; they cannot neglect it. It is thus by a word behind them they are brought back into the straight and narrow path that leads to

glory.

ii. And what does the “word” say? “This is the way.” The word not merely reproveth and rebukes when we turn aside from it, but it gives a direction, a clear, positive direction: “This is the way!” What “way?” Jesus, who said of Himself, “I am the Way” (John 14:6). There is no other way. Now every turning aside “to the right,” and every turning aside “to the left,” is a turning aside from Jesus. For instance, if we get into legality and pharisaism, is not that a turning aside from Jesus? If we get into a state of miserable dejection and gloom, and are unable to look to Him, is not that a turning away from Jesus? If we get into a dead assurance, and rest upon the doctrines instead of the sweet manifestations of Christ to our souls, is not that a turning aside from Jesus? If we get into carnal ease and security, is not that a turning aside from Jesus? If we get into the precepts as distinct from a vital experience of God’s truth in the soul, is not that a turning aside from Jesus? And if we neglect the precepts He has given, is not that a turning away from Jesus? If we smite and wound the Lord’s family, is not that a turning away from Jesus? And if we justify or make light of sin, is not that a turning aside from Jesus? Thus every turning aside “to the right hand,” or “to the left,” is a turning aside from Jesus, the only “Way” that leads to eternal life.

1. But how is Jesus the Way? In everything that He is to God’s people He is the Way. His blood is the way to heaven, “for the whole path,” as Hart speaks, “is lined with blood.” By His precious blood shed upon Calvary’s tree He has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and opened up a way of access to God. His righteousness also is part of the way; for only so far as we stand clothed in His glorious righteousness have we any access unto, any acceptance with God the Father. And His love is the way; for if we walk in love, we walk in Him, for He is love. Every part of the way was devised and is executed by the love of His tender heart.

2. But the way also is the way of tribulation. Was not Jesus Himself the great Sufferer? And if He be the Way, the only Way,

I must be conformed to His likeness in suffering. Not to know afflictions and tribulations is not to know Christ. He was “a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” And if so, to have no sorrow, to have no acquaintance with grief, and to know nothing of tribulation, is to proclaim to all with a loud voice that we have no union and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. But we are continually turning aside “to the right hand” or “to the left.” There is that cowardice in the heart which cannot bear the cross; there is that slipping into carnal ease and fleshly security, so as to get away from under the painful cross of affliction and suffering. But when we thus turn aside “to the right hand,” or “to the left,” the voice the Lord sends after us is, “This is the way”—the way of affliction, no other; the way of tribulation, the way of trial, the way of exercise. This is the way in which the King walked of old; and this is the way in which all His people have walked before Him and after Him; for this is the only path in which the footsteps of the flock can be found.

3. But again, it is the way of temptation. The Lord Jesus Christ was tempted in the wilderness by Satan. He said to His disciples, “Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations” (Luke 22:28). If we, then, are not acquainted with temptations, we know little of union to a tempted Lord. But we are very glad to get out of the way of temptation. It is a painful path to walk in. To be continually tempted by Satan, by our evil hearts, by “the world lying in wickedness,” and have a conscience suffering and groaning under the weight of temptation, is no small burden. But the voice still sounds behind us, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” It is indeed a way of temptation; but still the way of temptation is the way of deliverance, and the way of deliverance is the way of glory.

4. Again. It is the way of faith, for only by faith can we walk in the way. Nothing but faith can enable us to see the way before us, or to move a single step in the way. By faith we stand, by faith we walk, by faith we fight, and by faith we triumph. So that would we walk in the way, we can only walk in that way by living faith.

And here is the distinction. It requires no faith to turn aside “to the right hand,” or “to the left.” Unbelief can lead us astray, sin can draw us aside; but to walk in the straight and narrow way—in Jesus, in the path of tribulation and affliction, in contradistinction to the general way of man—we can only walk in that way as God is pleased to raise up and keep alive living faith in our souls.

5. And as we walk in it by faith, so we walk in it by hope; hoping to the end for the glory of God, hoping that the Lord will appear in due time and cheer our souls, hoping for the day when all our cares shall be at an end and tears wiped away from our eyes; hoping in God’s faithful word of promise, in His expected deliverance, in His promised mercy; hoping for nothing in self, but hoping for all in Him.

6. We walk in this path also in love; for only so far as we have some love to the Lord, love to His ways, love to His Word, and love to His people, can we be found walking in Him. He Himself is love; and when we have felt a little of His love in our souls, then we can love Him; and this is the language of our hearts, “Draw me, we will run after Thee” (Sol. Song 1:4). When we feel a little of the soft touches of love in the soul, then there is a running in the way of God’s commandments, in that straight and narrow path that leads to eternal glory.

7. We walk in it, again, in the way of prayer. The Lord’s family are continually sighing, crying, and pouring out their petitions to the Lord. “Lord, guide me, teach me, direct me; hold me up; keep me from error. Lord, visit and bless my soul; look down upon me in Thy infinite mercy.” O how these cries, sighs, and petitions are continually going up from broken hearts to the footstool of mercy! We cannot walk in the way except by these continual sighs, groans and cries after the Lord. A prayerless, reckless, hard heart never finds the way, and could not walk in the way, if found. The life we have to live is a life of faith and prayer; and the Lord will take care, I am well convinced, that we shall, as He declares of the elect, “cry unto Him day and night.” There shall be those conflicts, exercises,

trials and temptations; those desires and those wishes, those pantings and longings; all combining and conspiring to keep up communion with the throne of mercy. Thus, as the Lord's people walk, they are led by supplications. He says, "With weeping and with supplications will I lead them" (Jer. 31:9). "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced."

8. And this way also is a way of self-denial; grappling with the flesh, putting off the old man, and putting on the new—plucking out right eyes, and cutting off right hands, as the Lord may enable; "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

9. Again. It is the way of godly fear. We can only walk in this path aright as godly fear is from time to time springing up in our hearts; a fear to be wrong, a desire to be right, a tenderness of conscience lest we break the bounds, slip into error, or turn aside into evil. So that the Lord's people, in their passage home to glory, are continually fearing and trembling, knowing what fallen creatures they are, lest they make a mistake, be deceived or deluded, and turn aside on "the right hand" into some grievous error, or on "the left" into some awful deception of Satan. Therefore, they walk in self-suspicion, in godly fear, in holy desire, that the Lord would be their guide and keeper, and "lead them in the way everlasting."

Contrast this with the way in which dead professors walk, be they ever so high or ever so low. They have none of these jealous feelings over self; none of these suspicious thoughts over their own hearts; no fears lest they be wrong; no earnest desires to be right; no cries, groans, and sighs after the Spirit's leadings; no fear of error, no dread of evil; no listening with anxious ear to the voice that speaks behind them: "This is the way, walk ye in it." "Turn not aside 'to the right hand,' nor 'to the left'—here is error, there is heresy; here is evil, there is sin; avoid this quicksand, beware of that sandbank; a precipice on one side, a quagmire on the other."

Thus the Lord's people go along trembling, fearing, crying, sighing, watching, praying, because they know they carry in their bosom a heart so "deceitful and desperately wicked," that turn aside they will, turn aside they must, except they hear the voice behind them, saying, "This is the way!" "This is the way, poor soul; walk in it; let your eyes look straight on before you; it is a safe path, it leads to endless glory; it will bring you right at last." You may have many doubts, many fears, many suspicions, many sighs and groans, and think you are altogether wrong because there is a turning aside to "the right hand," and a turning aside "to the left." But the promise still holds good; you "shall hear a voice behind you" sounding in your ears, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

But what a mercy it is to have this word sometimes sounding in our ears, and see that there is a "way" to heaven—a way independent of man, distinct from all the doings of the creature—God's own dear Son, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life!" that there is blood, precious blood, that cleanseth from all sin; a righteousness, a glorious righteousness, to justify a needy, naked soul; love, dying love, as a sweet cord twined round a drooping, desponding spirit; and that the blessed Comforter, from time to time, shows us and gives us power to walk in the way of eternal life! But has it not been, is it not sometimes with you, a matter of earnest consideration whether your feet are in the path? What makes it so? Because you find working in you so many things that seem utterly opposed to this path; so many trials, temptations and exercises, so many anxious questionings, and so much of the working of "a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." All these things combined make you fear that you are not walking in the path. But what is all this but the blessed fruit of the "word behind you?" You expect, perhaps, to see something, but that is not God's way. The word is "behind," not before you; dropped into your conscience, not held up to your eyes. Yet because it does not go before us to warn us beforehand, instead of coming to reprove us afterward, we often think that it is not the word of God at all. But I would say, what is

it that has kept you that are the people of God, and desire to fear His name? what has kept you out of that dead assurance in which so many walk? Doubts and fears, the tremblings and suspicions of your anxious mind, have not these instrumentally kept us from this great evil? What has kept you from being altogether swallowed up in despair? Have there not been now and then some glimpses, tokens, testimonies, some shinings in of God's countenance, some dropping of His word into your heart? What has been all this but the "word behind you?" When sin has been presented to you as a sweet honied drink, and you have almost grasped the bowl, there has been some lash of conscience, some cutting conviction, that dashed the cup away before you drank the deadly draught; has not that been a "word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it?" While you have been working and struggling, and thinking you would do something to please God, and got well-nigh stuck fast in the old pharisaical sandbank, a sweet light has broken in upon you, whereby you have seen Jesus, and turned aside from ruined self, and anchored within the veil; and has not this been "a voice behind you, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it?" When your path has been little else but trouble, sorrow, and affliction, and you are almost ready to give all up, and say, "This religion has brought nothing but trouble with it;" still there has been a soft whisper in your conscience, "'This is the way;' turn aside, and you must perish; you have a soul to be saved or lost." This has been a gentle admonition, and you have still kept on. Has not this been "a voice behind you?" When you have felt your heart prompted to break forth and pour out your petitions at the throne of mercy, and wrestle with God as for life and death, has not this been "a word behind you," sounding in your ears, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you?" When some precious promise has come into your heart, and cheered up your downcast mind, when you were fain to give up all for lost, what has this been but "a word behind you?" But because the word does not always come before us, and we cannot see something

with the bodily eye, we get confused and perplexed. But God has not promised we shall see anything with the bodily eye, or hear anything with the bodily ear. The word is to come "behind us," as a reproving, rebuking, encouraging, or comforting word, as God sees fit. But, however it comes, as a rebuking or comforting word, it still sounds, "This is the way! this is the way!"—Jesus, His blood, His righteousness, His Person. His perfect salvation—"This is the way, walk ye in it." Turn not aside to "the right hand," nor "to the left"; walk in Him, and by walking in Him you will obtain eternal life.

What a mercy it is that God has left such a promise on record! and O, what a greater mercy to have this promise fulfilled in our heart's experience! That is the mercy. This we know, if we know anything, that we are ever turning aside "to the right hand" or "to the left." If we do not know that, what do we know? We are shut up in ignorance, presumption and carnal security, if we do not know that. But then, on the other hand, what a mercy if God does not leave us to turn aside to be engulfed as thousands are in destruction and ruin; but deals with our conscience in mercy, and gives us a lash now and then; or a refreshing admonition, promise, or encouragement; or turn our eyes, as Jonah did, to look once more "toward His holy temple." Thus the Lord, sometimes in one way, sometimes in another, still encourages our poor, fainting souls to look to Him, and hope in His mercy; and still mercifully says to us, "This is the way, walk ye in it

128 The Saviour of Israel

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening, on Tuesday Evening,

July 20, 1847

"Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

Psalm 35:3

If we take the Scriptures as our authority (and upon what authority can we depend but the inspired word of the living God?)

in what a fearful state is mankind at large! When we compare what man now is with what man was when he came forth from the hand of his Creator; when we contrast his degraded condition with that primeval purity, innocency, and uprightness, in which he stood as created in the image of God—O, how awfully fallen, O, how deeply sunk, man is! And yet one feature of man's ruined state is, his complete ignorance of the depths of the fall. Though the sinful child of a sinful parent—though under the curse of an avenging law—though an enemy to God and godliness—though passing rapidly down the broad road that leads to eternal destruction, he knows it not. The veil of ignorance and blindness is upon his heart, and he is, as the Scripture speaks, “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him.” (Eph. 4:18.) God hath poured upon him the spirit of slumber; therefore, he cannot see, nor know, nor feel who he is, nor what he is, nor where he is going. Language cannot describe the awful state in which man is. But, through mercy, infinite mercy, there is “a remnant according to the election of grace,” who are made deeply and sensibly to see, to know, and to feel their ruined and lost condition; into whose hearts the blessed Spirit puts a sigh and cry that they may know God's great salvation; and whom the same blessed Spirit, who first convinced them of their ruined state and implanted that cry in their souls, eventually brings to a happy enjoyment of the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. Such, and such alone, can and do feelingly use the words of our text, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.”

It is a mercy for the children of God that the saints in all ages have been similarly taught and led; and thus they find their experience traced out in the word of God, as with a ray of light, by the unerring finger of inspiration. How many of the Lord's exercised family can breathe forth this very prayer, as though it were written especially for them! And how it seems to concentrate into one focus the language and desires of all the Lord's deeply tried and exercised children, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.”

Two things, I think, we may observe connected with, and

flowing out of our text. First, in what way God is the salvation of his people; and secondly, the cry that is breathed out of the soul, imploring the Lord to shew them that he is their salvation.

I.—Salvation implies a lost and ruined condition, out of which salvation brings them. It presupposes, by the very word itself, a lost, ruined, and undone state. None, therefore, can feelingly and experimentally use the words, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation,” except those who, by a divine work upon their conscience, are brought to know and feel their lost, ruined and undone condition. On the lips of any other, it is mockery and hypocrisy.

But in what sense is God, the triune Jehovah of Israel, the salvation of his people? The God of Israel is a Three-One God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; and each of these three Persons in one glorious and undivided Godhead, is the salvation of the people of God.

1. God the Father is the salvation of the elect. The fall did not take God unawares. It was not an accident that broke in upon the divine economy—some unexpected and unlooked for event that threw heaven into consternation. It was a part of God's eternal purpose. He designed, in his own eternal mind, that the fall should take place; and though we, with our poor finite intellect, are lost in the contemplation of this amazing fact; though when we look at the ruin of thousands and tens of thousands through the fall, we stand aghast; and when we look down, as it were, into the awful gulph into which thousands and millions have been precipitated by Adam's transgression, we recoil from the sight, and our palsied minds seem struck with horror; yet, on the other hand, when we can view the fall as drawing forth and manifesting the glory of God in making known salvation by the blood of the Lamb, and in bringing to light mercy and grace, those divine attributes which otherwise must have been hidden for ever in the bosom of God from created eyes; when too, we can see that the ungodly are justly punished for their sins—that justice must be magnified as well as mercy,—and we ourselves (for that is the chief point after all)

have some testimony that our names are written in the book of life; when we see the glory of God thus reigning supreme over man's ruin and misery—then, though our finite intellect cannot sound this great deep, yet we stand upon the brink of it with holy awe and trembling adoration, knowing that whatever God does must be in infinite wisdom and for the manifestation of his own eternal glory.

The fall, then, as I have just hinted, did not take God by surprise; but fore-viewing it, and designing in his own eternal mind and will to permit that the fall should take place, he chose a people in Christ, the Son of his love, that they might be saved by him with an everlasting salvation. And this, be it remarked, does not make God the author of sin; God forbid. The fall took place by divine permission, but not by divine agency. God decreed to allow it; but did not decree to execute it. In the same way as he decreed the death of Christ to take place, and decreed it should be by the cross, executing his own holy counsels by allowing men to execute their own wicked purposes; so he decreed the fall to take place, permitting Satan to tempt, and permitting man to be tempted. If any consider I am here going beyond, or speaking contrary to, the word of God, let them consider that Scripture which to my mind conclusively settles the whole question, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." (Acts 2:23.) Two things are here distinctly stated by the Holy Ghost—God's "counsel and foreknowledge," and man's "wickedness." Christ was "delivered" by God's "determinate" decree; and yet "the hands" that executed that decree were "wicked." Yet God's "counsel and foreknowledge" did not make their hands "wicked;" nor did their "wicked hands" mar God's "counsel and foreknowledge."

2. But Jehovah the Son is also, in a more special way, the salvation of his people. And when, with believing eyes, we can view God the Son as the eternal salvation of all whom the Father gave unto him—when we can see him, by the eye of faith, coming down into this lower world, taking our nature into union with his

own divine Person; when, by faith, we can accompany the Man of Sorrows into the gloomy garden of Gethsemane, or behold him groaning, bleeding, and dying on the cross, an object of ignominy and shame, and believe that in this way, and this alone, salvation could be wrought out, O, what a view it gives us of the demerit and awful nature of sin, that nothing short of the incarnation of God's only begotten Son, nothing short of such a tremendous sacrifice could put away sin, and bring the elect back unto God! On the one hand, as we take a glance at the suffering and dying Lamb of God, how it shows us the awful and abominable nature of sin; and, on the other hand, when we can see by the eye of faith what that work is, by whom that work was wrought out, and how glorious and efficacious that work must be which the Son of God, equal with the Father in glory and majesty, undertook and went through to the uttermost,—how it exalts salvation in our eyes! Thus a believing sight of the Lord Jesus hanging upon Calvary's tree, not only on the one hand shows us the awful nature of sin, but on the other, how full, how complete, how glorious, and how effectual must that salvation be of which the expiring Son of God could say, "It is finished!"

3. But again, God the Spirit, also, has a part, a glorious and blessed part, in this great work of salvation. It is he, and he alone, who makes us feel our guilty, lost, and undone condition. It is he, and he alone, who wounds and pierces our heart with conviction, who opens up the depths of the fall, brings to light the evils of our nature, and makes us sigh and lament beneath the load of guilt upon the conscience; and gives us not only to feel the burden of sin, but puts into our hearts a groan and a cry after God's salvation to be made manifest to our heart. It is he, and he alone, who unfolds to our eyes who the Lord is, who reveals Christ in the heart, who sprinkles his blood upon the conscience, who manifests his justifying righteousness, who gives us eyes to see his glorious Person, and shed abroad his dying love in the soul.

So that God the Father, in his eternal choice; God the Son, in

what he did and suffered according to his covenant engagements here below: and God the Spirit, in his work of grace upon the heart—all these Three Persons of the Three-One Jehovah, are equally engaged in this great, glorious, blessed, and effectual salvation.

II.—But we pass on to consider the experimental portion of our text. This is the point upon which I love chiefly to dwell. This seems to be the line of things that I am able to handle with most life and feeling in my soul. Not that I do not love the doctrines of grace; not that they are not sweet and precious to my heart; not that they are not the foundation of my hope; not that they are not as important, and should be preached as well as the experience that is based upon them; but the Lord seems to have given me (if he has entrusted me with any line at all) to enter into and describe the various things of experience that are connected with, and spring out of the work of grace upon the soul, rather than set forth and open up doctrinal truth. I come now, therefore, to the part in which I feel myself most at home—the experimental dealings and teachings of the Spirit in the soul, in leading us to sigh and cry after an experimental knowledge of this salvation, and making it known to our hearts.

i. “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.” Who are the persons that can feelingly and believably utter this cry? Not those who are seeking to establish their own righteousness; not those who are contended with a graceless profession; not those whom the doctrines of grace in the letter can satisfy. But God’s own exercised family, whose conscience the blessed Spirit has ploughed up with the keen shear of conviction; and whom he has brought to feel and know that nothing short of God’s manifested salvation will bring one moment’s pace or comfort into their drooping hearts. The very words, then, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation,” imply that the persons who use them are inwardly exercised about their lost and ruined state; who feel deeply, daily feel, that they are ruined wretches; who know, painfully know, that in their flesh dwelleth

no good thing. Being, therefore, convinced of sin, pierced with conviction, and exercised with eternal things laid as a weight upon their conscience, they are brought to this point as a solemn reality fixed and fastened within—as a weighty matter which will work sometimes day and night in their bosom—as an eternal, unalterable truth, by which they must live or die, stand or fall, that nothing can bring peace into their souls except God himself revealing this salvation to them by speaking it unto them by his own lips, and coming into their hearts by his presence, power, light, life, liberty, and love, as their God and Saviour.

1. Now, if this be the case, it cuts off effectually all salvation by works. Salvation by works is, what we all at first ignorantly seek after; and it needs a special work of God upon our souls to crush this self-righteousness of which our hearts are full; this “going about” with the Jews of old, “to establish our own righteousness,” and looking to be saved by the works of the law. To expect, or endeavour to be saved by our own works is in fact, saying, ‘I am my own salvation; I need not Christ; I myself am amply sufficient for myself; mine own arm shall save me.’ Before, then, we can cry unto God, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation,” we must be killed to a covenant of works; we must be effectually slaughtered as to deriving any hope from any goodness or worth of our own.

2. Again. We must be convinced that all our righteousness, inward as well as outward, are as filthy rags; not only must our external works be cut off in the matter of salvation, but anything inward whereby we seek to establish a righteousness acceptable in the sight of heaven. All schemes, therefore, of fleshly holiness; of purifying our hearts by legal endeavours and motives; of becoming perfect in the flesh, and rooting out the very being of sin—all this inward leaven in which the religion of thousands consists, must be put away out of our houses. (Exod 12:15.) And not only so, but all hopes grounded upon reformation of life, of doing something to gain God’s favour, and bringing forth something whereby we may please the Almighty; all mere reliance upon doctrines in

the head without a feeling power of God's salvation in the soul; all rest upon the opinion of man, all hoping from the esteem of the creature—in a word, all looking for salvation from any other quarter than the Lord himself, must be entirely and effectually cut off. Now, who shall fully declare, who shall aptly and adequately describe the various trials and exercises that are carried on in the court of conscience before the soul is effectually cut off from all hope of salvation except in the manifestation of that salvation from the mouth of God himself? How much lurking self-righteousness has to be hunted out of its secret corners! how much fleshly holiness has to be put to the rout! how much self-dependence, self-conceit, self-esteem, in all their various shapes and forms! How all these dunghill gods need to be dragged from their homes, and slaughtered, as Elijah slew the priests of Baal at the brook Kishon! Yes; all these delusive hopes and deceitful expectations need to be slaughtered, and their very lifeblood let out, before we are brought in real soul feeling to be convinced of this one point—that nothing but the manifestation of God's salvation from God's own lips, can bring pardon, peace, comfort, and joy, into our hearts.

3. But besides this, we need to have our eyes illuminated by the Holy Ghost; as the Apostle says, "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened." We need to have the eyes of our understanding enlightened from above, to see where and in whom salvation is. We may long for it, and be groping after it; but, through the want of a divinely enlightened understanding, we may all the time "grope for the wall like the blind, and grope as if we had no eyes." We may be long stumbling upon the dark mountains, and wander here and there in desolate places, not knowing where salvation is, nor whence it comes. We need, therefore, that the blessed Spirit should enlighten our eyes by showing us where salvation is, and who is the salvation of God's people—that salvation is in the Lord Jesus Christ, through his atoning blood and glorious righteousness; that salvation was wrought out by the Son of God in our nature; and that the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost alone, can apply that

salvation and make it experimentally known, felt, and enjoyed in our heart.

4. Again. We need that the blessed Spirit, who makes us know and feel our wretched condition, who opens our blind eyes to see where salvation is, in whom it centres, and from whom it comes—we need that the same blessed Spirit should also raise up in our souls an earnest longing after this salvation to be made manifest in our consciences; not only to bring us poor and needy to the footstool of mercy, and lay us in ruins, in our feelings at the foot of the cross, but to raise up in us those earnest desires, those ardent longings, those unceasing cries, those heavenly pantings, which so plainly and undeniably bespeak the work of grace commenced in the soul.

5. Again. We need that the blessed Spirit should not only plant in our breast, in the first instance, these earnest pantings and longings after God's salvation; but that he should also keep up the cry which he himself had planted there, should carry on his own work in the soul, should fill our mouth with arguments and our heart with desires, and draw forth from time to time the longings and pantings which he himself has planted.

6. Again. We need the same blessed Spirit, who is all in all as the Teacher of the church of God, to bring this salvation near, to apply it to our hearts, reveal it in our conscience, and seal it with a heavenly testimony, and soft, melting, overpowering influence within, so as to give us to enjoy that sweet peace which passeth all understanding by shedding abroad the love of God in our souls.

Thus, we need the God of our salvation to be all in all to us, and all in all in us. We cannot dispense with one Person in the sacred Trinity, nor can we dispense with the work of each sacred Person. We want the Father, and to know the Father, as having chosen us in Christ before all worlds. We want the Son, and to know the Son, as having loved us and given himself for us. And we want the Spirit, and to know the work of the blessed Spirit, that only the Divine Teacher, to bring salvation home, and seal it with his own heavenly

witness upon our soul.

ii. But when the Psalmist breathed forth the cry, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation," it surely implied there were things from which he desired to be saved. For instance,

1. When a man is exercised as to his eternal state, the grand desire of his soul is, to be saved from "the wrath to come." He feels, he knows, that unless the Lord Jesus died for him, and unless the blessed Spirit is pleased to make the blood of Christ known in his conscience, hell will swallow him up. Being exercised, then, as to his eternal state, and fearing lest hell should be his eternal portion, his longing desire is to have salvation made so manifest in his heart, and brought with such divine power into his soul, that the flames of hell may be extinguished for him, and he may be brought, as it were, from the very gates of hell into the enjoyment of heaven below. In this state, therefore, when deeply exercised, he will cry and sigh and beg of the Lord to say unto him, "I am thy salvation."

2. But again. He may be, as many are, exercised, deeply exercised, with doubts and fears as to his standing before God. He cannot altogether abandon the hope that God has begun the work of grace upon his soul, or that he has done something for him. There have been times and seasons when the things of God were very precious to his heart; but doubts and fears may arise, and do arise, from time to time, in his soul, whether he is altogether right in the sight of God; whether there may not be something altogether wrong at the bottom—something peculiar, whereby he is deceiving himself. And the blessed Spirit having made his heart honest, planted the fear of God there, given him godly sincerity, and shown him the danger, the fearful danger of being deceived—he comes before the Lord in all the simplicity of a little child, and says, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." Nothing, Lord, can save me but a word from thy lips. If thou wilt but be pleased to say unto me, "I am thy salvation"—I have saved thee from the wrath to come—I have set my love upon thee—Lord, it will be enough; but nothing short of this will bring into my soul that peace and

consolation which I want to experience there.'

3. Again. The Lord's people are, from time to time deeply exercised with the power of sin. They not only feel the guilt of sin by the blessed Spirit laying sin upon their conscience, but they are also from time to time deeply exercised with its power. They find such ungodly lusts, they feel such horrid evils; the corruptions of their hearts are laid so naked and bare, and they find in themselves such a headlong propensity to all wickedness; they feel sin so strong, and themselves so weak—that nothing short of God's salvation made manifest in their conscience, they are well assured, can save them from the power of sin. O how many of the Lord's people are tempted with sin morning, noon, and night! How many evils, horrid evils, are opening, as it were, their jaws, in their carnal mind, to swallow them up outright! Wherever they go, wherever they turn, gins, traps, baits seem lying on every side, strewed thickly in their path. They feel too so helpless, and so inwardly sensible, that nothing but the almighty power of God can hold them as they walk in this dangerous path—a path strewed with snares on every hand, that they are made to cry to the Lord, "Hold thou me up." "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation;" for nothing short of God's salvation, in its freeness, in its fulness, in its divine manifestation, and in its sin-subduing, lust-killing influence, can save them from the power of sin.

4. Again. The Lord's people are a tempted people. Satan is ever waiting at their gate, constantly suggesting every hateful and unbecoming thought, perpetually inflaming the rebellion and enmity of their carnal mind, and continually plaguing, harassing, and besieging them in a thousand forms. Can they repel him? Can they beat back this monster of the awful den? Can they say to him, "Thus far shalt thou come, but no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?" Can they beat back this leviathan, who "esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood?" They cannot, they feel they cannot. They know that nothing but the voice of Jesus, who "through death destroyed him that had the power of

death, that is, the devil," inwardly speaking with power to their souls, can beat back the lion of the bottomless pit. When, then, they are thus sorely tempted by Satan, how they long to hear the Lord say, "I am thy salvation!" One whisper, one soft word from the lips of his gracious Majesty, can and will put every temptation to flight.

5. But again. Many of the Lord's people are deeply exercised with the fear of death. When their evidences are beclouded; when darkness broods over their mind; when the Tempter is present, and the Comforter absent, they sink down sometimes almost into feelings of despair. These know and feel that none can disarm the monster of his sting, none speak peace to their souls in the gloomy hour, take them through the dark valley, and land them safe on the happy shore, but the Lord who has passed through it before them. They want him, therefore, to whisper in their souls, "I am thy salvation;" and then, like aged Simeon, they will be able to say, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes hath seen thy salvation."

iii. But the salvation that God's people want is a daily salvation, and sometimes an hourly salvation. And herein the Lord's exercised family are distinguished from all others. They cannot be satisfied with looking back through a long vista of years upon something which, in times past, they hoped was a visit from the Lord, and rest secure upon that; as though having their title-deeds safe in a chest at home, no present manifestations of the Lord's mercy and love to their souls were needed now. How many do we see in this wretched state! They can speak of something they experienced some ten or twenty years ago; but what has been their intervening experience? What exercises, trials, temptations, inward tribulations have been since felt? What battles have they been engaged in? what victories gained? what conquests achieved? What sweet deliverances? What powerful application of God's word to their soul? What bright testimonies from the Lord of life and glory? Their religion is like a sluggish pool; and the green weeds of carnality and sin have, for the

most part, overspread that sluggish pool of a lifeless profession. But the Lord will not leave his dear people here. To keep water sweet, it must be perpetually running; and to keep the life of God up in the soul, there must be continual exercises. This is the reason why the Lord's people have so many conflicts, trials, painful exercises, sharp sorrows, and deep temptations,—to keep them alive unto God; to bring them out of, and to keep them out of that slothful, sluggish, wretched state of carnal security and dead assurance in which so many seem to have fallen asleep—fallen asleep like the sailor upon the top of the mast, not knowing what a fearful gulph is boiling up below. The Lord, therefore, "trieth the righteous." He will not suffer his people to be at ease in Zion; to be settled on their lees, and get into a wretched Moabitish state. He, therefore, sends afflictions upon them, tribulations, and trials, and allows Satan to tempt and harass them. And under these feelings the blessed Spirit, from time to time, raises up in them this sigh and cry, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." 'None but thyself, Lord, can save me; nothing short of thy voice can whisper peace to my conscience; nothing short of thy blood can speak away guilt from lying as a heavy burden upon my heart; nothing short of thy love shed abroad by the Holy Ghost can make my soul happy in thyself.'

Thus the Lord's people are kept alive in their souls by their various exercises, trials, and afflictions. They are thus kept from falling into that carnal ease, that wretched security, in which the church seems for the most part to have fallen asleep, the Lord taking care still to leave in the midst of professing Zion "a poor and afflicted people," who shall call upon his name. Thus day after day, as it brings its trials, will also bring, as the blessed Spirit raises it up, this sigh and cry, and desire of the heart—"Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." Speak it not to my judgment, speak it not to my memory, speak it not to my understanding, but speak it into my soul—my poor, tried, tempted soul; my exercised and cast-down soul; my hungering, panting, longing, crying, and groaning soul; my dejected, depressed, and burdened soul.' There the malady

lies, there the trials are felt, there distress is experienced, there the battle-field of conflict is; and therefore nothing short of the voice of God himself speaking there, can communicate that peace which our hearts, from time to time, are in quest of.

If we could be satisfied with seeing salvation in the word, or with a well-informed judgment in the things of God, there would be no cry in our hearts, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." If we could rest upon the good opinions of men, or upon ordinances, church membership, coming to chapel, family prayer, and a thousand other things, we should not be crying, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." But when all these things are felt, painfully felt, to be "a bed too short, a covering too narrow" (Isa. 28:20); and when the wrath of God pierces through these mantles, wimples, veils, and hoods, and comes into the sinner's conscience; when thus all things are open and naked before the eye of him with whom he has to do, and he lies a guilty, needy, naked sinner before the footstool of mercy—nothing short of God himself coming into the soul with divine power, and manifesting blood, righteousness, and love, can raise up that solid consolation, that true peace, that "joy unspeakable and full of glory," which the soul longs after. What reason, then, have we to thank God for sending us trials, exercising our souls, laying affliction upon our loins, suffering Satan to tempt, distress, and harass our minds, that we may not be at ease in Zion and settled upon our lees! And what a mercy it is for the Lord, from time to time, to be raising up in our hearts dissatisfaction with everything short of himself—dissatisfaction with everything connected with the things of time and sense, with everything that springs from the creature, with sin in all its shapes and forms—dissatisfaction with everything that does not come from the mouth of God himself into our soul! And what a mercy it is to be blessed, from time to time, with some sweet and soft word from the God of salvation; and to hear his "still small voice" speaking to the soul, and saying, 'Fear not, I am thy salvation. I have saved thee with an everlasting salvation. I have laid down my precious life

for thee.' "Fear not for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name: thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." (Isa. 43:1, 2.) What a mercy to have such inward testimonies that the Lord himself is our salvation! that God the Father chose us in Christ before all worlds, that God the Son laid down his precious life for us, and that God the blessed Spirit has begun and is carrying on that saving work of grace upon our souls which will end in our salvation and in God's own eternal glory!

There may be, and doubtless are, those here who are amply satisfied with something short of this. But if so, O what is your standing? What evidence is there that God is dealing with your souls, that the blessed Spirit is at work upon your consciences? If you can be satisfied with anything short of God himself as your salvation coming into your soul, fatal mark, fatal mark! If you can be satisfied with a name to live, wretched state, wretched state! If you can be satisfied with the doctrine of salvation, without knowing the sweet manifestation of it to your own soul, state equally wretched! Or are you resting in doubts and fears, in corruption, in the workings of your evil nature, in those temptations which the children of God are daily subject to? Both extremes are alike dangerous. To rest in corruptions and the evils of our nature felt and known, and to rest in dry doctrines and dead assurance, are extremes equally removed from the strait and narrow path. But hereby the strait and narrow path is known, as God has revealed it—to be either, from the bottom of our heart, sighing, crying, and longing that God would manifest his precious salvation; or to be walking, from time to time, in the light of it, enjoying its sweetness, and having the blessed Spirit communicating the power of salvation to our souls, and making it near, dear, and precious to our hearts.

But O, what encouragement the word of God affords to every

poor, dejected, cast-down sinner, who is crying, from the bottom of his heart, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.” This cry was raised up in the soul of David, by the Holy Ghost; and the same blessed Spirit is raising up that cry in your heart. Will he who has raised up that cry, who is from time to time drawing forth that cry, and who has made you feel how blessed and suitable that salvation is—will he, can he, leave his own work unaccomplished? To have raised up the desire, and not to grant that desire? when the Lord says, “the desire of the righteous shall be granted;” to have drawn forth the cry, and not to hear that cry? when God promises to hear and answer prayer; to give a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, which the Lord has pronounced blessed? and then to say, “Depart, ye cursed”—it would be high treason against the Majesty of heaven to believe that the Lord the Spirit, who began the work, would not carry it on. It would be a flat denial of the truth of God from first to last, to believe that God’s poor, needy, trusting family, can be put to shame. “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” “Blessed are all they that wait upon the Lord.” Those who hope in his mercy shall find, to their soul’s joy, that their hope shall not be disappointed, nor themselves put to shame.

129 Plenteous Redemption

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord’s Day Morning,
July 25, 1847

“Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

” *Psalm 130:7, 8*

There is one feature in the experience of David which I never remember to have seen noticed—his sympathy with the suffering church of God as connected with, and flowing out of, his own trials

and exercises. I will endeavour to explain my meaning more fully and clearly, and perhaps I cannot better succeed in so doing, than by contrasting our experience in this matter with David’s. When we are tried and exercised, it is usually altogether concerning ourselves. We do not often look beyond self; we want the remedy to be of a personal nature. I do not mean to say that we are not often exercised about others. That is not my meaning. But at those times and seasons when we are most exercised about ourselves, we are least exercised about others. Self at such times is usually too much absorbed to look beyond its own narrow horizon. But it does not seem to have been so with the Psalmist. Though he was exercised, far more deeply exercised than you or I have been or probably ever shall be, he was not so lost and absorbed in self, as to have no sympathy for the suffering church of God. I will illustrate my meaning by referring to two or three instances.

In Psalm 51, we find David lamenting and bewailing before the Lord his awful transgressions, and crying out, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.” (ver. 4.) How piteously he pleads! “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” (ver. 7.) But towards the end of the Psalm, he stretches forth his sympathy towards, and desire after the suffering church of God: “Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion; build then the walls of Jerusalem.” (ver. 18.)

So also, in Psalm 69, he says, “Save me, O God, for the waters are come into my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.” (ver. 1, 2.) And yet, though sinking in these deep waters, he does not forget the church of God. “For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah; that they may dwell there, and have it in possession. The seed also of his servant shall inherit it; and they that love his name shall dwell therein.” (ver. 35, 36.)

So in the Psalm before us. “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.” (ver. 1, 2.) But, though wading in

those depths, and crying for deliverance, still he does not forget the church of God: "Let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

Three points seem to strike my mind as most prominent in the words before us. First, a divine exhortation; "Let Israel hope in the Lord." Secondly, a spiritual reason; "For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." And lastly, a gracious promise; "And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

I.—But what are we to understand by "Israel?" In order to lay a solid foundation for a spiritual superstructure; not to stumble at the very threshold, nor slip at the very outset, we must, first, decide who is meant by "Israel." And to settle this point, we must interpret the Old Testament by the New, for in that the mind of the Spirit is more clearly revealed. The Apostle Paul tells us then, "They are not all Israel which are of Israel;" (Rom. 9:6;) whereby he gives us clearly to understand that the literal Israel was but a type and figure of "the Israel of God," the election of grace, redeemed by precious blood.

But we must go a step farther than this, and show, that by "Israel" is meant not merely the elect, but the quickened elect. Does not the Apostle say, "As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." (Gal. 6:16.) What was this rule? That "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature;" clearly pointing out that "Israel" is not only the chosen of God, but "a new creature," begotten from on high.

But again. As strongly distinguishing the spiritual from the carnal Israel, he says, Rom. 2:28, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God."

By "Israel," then, in our text, we are to understand the quickened

elect; God's spiritual family, in every state, stage, or circumstance of their experience. Thus it will comprehend every living soul, from the first pang of conviction to the last expiring hallelujah, from the first cry for mercy raised up in a sinner convinced of his sin to the triumph of a saint dying in the full blaze of manifested glory. And thus, of all Israel, in every state and stage of experience, in every circumstance of their spiritual life, we may say, "Let Israel hope in the Lord;" for Israel will ever have to "hope in the Lord." I do not mean to say, that Israel will not be able to rejoice and triumph in the Lord; but as long as Israel is in the body, so long will Israel be exposed to the temptations of the flesh, the assaults of Satan, and the hatred of the world; and therefore till safely folded in the arms of the heavenly Bridegroom will there be a necessity that Israel should "hope in the Lord."

We may look, then, at "Israel" under various circumstances and in different states and stages of the divine life; and of each and of all we may still say, "Let Israel hope in the Lord." For instance,

1. There is, first, convinced Israel. When the Lord is pleased for the first time, to shoot from his unerring bow an arrow of conviction into the conscience, and raises up that cry in the bosom which he has never failed to hear: "God be merciful to me a sinner!" "What shall I do to be saved?" "How can I flee from the wrath to come?"—when thus under conviction, with a feeling sense of utter ruin and misery, crying to the Lord for pity and pardon, there is still a divine exhortation for Israel to "hope in the Lord." It is from the word of the Lord, which is "sharper than any two-edged sword," that this spiritual distress and exercise arise; and the same God that wounds is able and willing to heal; for "He maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands maketh whole." And thus, there is every encouragement for convinced Israel to "hope in the Lord."

2. But there is seeking Israel. No sooner does the Lord convince of sin, than he puts a cry and sigh into the soul for his manifested mercy. And hereby the convictions of the Lord's family are distinguished from the convictions of reprobates, that in the

heart of the latter there is no cry after mercy. “They cry not when he bindeth them.” (Job 36:13.) But when the Lord begins a work of grace upon an elect soul, and convinces it of sin, he plants a cry for mercy; and urges it to seek earnestly, imploringly, and perseveringly until in due time that mercy comes. The Lord will not let begging Israel seek his face in vain. He says, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” There is, therefore, every encouragement for seeking Israel to “hope in the Lord;” for from the Lord the spirit of seeking comes, and to such the promise is made.

3. Again. There is longing, hungering, and thirsting Israel; and Israel in this state is still bidden to “hope in the Lord;” for there are certain blessings which the Lord has to bestow on his hungering and thirsting people. He has said, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.” (Matt. 5:6.) David also records his experience thus: “As the heart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.” (Psa. 42:1, 2.) Whence come these holy pantings, these intense longings? Who created these ardent desires? What has made the soul thus to hunger and thirst after manifested salvation? After Jesus’ atoning blood applied to the conscience, and the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost? Whence can they, whence do they spring, but from “the Father of lights,” the unchanging and unchangeable Jehovah, from “whom cometh every good and every perfect gift.” There is, therefore, every encouragement for longing, panting, hungering and thirsting Israel, to hope in the Lord.

4. But there is believing Israel. When faith is raised up to believe in the precious name of Jesus; when there is a gracious discovery of his Person, of his atoning blood, of his justifying righteousness, of his dying love, and of his divine suitability to every state and case; and God the Spirit is pleased to draw forth faith to look unto him, lay hold of and clasp him, and bring him in all his beauty, preciousness, and loveliness—then there is a blessed change, and

we have believing, loving, and praising Israel. But Israel is not yet safely landed; yet as anchoring within the veil she is encouraged more firmly than before “to hope in the Lord.”

5. But Israel is not always here: these are for the most part short seasons. The visits of Jesus are but a “glittering,” or “glancing,” (as the word means,) “through the lattice;” very transient, yet enough to raise up sweet emotions of love to him who is “altogether lovely.” When, therefore, these ‘short visits end,’ Israel is, in her feelings, forsaken of the Lord. She cannot find that access which she once enjoyed; the Lord does not seem to listen to her prayers as he did in former times. There are no sweet love-tokens, no precious promises applied, no blessed visits, no manifestations:—all within is dark, dark, dark as midnight. But is Israel to cast away her confidence because she is forsaken? “For a small moment have I forsaken thee, saith the Lord; but with great mercies will I gather thee.” (Isa. 54:7.) “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.” (49:15.) There have been times and seasons when the Lord blessed Israel with his presence, smiled upon her, applied his promises to her heart, enlarged her soul with his love, drew forth her affections, fixed them upon himself, and gave her to enjoy some sweet moments of heavenly communion with his gracious Majesty. Israel is not to forget these, nor to cast them behind her back. She is, therefore, still encouraged to “hope in the Lord.”

6. But there is also tempted Israel. Israel is not always enjoying the manifested love of her covenant Head. She is often tempted, tried, buffeted, plagued, and exercised; and yet, in all her temptations, trials, and exercises, she is still bidden and encouraged to “hope in the Lord” that these temptations shall not swallow her up; that these severe exercises shall not prove her downfall; that these snares shall not fatally, nor fully entangle her feet; that she shall not be overcome by the number of her inward or outward foes, but be victorious over all. And thus tempted Israel is still encouraged to “hope in the Lord.”

7. But there is backsliding Israel. How many of the Lord's family get entangled in the snares of Satan, in the lusts of their fallen nature, in the things of time and sense, in the cares and anxieties of the world, in the nets and gins that Satan spreads for their feet! How many backslide from the Lord, grow hard and callous, secure and reckless; neglect a throne of mercy; and seem as it were to fall into a state where they can scarcely trace one mark or feature of the divine image in their soul! But backsliding Israel is still encouraged to "hope in the Lord." He will not cast her off. He has said, "return unto me, ye backsliding children; for I am married unto you." The Lord's people may backslide from him; but he will not turn away from them, though they deserve to be banished entirely from his presence. Thus Israel, after her worst state of backsliding, when pierced and wounded by a sense of her guilt and sin, is still encouraged to "hope in the Lord."

Why should Israel, in these various states and circumstances, "hope in the Lord?" Because she is divinely taught to hope nowhere else. The work of the Holy Spirit upon her heart is mainly to bring about two things—a death to self, and a living unto God; a slaying of the creature, in all its shapes and forms, and a setting up of the blood, obedience, and love of Immanuel. This work takes in Israel in all her states of experience. Look at her in every stage of the divine life; whether when first convinced of sin, or seeking after mercy, or panting after God, or believing in Jesus, or forsaken by him, or tempted by Satan, or backsliding in heart. All the dealings of God with her, in every state and stage of her experience, are to slaughter her, to make her distrust the creature in every shape and form, and bring her out of self, with all its miseries, to look to, hang upon, and "hope in the Lord," with all his mercies. Hereby Israel is distinguished from all the nations that are upon the face of the earth. Hereby "Israel of God," the Spirit-taught Zion, the quickened elect, the living family—are distinguished from all mere dead professors, however high in doctrine, or however low in doctrine. By these two features the living family of God are distinguished from all—

that they put no confidence in the flesh, and that all their hope and trust is in the Lord alone. What said David? "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him." (Psa. 62:5.) And is not this the state and case of every child of God, so far as the Lord is pleased to lead him into the truth,—to turn away from the creature in all its shapes and forms, and fix the heart and affections where Jesus sits at God's right hand? Thus the divine exhortation is to hope—not in self, wretched, ruined, undone, bankrupt self; not to hope in the law, which can only deal out thunders and lightnings and wither by its consuming flames every one found under that fiery dispensation; not to trust in the creature; for to trust in the creature is to lean upon a bruised reed that runs into our hand, and pierces it; not to trust in man, sinner or saint, because "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." (Jer. 17:5.) But, brought away from self, away from the law, away from the creature, as a poor perishing worm, Israel is enabled by divine teaching and divine testimony to look unto the Lord, wait upon the Lord, hope in the Lord, and cast her burden and care upon him who has said, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (Psa. 55:22.)

But what is this "hope?" There are many "hopes" that the word of God declares to be utterly fallacious. There is "the hope of the hypocrite" that cometh to nought; (Job 27:8.); the hope of the pharisee; the hope of the self-confident professor. There are "hopes" of every name and size, of every stature and dimension; nay, almost as numerous and diversified as the sons of men. And yet, all these "hopes" are but refuges of lies. The true hope is that which cometh down from God into the soul—the "good hope through grace," that springs out of the Spirit's teachings and testimony—that grace of the Spirit which lives together with faith and love. "And now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love," (1 Cor. 13:13,)—a threefold cord, that cannot be broken.

II.—But we pass on to consider the spiritual reason which the Holy Ghost has given by the pen of the Psalmist why Israel is to “hope in the Lord.” “For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.” Two reasons, then, God the Spirit has given why Israel should “hope in the Lord.”

i. One is, that “with the Lord there is mercy.” Observe how the text is worded. To my mind there is something very sweet in it. It does not say, “from the Lord is mercy,” though from the Lord all mercy comes; though from him, as the Father of lights, every good and perfect gift issues: and what more perfect gift can there be than mercy? Nor does it say, “in the Lord there is mercy;” though there is mercy in him, and in no other. But as though it would draw forth the affections of our soul more towards this mercy, it runs thus, “with the Lord there is mercy.” As though it would say, ‘In his hands, in his bounteous heart, a part of his divine nature, an attribute of his eternal character. It is with him, and bestowed upon his Israel, upon those who feel their deep need; yes, so with him, that none need despair who are brought to long after it, and to know that they must perish under the wrath of God without it.’ If it ran thus—“From the Lord there is mercy,” a poor convinced, and half-despairing soul might argue thus: ‘Yes, I know from the Lord there is mercy; but how can I expect that mercy to come from the Lord into my soul; for I am unworthy of the least ray of mercy from him; nothing can come from him but purity and holiness, while I am all guilt, filth, and shame.’ Thus it would hardly be sufficient for us. Or if the words ran, “In the Lord there is mercy; he might say, ‘Yes, I know there is mercy in the Lord for the elect; but am I one of the elect?’ Doubts, fears, and misgivings might harass his mind whether, though there is mercy in the Lord, there were mercy in the Lord for him. But by “with” the blessed Spirit takes a wider range, a fuller sweep, and opens the arms of mercy wider than he would have done, had the expression been “from” or “in.” Thus there is encouragement for convinced, seeking, longing, forsaken, backsliding Israel to creep within these arms of mercy

that fold themselves around her, and gather her into the bosom of Immanuel; for the good Shepherd will “gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” (Isa. 40:11.)

“With the Lord,” then, there is mercy.” It is a part of his divine character; it is one of his most precious attributes.

But what is “mercy?” There are several ideas contained in the expression.

1. First, it intimates compassion. We read of the “bowels of the mercy of our God” (Luke 1:78, marg.); and this expression implies a flowing forth of compassion and tender-heartedness towards the object of mercy. Let us look at this in the case of the returning prodigal. How when he was coming homeward, all rags and ruin, full of confusion and shame, guilt and distress, the Father’s compassion flowed forth, and his bowels yearned over his returning son! This compassion working in his bosom, was a part of the mercy which the Father showed to his returning prodigal.

2. But again. Mercy implies pardon; not merely compassion. We may compassionate, and yet not pardon. A judge may compassionate the criminal whom he justly condemns to death, and may mingle tears with the fatal sentence. But mercy in the mind of God is not merely confined to the flowing forth of compassion and pity. He is a sovereign; and not only can compassionate the trembling culprit, but also, by a free act of his distinguishing favour can freely forgive every transgression that he has committed.

3. But again. Mercy, also, implies that the party to whom the act is manifested, is a criminal, a transgressor. Mercy is not for the righteous and holy; but for the guilty sinner, the transgressor, the criminal at God’s holy bar. Israel, then, is treated as a criminal, and pardoned as a criminal. Israel does not come to the throne to lay down her merits, and take up God’s mercy as a counterbalance for them; but Israel comes as a poor criminal, ruined and undone, sentenced and condemned by God’s righteous law. And to none other but criminals, deeply dyed criminals, will the sound of

mercy be sweet. But oh, what a sweet sound is there in mercy, when pardoning love reaches the conscience! when the mercy of God is manifested by his blotting out and casting behind his back all Israel's guilt, filth and shame!

Now here is the exhortation, the divine exhortation, "Let Israel hope in the Lord;"—Israel sunk, however low; Israel tempted, however severely; Israel condemning herself, however justly; Israel almost on the brink of despair;—let her still "hope in the Lord." Has she ceased to hope in the creature? Has she ceased to look to an arm of flesh? Does she despair of salvation from any other source or quarter but the blood of the Lamb? Is she crying, sighing, longing, panting, and begging of the Lord to appear in her soul? "Let Israel," then, "hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy." He will not spurn his waiting Israel from his feet; he will not smite her with the lightnings of his wrath; he will show mercy to the poor guilty sinner that comes with dust upon his head, clothed with sackcloth and ashes, mourning and lamenting his vileness before the Lord. There is no wrath in the bosom of the Lord against him; there is mercy, pardoning mercy in the bosom of Jehovah for Israel; therefore "let Israel hope in the Lord." If Israel look to herself, she cannot have one grain of hope; if she look to the law she cannot have one ray of expectation; or if she look to an arm of flesh, none can do her good. But if Israel looks "to the hills from whence cometh her help"—to God the Father, in his electing love—to God the Son, in his redeeming blood—to God the Spirit, in his sanctifying work; if Israel is thus enabled to anchor within the veil, thus to "hope in the Lord," her hope shall not be cut off, shall not be disappointed; it shall not be as "the hope of the hypocrite," a spider's web, that the first gust of eternal displeasure shall for ever sweep away.

ii. But there is another reason—"And with him is plenteous redemption." How this text is perverted! I never heard many sermons from Arminian preachers since I knew anything of divine things; but I doubt not that this passage has been abused

by thousands, to prove, or attempt to prove, universal redemption. But how they overlook "Israel" here! If it ran thus—"Let the world hope in the Lord;" then there would have been some colouring from plenteous redemption being universal redemption. But when it runs so clearly and is backed up by, "He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities," how limited immediately does the word become! And yet, though limited in extent as regards persons, yet plenteous in itself towards those characters to whom it comes. And I am very sure that nothing but "plenteous" redemption can suit you and me.

But what is "redemption?" Does it not signify a buying, a purchase? and if it signify a buying, a purchase, there must be a price laid down. If I go into a shop, and buy an article, of course I lay my money down, and take up the article; otherwise it is not buying, but cheating. So spiritually. Redemption implies an actual price. What is this price? The blood of the Lamb. "Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Pet. 1:18, 19.) That was the redemption price; and when we look at it in the Spirit's light, how "plenteous" is that redemption! View it as the blood of the Son of God—the Godhead giving infinite and eternal value and efficacy to it—how precious must that blood be—the blood of God! As the Apostle says, "Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28) Not that God can bleed any more than God can die; but the God-Man, "Immanuel, God with us," bled and died. Oh, how great, how precious, how plenteous then, that redemption must be, that was effected by the blood of Christ! Now, when we look at redemption in this point of view—first, at the infinite virtue and efficacy of redemption, seeing it was God who became incarnate, and God-Man, Immanuel, bled and died upon the cross: and, secondly, at the demerit of sin, its awful character, its dreadful nature;—when we look at redemption in these two points of view, we see that nothing short of a "plenteous redemption" could suit our souls, or save us from the wrath to come. What

am I? what are you? but a desperately wicked wretch—a vile, an awful vile sinner—a monster of iniquity? What then, can save such wretches from the very depths of hell—what can redeem us from the wrath to come, and bathe our souls in the raptures of endless bliss, instead of howling for ever beneath the wrath of God—I say, what can thus take us from the very jaws of hell, and transport us to the gates of heaven but “plenteous redemption?” What but the superaboundings of grace over the aboundings of sin, can deliver my guilty, polluted, justly condemned soul, can snatch it from the jaws of hell, and lift it up to the bosom of God to be with him through the countless ages of eternity? It must be “plenteous redemption” to do this for one sinner—I repeat, for one sinner! When we view sin in all its aggravated nature, all its magnitude, all its defilement, all its horrible, most detestable, and abominable character; when we view even the sin of one day, or one hour, as opposed to the infinite purity of the Lord God Almighty; what short of “plenteous redemption” can pluck one sinner from the jaws of eternal destruction? But when we include all the elect of God, as numerous as the stars in the winter sky, or the sands upon the seashore, what short of “plenteous redemption” can save the whole election of grace? I cannot call that “plenteous redemption” which meets me half way. It must come into my very conscience, be dropt from the mouth of God into my very heart, and save me body and soul as a lost sinner from the wrath to come, or it cannot be a redemption suited to my aggravated sins, my desperate case. But “with him”—in his bosom, in his heart, in his hands, in his dying love, in his risen power—in all that he is and all that he has for the church of God—“with him his plenteous redemption;” and therefore, “let Israel hope in the Lord;” because with the Lord is mercy, even for such a wretch as I, and “plenteous redemption” even for one so deeply stained with guilt as thou.

III.—We pass on, as time is waning, to the gracious promise; “And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” If we were to listen to what people say about Christians and believers, we should

think they had no sin about them; that they were so holy, spiritual, and religious that sin and they had for ever parted company; that when they gave themselves to the Lord, they shook hands with sin, and never had to do with it more. Nay, if you would believe some, they had long ago buried sin, and written his funeral epitaph; and you might walk in their beautifully laid out, neatly gravelled and flower-decked cemetery on a summer evening, and see written, ‘here lies sin!’ Foolish, foolish men! ignorant, ignorant creatures! deceivers! perverters of God’s truth! I say feelingly, that we never know anything about sin, nor what sin is, till God is pleased to quicken our souls to fear his great Name. We do not know its hideousness, its mighty power, its subtle insinuations—the iniquity, the horrid iniquity, we carry in our bosom—till God is pleased to plant his precious fear in our hearts.

But look at our text—“He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” No light word that. Not, ‘his little peccadillos,’ ‘his slight failings,’ ‘his slender faults;’ as though Israel were such a pious, humble, excellent creature, that it was only once or twice throughout the year that he did or thought anything wrong. “His iniquities!”—a strong word that; but no stronger than the case justifies, no stronger than every one taught of God feels he deserves. And “all his iniquities.” We might have thought, if we talked with some people, that Israel had not above half-a-dozen iniquities. But the word of God says, “all his iniquities.” Let us look at some of them.

Iniquities of eye—has conscience no voice there? Is no iniquity ever practiced by your eye? Let conscience speak. Iniquity of ear—is there no iniquity that enters into your heart through the ear? You cannot listen to a conversation in the street, without iniquity entering into your heart through what Bunyan calls, “Ear-gate.” Iniquity of lip—do you always keep your tongue as with a bridle? Do your lips never drop anything unbecoming the gospel? Is there no carnal conversation, no angry word at home, no expression that you would not like the saints of God to hear? What! your

lips always kept so strictly, that there is never a single expression dropt from them which you would be ashamed to utter before an assembly of God's people? Iniquity of thought—if your eyes, ears, and lips are clean, is there no iniquity of thought? What! in that workshop within no iniquitous suggestions, no evil workings? Oh, how ignorant must we be of ourselves, if we feel that we have no iniquity of thought! Iniquity of imagination—does not fancy sometimes bring before you scenes of sensuality in which your carnal heart is vile enough to revel? Iniquity of memory—does not memory sometimes bring back sins you formerly committed, and your evil nature is perhaps base enough to desire they had been greater? Iniquity of feeling—no enmity against God's people ever working? no pride of heart? no covetousness? no hypocrisy? no self-righteousness? no sensuality? no base thoughts that you cannot disclose even to your bosom friend? Let conscience speak in your bosom. I know what conscience says in mine. I do not stand before you as a holy being. God knows the iniquities I daily, hourly feel working in my carnal mind, oft to my grief and shame.

But here is the blessed promise—a promise only suited to Israel; for all but Israel lose sight of their iniquities, and justify themselves in self-righteousness. None but Israel feel and confess their iniquities; and therefore to Israel is the promise of redemption limited—“He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” What! all? Yes. Not one left? No, not a trace, not a shade, not the shadow of a shade; all buried, all gone, all swallowed up, all blotted out, all freely pardoned, all cast behind God's back. If a single spot or wrinkle could be found upon our souls before the Majesty of heaven, it would condemn us for ever to the lowest hell! therefore the church stands before God, in Christ, “not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” (Eph. 5:27.) “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.” (Sol. Song 4: 7.)

But again. There is the guilt of iniquity, that our conscience feels and groans under. There is the filth of iniquity, that so defiles us and puts us to shame. There is the power of iniquity, the inward

working of sin, ever striving for the mastery. But God has said, “He shall redeem (or deliver) Israel from all his iniquities”—iniquities of eye, ear, thought, imagination, memory, action, lip, and life—from every iniquity, its guilt, its filth, and its power—he shall redeem and deliver, wash and cleanse his Israel perfectly and completely from all.

Now, is there not every encouragement here for Israel to “hope in the Lord?” “Yes,” the answer rises, “every reason; but am I one of this Israel?” Well, can you find some of the features of Israel traced out this morning? I have gone as low as I could, to mark out the very first work of God upon the soul. Surely you can come in here, if God has quickened your soul into spiritual life. Has he convinced you of guilt, and made you cry, “God be merciful to me, a sinner?” Has he taught you to seek his face, given you a spirit of prayer, raised up hungerings and thirstings after righteousness, and brought you to beg and cry that he would appear in your soul? These are marks and features of a divine work upon your conscience. You are one of God's Israel if you can find these things in your heart. “Behold,” said the Lord, in the early days of Nathanael, whom he had seen under the fig-tree, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” (John 1:47.) There is no guile in a true Israelite, but honesty, integrity, and sincerity.

Now, the Lord will encourage his Israel in every stage and state, in every case and circumstance, to hope in him—to hope in his word (as David says, “I hope in thy word,” Psa. 119:81), in his invitations, in his truths, in himself; in himself, I repeat, as made manifest in our conscience, as from time to time revealed to our souls. But why should Israel “hope in the Lord?” On what grounds? What reason is given for it? “With the Lord there is mercy”—mercy to pardon the blackest crimes, to absolve the deepest-dyed transgressor. Nay, more; “and with him is plenteous redemption.” A price has been paid; God's justice has been satisfied; the holy law has had all its demands; God's attributes do not clash; “Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” (Psa.

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85:10.) And thus, “he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities,”
however numerous, however aggravated, however powerful they
may be. How suitable and encouraging, therefore, is this divine
exhortation: The Lord drop it, from his own mouth, from time to
time, into our hearts!

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Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord’s
Day Morning,
July 8, 1849

*“And we know that all things work together for good to them
that love God, to them who are the called according to his
purpose.”*

Romans 8:28

The child of God seems to me often to resemble a benighted
traveller. He has left his home, and is struggling onward to a
certain destination. He is surrounded on every side with mists
and darkness; still he struggles onward. But looking up into the
sky, he sees a star glimmer through the clouds: by-and-by another
appears; and by-and-by another; till at last all the mist and fog are
dispersed, and the stars shine forth in all their beauty and glory.
Thus is it often with the child of God. He has left the world; he
is struggling onward to his heavenly home; but he often walks in
darkness and has no light; little else but mists and fogs surround
the path he is treading. In this state, perhaps he opens the word
of God; or, as he is musing over his many trials, a text, a promise
breaks in upon his mind, and that shews him the mist and fog are
breaking up; by-and-by another portion of God’s word, another
sweet promise comes into his soul; and this encourages him still
more, till by-and-by the Bible seems full of promises, shining forth
in the pages of the sacred volume more thickly and gloriously than
the stars that spangle the midnight sky.

Among these bright stars that glimmer in the firmament of

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Scripture, there is scarcely one more resplendent than our text. Let
us travel through the promises upon record, and we can scarcely
find one more sweet or suitable to an exercised child of God than
this, “We know that all things work together for good to them that
love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

In looking at these words this morning, I shall, for the sake of
greater clearness, somewhat invert the order, and show,

First, who the characters are that are interested in this promise.

Secondly, the promise itself, and

Thirdly, the knowledge of the promise, and of our personal
interest in it. The Lord grant his presence; and enable me to speak
such things as he shall bless to our souls.

1.—First, then, let us consider the characters to whom the
promise belongs. Now it is necessary to make the ground good
here; for if we err here, we err everywhere. Let me illustrate this
by an example or two taken from the things of common life. A
man makes a will; when he dies, and the will is opened and read,
the very first thing to be settled is the person in whose favour the
will is made. Until that is settled, there is no going a step further.
Or, there is a society founded for a certain object. This society has
certain objects in view, certain characters on whom it bestows
its liberality. There are prescribed limits; as age, poverty, being
members of the household of faith; and if these qualifications are
not in the individual, he cannot be a candidate. So it is spiritually.
Unless we make the ground good at first by coming to some clear
decision who are the characters interested in this promise, we are
all in confusion; we do not make straight paths for our feet; our
eyes do not look onward, nor our eyelids straight before us. It is
absolutely necessary, therefore, in order to make the ground good,
to clear up who the characters are in favour of whom the promise
is made.

If we look at these characters, we shall find them described as
bearing two distinct marks,

1 that they “love God;”

2 that they are “the called according to God’s purpose.” If a man, then, do not love God, and be not called according to God’s purpose, he has no manifest interest in this promise. And if, on the other hand, he bear these two marks, that he loves God, and that he is called according to God’s purpose, the promise is intended for him, and is ready to discharge its full contents into his heart.

I. First, then, let us look a little more closely at the character set forth as a lover of God. We are very certain this never can be true of any man in a state of nature, for “the carnal mind is enmity against God;” and if so, there cannot be any love to God in his heart. He is therefore excluded from the benefit of the promise; his name is not in the will.

But, in order to make this weighty matter more clear and plain, let us see what the Scriptures say of those who love God. I think we shall find in the first epistle of John three marks given us of those who love him; and by these three marks may we try our state. Let us, then, bring our hearts and consciences to the test of God’s unerring word, and see whether we can find these three marks of the lovers of God in our soul. We read, “Love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” 1Jo 4:7 Here, then, are two marks which the Holy Ghost has given of him that loves God, that he is born of God, and that he knoweth God. And if we look a little lower down, we shall find a third mark, “This is the love of God that we keep his commandments.” 1Jo 5:3

These, then, are the three marks of a man being a lover of God:

1. that he is born of God;
2. that he knoweth God; and
3. that he keepeth God’s commandments.

1. But what is it to be born of God? We read of those who were followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, that they were “born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Joh 1:13 A heavenly birth is contrasted here with the birth of the flesh; the one is set aside, and the other set up. To be born of God is to be quickened into spiritual life by the Holy Ghost; to have

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 passed from death unto life; to have faith, hope and love brought forth in our hearts by the operation of God the Spirit; to be made new creatures in Christ; to have the kingdom of heaven set up, and the power of God felt in our souls. If, then, a man can feel that he is born of God; that a mighty revolution has taken place in his soul; that he is a new creature in Christ; that old things are passed away and all things become new: if he has the witness of God in his conscience that this divine change has taken place in him, and that a measure of the love of God has been shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost—then he has an evidence that he is one who loves God. and therefore has an interest in the promise before us.

2. Our second mark of one that loves God is, that he knows God. This we cannot know by nature, for there is a veil of unbelief over our heart. We are born in darkness and the shadow of death: but when God is pleased to shine into our souls, and give us “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;” to take the veil of unbelief away, and give us that knowledge of himself as the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, which is eternal life—then we know God; we know who he is, and we fear his great Name.

3. The third mark is, that we keep his commandments, that we come out of the world, and are separate from it; that we desire to do his will, to serve him, and to walk before him in simplicity, humility, and godly sincerity; that his fear is alive in us; that we obey him, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

But why do I mention these marks? For this reason; because the children of God are often tried and exercised whether they do love him. There are so many things in their hearts to oppose the love of God. There is the world; a going out in their carnal mind after the things of time and sense; sin working in them, bringing them continually into bondage; darkness of mind, so as to be unable to see their signs; deadness of soul, so that the love of God seems reduced to the last spark. All these things are so opposite to the love of God that they seem at times not to have one grain of it in

their hearts. And when they would fain look back to certain spots, times, and seasons, when they did feel the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, when they could delight themselves in the Almighty, when his word was sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, and they could walk before him in holy obedience and love, I say, when they would fain look back upon these favourite spots, times, and seasons, they often cannot. Such is the darkness of their minds they can scarcely see the hill Mizar, or remember him from the land of Jordan and of the Hermonites. Therefore, it is necessary to look to certain marks of God's word. The landmarks in our experience are sometimes swept away, or clouds of darkness cover them. We therefore must look to the unerring landmarks of God's word, which, unlike the landmarks of experience, are never swept away, but stand there firmly fixed by the pen of the Holy Ghost. If therefore, with all our doubts and fears and misgivings, our hardness of heart, our unbelief, darkness of mind, and deadness of frame, we can find these three marks in our souls, that we have been born of God, that we know him, and that we are keeping his commandments and desiring to do his will, we have Scripture testimony that we are of those who love God, and therefore have an interest in this promise.

II.—Our second mark is, that such are the “called according to God's purpose.” This seems to be added as a kind of supplement to clear up the first mark; and added for this twofold purpose. First, to exclude all men in a state of nature. A man, in a state of nature, might say, ‘I love God; I love to walk abroad, and mark his glory in the beauties of creation. I look up by night, and as I see the stars in the sky I recognize in them a heavenly Architect. I am sure I love God.’ A man in a state of nature may do this. Now this seems added to cut off such. It says, ‘No; all those that love God are the called according to his purpose.’ A man must be called; there must be a work of grace upon his soul before he can be a true spiritual lover of God.

But there is another purpose also. The child of God may say,

Do I love God? If so, what love do I now feel? Are my affections now in heaven? Do I feel my soul now desiring the Lord more than thousands of gold and silver? Is my heart now softened and melted by the sweet operations of his grace, mercy, and love? No;’ the poor child of God says, I feel too much the contrary—hardness, darkness, carnality—perhaps enmity, rebellion—how can I, then hope I am the character for whom this promise is made? Yet if I be not a lover of God, I have no interest in it.

To clear up this dark path, it seems added by way of supplement, “called according to God's purpose.” His purpose is not affected by what we are, or what we have. His purpose is still going on. We may be in darkness and deadness; but our darkness does not alter God's purpose; our deadness does not change his decree. We may not have the sweet enjoyment of his love in our hearts; but still his ‘purpose’ remains unchanged and unchangeable, like its divine Author.

But how can we prove we are called according to God's purpose? Love may flag; evidences may fade; hope may droop; enjoyment may cease; but the calling still remains. Can we, then, look back to any time or spot when the Lord signally called us? Can we cast an eye on the path we have trodden in the ways of grace, and say that none but the Lord could have separated us from the sins in which we were entangled, the company with which we were mixed, the course we were pursuing? Can we remember there were at the time certain feelings which none but God could inspire? certain operations in our hearts which none but God could perform? certain effects which nothing but a heavenly hand moving upon the soul could create? If we cannot now trace distinctly that we are the lovers of God; if we cannot now feel the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, yet we may compare ourselves with the three marks I have given, and take some comfort from them; or even if these three marks be buried in obscurity, we may still cast an eye along the vista which we have trodden, and see the hand of God stretched out in a manifestive way to call us out of nature's

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darkness into his marvellous light.

I have been thus particular, and dwelt thus long upon this portion of the text, because I love to make sure ground. Let us make the ground good—then we can step safely on; but if the ground be sandy, the foundation uncertain, we are faulty at the very outset. There is no advancing a single step till the ground be made good. I will suppose, then, the ground is thus far made good, and that there are in this congregation those who have some internal testimony that they are lovers of God, and that they are “called according to God’s purpose.”

II.—But I proceed to the substance of the promise, “that all things work together for good” to such characters. Every word here is pregnant with blessed import: we could not part with a single syllable. And yet, what an exalted view does it give us of the wisdom, providence, and power of God! Look at this complicated scene. Here are God’s people, surrounded by a thousand mysterious circumstances, travelling in the various paths of life—station, age, sex, circumstances, all widely different. Here is the world lying in wickedness around them—a crafty adversary ever on the watch to beguile or harass them,—a heart full of sin to overflowing, except as kept down by the mighty power of God! Look at all our varied circumstances; and then to believe that if we are the lovers of God, all things we experience are working together for our spiritual good, what a view does it give us of the wisdom, grace, and power of a wonder-working God! Let us bear with all our weight upon the text: it will bear all the strain that we can put upon it. “All things!” Look at that! All that concerns our body and soul; everything in providence, everything in grace; everything you have passed through, everything you are passing through, everything you shall pass through.

Let each of you who love God, and fear his name in this congregation, take everything belonging to you, and lay it upon this text, as you might lay hymn-books and Bibles on the table before me. There is not a single thing in providence or grace that concerns

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any person in this congregation who loves God that the promise cannot bear. “All things! all things!” What! is there not a single thing, however minute, however comparatively unimportant, that is not for my good if I love God? No, not one. If there were a single thing, this text would not be true; God would speak an untruth. If there were a single thing which befalls me, be it in providence, or be it in grace, that is not working together for my good, if I am a child of God, I say it with reverence, that this would be a lie in God’s book. And yet, when we consider the variety of things that affect us—to believe that all of them are working together for our good, how must we admire the wonderful wisdom, and power, and government of God.

But let us, by the way of casting a clearer light upon the words, “all things,” look at them more minutely. All things that take place are either according to God’s decretive appointment, or according to his permissive appointment. Many things that try your mind, and exercise your souls, are according to God’s decretive appointment. Everything with which sin or Satan are not intermingled, we may say, comes from God’s decretive appointment; and if we are lovers of God, they are working together for our good. Are we tried in our circumstances? This is according to God’s decretive appointment. Is it the Lord’s will and pleasure to bring us down in the world, by sorrows and adversities in providence? This is still according to God’s decretive appointment. Have we afflictions in the family? It is still according to God’s decretive appointment. It comes from him. Nothing can happen in body, in property, in family, that does not spring from God’s decretive appointment. Are children taken away? They are taken by the hand of God. “The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away.” Is wife or husband afflicted? The hand of God is in it. Is the body brought down with sickness? It cometh from God. Is the mind tried with a thousand perplexities, anxieties, and cares? It is still the hand of God. All these matters spring from his decretive appointment! But is Satan permitted to harass and distress our minds? This is only by God’s permissive appointment.

He could do nothing against Job until God gave him permission. Have we enemies in the church or in the world? Have we to endure persecution for Christ's sake? slander, calumny, and opposition? Shimei was permitted to curse David; and Jeroboam was raised up in consequence of the idolatry of Solomon. All is still according to God's permissive' appointment. Are we tried by the evils of our fallen nature? It is still according to God's permissive appointment; for nothing can take place, either in providence or in grace, except as God in his infinite wisdom has decreed to perform, or decreed to allow.

But all these things, however trying to our minds, however hard to bear, however painful to our flesh, are decreed to work together. They do not work singly, but they work together with something else. It is like my watch. The wheel that turns the hand is not the same wheel that is moved by the spring; but one wheel works within another wheel, and one cog catches in another cog, until at length the time of day is shown upon the dial. So with respect to our afflictions, our exercises, the trials of our minds, the various disappointments and perplexities we have to endure; they do not work singly, but together with something else; and it is by this working together with something else that they produce a divine and blessed result.

But what is that with which they work. The grace of God in the soul. The wheel of providence works with the wheel of grace; and the wheel of grace works with the wheel of providence; and together a blessing is the result. For instance. Some affliction befalls your body; you are laid upon a sick bed. That affliction will do you no good in itself; but it works together with the grace of God in your soul; and by its working together with the grace of God in your soul, a blessing is the result. Or, you are brought down in circumstances: you have a very difficult path to tread in providence. This will do you no good in itself; there are thousands of persons in bad circumstances who get no good from them. But it works together with the life and power of God in your soul; and

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so it produces a blessing. Or, you may lose a wife, or a child, or have sickness in your family; in themselves no good is produced by these things; but they work together with the life and power of God in your soul; and this brings about the blessing. In this word lies the mystery—they work together.

But what do they work together for? "For good." But what do we call good? We must not take our idea of good, but God's idea of the matter. We must not take what we fancy to be good, but what is really and truly so in his eyes. For instance. A man may say, it is very good to have health; it may be so in his eyes, but not so in God's. Another may say, it is a very good thing to get on in the world, to have a flourishing business, and prosperous trade; that may be good in his eyes, but not in God's. Another may say, it is good for me to have a family growing up in health and strength, and well provided for: it may be so in his eyes; but it does not follow that it is good in the Lord's. Another may say, it is good to have no troubles, no temptations, no wicked heart, no devil to beguile or harass; it may seem very good in his eyes, but it does not follow that it is so in God's eyes. He is judge in these matters.

What, then, are we to say is "good?" Whatever produces spiritual profit and a blessing; that which is really good in the eyes of a heart-searching God.

Now just see whether all these things do not in this sense work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose. You have had an afflicted body. Well, that in itself did you no good; for it incapacitated you for business, troubled your mind, made you a burden to yourself and a burden to all around you. There was no good in that. But suppose it weaned you from the world; suppose it set death before your eyes, made you die daily, stirred up a spirit of prayer and supplication in your heart; suppose it opened up those promises of God which are suitable to his afflicted family; suppose it was the means of blessing your soul with some sweet manifestation of your interest in the love and blood of the Lamb—are you then to say, that your

sickness, your affliction has not been for good, when it worked together with the grace of God in your soul to bring forth a real blessing? Or, you have had reverses in the world, have lost money in trade, and are now in distressed circumstances. There is no good in these things considered abstractly; but do they stir up the life and power of God in your soul? do they give you an errand to the throne of grace? do they shew you what is in your heart? do they call forth confession before God? do they make Jesus near and dear to your souls? do they wean you from the world? then they have worked together for your good. You have lost a child, or have an afflicted wife, and unhealthy family; there is no good in that; for “the sorrow of the world worketh death.” But suppose that this wife or child has become your idol; that you have worshipped it instead of worshipping God,—why, then, this affliction works together for good, if through it your heart’s affections are now fixed on the Lord Jesus alone. Thus we are to measure this good, not by what the creature thinks, but by what God himself has declared to be good in his word, and what we have felt to be good in our soul’s experience. Have your trials humbled you, made you meek and lowly? They have done you good. Have they stirred up a spirit of prayer in your bosom, made you sigh, cry, and groan for the Lord to appear, visit, or bless your soul? They have done you good. Have they opened up those parts of God’s word which are full of mercy and comfort to his afflicted people? They have done you good. Have they stripped off the covering that is too narrow? They have done you good. Have they made you more sincere, more earnest, more spiritual, more heavenly-minded, more convinced that the Lord Jesus can alone bless and comfort your soul? They have done you good. Have they been the means in God’s hand of giving you a lift in hearing the preached word, of opening your ears to hear none but the true servants of God, those who enter into a tried path, and describe a gracious experience? They have done you good. Have they made the Bible more precious to you, the promises more sweet, the dealings of God with your soul more

Now this is the way, that “all things work together for good.” Not by puffing you up with pride, but by filling your heart with humility; not by encouraging presumption, but by raising your affections to where Jesus sits at the right hand of God; not by carrying us into the world, but by bringing us out of it; not by covering us with a veil of ignorance and arrogance, but by stripping this veil off, and bringing light, life, and power into the soul. In this way, “all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose.”

III.—And this leads me to our third point, which is our knowledge of these things. “We know that all things work together for good.” How do we know it?. We know it in two ways. We know it, first, from the testimony of God’s word: and we know it secondly, from the testimony of God in our own conscience.

1. Let us look at the record of God’s word. See the saints of old; how afflicted they were! But did not all things work together for good to them? Look at Jacob! What sorrows, trials and afflictions the aged patriarch went through! his whole life one continued scene of trouble and sorrow. But did not all work together for his good? Was there one too many, or one too heavy? Could he not in the end lay his head upon his dying pillow, and bless and thank God for them all? Look at Joseph! Did not all things work together for his good? His brethren’s enmity; his being sold into Egypt; the wicked conduct of his master’s wife: his being cast into prison: his interpreting the chief butler’s and baker’s dreams. How all these things worked together for his good, and brought him out to occupy the next place to Pharaoh himself, and be the means in the hand of God of keeping alive the people of Israel. Look at David! Hunted on the mountains like a partridge; continually exposed to the spear of Saul; on every hand nothing but persecution and distress: on all sides affliction and sorrow. Yet all things worked together for his good. What blessed Psalms we have in consequence! What a sweet treasury of comfort for God’s people through David being

thus hunted about on the mountains and in the wilderness! How suitable they are to God's poor tried and tempted family! If David had not had all these persecutions and afflictions, he never could have written the Psalms, nor would there have been in them such treasures of consolation. Look at Job's troubles and afflictions! Children taken away; property swept off in a moment; his body plagued with boils; his friends turned to enemies; and God himself appearing to be against him. Yet, how all things worked together for good in his case!

2. And have we not in our measure proved the same? When trials came, we could not see that they were working together for good. No: perhaps you have sometimes been, as I have felt, in such a state as to believe we never should see the day when they would prove for our good. They were so dark in themselves, so mysterious, so painful, so trying, so perplexing, that in the unbelief of our mind, we could scarcely believe that God himself could ever convince us they were working together for our spiritual good. But has there been any trial, any temptation, any exercise, any affliction, any sorrow, which has not in some way or other worked together for our spiritual good—in humbling us, shewing us more of what we are, opening up the Scriptures to us, stirring up a spirit of prayer, making Jesus precious, throwing light upon God's truth, or applying that truth with a measure of sweetness and comfort to our souls? Thus, we know from our own experience as well as Scripture, that "all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose."

But, you may say, 'I do not see it now.' No; there is the trying point. 'I do not feel it at this present moment.' No. Did you see your past trials at the very moment that they were working together for your good? When the Lord afflicted your body, brought you down in circumstances, sent disease into your family, suffered your mind to be tried with the fiery darts of the devil, and a thousand temptations and perplexities—I want to know whether at the time you could speak confidently, 'I know that what I am now passing

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through will work together for my spiritual good.' If you could say that, then I will add this—it was not half a trial. If you are passing through any trial, sorrow, or temptation; and can look up unto God, and say, 'I know and am persuaded that this very thing is working together for my spiritual good—if you can say that, you have got through more than half the trial. It is this which aggravates the trials, temptations, and exercises of God's people for the most part, that when they are in them they have not this blessed confidence.

But say, that they have faith to see that all the trials and afflictions that grieve and burden them are working together for their spiritual good, then they do not want much comfort from God's word, and have no communion with God's tried saints. If I can fight my own battles, I do not want a precious Jesus to bring me off more than conqueror. And thus we should lose all the blessedness of having something to look back upon, and to say, 'I was in this trial, and it did me that good; I was upon that bed of affliction, and it brought me this blessing; I had that reverse of circumstances, and it did me good; I had that trouble in my family, and it did me good; I was harassed with this temptation, and it did me good; I was put into this furnace, and it did me good; sifted in that sieve, and it did me good; had these oppositions, and they did me good.' When we can look back and say, 'there has not been a single trial that has not worked in some measure for my good'—that experience encourages us to look forward, and to believe that present trials will have the same result—and that all things are working together for good to us as far as we love God, and are the called according to his purpose.

Thus we may resolve it all. There is no man that can say, 'I can make my trials work together for good.' He cannot manage that he must have them; and it is a mercy to have them. It is a mercy when we are enabled to bring our trials, our exercises, our temptations to the Lord's feet, and say, 'Lord, here I am, with all my trials, troubles, exercises; I cannot manage them; they are too much for me; do thou undertake for me; do thou bring me off more than conqueror;

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do thou appear for me; do thou bless me; do thou cause all my trials, exercises, and temptations to work together for my spiritual good; let the trial be sharp, let the affliction be heavy, let there be nothing in it but what is most painful and grievous, yet, Lord, if I can but believe that they are working together for my spiritual good, I can bear them all! If we have found that this has been the result of all that has passed, it may enable us at times to believe it for all that is to come, and to look up in confidence that nothing can happen to us, be it in providence or in grace,—but can and will “work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose.”

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Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening,
July 8, 1849

“Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise.”

Jeremiah 17:14

Among the many features which distinguish the people of God, there is one which seems more particularly to shine forth; and that is, that however distressed their minds may be, however low they may be sunk, they can accept no help nor deliverance, but that which comes from God Himself. We find this spirit breathing all through the word. Take such passages as these, for instance; “Give us help from trouble; for vain is the help of man.” Ps 60:11 “In vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel.” Jer 3:23 “O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me.” Isa 38:14 The Psalms are full of this spirit. However exercised, however distressed, however deeply sunk the soul of the Psalmist was, you will always find this distinctive feature, that to God, and to God alone, he looked. “My soul”—he charges her—“my soul, wait thou

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only upon God; for my expectation is from him.” Ps 62:5 And we find something of the same spirit breathing itself forth in the words of our text, “Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise.”

Our text consists of three clauses. And these three clauses I shall, as the Lord may give me strength and ability, endeavour spiritually and experimentally now to open up.

I.—The first is, “Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed.” What is this expressive of? A felt disease; a disease too deeply felt for any but God to cure. Now when the Lord teaches His people to profit and all His teachings are to profit, He makes them sensible, deeply sensible of the malady of sin. Thus, without doubt, there is not a living soul upon the earth whom the Lord has not more or less taught to feel the malady.

There are, however, three things necessary in the work of grace upon the soul with respect to this malady of sin. There is, first, a knowledge of the malady: there is, secondly, a knowledge of the remedy; and there is, thirdly, the application of the remedy to the malady.

1. There is the knowledge of the deep and distressing malady of sin; and this lies at the root of all. At the foundation of every sigh, every cry, every prayer, every groan is an internal and experimental acquaintance with the deep and distressing disease of sin. Thus, if a man do not feel internally and experimentally the desperate disease with which he is infected from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, I am bold to say, that a spiritual groan, cry, or sigh, never came forth from his heart.

Let us, as the Lord may give us ability, look a little more closely at the various maladies that the Lord's people feel themselves to be infected by; for this disease of sin is not a single or solitary one. It has many, many distressing branches; and for the various distressing branches of this one disease, God has His own divinely appointed remedy.

i. There is the disease of blindness. Now this is what man does

not feel by nature. When the Lord told the pharisees their state and condition, could they receive it? This was their answer, "We see;" therefore the Lord said, "your sin remaineth." They were not acquainted with the desperate disease of blindness; they thought they saw; they were well persuaded they knew everything, which they ought to know. But the Lord's people are taught to feel how blind they are, and how unable to see anything except as the Lord is pleased to anoint their eyes with His divine eye-salve. Thus they cannot see what or where they are, nor the meaning of any portion of God's truth, nor the blessedness and beauty of Jesus; they cannot see His glorious Person, atoning blood, justifying righteousness, dying love, sweet suitability, nor the preciousness of all His covenant characters and divine offices, whilst labouring under this disease of blindness.

Now, when we feel at first what poor, blind, ignorant creatures we are, we often have recourse to human remedies. We think perhaps that study may remedy this disease of blindness; that if we get together a number of religious books, read the Bible very much, and hear the best preachers, we may heal that disease; but alas, alas, we soon find that all these fancied remedies only leave us blinder and darker, and more ignorant than before; till feeling how blind we are, how little we know, what a veil of ignorance is over our hearts, it makes us sigh and cry and beg and pray and look unto the Lord to open these blind eyes of ours; to bring light, and knowledge, and truth into our hearts. This is in fact a part of the breathing in our text, "Heal me, and I shall be healed." And when the Lord is pleased to open our blind eyes, and show us something of His own beauty, blessedness, and glory; when the blessed Spirit anoints our eyes with heavenly eye-salve to see something of the glorious Person of Christ, the riches of His grace, the efficacy of His blood, and the sweetness and suitability of all His covenant characters and offices—when He thus brings a measure of divine light, life, and power into our souls, He answers that prayer, and heals our blindness.

ii. We are also afflicted, naturally, with the dreadful disease of deafness. We are deaf to all the admonitions of God's word, deaf to all His threatenings and judgments, deaf to all His gracious promises; and not all the preaching in the world can of itself heal this deafness of ours. But it is the Lord's office to unstop the deaf ears; and when we begin to feel how deaf we are, and to mourn over our inability to hear God's truth with life and feeling, it brings a cry up out of our hearts unto God that He will apply and bless His precious word with a divine power to our souls. Do you not sometimes come to chapel with this dreadful disease of deafness upon you? You may come time after time, Lord's day after Lord's day, and yet, through this disease of deafness, no power accompanies what you hear. You do not hear to your soul's satisfaction; there is no melting, no softening of your heart and spirit under the word. It seems as though, however you heard with your outward ear, there was another ear wanting—the ear of your heart; and until the Lord is pleased to open that ear, all that you hear with the outward ear is unavailing. Now, when we begin to cry to the Lord. that He would apply His word to our hearts, bring His precious truth into our soul, cause it to drop like rain upon our spirit—this is, in effect, to cry to the Lord to heal this disease of deafness.

iii. There is another disease that we are sadly afflicted with, and that is the disease of a hard heart; a heart that refuses to melt, a heart that can read of all the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and feel no compunction; no trickling tear, no godly sorrow, no softening experienced within. O this disease of a hard heart! For the people of God want to feel their hearts made soft, their souls watered, their spirits melted, laid low, and dissolved into tears of contrition. But through this dreadful disease of a hard heart, they cannot produce these gracious feelings in their souls. They cry, therefore, 'Lord take this hard heart away; Lord, do thou soften my soul. When I come to hear Thy word when I read of Thy sufferings, do Thou melt my heart; do Thou take away this heart of stone, do Thou give me a heart of flesh.' This is, in effect, breathing forth the

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words of the text, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed."

iv. We are afflicted also with another dreadful disease, that of unbelief. So afflicted are we with this dreadful malady of unbelief that we cannot raise up a single grain of faith in our souls; we cannot believe a promise, however sweet or suitable; we cannot believe our interest except so far as it is made clear to our eyes; we cannot believe that "all things work together for our spiritual good;" we cannot believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, nor trust in His blood and love. Now when we feel this, and ask the Lord to take it away, to bless our souls with faith, what is this, in effect, but breathing forth the prayer, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed?" And when the Lord is pleased to give us faith to believe His word, to come to Him, to hang upon Him, to trust in His mercy, and rest in His love—this is the fulfilment of the prayer, the Lord hearing and answering it to heal this felt disease of unbelief.

v. There is pride, worldly-mindedness, and carnality, self-glorying, and a host of vile corruptions and dreadful lusts, continually bringing our souls into bondage; and these we cannot heal. We cannot clothe ourselves with humility; we cannot give ourselves repentance and godly sorrow for sin; we cannot sprinkle our own conscience with the precious blood of the Lamb; we cannot shed abroad the love of God in our hearts, cannot dispel doubt and fear, cannot deliver ourselves from temptation, nor subdue the evils of our hearts. Man may tell us to do so; but we have tried, and tried, and tried, and found we could do none of these things. And thus we are brought to fall low before the footstool of mercy, and cry unto the Lord in the language of the text. "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed."

2. Now these are the three steps. We first of all feel the malady; then we see revealed in God's word the remedy; and when the Lord is pleased to bring the remedy into our hearts, then He fulfils the prayer of the text in healing our souls. When light comes, it heals our blindness; when power is felt in the heart, it heals our deafness; when we feel softness and humility, by a sense of God's

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goodness, it heals our hardness; when faith springs up in living exercise, it heals our unbelief; when contrition, humility, meekness, and godly sorrow are given to us, it heals the disease of hardness and coldness, deadness and barrenness.

Thus, when the Lord is pleased to apply His precious word with divine power to our hearts, and to work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, it is a fulfilling in our soul's experience of the words of the text; it is not only a cry to the Lord that He would heal, but it is a healing of our diseases. "Heal me, O LORD," the church cries, "and I shall be healed." I want no more. It is not man that can do it. I cannot do it. It is not my promises, nor my resolution; it is not my prayers, nor my desires; it is not my sighs, my cries, my groans, nor breathings, nor wishes. All these are physicians of no value. But Thy precious blood sprinkled upon my conscience, Thy glorious robe of righteousness put upon me by Thine own hand. Thy dying love shed abroad in my soul by the Holy Ghost,—there is healing efficacy, blessed virtue in these things, O Lord. And if Thou do but apply these things with a divine power to my heart, then I am healed. One look can do it; one word can do it; one smile, one touch can do it. Thou, Lord, hast only but to speak, to bring one word, to bestow one look, to give one promise, to drop but one drop of Thy precious love, blood and grace into my heart—it is done in the twinkling of an eye. This is the substance of the cry that comes up from time to time out of a living soul, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed."

Now if this be not the substance of your prayers, why do you go to a throne of grace? What else is the real subject of your petitions? What else is the language of your groans? What else is the import of all your desires? "Heal me, and I shall be healed" this is the language of all prayer; this is the import of all supplication; this is the breath of every praying soul; this speaks in itself volumes of anxious desires, earnest longings, fervent prayers, hungerings and thirstings—all the wants and wishes of really contrite hearts.

II.—We pass on to the second clause. "Save me, and I shall be

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saved." Now what after all is the great concern of every living soul? Is it not salvation? If his soul be saved, what can hurt him? and if his soul be not saved, what can profit him? "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall he give in exchange for his soul?" Whatever trial, whatever temptation, whatever difficulties, whatever exercises beset me by the way, if I reach heaven at last, what do all these anxious troubles concern me? If I bathe at last in streams of endless bliss, what are all the cares, sorrows, troubles, perplexities, trials, and griefs of this life? "Save me," then the church cries, "and I shall be saved."

Do not the words imply despair of self salvation? If I can do anything whatever to save my soul; if I can by a desire, if I can by a prayer, if I can by a wish. if I can by any exertion of my own free-will do anything whatever to save my own soul. I cannot, with an honest heart utter the words of the text. But if I am brought to this inward feeling, that do what I can, do what I may, I cannot in the matter of salvation bring my soul a step nearer heaven, and that I am absolutely helpless as regards all divine matters; then, as the Lord is pleased to quicken and revive my soul by the blessed operations of His Spirit, how the substance at least, if not the words of the text, comes forth, "Save me, O Lord, and I shall be saved!"

I. Now salvation implies several things. First of all, it implies a salvation from the guilt of sin. This is what the souls of God's people are first chiefly exercised by—the guilt of sin, and the troubles and sorrows that it brings; as well as the distressing doubts, fears, bondage, and hard labour that a sense of sin laid upon the conscience is always accompanied with; so that in crying, "Save me, and I shall be saved." they cry to be saved from the guilt of sin felt in the conscience.

2. There is the filth of sin. which pollutes the mind. When we see what sin is in the light of God's countenance, it stains our conscience, and brings a distressing sense of self-abhorrence and self-loathing. Now from this filth of sin polluting and defiling the mind, do we desire to be saved and delivered by the mighty power

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of God.

3. There is the power of sin—the secret dominion sin possesses in the heart; and O, what a tyrannical rule does sin sometimes exercise in our carnal minds! How soon are we entangled in flesh-pleasing snares! How easily brought under the secret dominion of some hidden corruption! and how we struggle in vain to deliver ourselves when we are caught in the snares of the devil, or are under the power of any one lust, besetment, or temptation!

The Lord, and the Lord alone can save us from all these things. He saves from the guilt of sin by sprinkling the conscience with the precious blood of the Lamb; when that is felt in the soul, it delivers us from its guilt. He saves us from the filth of sin by the washing of regeneration, renewing us in the spirit of our mind, and giving us a solemn plunge in the fountain once opened for all sin and uncleanness. He saves us from the power of sin by bringing a sense of His dying love into our hearts, delivering us from our idols, raising our affections to things above, breaking to pieces our snares, subduing our lusts, taming our corruptions, and overmastering the inward evils of our dreadfully fallen nature.

None but the Lord can do these things for us. If we have backslidden from God, and who among us has not backslidden from Him?; if we have been entangled in Satan's snares, and the corruption of our own hearts, and who has not been entangled in these evils?, nothing but a sweet application of the precious blood of Christ can cleanse us from the guilt of sin. If we have defiled our conscience by our crooked and perverse ways, nothing but the sanctifying operations of the blessed Spirit, washing us in the fountain of Christ's blood, can cleanse away and remove this inward defilement. And if we are under the power of evil; if sin be working in us and bringing our souls under this dreadful tyranny, nothing but the felt power of God, nothing but the putting forth of His mighty arm, nothing but the shedding abroad of dying love, nothing but the operations of His grace upon our soul, can deliver us from the secret power of evil.

If we never felt the guilt of sin, we should never want to have our consciences sprinkled with the precious blood of the Lamb; if we never felt how we are defiled from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, we should never want to be washed in the fountain for sin and uncleanness. If we never felt the secret power of sin, how it entangles our thoughts, carries away our affections from the right path wherein we should walk; if we never sighed, cried, or groaned beneath the power of evil, we should want no mighty miracle to be wrought in us, we should want no outstretched hand of God, we should not want to feel the power or taste the sweetness of dying love. Thus, would we enter into the freeness, the suitability, the beauty, the riches of God's great salvation, we must descend into the felt depths of our malady, into our distressing disease—the hidden workings of the evil within—into the abominations that lurk, work, and fester in our fallen nature; for the knowledge of the malady is so deeply connected with a knowledge of the remedy, that if we know not the one we never can know the other.

When the Lord is pleased in any measure to bow down His ear to hear our prayer; when He is pleased to make His word sweet and powerful in any degree to our souls; to give us a sight and sense of our interest in the precious blood of the Lamb; and to deliver our souls from the hand of the enemy—then we can see and feel and know what a great salvation the Lord Jesus Christ has wrought out; and we are brought to see and feel that nothing but such a salvation as He has accomplished, and none but such a Saviour as the Lord Jesus Christ is, can really suit and save our souls. So that the foundation of all true religion—the foundation of every sigh, of every cry, of every groan, of every wish, of every desire, of every true breath of prayer is, an experimental acquaintance with the disease in its various branches, and a knowledge, an internal knowledge of the depth of the fall, as made manifest in our wretched heart. Thus, when the Lord is pleased in any measure to stretch forth His hand, and to work powerfully for our deliverance; when the Lord blesses our souls, and visits us with the discovery of

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His goodness and love,—then, comparing what we are, and what we have been, with the riches of His mercy and grace, how it exalts His salvation and sacrifice, and the love, blood, and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in our eyes!

These two things will always go together. When I feel no malady, I want no remedy; when I feel no condemnation, I want no salvation; when I am not exercised with a sense of inward guilt and distress, I want no precious blood sprinkled upon my conscience; I want no love shed abroad in my heart; I want no blessed visit from the Lord of life and glory; I want no sweet promise to bring its dew into my soul; I want nothing that the Lord has to bestow; I can occupy my mind in the things of time and sense, and be carnal, sensual, and earthly. But when various exercises recommence in the soul, and the Lord sets to His hand, and begins to revive the work of grace in the heart, then I want something divine, something experimental, something applied, something done in my soul that He alone can do for me. Without, then, these exercises, without a knowledge of the dreadful malady, without strong temptations, without daily conflicts, what is internal religion to me? If unexercised, I can do without internal, experimental religion; without the felt power of God; without Christ, without the blessed Spirit, without the Bible. But place me in circumstances of guilt, of exercise, of distress, of sorrow, of trouble, and the various perplexities that encompass the child of God, and let the Lord work by these things to kindle in my breast the spirit of supplication, then my soul will be wanting every blessing that God has to bestow; it will be separate from the world, and living a life of faith and prayer; it will be dealing with God; it will be coming out of the creature in all its shapes and forms, looking simply and solely to the Lord Jesus Christ. So that as we have the knowledge of the malady in its various branches, and an acquaintance with temptation, guilt, sin, shame, and sorrow—as these things are opening a way for the precious truths of God, and giving a place in our hearts for their heavenly influence, we are arriving at the knowledge of the remedy.

I can appeal to your consciences, you that have any for there are very few that have consciences, there are very few really exercised about divine things, there are very few that the Lord is really teaching by His blessed Spirit, and leading down into the solemn depths of divine things I say, you that have consciences, whose souls are kept alive by daily exercises, who know the evils of your hearts by their continually bubbling and springing forth; you that are not deceived by a name to live, or an empty profession of religion: I say, you whose souls are thus exercised, know that "in all these things you live and in all these things is the life of your spirit." Take away your exercises, your afflictions, your sorrows, your perplexities, and the working of God by these things, and where is your religion? It has made to itself wings, and flown away. But let your minds be well exercised in the things of God; let affliction befall; let the bonds and ties of this world be severed: let temptations come with overwhelming weight; let the corruptions of our fallen nature boil up; let your soul sink down into trouble; let eternity open before your eyes; let death come into sight; and let your souls be solemnly exercised on divine realities; then I will answer for it, you will want what God alone can bestow upon you; and in the silent watches of the night, you will be crying, to God to look down upon you, to visit and bless you, to speak words of mercy to you, to shed abroad His love in your hearts, and to comfort and cheer your troubled soul.

Take away a sense of the malady, you are taking away a sense of the remedy; take away the doubts and fears, the temptations, the trials, perplexities, the troubles and disappointments that God is exercising you by, and you are taking away the promises, the sweet manifestations of God's love, and all the application of God's truth with divine power; in fact, you are taking away all prayer out of the soul, and removing that which lies at the foundations of every groan and every sigh that comes up out of the heart.

III.—This leads us to our third clause; "for thou art my praise." Why, when we can feel that the Lord has in mercy done anything

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for our souls, when we can believe that He has wrought a work of grace in us; that He has convinced us of our ruined state by nature; that He has led us to Himself. enabled us to rest on His promises, and made us to hate ourselves in our own sight; that He has kindled and stirred up in us a spirit of prayer, and at times made Jesus precious to our souls; that He has given us a view of the glory of His Person, the riches of His grace, the suitability of all His offices and characters, and thus endeared Him to our hearts—then we can say. "Thou art my praise." 'I can praise Thee for every trial, thank Thee for every sorrow, and bless Thy name for every exercise; for I feel that all these things have been for the good of my soul. There has not been one trial nor one sorrow too many; it has all issued in my good and Thy glory.' And therefore, in solemn moments, we can take up this language in our lips, because He is "our praise."

We have reason to praise Him for every discovery of our dreadful malady and every discovery of the suitability of His precious remedy; we have reason to praise Him for every view of self, and every view of Christ; for every view of guilt, and every view of atoning blood; for every view of sin and shame, and every view of the robe of righteousness that shields and shelters from it. We have reason to bless Him for every breath of prayer, for every desire, for every sigh, for every cry, and for every groan. We have reason to praise Him for every acting of grace in the soul, for every spark of living hope in the breast, and every feeling of life and love in the conscience. We have to bless Him for looking down upon us in the depths of His mercy, convincing us of our ruined state by nature, leading us to the Lord Jesus Christ, making Him precious to our hearts, and giving us to see something of His beauty, blessedness, and glory; and all this connected with a sense of sin, and the exercises of the soul, with the cries and sighs of a burdened heart, as all having been effectual, preparations for the blessings that God, and God alone can bestow.

Now just see whether we can lay down our exercises side by

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side with this text. This is the way that we are to deal with our experience if we have any. Have we, then, any hope that God has begun and is carrying on the work of grace in our soul? Have we anything that God has done, or is doing for us? Let us lay it down, and compare it with this part of God's word. Can we find this prayer in our hearts, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved." Has the Lord given to us any sight and sense of the distressing malady of sin? Have we felt what miseries we have brought upon our own heads? Have we seen too what a salvation there is in the Lord Jesus Christ? and how suitable it is to the state of our souls? And are we pleading with Him, and saying, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed? Thou hast but to speak the word; my case may be very desperate; my maladies very distressing; the evils of my heart very strong; my backslidings very numerous; my soul very far from Thee. But then, Lord, Thou hast all power; Thou has only to speak the word, Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed." Nothing else is wanting, I cannot wash the Ethiopian white; I cannot make the leopard change his spots; but Thou canst do all these things. Heal me, then, by Thy precious truth and grace, and let a sense of Thy pardoning love and mercy reach me. "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved" I want no other remedy but Thy precious blood applied to my conscience; no other love but Thy blessed love shed abroad in my heart.

If these are the exercises, desires, and feelings of our souls, they bring us to a throne of grace, they separate us from the world, exercise our minds to godliness, take away hypocrisy, deceit, lies, and falsehood, and make our hearts earnest and sincere, before the God of all truth.

If we feel that we have ruined our own souls, that no human arm can save us, that we cannot bring salvation into our own consciences, nor of ourselves see any beauty, glory, sweetness, or suitability in the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet are striving with prayer and supplication to touch the hem of His garment, to taste

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the sweetness of His dying love, to feel the efficacy of His atoning blood, to be wrapped up in His glorious robe of righteousness, and to know Him in the sweet manifestations of His grace, why, then too we can say, "Save me, and I shall be saved." Here is this sin! save me from it: here is this snare! break it to pieces; here is this temptation! deliver me out of it; here is this lust! Lord, subdue it; here is my proud heart; Lord, humble it; my unbelieving heart! take it away, and give me faith; my rebellious heart! remove it, Lord, and give me submission to Thy mind and will; take me as I am with all my sin and shame, and work in me everything well-pleasing in Thy sight, for "Thou art my praise." If ever I have blessed Thee, it has been for Thy goodness to my soul; if ever my heart has been tuned to Thy praise; if ever my lips have thanked Thee, it has been for the riches of Thy grace, and the manifestations of Thy mercy, I am nothing and never shall be anything but a poor guilty sinner in Thy eyes; but I have to praise Thee for all that is past, and to hope in Thee for all that is to come; "for Thou," and Thou alone, O LORD, "art my praise."

May this be an encouragement for every child of God who can say, 'This is really what my soul is exercised with; these are really the feelings and breathings of my heart.' And if there be this voice in your soul corresponding to the word of God, is not that a testimony that the same Lord that wrote this experience in the heart of Jeremiah has written the same experience in your soul too! The very desire after these things is from God; the very sense of our misery, the very knowledge of our helplessness, the very cry for mercy, the very looking to Jesus, the very hoping in His blood, the very act of casting ourselves down in godly simplicity at the footstool of grace, and seeking the manifestations of His love to our souls—spring from grace, and manifest the work of the Spirit.

Nay, if you cannot rise up to the full height, and thoroughly say, "Thou art my praise," why, the time will come when you will be able to say so; when you will bless the Lord for showing you the malady and showing you the remedy, when you will thank Him

for discovering to you your condemnation and your salvation, will give Him cheerfully all the praise and crown Him with all the honour. For I am well assured, we never can take a single atom of it to ourselves, but that this is and ever must be the language of our hearts, and, if sincere, the language of our lips, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed." I look to no other balm but Thy blood; sprinkle that precious blood upon my conscience, and I shall be healed. "Save me," in the sweet discoveries of Thy mercy and Thy grace, "and I shall be saved." I want no other Saviour, and no other salvation; and as that comes into my heart, I joyfully ascribe to Thee all the praise, and render to Thee all the blessing, honour, glory, and thanksgiving.

132 Seeds of Light and Gladness

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Morning,
July 15, 1849

"Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."

Psalm 97:11

True religion is not learnt in a day; in most cases, it is the slow growth of years. In grace, as well as in nature, the most lasting and solid materials are usually of the slowest growth. It takes twenty-five years to build up the body of a man; it takes near double that time to build up his mind. A gourd grows and withers in a night: the oak, the monarch of the forest, is the slow growth of a century. And thus, where there is a solid, substantial growth in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, it is, generally speaking, the fruit of years of trials, temptations, and corresponding mercies, favours, and blessings.

We may find, perhaps, this train of thought not altogether unconnected with the words before us; which as they consist of two clauses, I shall, as the Lord may enable me, endeavour to open

up this morning, by shewing,

First.—How light is sown for the righteous.

Secondly.—How gladness is sown for the upright in heart.

I.—We have a certain character set before us in the words of our text, who is called in the first clause, "the righteous;" and, in the second, "the upright in heart." It will be my business, therefore, before we proceed any further, to describe, as the Lord may enable me, who this character is; for all depends upon that; it is the base on which the whole superstructure stands; it is the hinge and pivot upon which the whole text turns. A mistake here is fatal throughout. Personal preaching I abhor; discriminating preaching I love. We cannot have too little of the one; we cannot have too much of the other. Individuals we should never desire to bear in mind, but characters we cannot bear in mind too much; for by describing character we enter into the very secret thoughts of God's people; and by unfolding, as the Lord may give light, their experience, we have a witness in the hearts of those who know the truth, that they are possessed of those divine marks which show that their names are in the book of life.

The word of God describes the children of the Most High under various names. They are called, sometimes, children of God, heirs of God, saints, brethren, temples of the Holy Ghost; but perhaps there is scarcely any title more frequently used, especially in the Old Testament, than that before us, "the righteous."

What, then, is meant by this word "righteous?" Who is the character described thereby? We may say, then, that in order to be righteous a man must be possessed of three qualifications. He must first, be righteous by the imputed obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ put to his account. He must, secondly, be righteous by the implantation of a righteous principle; and thirdly, he must be righteous by the bringing forth of this righteous principle in godly acts, in his life, conduct, and conversation. So that we may say, a person is righteous in three points of view. He is so by righteousness imputed, righteousness imparted, and righteousness manifested.

And if a man is not a partaker of these three distinct kinds of righteousness—if all three do not meet in the same individual—if he is not a partaker of imputed righteousness, he is not such a character as God himself in his holy word has called righteous.

I shall not dwell this morning upon the imputed righteousness which is put to his account, though it is the foundation of the whole, as it is not closely connected with my text; but shall confine myself chiefly to the second qualification, whereby a man is accounted righteous, as being made a partaker of imparted righteousness; for we shall find it is for him as righteous in this sense that “light is sown.”

Now this righteousness, as described in the word of God, stands in various things. Thus, it stands in light; as we read, “Who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (1 Pet. 2:9.) It stands in life; “And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.” (Eph. 2:1.) It stands in power; “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.” It stands in divine teaching; for “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord.” (Isa. 54:13.) It stands in the fear of God; “I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.” (Jer. 32:40.) It stands in faith; for those who are made partakers of this righteousness, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It stands in hope, as an “anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast.” (Heb. 6:19.) It stands in love; “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema-maranatha.” (1 Cor. 16:22.) It stands in the leadings of the Spirit; for “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:14.) It stands in simplicity and godly sincerity, in righteousness and true holiness. In a word, it stands in the work of the Spirit upon the soul. Therefore all these qualifications—light, life, and power; the fear of God; faith, hope, and love; righteousness and true holiness; sincerity, and godly simplicity—all meet in the same individual; and so far as they meet in the same bosom, and a man is made a partaker of them by the power of God, so far, and so far only, is he inwardly a righteous man.

Now we read in our text that light is sown for such. There is to my mind something very sweet and expressive in the figure; which I may observe is one of the simplest in nature. The casting of seed into the ground, and out of that seed a crop springing up, is a figure common to every country, and familiar to every understanding.

When, then, the blessed Spirit declares that “Light is sown for the righteous,” he means that seeds of light are sown for them, which in time spring up and bear a produce.

But what is there couched in the figure? Let us examine it a little more minutely, and look into it a little more closely. Before seed is cast into ground, there must be a preparation. The soil in its natural state is not fit to receive seed. It must undergo a certain process whereby it is brought into a state suitable to receive it. In other words, there must be a seed-bed in which it must be sown, in order that it may germinate and send down a root. But, there is another thing equally necessary, which is, that the seed when sown must be covered up in the soil; for only as far as it is thus covered up and concealed, does it germinate, grow, or bring forth a crop.

Let us bear these two ideas in mind, because they are the two leading characteristics of the figure.

i. First, then, there must be a preparation; the soil must be made fit for the seeds of light to be sown in it. This we may see in various ways. For instance,

There are certain providential leadings. And there is scarcely any child of God who is not more or less acquainted with them. These providential leadings are often of the greatest importance as it concerns spiritual things. Nay, I may add further, that some of the most important events of our life were connected with apparently the most trivial incidents. The most important event of my life was my going to Ireland in 1826, when a young man at Oxford; I call it the most important event of my life, because it was in 1827, now twenty-two years ago, that eternal things were first laid upon my mind, that I was made to know myself as a poor, lost sinner, and a spirit of grace and supplication poured out upon

my soul. I may have had doubts and fears since as to the reality of the work of grace upon my soul; but I have never doubted, and never shall doubt that if I possess grace in my heart, it was then first implanted. That important event, connected as it is with my standing before you at this moment preaching the word of life, depended upon a very simple incident. It was this. A gentleman sleeping at Oxford, instead of going off early the next morning, remained two or three hours later. That circumstance gave me an interview with him, which resulted in my going to Ireland. Upon that simple incident, then, of a gentleman staying a few hours in a town, hinged the whole work of grace in my heart. I may mention another thing, which may excite a smile, that the foundation of my present ministry turned upon the death of a horse. When I was first a clergyman, I used to ride backward and forward to my parish from the University; but my horse dying, and it not being convenient to buy another, I was induced to go and reside in that parish. And it was during several years that I lived there in separation and privacy, that the foundation of my present ministry was laid in the exercises of mind I then experienced. It was then I began to speak to the people of God of trials and exercises; and to trace out the difference between the teachings of God and the teachings of man. I merely mention these circumstances to shew how the most important events (for what can be so important to us as the things of God?) may depend upon apparently minute circumstances.

Now when we are in these circumstances, we have no light upon them; but light is sown in the circumstances. When I went to Ireland, I had no idea that the Lord meant there to visit my soul with his grace; I went merely from carnal motives; but light was sown in that circumstance, and has since sprung up. When my horse died, it was a trouble to me; but light was sown in that circumstance, to bring me more into an acquaintance with the inward workings of my heart, and lay the foundation of an experimental ministry. You may have experienced a similar thing. You may have gone up a

street, and there met a person; and that meeting have turned out an important event in your life. You may have changed your residence, and that change may have led to most important consequences. These are providential leadings. Light is sown in them; seeds of light, which are as different when they have sprung up as the blade from the seed. They are sown in the bed, covered with darkness, concealed by the soil; yet they spring up and bear a crop of light.

Or, you may have had providential afflictions, been laid upon a bed of sickness, and this may have been made a great blessing to you. Many of the Lord's people can say with me—that it has been in sickness the Lord has exercised their minds—in sickness the Lord has brought his word with sweetness and power to their souls—in sickness the Lord tried their religion to its very foundation; that it was then he put them into the sieve, and riddled away their chaff and dust. In the affliction we saw no light sown; it incapacitated us from business, made us a burden to ourselves and our families, entailed expense, and brought pain and sorrow; yet the seeds of light were sown in that affliction, and it sprung up in God's own time to bear a blessed crop.

Or, we may experience a providential mercy as well as a providential affliction. The Lord may turn our captivity in temporal things, and open a door in providence for relief in worldly circumstances. Something may turn up from a casual meeting with a stranger, some debt become paid, some friendship gained, some new acquaintance formed, some change of life connected with this providential event. In these providential mercies seeds of light are sown, which spring up and bear a crop.

Now we are as passive in the matter as the very soil in which the seeds are sown. But by these providential dealings and leadings, whether afflictions or mercies, a preparation is made for the seeds of light to be sown. Providential dealings are often as the ploughing, the furrowing, the removal of the weeds, the preparing a bed for the seeds to fall in. Nay more, when the seeds are sown in providential circumstances, in affliction, or mercy, they are

covered and concealed in the soil, yet in due time spring up and bear a crop.

But there are not only providential leadings, afflictions, and mercies in which light is sown; there are also spiritual dealings, and in these more especially light is sown for the righteous. For instance;

1. When the Lord first begins the work of grace upon the soul he usually pierces the heart with deep convictions of sin; and thus makes us to feel what poor, lost, undone wretches we are. Now in these he is sowing seeds of light. This conviction is to issue in conversion, this guilt in pardon, this sorrow in joy, this trouble in eternal praise and glory. At the time we cannot see it; yet the seeds of light are sown in the heart in these convictions, in this sorrow, in this grief, in this trouble; they lie indeed for a season buried as it were beneath the clods of darkness and unbelief; but in due time, as we shall shew presently, this light springs up.

2. Again, in the various temptations that our soul is exercised with, light is sown. We never learn the truth so well as when we learn it in the way of temptation. But when these temptations first come upon us, we know not their end; I remember well, when infidelity, blasphemy, obscenity, and all manner of dreadful temptations first seized me, having never heard or read of such things, I did not know what the issue would be.

But what do we learn by these things, say, by the workings of infidelity, so painful and perplexing to many souls? We learn what faith is. How? Because infidelity smothers and suffocates all false faith; false faith cannot live in it; it is so strong, so powerful, it chokes, smothers, or suffocates all false faith. We are brought then to this point, that nothing but the faith of God's own giving and communicating can stand in the soul beneath the withering breath of infidelity. So with blasphemous suggestions, vile thoughts, dreadful imaginations, what Hart justly calls, 'the very masterpieces of hell;' by painful experience I know what that blessed man meant. But what do these things for us? Why, instrumentally they pull to

pieces all our creature holiness; they shew us what we are; they take the deep covering off our heart, and let in the light of day upon these recesses and dens of our fallen nature, that we may see in every lurking cell some hideous monster, some poisoned fountain flowing forth in filthy streams, and thus abhor ourselves for the abominations that we see are ever ready to rush forth and swallow up the soul.

3. In an acquaintance with the evils of our own heart; its hypocrisy, deceitfulness, pride, selfishness, worldliness, carnality, covetousness, and all the dreadful workings of a depraved nature—light is sown. What! Is light sown in all these things? Yes. Is there not naturally a great distinction between the seed and the seed-bed? What similarity can you find betwixt the wheat cast into the ground, and the earth that receives it? What is the earth but a dark, lumpish, lazy clod; never rising beyond its earthly nature? and yet, in that lumpish clod, in that black soil, grain grows, food is produced. So, as every child of God feels, we have a hard, lumpish nature—a stupid unfeeling heart; yet in that soil the seeds of light are sown. I mean, that in the very acquaintance we have with our fallen nature, and the evils of our depraved heart, the seeds of light are sown, which will one day spring up to the praise and glory of God.

4. And so, in the various exercises, troubles, afflictions, griefs, and sorrows of a spiritual kind that the Lord's people experience—seeds of light are sown in them. The man who is unacquainted with trials, temptations, the workings of an evil nature, the fiery darts of Satan, the hidings of God's countenance, the various sorrows that the Lord's people are for the most part tried with—go where you will, be in what congregation you may, you will find him to be only a light, frothy, and superficial professor. It is a certain truth that only so far as we are exercised by trials, temptations, and afflictions we come into real heartfelt religion.

ii. But we pass on to show how light is sown for them. Hitherto I have been speaking rather of the preparation to receive the seeds

of light; but we now come to the springing up of light, in the germination, the striking forth of the root, the coming up of the blade, and its growth into ear.

The seeds of light, then, are sown in the very first teachings and dealings of God with the soul; in the very first cry for mercy; in the very first pang of conviction; in the very first heartfelt prayer; in the very first sincere desire; but so covered up, so concealed, so buried, as not to be seen; and yet all the time taking root downwards, and pushing a blade upwards. And here is the difference, as the Lord himself has described it, between those who bring forth fruit, and those who do not. These latter, “because they had no root, withered away.” But where the Lord has sown in the heart of the righteous—in troubles, afflictions, temptations, griefs, and sorrows—the seeds of light, a crop will come up. The root will bury itself deeper, take firmer and stronger hold; and after a time will spring up, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.

To carry out the proof of this, look at the Lord’s providential leadings. When the first providential leading took place, the seeds of light were sown in darkness; but by and by light began to spring up, and the hand of God began to appear more manifestly. You were brought through a leading in providence to sit under a certain minister, to read a certain book, to hear a certain sermon, to peruse a certain portion of God’s word. Now, as grace began to work, the seeds of light began to spring up; you began to see why God placed you in that village, why you went down that street, why you came under that ministry, or met with that individual; light began gradually to spring up, and cast itself over the providential circumstance, just as the blade springs up, and casts its shadow over the ground. You begin to see now clearly the hand of God in your change of situation, in your leaving that town or village, in coming to that house, reading that book, hearing that minister, or opening that chapter. Now you can see the hand of God was in it. Here is light springing up; light sown in the very providential dispensation, now springing up and casting its blessed light on that

circumstance. I see now why I went to Ireland, while a carnal young man at Oxford; I view now the hand of God in it; light shines upon that providential circumstance; and, though dark then, it is clear now.

Or, perhaps you were reduced in circumstances, brought into temporal trouble, and through that providential difficulty were introduced to some friend or acquaintance, put into another situation of life, got into another family, met with a fellow-servant, or in some way or other—for all these circumstances differ in every case—light began to spring up upon that providential circumstance. Or, you were laid on a sick bed, and were murmuring at being taken from your business, at becoming an expense to your family, and a burden to yourself; yet the end was a solid spiritual blessing to your soul. Light now sprang up, and fell on that providential affliction.

By this the children of God are distinguished; and this is what we should be doing—watching the hand of God. Why, if we lived like Christians, we should scarce speak to a person, or leave our door, without praying and watching, or mentally lifting up our hearts that the hand of God might be with us. We should be waiting for and watching the hand of God all through the day; and tracing out his providential leadings and guidings in every event of our life. “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.” (Psalm 107:43.)

But more particularly in spiritual things do we see light sown.

1. You have perhaps in times past experienced very painful and powerful convictions of sin. Now what could you see when passing through these powerful convictions? Heaven, glory, bliss, salvation at the end? No: hell, wrath, terror, damnation. And yet the seeds of light, glory, bliss, and immortality were sown in these troubles. You have sown in tears, to reap in joy; sown in conviction, to reap in conversion. When light comes, we begin to see something of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, which we should not otherwise have seen, how it cleanses from all sin; and when there is some application of that precious blood to the conscience, the seeds of

light are seen to have been sown in that very conviction that made the soul cry for mercy.

2. So with temptation. When temptation comes upon a child of God, does he see that he is to be established in faith thereby? that thereby he is to have brighter views of the Lord Jesus Christ? that he is to stand more rooted and grounded in his finished work? No more than when the oak is trembling to its very base under the storm, it can see that those very storms are giving it a deeper root in the soil. But when the Lord is pleased to open up the riches of his glorious Person, dying love, justifying righteousness, covenant characters and offices, then we see how these temptations have prepared our souls for the reception of the Lord Jesus Christ in all those covenant characters and offices. For what do I know of precious blood but through a guilty conscience? What do I know of covering righteousness, but through a naked and trembling soul? What do I know of dying love but by feeling my heart wretched without it? What do I know of the suitability, tenderness, and compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ except so far as I am brought by temptations and trials into circumstances to need him in all his covenant characters, divine offices, and blessed relations? So that light is sown in these very temptations; and when light beams into the soul to show me the mercy of Jesus, his preciousness, his blood, his righteousness, his love, his suitability; and faith is drawn out to lay hold of him in all his covenant characters and relationships, how the light that shines in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the word that speaks of him, is seen to be sown in the temptation through which instrumentally he becomes endeared to the soul.

So with all our afflictions, exercises, sorrows, and griefs. Are not all overruled in a most wonderful way to teach us more what we are, to unloose us from the creature, separate us from the world, and bring us nearer and nearer to the Lord Jesus Christ? How in all these things light is sown! and yet such is the nature of it, that though thus sown, we can only see it as light springs up. Thus the light springs up out of the very circumstance in which it

is sown. How blessed this is! Whatever circumstances may arise, however painful, however perplexing, however opposed to the natural feelings of the heart; or whatever we may pass through in our minds—still to believe that side by side with every trouble God sows the seeds of light; how this should reconcile us to all our afflictions and difficulties! Afflictions and light are sown together; and as the affliction spreads and grows, so light spreads and grows, till at last it is clearly seen rising up out of the dark clods, and by and by bears a crop, till the whole harvest of light covers the dark soil, and strangles the afflictions which once seemed as if they would strangle it.

Wherever, then, there is imparted righteousness, and the soul is possessed of light, life, and power; the fear of God; faith, hope, and love; sincerity and godly simplicity—there are the seeds of light sown. It may be in some cases long before it springs up. It is in nature as in grace. Some seeds spring up soon. Mustard and cress spring up in a day; the cone of a fir tree may be two years before it germinates. Months and months may roll over our heads before a blade of light is produced, and years more before the ear is ripened, and the harvest gathered in. But if we are righteous, with every circumstance, and especially with every painful circumstance, the seeds of light are sown; and our wisdom and mercy is to be watching it, looking out for it, just as the farmer after his seed is sown takes his walk, and asks, 'Is the blade springing up? Shall I have a crop?' So the righteous will ask, 'Is there good coming from my affliction? Is light springing up? Is the morning approaching? Is the sun rising? Is there a blessed, holy light springing forth upon these painful circumstances that my soul has passed through?' The man that thus waits, and thus watches, shall not wait nor watch in vain; but will soon have to say, 'Thanks be to God, light is come at last! Blessings be upon his name, I can see a mercy coming out of the ground.' And if it be a mercy, if it be a blessing, it will grow and grow and grow till a crop is seen by our eyes, and all who have eyes to discern the ways and works of the Lord.

II.—Our time is nearly gone, and therefore I cannot dwell so long upon our second clause, which in fact is closely connected with it, and show how “gladness” is sown for “the upright in heart.” You may say, how do these characters differ? I do not know that they do differ, or at least, not widely; but the one seems to be rather an explanation of the other. It seems to be added lest there should be any mistake who the righteous was; lest persons who produce only outward fruits of righteousness should say it was for them; therefore it is added, “for the upright in heart.” A man may be very upright in life and conversation, who has no uprightness of heart; therefore the Holy Spirit seems to have put his mark upon it thus, “upright in heart.” Now if a man is not upright in heart, it matters very little how far he is upright in conduct. I dare say one of the most upright men in Jerusalem was the pharisee who went into the temple. I have no doubt he paid tithes of anise, mint, and cummin to the last sprig; or, if he weighed them, to the very turn of the scale within half a grain. Yet was he withal a whited sepulchre, an abomination in the sight of God, a stench in his nostrils, a smoke that burnt all day. And perhaps, the most crooked creature in all the town was his fellow sinner, who could only smite upon his breast, and say, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” He was a publican; and you know they were noted for their corrupt dealings; and hated by the Jews for covetousness and extortion, as the farmers-general of taxes. Here we have, we will suppose, side by side, two characters—the most righteous man in Jerusalem, and the most crooked as far as regards outward things. I do not say he was crooked after he was called by grace. When the Lord put that cry into his soul, it made him upright in heart; and I venture to say, afterwards he was upright in life.

But let us just mention a few particulars which seem to point out the man who is upright in heart.

1. A man who is upright in heart cannot mock God; every body else can mock him by false prayers. Presumptuous, superficial professors can mock God by saying one thing and meaning

another. A man cannot do this who is upright in heart.

2. Another mark is, that he cannot take to himself any thing but what God is pleased to communicate by a divine power to his soul; for the uprightness of his heart forbids this. This is a grand distinction betwixt the truly spiritually taught child of God, and a mere carnal professor. The one can take nothing except what God himself is pleased to apply with divine power to his soul: the other can take everything. Because he reads in the Bible about Christ, and the things of God, he can take them with a daring hand, and claim them as his own: but time will prove him to be nothing but a thief and a robber. This being the case, the upright in heart will continually be the last in the race: for they can only speak as the Lord is pleased from time to time to bless their souls with his manifested mercy and love. When these favours are withheld, they cannot press forward, and take them: their uprightness of heart forbids it.

3. Again, as the upright in heart are upright before God, so are they upright before man. They cannot take every professor by the hand, and say, ‘my dear brother this, and my dear sister that,’ upon a mere profession of religion. They cannot fawn on any one; they dare not give flattering titles to man. They may give offence—they will give offence; for no man can be faithful—in the pulpit, or out of the pulpit—by acts or words, without giving offence, and bringing down persecution. But the upright in heart cannot act deceitfully; there is a principle within them that forbids them to lie; they are upright in heart, and must be honest in life.

Take these three marks, and see whether you can find them in you. If you are made upright in heart, you cannot mock God; but you will have godly simplicity and sincerity as in the presence and before the eyes of a heart-searching Lord. Can you find that in you? Can you take any blessing or mercy, and call it your own, except so far as God is pleased to speak and apply it with divine power to your soul? If you cannot, then you are one of those who may be said to be upright in heart. Have you a principle in your

heart that cannot flatter; that you would sooner in your right mind die than deceive any one; that you must be faithful wherever you go, so far as power is given to you? You do not wish to give unnecessary offence; you would rather be silent: but if you must speak, you must be faithful. Can you find these marks in you? I might add more; but these three may be remembered. Take them home, and see if you can lay them side by side with anything in your souls.

Now gladness is sown for these. What does that imply? That they are for the most part a sorrowful people; because if gladness is to be sown for them, it is very plain that they are not usually glad. Their uprightness of heart makes them sad; for they see what a God they have to do with, that cannot be mocked. They feel too that they are such poor filthy, loathsome, leprous creatures. And, if they are upright in life, they will have many persecutions; the opposition of wife, husband, parents, children, ministers, friends, and relations. All will be in arms against them; and this keeps them from gladness of heart. Their very uprightness brings them many trials, because they cannot pass things lightly by. They see evil in this, and sin in that; something wrong here and something wrong there, so as to keep their minds pretty well exercised all the day long. This keeps them from gladness; and makes them for the most part “a poor and afflicted people.”

An upright man cannot enter into things which others can to deliver themselves. If a man without conscience be in business, he can do things to deliver himself; he can borrow money with little expectation to repay it; he can make promises, ‘Send me this, and I will pay you next week!’ when he knows the next week will bring no provision for the debt to be paid, or the bill to be taken up. He can enter too into trades and businesses of anything but a godly nature; and thus do many things to deliver himself, which a child of God cannot. Many things such an one dare not touch; and therefore for the most part is kept down in a state of poverty and difficulty; and all connected with his uprightness in heart. If

he were not upright in heart, how many painful things he would be delivered from! but being upright in heart, he has little else but troubles and trials. Yet in his heaviest burdens, and in his greatest troubles, there is gladness sown. Just as light was sown in darkness, so is gladness sown in sorrow.

Now gladness is sown in these very things, because he is brought by uprightness of heart to confess, mourn, grieve over, and forsake sin; and when the Lord is pleased to speak joy and peace to his soul, gladness springs up. Gladness is also sown by the very circumstance that he is upright in heart, so that he cannot mock God. So with respect to his not being able to take any blessing, or any mercy, except what God give to him. When he hears others speak of their sweet enjoyment of Christ and the promises of the great manifestations they have received, of their Gospel liberty—these things often trouble and burden his mind. Why? Because he is upright in heart, and can take nothing but what God brings with divine power into his soul. Therefore he is troubled and sorrowful; but gladness is sown in the very trouble he has about these things; and by and by it will spring up to the joy of his soul. So also in his dealing with his fellow-men; he cannot lie, deceive, and cheat. And though he is brought into providential trouble often thereby, he knows he cannot mock God; that he must not put his hand to wrong courses; God sees all, and can bring out of all. So he continues in his worldly difficulties and troubles, and under the weight of trying circumstances, simply because he cannot and will not deliver himself. He is like Daniel. He might have delivered himself. ‘Why need Daniel,’ some would have said, ‘make such a display of his religion? Why did he not shut his door, and pray upon his bed? Why need he open his window?’ He might have saved his life thereby; but he felt it was necessary to make an open confession, and to show that he believed in the God of Israel. That brought trouble upon him; but when God delivered him out of the lion’s den, was there not gladness? And was not that gladness sown in the very circumstance of being cast into the lion’s den? If

he had not been upright in heart, he would have saved himself the lion's den; but he would also have saved himself the deliverance from the lion's den, and the gladness it brought to him.

So that gladness is sown for the upright in heart in all their troubles, afflictions, castings down, sorrows, and exercises. There is gladness lodged at the root of all. The seeds of gladness were sown in sorrow; but when it springs up, it is true gladness; the joy which "the stranger intermeddled not with;" the "peace of God which passeth all understanding."

Are you in trouble, sorrow, and darkness now? Light is sown in them. The seeds of light are in the trouble, in the affliction, in the temptation, in the perplexity; and you shall see light upon it; it will spring up in due time. O these seeds of light! How sweet it is to have some of the seeds of light in the soul! And the seeds of gladness and joy! Sweet smiles and heavenly favours; And for whom? "The upright in heart." That is the character. Not great towering professors, but the upright in heart. These are the persons for whom the blessing is designed; and every one in this congregation who can come in with these two characters, "the righteous," and "the upright in heart," light and gladness are sown for them, and in due time they will bless and praise God for his wisdom, goodness, and love.

133 The Sieve and its Effects

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening,
July 16, 1849

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

Luke 22:31, 32

God's ways are not our ways; neither are his thoughts our

thoughts. This is applicable to a variety of things. In fact, there is scarcely a single circumstance connected with the things of God to which these words do not apply. But there are two special instances to which, according to my mind, they apply particularly. One of these respects the growth in grace of the child of God; the other, the necessary qualifications for a minister of Christ. If we were asked, (supposing that we were ignorant of the way, and that we had the educating of a Christian), what was most conducive to a growth in grace, and how we should set about it, perhaps some such scheme as this might occur to our mind. Place him in the country, in a quiet and retired spot, where he would have no business nor worldly anxieties to distract his mind; there let him read his Bible, be surrounded by religious friends, fix certain hours to meditate, watch, and pray. Such might be a faint sketch of what we should consider the right mode of educating a Christian in the things of God. This scheme has been acted upon. By it men have been driven into the cave of the hermit; monasteries and convents have been formed upon this plan; and instead of being the abodes of religion, they have eventually proved little else but dens of wickedness. But suppose we were also called upon (I still presume we are ignorant of God's mode) to fit and educate a minister for the work of the ministry. We might propound some such scheme as this. Give him a good education; instruct him in the original languages; furnish him with a well-selected theological library; place him in a circle of brother ministers; let him spend his time in reading, meditation, watching, and prayer. Upon this scheme men have endowed Universities. Colleges, academies, and institutions of various kinds have sprung up on this system. And what is the result? Instead of nurturing servants for God, they have ended in bringing up servants for Satan. This is man's way. And we see the result; that instead of conducing to the growth of grace in a private Christian; instead of fitting a minister for the service of God, all ends in confusion, and a departing from the right ways of the Lord.

I have thus simply sketched out man's ways and man's thoughts.

Let us now come to the fountain head of all truth and all wisdom, and see whether God's ways do not differ from the ways of man, and the thoughts that dwell in the heart of the Creator from the thoughts that lodge in the bosom of the creature.

What those ways and what those thoughts are, I shall endeavour this evening to lay before you from the words of the text. "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

We may observe three leading features in the words before us.

I.—First, the sieve; "Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat."

II.—Secondly, what it is that fails not in the sieve; "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not."

III.—Thirdly, the benefits and blessings that spring out of the sieve; "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

I.—The Lord was approaching the close of his sojourn upon earth; he was drawing near the solemn hour when he was about to be baptised with the baptism of suffering and blood. And it seems that Satan took this opportunity to see whether by his infernal arts he could not draw away his disciples. He was not ignorant that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of God, nor what he came upon earth to do. He knew that he came to build up a church against which the gates of hell should not prevail. But if he could succeed in drawing aside into temptation, or into perdition, any of the Lord's disciples, what a victory he would obtain! He, therefore, seems to have reserved his great strength for the last hour, and to have looked with a watchful eye upon every one of the Lord's followers. There is an expression in Job (1:8), which, I think, throws great light upon the way in which Satan marks out his prey. The Lord said to him, "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" Now, if we look at the margin, we find it runs, "Hast thou set thine heart on my servant Job?" The Lord saw that he had set his heart upon Job; not a heart of love, but a heart of enmity; that he was like a butcher

fixing his eye upon a lamb, and saying, 'Here is one for my knife!' or like a wolf surrounding a flock of sheep, and singling out the fattest for his greedy maw. Therefore, God said to him, "Hast thou set thine heart on my servant Job?" 'What! must he be thy prey? Will nothing satisfy thee but to glut thy malice upon him?' But what was the reply of the adversary of God and man? "Hast thou not set a hedge about him?" He did not deny that his heart was set upon Job; that he longed to embrace his hands in his heart's blood; but he complains that God had set a hedge round about him; that there was a fence through which he would, but could not break. Thus, though he could look over the hedge, the prey was safe from his infernal malice until God took the hedge away. But the Lord did twice take the outer hedge away, and twice reserve the inner, saying, at last, "Behold, he is in thy hand; but save his life." The Lord kept that; the rest he gave to Satan. And thus, when the outer hedge was taken away, we find Satan bursting in upon him, first stripping away his property and his family, then afflicting his body, and doing everything but what he was not allowed to do—to touch his life. So it seems to me in these last days of the Lord's sojourn upon earth, this wolf was surrounding the pen in which the Lord had placed his sheep, setting his heart upon one and another, and desiring to glut upon them his infernal maw. And God permitted him in one instance; he allowed him not only to set his heart upon one, but to gratify his infernal malice upon Judas, the son of perdition, who not being kept by the mighty power of God, was allowed to fall into Satan's hands, and to be destroyed body and soul for ever.

The Lord comprehends in our text all his disciples. It is a mistake to think it is only applicable to Peter. The words run thus: "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you; not only thee; (it is in the plural in the original;) "to have all of you that he may sift you as wheat." What follows is special: "but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; that is thee, Simon. As though Satan viewed them all, and longed to sift all in his sieve. And so he did to a certain extent. But there was one in particular. It is almost as though Satan

spake thus: 'I have picked off one of the lieutenants; let me see if I cannot shoot down the colonel. I have got Judas; I will have Peter next.' And so he would, if the Lord had not prayed for him, and strengthened his faith. Judas he might have; he was one of his own. Peter he might not have; he was one of the Lord's. Encouraged by the fall of Judas, he was determined to have Peter next. But how the Lord overruled it all, and made it a blessing to Peter, and the rest of the disciples! And this shows us that all must have the sieve. All professors—all that call themselves by the name of the Lord, and all that call upon the name of the Lord—all must be put into the sieve; and thus be proved who are God's and who are not.

But what is a sieve? First, let us view the figure literally and naturally; for unless we understand the figure literally, we cannot expect to understand its spiritual signification. What is the object of the sieve? It is to separate the corn upon the barn-floor, mingled as it is with dust and chaff, small seeds, and rubbish. It must be separated from all these before it is fit to make bread. And what is that instrument used for this purpose? A sieve. This is the leading idea represented. The sieve is riddled backwards and forwards to separate the sound grain from the unsound; dust and small seeds thereby drop through the meshes of the sieve, while the good corn remains behind. This agrees with the words of the Prophet, "Lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." (Amos 9:9.)

Now to apply it, let us see its spiritual interpretation. It signifies, then, being put into those circumstances whereby our profession is tried to the utmost. Whatever it be whereby our profession is tried, our religion sifted, and the dust and dirt separated from it; whatever it be, whereby that process is performed, it may be called a sieve. And I would say, there are for the most part four sieves employed. There may be others; but there are four especially which occur to my mind—wherein professors of religion, and all that call themselves by the name of the Lord, are to be tried, sifted, and

proved, whether they are the Lord's or not.

1. First, there is the sieve of prosperity. The effects of this we read in the 73rd Psalm, and in the 21st chapter of Job, where we find the fruits of professors being in prosperous circumstances. This sieve we find also hinted at in the first epistle to Timothy, where the Apostle says, "The love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many arrows." [sorrows in the KJV] (1 Tim. 6:10.) Who that has eyes to see, has not seen this plainly again and again? There shall be a member of a church, and he shall be, whilst in poor circumstances, a humble, contrite, broken-hearted character; his conversation shall be savoury, sweet, and profitable; he shall be watching the hand of God in providence, and receiving many marks of God's favour, mercy, and love. But he shall have money left him, business shall prosper, or he shall marry a rich wife. And what is the effect? He becomes lean, barren, dead, and unprofitable; and instead of his conversation being as before, savoury and sweet, and upon the things of God, the world and the things of it seem to eat up every green thing in his soul. By this sieve God also sifts out professors, and often manifests whether there be the true life of God in the soul or not.

2. But again. There is the sieve of adversity. And the sieve of adversity tries some who have not been tried in the sieve of prosperity. Poverty, depressed circumstances, losses in business, a sinking trade, anxieties in the family, and sickness of the body, form a part of this sieve; and a very trying one it is.

3. Another sieve is the sieve of soul tribulation. Exercises concerning our state before God; painful discoveries of the evils of our heart; the workings up of the unbelief and infidelity, rebellion, blasphemy, and obscenity of our depraved nature; no light upon our path, no sweet answers to prayer, no manifestations of mercy and love, no appearances of God to our heart; groans and cries, sighs and tears, exercises, burdens, afflictions, and sorrows—in this sieve how many of God's people are tried to the uttermost!

4. The fourth and last sieve I shall speak of, is the sieve of temptation; such as Peter was placed in, and such as all the people of God are more or less put into. For Satan desires to sift all as wheat; and there is not a child of God, nor a professor either, whom Satan does not desire, more or less, to sift with the sieve of temptation. Now of these temptations, some are very suitable and pleasing to our flesh, and some are very dreadful, cutting, piercing, and wounding to our spirit. For instance; look at the way in which Satan sifted the saints of old. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by the fear of man; and Aaron by the same temptation. Look how he sifted in his sieve Noah by strong drink; Rachel by envy and jealousy; David by lust; Hezekiah by pride; Asaph by fretfulness; Solomon by idolatry; and Moses by impatience. Look through the records of old, and see whether we can find a saint in God's word who has not been in some way or other sifted in the sieve of temptation. But, besides those suitable and alluring to the flesh—besides the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life—besides ease, covetousness, worldly-mindedness, and a thousand alluring besetments, there are other temptations whereby Satan is allowed to sift the people of God. Temptations as to his very being; temptations as to the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ; temptations as to the inspiration of the Scriptures: temptations as to the efficacy of the blood of the Lamb; temptations as to whether God hears and answers prayer; whether we have a soul, or our souls exist after death; temptations about heaven and temptations to blaspheme, to give up all religion, and plunge headlong into the world; temptations to curse God and die; temptations to murmur, fret and repine under every painful dispensation; temptations to pray no more because God does not manifestly send an answer to prayer.

Who that knows anything of the things of God, or of his own heart, does not know what it is to be in one or other of these four sieves; sometimes elated by prosperity; sometimes depressed by adversity; sometimes exercised by tribulation; sometimes riddled backwards and forwards in the sieve of temptation?

II.—But we pass on to our second branch,—what does not fail when put into the sieve. “I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.” The Lord did not pray for Judas; he was the son of perdition, and therefore he fell through the sieve, and fell into hell, where he now is, and where he will be to all eternity. And you and I must fall through too, unless we have an interest in the love and blood of the Lamb. You may escape for a time; but if you have no interest in the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ; if you have no part in his atoning blood and grace; if he is not pleading for you by virtue of his presence at the right hand of the Father, sooner or later you will fall through the sieve and will drop into hell, and that perhaps speedily.

Now in the spiritual sieve there are things that fail, and there are things that fail not; just as in the literal figure, there are things that drop through the natural sieve, and there are things that drop not through it. Dirt, small seeds, rubbish drop through; good, sound, solid grain remains. So in the Christian's soul, there is that which drops through the meshes of the sieve, and there is that which is left behind.

But what is it that drops through? I will tell you.

1. First, self-righteousness. That drops through; for if a man be put into the sieve of tribulation, and in it there be to him a discovery of the evils of his heart; or if Satan be allowed to riddle him backwards and forwards in the sieve of temptation, it will riddle out his self-righteousness. It must drop through. A man cannot be a self-righteous Pharisee who is well sifted in the sieve of temptation. It is impossible. Self-righteousness drops out of his soul as the dirt drops through the meshes of the sieve.

2. False confidence is another thing that drops through. How vain-confident some men are! What strong language they make use of! What a high position they occupy! Is there one of the heights of Zion on which they will not stand? Why, if you judge them by their words, they would seem ready to fly to heaven; but watch them in their deeds, and you will see them grovelling upon earth.

In words, they seem very near to the throne of God; in actions, not very far from the spirit of the devil. Now this vain confidence drops through. If I am sifted in the sieve of temptation; if I know the evils of my heart; if I am riddled backwards and forwards in the sieve of soul tribulation and exercise, how can vain confidence stand? It all breaks up and flies away like the mist before the sun, or the thistledown before the wind. It drops through, and I sink to my right place—a poor needy wretch.

3. Creature strength is another thing that drops through the sieve. Creature strength! That was Peter's strength when he trembled before a servant girl; when he could not stand the brunt of a house-maid, but cowered like a chicken before a hawk. That was the strength, the prowess, the courage of this boastful mighty Peter, who was going to prison and to death, who could draw his sword and cut off the high-priest's servant's ear, but was now shivering and trembling before a silly maid of all work. Let our creature strength be put into the sieve of temptation; let the devil riddle us backwards and forwards; let God hide his face; let darkness cover the mind; let trouble seize the soul—where is all our strength? Let temptation come to allure, to bewitch, to ensnare, to entangle, to draw aside, can we stand? No; we are gone in a moment. Let the devil come in, can we stand? Could Job stand? Could David stand? Could Aaron stand? No, not for an instant; our creature strength gives way when we are put into Satan's sieve.

4. Fleshly wisdom is another thing that drops through the sieve. Our boasted acquaintance with God's word; our deep views of this chapter, and our deep views of that passage; the doctrinal knowledge that perhaps we have stored our heads with for years, all drops through, affords no comfort, brings no relief, communicates no support; all that we have learned in our judgment fails us in the hour of trial. We cannot make use of these things; they all fall through the sieve.

Others I might mention; such as fleshly prayer, creature holiness, legal observances. Everything of an earthly nature, everything not

of God's own implantation in the soul, fails us in the hour of trial. You know it, if you have been in the sieve. It was a sieve to me to be laid aside from the ministry, and my enemies saying, 'God has shut his mouth; we hope it will never be opened again!' Was not that a sieve? I know it was to me. Affliction, trouble, sorrow, and tribulation; the fiery darts of hell; snares and besetments laid for our feet;—a man that does not know these things to be a sieve, never has been in them. But if he get into this sieve, it will riddle out all his false religion, and make him feel he has nothing but what God himself has put into his soul, breathed into his heart, and made known to him by the power of the Spirit. Nothing else will stand in the sieve; "for every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." (Matt. 15:13.)

All these things, then, and others which might be mentioned, fail us in the sieve.

But is there not something which does not fail? Blessed be God there is. The Lord said to Peter, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." And what a mercy that Peter's faith never failed; for if his faith had failed, he would most assuredly have gone down through the sieve. But the Lord had prayed for him; and his faith did not fail. It did not leave him in the day of trial; there it was where God himself had first implanted it. But how does faith act in these circumstances? Why, to lay a firmer hold upon God's truth; a firmer hold upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the only refuge and Saviour of sinners; a firmer hold upon his atoning blood, glorious righteousness, and dying love. Faith does not fail; no, it is only more strengthened by being put into the sieve; for the false religion, the carnal faith that had surrounded it, as the ivy clasps the trunk of the tree, being cut away, faith grows stronger in the soul. Faith does not fail, and never will, where it is really implanted by God. And hope does not fail. False confidence fails; creature strength fails; fleshly reliance fails. All fall through; there is not one of them left. But hope never fails; for it is the anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast; and does not fail because it enters into that within the veil.

It stands the trial; it remains in the sieve, as the good grain does not, cannot fall. Love does not fail. Peter never ceased to love the Lord Jesus Christ; he could appeal to him as a heart-searching God, and say, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Let us be in the sieve of tribulation, temptation, adversity, and distress, does this blot out the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, where once it has been shed abroad in the heart? No; it draws it out; it cannot die; the soul is going out in affectionate desires after Him as "the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely." It cannot, does not fail. Does prayer fail? O no; where once the spirit of grace and supplication is poured out upon a soul, it never fails. I have never known this to fail. We may have long seasons of deadness and barrenness; but the more we are tried, the more we pray; the more our soul is exercised, the more we cry unto the Lord; the heavier the trial presses, the more we groan out our desires. We cannot do without it. Does sorrow oppress our labouring breasts? Prayer, supplication, cries, groans, desires? What! these fail? Never. There may be stunning blows for a time; I have felt it so. The blow seems so heavy we can scarcely utter a word; but prayer rises, springs up again, is poured out again, drawn out again to the Source and Fountain of all good. Does looking to the Lord fail? Dependence upon his word fail? Hanging upon his promise fail? No. These are God's own implantation in the soul; these do not fail. False prayer drops through, true prayer abides; false hopes perish, true hope remains behind. So we might run through the whole work of grace, and shew that none of the graces and fruits of the Spirit ever fail when we are put into the sieve of temptation, but are all strengthened thereby.

III.—But we pass on to our third leading feature, which is a very remarkable one; for it throws a blessed and gracious light upon the whole, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Some have drawn a very strange conclusion from this, that Peter was not converted before. That is not the meaning of the word; the meaning of the word is this, "when thou art restored strengthen thy

brethren." "When thou art brought back; when thou art recovered." Peter was converted before. Before this, the Lord had said to him, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven;" (Matt. 16:17); and Peter could say, "We believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6:69.) Men must be strangely misled by the sound of a word to think that Peter was not converted before. But he fell away, and denied his Lord. Under the temptation he was not able to stand; but mercy restored him, and brought him back; the Lord had pity on him; and he came out of the furnace like pure gold. But when he was thus converted, restored, recovered, brought back, this was the benefit, this was the fruit of his having been sifted in the sieve of Satan; he was to strengthen his brethren. This was the way in which Peter was made a minister. He was not sent to the academy at Capernaum, nor to the university of Nazareth; he was put into the sieve of Satan; and in this sieve he learnt those lessons whereby he came forth to strengthen his brethren. I am bold, then, to say that a man who has not been more or less in the sieve is scarcely worth the name of a Christian and I am sure that an unexercised preacher is scarcely worth the name of a minister. In fact, what are such fit for? Pretty much like the salt which has lost its savour—only fit for the dunghill.

Take for instance, an unexercised minister; what is he fit for? To eat, drink, and sleep; to build up hypocrites in deception; to crush the poor, needy, exercised people of God; and to shoot the arrows of contempt and scorn against those servants of the Lord that feed the flock of slaughter. That is all he is fit for. To build up the church of God; to cast up the highway; to take up the stumbling blocks; to strengthen the weak hands; to confirm the feeble knees; to lift up a standard for the people; he does not know, he is not fit for these things. And no exercised child of God will long listen to his ministry. Take an unexercised hearer, what is he fit for? Half the time asleep, and the other half looking at the clock; or dreaming away the time about something he did on the

Saturday, or occupying his thoughts with something to be done on the Monday. That is all he does, except to make a minister an offender for a word, or pick up something from the pulpit that he may go and make a tale about. That is all he is fit for. What is an unexercised member of the church fit for? To breed strife, and make others as dead as himself. What are unexercised deacons fit for? To fill the church with empty professors. Not being exercised themselves in the things of God, not being riddled themselves in the sieve, not knowing how to distinguish between the work of God and the work of nature; how can they, when candidates come to them, discern what is of God in their soul? If they cannot discern it, (and discern it they cannot, except they have been well riddled in Satan's sieve), they will fill the church with empty, superficial professors. In fact, what is an unexercised professing man fit for? For nothing; his profession unfits him for the world; and his want of exercise unfits him for the church of God; he is only fit to be cast out by both.

But take the other side of the case. What is an exercised Christian fit for? He is fit for God and glory; fit for heaven and eternal bliss, wherever [where?] the billows of trial and sorrow shall no more beat over his troubled soul; fit for conversation with the exercised people of God; fit to hear the truth as it is in Jesus; fit to live a life becoming the gospel he professes; fit to shine as a light in the world. What is an exercised hearer fit for? He is fit for crying and sighing as he comes to chapel, that the Lord would bless the word to his soul; he is fit to hear an experimental ministry; fit to sit under an exercised servant of God; fit for the promises, mercies, and blessings of the gospel; fit for the sweet manifestations of blood, grace, and love to his soul; fit for every good word and work. And what is (I must go through it all; I have shown one side of the case, I must shew the other) an exercised deacon fit for? Fit to find out the real state and case of the candidate; to know the experience of the members; to see where the work of God is; to prove what the servants of God preach from personal experience; to discern

what is truth, and what is error; what is the teaching of the Spirit, and what the teaching of man; what is the wisdom from above, and what is the wisdom from beneath. And what is an exercised minister fit for? To strengthen the brethren; that is what he is fit for. Nobody else is fit to strengthen the brethren but he that has been in the sieve of Satan. If false religion has not been riddled out of the soul, he must build up false religion in the soul of others; if he has not proved what will stand, and what will not stand, how can he build up a real work of grace in the hearts of God's people? or how can he take forth the precious from the vile?

But how does he strengthen his brethren? He is not to strengthen the hands of evil-doers; he is not to strengthen the hands of ungodly professors; he is not to strengthen dead assurance, vain-confidence, empty presumption, superficial and outside religion; he is not to strengthen one of these things; but to pull them to a thousand pieces, as God shall enable him, and not leave one tatter remaining. All is to be torn away; and he will do it, if God has pulled away these rags from his own back. But he will strengthen the brethren; the dear children of God; the tried, exercised saints. He will strengthen them; for they are often weak, and need strengthening.

But how will he strengthen them? In various ways.

1. He will show them the way wherein God leads his people. There may be, for instance, a child of God here this evening who has never heard the various trying leadings and dealings of God described. But he now says, 'I have felt temptations for years; but I have always been told that this was not religion; that we ought to put away all these things; that we ought never to have a doubt; that we should never entertain a fear; but put them all under our feet. I have been told to look to Christ, to live upon him, to claim a share of his mercy and love, and to mount to heaven as upon eagle's wings. I have been instructed again and again that this is religion; and that temptations, trials, exercises, conflicts, groans, sighs, tears, dejection, and depression—that all this is never to be

entertained, never to be thought of for a single moment; that a child of God has no trials and exercises, but walks in the light of God all the day long. But now,' (I suppose a tried child of God here to speak) 'I can see I have experienced all this for years; but I have been tried because I could not be what I thought a child of God ought to be, and could not put away those doubts and fears that made me such a poor dejected creature, or overcome those temptations that have so pestered me.'

2. He will also strengthen the brethren by pointing out more clearly the fulness of grace that is in Christ, and thus lead them to look to and lean more upon him, and less upon themselves.

3. Or, a servant of God may shew from the sieve what is opposed to the work of God in the soul; and in this way the brethren may be strengthened to fight against it.

4. Or, again, when the Lord is pleased to bring us up out of our troubles, and bless us with any discovery of his mercy, we can say to the people of God, 'I have been in trouble, and the Lord appeared for me, and blessed me and delivered me.' When we come forth in this way out of the furnace, we can strengthen them by saying, 'Wait, look, sigh, cry, and pray; and the Lord in his own good time will appear.'

5. Again. We strengthen the brethren by showing them that in the sieve all false hopes give way; all creature righteousness comes to an end; and everything of an earthly nature perishes. And thus, by taking away these things, the life and power of God are strengthened. Suppose that you were a farmer, and in early spring you took a walk in your fields, and saw the charlock, the poppy, and all kinds of weeds springing up, 'O,' say you, 'I shall lose my crop: these filthy weeds will choke the corn.' You set to work to pull up the weeds, root them out, and to cleanse the crop; and when it is done, when the weeds are pulled up, and thrown upon the dung-heap, what is the consequence? The wheat flourishes. It is so spiritually. The exercised servant of the Lord comes and shows you the rubbish in your heart; that which is not grace, but only

nature. 'Here is the corn-cockle of self-righteousness; there the couch-grass of covetousness; here the charlock of fleshly holiness; there the red poppy of pride and ambition: pluck them up; do not leave one remaining.' What is the consequence? When these things are plucked up, the life of God begins to flourish in the soul: and a crop begins to spring up to the honour and glory of God. They were before half suffocated by the weeds: but now the weeds are plucked up, grace thrives.

Now in this way the man who has been in the sieve of temptation will be able more or less to strengthen his brethren. But he will strengthen nobody else: and in his right mind he does not want to strengthen any one else. Suppose I were to come to Eden Street with a view to strengthen the hands of evil-doers; to encourage careless professors; to strengthen those who know nothing of the life and power of godliness—should I be doing God's work? should I have a clear conscience in the sight of God? should I this evening lay my head upon my pillow, and say, 'I have been doing God's work to-day? I have been strengthening the hands of the ungodly? I have been making them bolder, stouter, and stronger than they were before.' Could I, if I had any conscience at all, lay my head upon my pillow, and say, 'Bless God, I have strengthened the hands of the ungodly to-day?' No; I could not do it. But if God should bless my feeble words, and cause this visit to be a means of strengthening the brethren, and comforting the poor, dejected children of God, by showing the work of God in their souls, and cheering their hearts, what other reward do I want? Why should I leave my people and family, and come here with a weak body, with many trials and exercises of mind, except in the Lord's hand to strengthen the brethren? If the Lord has put me in the sieve, (as he has again and again) and has brought me forth out of the sieve, and enables me so to speak, that I may strengthen the hands of the brethren—God's tried and weary people—and thus be made an instrument of blessing to their souls, I want no more and if God will, I would have no less. This can bear up my soul, let men say

what they will, or think what they will. If God give me a testimony in my own conscience; and if God approve me to your conscience, that is a sufficient testimony. It is what God is pleased to do in me, and what he is pleased to do in you by me that will stand. Let my soul; let our souls who fear God, stand on the testimony of God. "If I pleased man," said the apostle; and every true servant of God will add his hearty amen, "I should not be the servant of Christ." I leave this to your consciences.

134 Israel's Departure and Return

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Tuesday Evening,

July 17, 1849

"O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

Hosea 14:1, 2, 3

Our text is rather a long one; but it presents such a connected chain of blessed truth, that if I were to attempt to make it shorter, I could only present to you broken links and scattered fragments. As it stands, it is complete in itself—a beautiful and blessed exposition of divine truth. But it is only so as taken in its connection. Tear it asunder; take separate verses; and the beauty and sweetness of it are lost. I shall, therefore, as our text is long, and contains much matter, proceed at once to consider its contents. And I think that we may observe in it three or four leading features.

I.—First, the charge; "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."

II.—Secondly, the invitation; "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him,

Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously."

III.—Thirdly, the response of the church to this gracious and tender invitation; "So will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us: we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our gods."

And to these three leading features, I may add a fourth, which seems to put a crown upon the whole; "For in thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

I.—The charge—the accusation that God brings against Israel; "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." But there may be some here who are inwardly saying to themselves, "These words do not apply to me; I have never fallen by mine iniquity; I stand upright; what has this to do with my case?" If there be such secret feelings at work in any of your minds, it does not show that the text will not apply to you: it merely shews, that the veil of ignorance, self-righteousness, and unbelief is still upon your heart. For, were that veil taken away, and you had a sight of yourself as you stand in the eyes of a holy God, you would find, that in one sense or other you have much to do with the accusation; and then, so far from putting the charge from you, you would be the very first to fall under it.

The book of Hosea is filled with expostulations, warnings, admonitions, invitations, and promises. Spiritually viewed, these are applicable only to a certain character, one who has departed, or is departing from the Lord. And, as I believe in my conscience, there is no child of God who really knows his heart, that has not departed from the Lord, and is not, more or less, daily departing from him, in thought, word, or deed, this charge belongs to the whole family of God. But if you think it does not apply to you, stand aside, and let those hear who have ears to hear.

But what is the substance of the charge? The Lord is speaking here to his own people, whom he addresses by the name of Israel; and in order to make the charge more pointed, he puts it in the second person; "O Israel, thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."

The words will need a little opening up.

1. What are we to understand, then, by “iniquity?” Are we to limit the expression to open acts of sin? Are we to say there is no iniquity except that which consists in words spoken or acts performed? that nothing short of drunkenness, adultery, theft, falsehood, and other such open sins, can be designated by the word iniquity? A man who thinks and argues thus, can know very little of the character of God; he can know very little of the holiness, purity, majesty, and power of the Lord God Almighty; and he can know very little of the wickedness, sinfulness, and depravity of his own fallen nature. Every, yea, the least departing from God, is iniquity; all that does not lie level and straight with the divine character. Just as when a straight rule is laid upon a curved surface, it detects the least crookedness; and as the slightest crookedness whatever maybe called a departure from a right line, so every departing of the heart from God is iniquity. Or, in the same way as a grain less than the real weight makes the weight defective, so the least deviation from the purity, perfection, and holiness of God, is iniquity. A man that is not aware of this, and is not keenly alive to it, can know little either of the character of God, or of the character of sin.

2. But what is it to fall? “Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.” Must we refer this falling only to something outward? Are there no other falls but positive words or positive acts of sin? Is nothing to be designated a fall but that which may be brought before a church as an act to be visited by its censure? A man must be as ignorant of what falling is, as he is of what iniquity is, if he thinks that there is no other falling but that which consists in some words spoken, or some acts done. There is a falling inwardly. There are secret thoughts, desires, lusts, and workings of our depraved heart by which we fall; and the more a man is acquainted with his own heart, and the character of God, the more will he be alive to these inward slips and falls, even when to the eye of man, however keen it may be, there may seem to be nothing inconsistent or unbecoming.

I wish to explain this matter fully at the very outset, in order

that I may throw the net as widely as possible, and include in its capacious folds every one whose soul God has quickened to fear his great Name. For, I am certain, if the grace of God be in your heart: if your conscience be made and kept alive and tender in God's fear; if you have light to see, and life to feel, you will acknowledge and fall beneath the charge, “Thou art fallen by thine iniquity.”

When the Lord is first pleased to draw us near to himself by some manifestation of his mercy, goodness, and love, we walk with him in simplicity and godly sincerity; he has our hearts and our warmest and most ardent affections, and our delight and pleasure is to have sweet communion with him. And here for the most part we stand so long as the blessed Spirit is drawing up our hearts and affections, and fixing them where Jesus sits at God's right hand. But when he leaves us; when he withdraws his inshinings and the visitations of his mercy and favour, then, like Abraham, we return to our place, and it may be said often of us too truly, “Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.”

But in how many ways do the Lord's people inwardly fall when God keeps them from slipping outwardly! Some fall by spiritual pride, even those whom the Lord has specially blessed. The very blessings of the Lord may be and are abused by the carnal mind; as Hart says, and to my mind he never wrote a truer line,

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

The Apostle Paul found this. After he had been caught up to the third heaven, “lest he should be puffed up with the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, was sent to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure.” (2. Cor. 12:7.) Spiritual pride was working in him; even from the manifestations and revelations that God had favoured him with. And who that knows anything of the visitations of God to his spirit, does not feel that when these sweet seasons are withdrawn, he is lifted up with pride, thinks that he stands nearer to God, and higher in the divine favour than others, and has something to boast

of over his weaker brethren? Others fall by worldly pride. Pride is a tree with many branches. Some who are free, to a certain degree at least, from the outward manifestations of worldly pride, are eaten up with spiritual pride; and those, perhaps, who are kept humble in their souls, and in whom spiritual pride does not manifest itself, feel one of their chief enemies to be worldly pride. Others fall by covetousness; "the love of money, the root of all evil," entangles and draws them aside. Others fall by worldly-mindedness, earthly cares, and temporal anxieties, that seem to eat up, like the locust, every green leaf of the life of God in the soul. Others fall by presumption; and others fall by despair. Each person that knows his own heart is best acquainted with that which entangles him, and draws him aside.

Sensuality is the snare of some. An inclination to strong drink is a temptation to others. Worldly relations and connections are a besetment to a third; family cares and anxieties are a temptation to a fourth. Each may have his own besetment; each may have his own snare; and yet the end and result be the same in all and each. "O Israel, thou hast fallen by thine iniquity"—'by that iniquity which has more or less power in thy heart to entangle thee, to bewitch thee, to allure thee, to blind thy eyes, to draw thee aside, to turn thy feet out of the narrow path, to carnalize thy mind, to deaden thy spirit, to harden thy conscience, to weaken the influences of faith, hope, and love.' Let conscience speak in the bosom of each, (who know what it is to have a conscience), and it will point out to each some besetment connected perhaps with his situation in life, or some temptation springing perhaps out of the peculiar relationship in which he stands. Each whose eyes are opened to see the workings of his heart, may see (if God be pleased to show him) that there is some iniquity, some besetment, some temptation, some lust, some idol, some snare; that there is something working in his heart whereby he continually falls away from communion with God; from the actings of faith, hope, and love; from his steadfastness; and from the sweet feelings that the Lord has from

time to time blessed him with; so that his mind becomes more or less carnalized, darkened, and deadened.

Now if you cannot go thus far with me, I have no hope whatever that you can go one step further. If there is no response in your bosom to what I have thus far been attempting to sketch out (and most feebly I confess have I thus sketched out some of these inward departings from the Lord); if you cannot go thus far, I have not the least hope of taking you one step further. But if you have been able thus far to follow me, and conscience bears its inward testimony that I have spoken the truth, and described more or less what you daily feel and mourn under, then let us proceed in company a step further, to our second point, which is,

II.—The invitation which the Lord addresses to all who know and feel that they have fallen, and that they do fall, and that daily by iniquity. And perhaps if I could follow some of those sitting before me into their secret retirements; could I listen to their sighs and cries as they lie upon their midnight bed; could I be near them when they are engaged in their various occupations; could I watch their lips as they traverse the streets of this metropolis,—I might hear them secretly complaining and confessing to God how vile they are, how base, how filthy, how entangled, how overtaken, how ensnared, and what trouble this causes them, that they are continually falling by their iniquity.

i. The Lord speaks to these; they have ears to hear; and his words will not fall to the ground. And what does he say? He addresses them tenderly; he speaks to them in the sweetest invitation; "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God." 'I know where thou hast been, Israel; I know what thou hast been doing; I see how thou hast fallen; I know what grief thine inward or outward backslidings have cost thee; mine eye hath seen the trouble of thine heart, and mine ear hath been opened to the sighs, and cries, and groans of thy lips. I am not a hard taskmaster, to cast thee off, cut thee down, and send thee to thy deserved place; "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God.'"

But how much there is couched in the words, "the Lord thy God!" What still! though thou hast fallen by thine iniquity; though thou hast departed from the Lord; though thou hast nursed every abomination in thy heart; though thou hast gone, in thy fallen nature, after the filthiest idols; though thou hast forsaken me times without number; though thou hast preferred anything and everything to my ways; yet he is the Lord thy God still, who has loved thee with an everlasting love, who hateth putting away, who will not reject thee, nor cast thee aside, nor cut thee down, nor send thee into eternal misery. He is still the Lord "merciful and gracious;" thy tender, thy compassionate, thy ever-living, ever-loving God; thy Father still, thy Benefactor still, thy sin-pardoning God still!

Now there is nothing that so melts and moves a poor sinner's heart, as when the Lord is pleased to drop such gracious and tender words into his soul as these. The Lord knows how to deal with us. He knows how to overcome us. He does not drive us to distraction by his wrathful anger; but he softens, melts, and moves the heart by tenderness, compassion, and love. He puts his hand upon the tenderest springs of our heart; he touches the right cord; he addresses to us the invitations, which when they come from his lips move and melt the soul. 'Return; I am ready to receive thee. I hold out my arm of tender compassion to thee.' "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."

If you have never known the misery of departing from God, you can never know the sweetness of returning to God. If you have never bewailed, lamented, nor mourned over the backslidings, the idolatries, and the adulteries of your fallen nature, you can know nothing of the sweetness of forsaking him. You are like the elder son in the parable, who never at any time offended his father, but always kept his commandments; and you therefore have never had occasion to confess to the Lord how you have fallen by your iniquity. You stand in your own holiness, righteousness, obedience, and consistency of life; and therefore know nothing of the moving

and melting breakings of heart that spring out of the Lord's tender invitations as applied to those who mourn and sigh because they have departed from him.

ii. But the Lord says also, "Take with you words;" as though he would put words into our mouth; as though he would himself suggest to us the most prevailing arguments. Some have contended from this language of the prophet for written forms of prayer; but, I think such have sadly overlooked the real spiritual meaning of the text. I think I may illustrate it by a very simple figure. Here is a criminal in a court of justice who is so cut up with shame and guilt, that he has not a word to say; but there stands by his side an advocate, a councillor, who knows the whole of the case; and he puts words into the criminal's mouth, and such words as he knows will have the greatest prevalence with the judge and jury. He tells him what to say, because he knows that the words which he puts into his mouth are the best to make use of, and such as will carry the greatest weight and power with those before whom he stands. And thus, when the Lord says, "Take with you words," he does not mean to put forms into the mouths of any. It is not to furnish a written formula for them to use; but it is to put prevailing arguments into the mouth of those who are so cut up with shame and guilt, that they have not a word to plead in their own behalf. It is as though he would himself put into Israel's heart and mouth arguments that would not fail to touch his own bosom, and bring down answers of mercy and peace out of his inexhaustible treasury. "Take with you words."

But what shall those words be? There are two which the Lord has here put into the heart and mouth of returning Israel.

1. First, "Take away all iniquity." How suitable is this! Iniquity has been the great stumbling-block, the main wall of separation, the chief cause of all the troubles, the real reason of all the controversy between God and the soul. Israel had fallen by iniquity. It was some secret idol set up in Israel's heart which had provoked the Lord; and thereby she had fallen from him. It was either her pride,

her covetousness, her sensuality, her worldly-mindedness, her carnality, her presumption, her unbelief, or her infidelity; it was some idol, some iniquity, or stumbling-block, set up in her heart, whereby she had fallen. Therefore, until this was taken away, she would ever be in the same state that she was in before. She must therefore say from the heart as well as from the lip, "Take away all iniquity."

Now, before the soul can use these words, it must see it has iniquity; and it must see that iniquity in particular whereby it has fallen. Therefore, I said, if you did not feel the application of the charge, I would not ask you to go a step further: I said, you had better stand aside, and give place to others. But when you have eyes to see there has been this iniquity whereby you have fallen, this lust, this pride, this worldly-mindedness, this besetment, this temptation, this indulgence in something sinful, this secret departing from God, this forgetfulness of prayer, this neglecting his word, this hardening of your heart against the truth—when you begin to see and feel you have departed from the Lord, and say, 'I have not that sweet enjoyment of God's presence that I once had; I have not that communion with him which my soul once enjoyed; I have not those manifest answers to prayer, not those visitations of his grace and favour, not that access unto him, not that delight in reading his word, not that love to his people, not that satisfaction I formerly had in hearing his truth;'—when you begin to see a little of the malady, then you are fit to receive the remedy. If you had some inward disease, and went to a physician, the first thing he would do would be to find out what the disease really was. He would ask you a number of questions; he would perhaps strip you to find out what was really the matter with you: and when he had found out the disease, he would address himself to the cure. So if you do not see or feel that there is some idol, some temptation, some besetment, some snare, something unlawful, something evil which you have been indulging in: and that this is the cause why you have not those sweet manifestations

of God's favour and love to your soul, and why you are living for the most part in a careless and hardened state: I say, unless you see the real root, and dig down into your heart to find out whence all this springs, you cannot come to the Lord, and say, "Take away all iniquity." But, besides that, you must have suffered; you must have groaned, cried, and almost bled beneath the iniquity, the lust, the idol, the temptation, the besetment, before you can say, "Take away all iniquity." 'What all? Must all be taken away? Take away what I love so much? Take away what my carnal heart so delights in? Take away what I have gone out in such secret desires after? Take all away? This is taking my life! It is taking away all my worldly happiness: it is taking away all that my carnal mind finds pleasure in.' But when we have suffered and learnt to value one smile of God in the heart beyond a thousand carnal pleasures and pursuits, and would make any sacrifice so that he would appear for us, and bless our souls with the sweet manifestations of his love—when we can come here, we can then say, "Take away all iniquity," and enter into the real meaning of the words, into the very heart of the text.

But you may, like those of old, with your mouth show much love, and in your heart go out after your covetousness. (Ezek. 33:31.) You may get up in the morning, fall upon your knees, ask the Lord to keep you through the day, to preserve you from that temptation which has entangled you before, or from the besetment whereby you have fallen; but directly you get off your knees, or leave the room, you are as weak, as powerless, as much off your guard, and as ready to fall into the temptation as ever the devil is to bring that temptation before you. Now, if you are there, you cannot use the words from an honest heart, and say, "Take away all iniquity." But when you see and feel what a horrible thing sin is! how hateful and dreadful! and what a filthy, base, depraved and wicked creature you are, for having been entangled in this bewitchment, for having been overcome by this temptation, or drawn aside into this snare; when you can smite upon your breast, and say, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the

body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24,) or, when you can smite upon your thigh, and say, 'Woe is me! was there ever such an one as I? so soon thrown down; so easily entangled, so quickly drawn aside; such a weak and wicked creature! Was there ever such an one as I? O, I could tear out this heart of mine it gives me so much trouble!'—when a man is brought by the secret operations of God upon his heart into this spot, then he can say, "Take away all iniquity." He will not say, 'Spare me this or that sin. Is it not a little one? May not I have this lust? May not I indulge this pleasure, if I give up all the rest? Let me have but this; O, I cannot part with this?' I say, if a man is there, it shows that he has not had a real sight and sense of sin; he has not been made sick at heart, nor has he been made really honest before God.

Now but few persons are brought here by divine teaching and divine power. It is not standing with presumptuous notions upon the heights of Zion, but it is being brought down by the power of God to lie at his feet that will do this. But if you can travel thus far with me, we will go a step further.

2. "And receive us graciously." Not only, "Take away all iniquity;" take away the guilt of sin by sprinkling my conscience with atoning blood; take away the filth of sin by washing me in the fountain once opened for sin and uncleanness; take away the power of sin by shedding abroad thy constraining love in my heart, and enabling me by every sweet constraint to live to thy glory. I say, not only do we, or can we thus use the words when we say, "Take away all iniquity;" but the Lord bids us to add, "Receive us graciously." How this seems sweetly to explain the other! 'What!' a person may say, 'if I go to the Lord, and he takes away all iniquity, shall I not then stand upon a better footing than before? Shall I not then have something that I can boast of?' No! "Receive us graciously." Free grace must still reign. 'Receive us into thy bosom, into thine heart, into thine arms, into the manifestations of thy mercy and favour, into the sweet testimonies of thy pardoning love and restoring grace. "Receive us graciously." Let "grace reign

through righteousness unto eternal life" in the superaboundings of thy sovereign grace. This must ever be our prayer. It is grace that makes us see our iniquity, and makes us feel that we have fallen by our iniquity; it is grace that brings us to the footstool of mercy, to say unto the Lord, "Take away all iniquity;" and it is still grace that we plead, when we say, "Receive us graciously." 'Receive us for the sake of thy grace into eternal life, into the manifestations of thy mercy, and the superaboundings of thy favour, whatever we have been, whatever we have done, whatever we have said, whatever we have thought; however far we have departed, however long we have gone astray, however hardened our heart, however fallen into the snares and temptations of the devil.' When we can find these two things (and they always go together) "take away all iniquity," and "receive us graciously," they carry with them a proof that the Lord is working in our hearts, and speaking his own invitation with a divine power into our souls.

III.—But we pass on to the response; the reception that these words meet with in Israel's breast; "So will we render to thee the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our gods; for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

We observe in these words two leading things; 1, what Israel says she will do; and 2, what Israel says she will not do.

i. What, then, does Israel say she will do? "So will we render unto thee the calves of our lips." The figure is taken from the sacrifices of calves and lambs which were offered under the law. So that when Israel says, she will "render the calves of her lips," she declares, that she will yield the sacrifice of praise. And this is a sacrifice acceptable to God; that we should not render to him merely carnal and worldly offerings, but, "the calves of our lips," the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, of blessing and extolling his holy name.

Now, if ever there be the incense of praise on the lip, it is when the sweet invitation of the Lord comes with power into our soul;

when we not only come to him, and say, "take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously," but have a sweet and blessed answer that he has taken away all iniquity, and so receive us. O how sweet it is to be able to praise God with joyful lips! and when we can do this from a sense of his goodness and favour let down into our souls, it is the sweetest and most blessed feeling that can possibly be enjoyed. And yet see the connection. Here is Israel; she has fallen by her iniquity, been indulging some secret lust, caught in some bewitching snare, drawn aside from the Lord, has departed from him, and got entangled in something that the Lord and the soul knows is not right; she is cut up with guilt, and filled with despondency, shame, and self-loathing, and almost driven into the very depths of despair. Now when the Lord is pleased, under these circumstances, to melt and move the heart by some gracious invitation, and the soul can hear the voice of God speaking in his word, and can come to him, and has power to say, "'Take away all iniquity;" break to pieces the snare; remove the temptation; let not that besetment reign with which my poor soul has been entangled; let it never entangle me again; Lord, thou knowest all my weakness, and all my wickedness; and how, if left to myself, I must fall; take away the snare; break it to pieces; let me never, never, be overcome with the temptation again'—when the Lord hears the sigh and cry of the poor prisoner, delivers him, takes away the temptation, removes the besetment, gives godly sorrow, and enables him to say, "'Take away all iniquity;" take it clean out of my heart; let it not reign or rule there for a single moment; at whatever cost, at whatever sacrifice; however deep it may cut; yet take away everything displeasing in thy holy and pure eyes; take away everything which intercepts the rays of thy mercy and favour; remove every stumbling-block, however near and dear; and deliver me from every temptation, however it may cut close into my very heart's fibres; "receive me graciously" in the blood and obedience of Jesus; and let thy grace shine forth in restoring and pardoning my soul'—I say when we can thus come before the Lord, and

there is some sweet echo and response in the soul from its inmost feelings that the Lord has taken and is taking away all iniquity, and casting it into the depths of the sea; that he is removing the temptation, and subduing the power of sin, and accepting us in his beloved Son—if ever there be a feeling of thankfulness; if ever there be a note of praise in a sinner's heart or in a sinner's lips, it is then. The church therefore says, "So will we render thee the calves of our lips." "We will not sacrifice the blood of calves and bullocks; we will not render to thee costly offerings of gold and silver; we will not build churches, nor erect altars, nor subscribe to painted windows, in order thus to obtain some manifestation of thy mercy; but "we will render to thee the calves of our lips." As we walk up and down our room, we will thank and praise thy holy name; as we lie upon our bed, we will bless and extol thee with every faculty of our soul, and with every breath of our lips. As we are engaged in our various occupations in life, our heart shall be continually blessing and thanking thee for thy mercy; a tear of gratitude, mixed with godly sorrow, will trickle down our cheek; and when no eye sees, and no ear hears, we will thank and praise and bless thee for what thou hast done for us.' This is the sacrifice of praise that God accepts at our hands; and it is all that we can give him for his mercy, goodness, and love.

ii. But Israel not only tells the Lord what she will do, but she tells him what she will not do. And what will she not do?

1. "Asshur shall not save us." Where had she been? What had been the main cause of her departing from the Lord? What had been the secret root of her iniquity? Why; looking to Asshur; that is, Assyria, which, spiritually, means some foreign help.

Let me try if I cannot trace out in this the very feelings of your heart. There is some temptation which you have been overtaken by; some besetment which has drawn you aside and entangled your affections. Let us dig down to the root of this; let us look, if it be possible, and see what gave this temptation such power, and what made this besetment so strong. It was because you were

secretly leaning upon Asshur; you were not looking unto the Lord Jesus Christ; not trusting wholly to his blood; not hanging entirely upon his arm; not resting solely upon his power. But when we have learned by fatal experience what looking to Asshur has cost us; and seen that whenever we have looked to the creature, or rested upon an arm of flesh, we have only been strengthening some temptation, putting force into some besetment, or adding power to some entanglement, the soul says, with holy indignation, "Asshur shall not save us." 'I have made resolutions and promises, and relied upon self to keep me when I went into temptation; my eye was not upon the Lord; I was looking more to my own strength or righteousness, or something in me or others; but it shall be so no longer; "Asshur shall not save us."

2. "Neither will we ride upon horses." Horses were forbidden the kings of Judah; they were used for the purpose of war, pride, splendour, or activity; and it is from this the figure is taken. This perhaps is the meaning of the words, "We will not ride upon horses;" 'we will not take unlawful means of advancing ourselves.' When the children of Israel went out to war, they were not to use horses; and if they used them, it was contrary to the divine command. How often have we been entangled in the same snare! When we have gone out to war, instead of using the means which God has appointed, as faith, prayer, and watchfulness, we have used means of advancing ourselves which were forbidden by God's word. The same thing is spoken of in Isaiah (30:16), "Ye said, we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee; and we will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift." They would try to get away when they were pursued; but those who pursued them should be swifter than they. Now every means of advancing or lifting up ourselves, which we take to supersede the leadings and teachings of God may be said to be "riding upon horses."

Now can you see anything of this in your experience? In your business, perhaps, instead of confining yourself to your lawful calling, you have been getting upon horses; you have been doing

something unlawful; you have not kept within right bounds; let honest conscience speak. Or, in the church, perhaps, you have taken a high position; you have exalted yourself above your real standing, and thought more of your religion than it is spiritually worth; got higher in doctrine than in vital experience; have a better informed head-piece than a heart established with grace; and instead of being a poor, toiling, labouring, groaning pilgrim, kept upon level ground, you have been desiring to obtain a something whereby you might advance yourself, and get beyond others. Now when you are convinced of these things, and seen how foolishly and wickedly you have acted, you can say, "We will no more ride upon horses."

3. "Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our gods." This was the besetting sin of Israel, to worship idols. And have you never said to the work of your hands, "Ye are our gods?" Never been pleased with yourself on this or that account; never thought highly of yourself; never looked into your heart, and thought there was something in which you might take delight? If a man does not see that the root of all idolatry is self he knows but little of his heart. Perhaps, if you have walked into the British Museum, and seen the idols that were worshipped in former days in the South Sea Isles, you have wondered that rational beings could ever bow down before such ugly monsters. But does the heart of a South Sea Islander differ from the heart of an Englishman? Not a bit. The latter may have more civilization and cultivation; but his heart is the same. And if you have not bowed down to these monstrous objects and hideous figures; though you have never prostrated your body before Juggernaut, there may be as filthy an idol in your heart. Where is there a filthier idol than the lusts and passions of man's fallen nature? You need not go to the British Museum to see filthy idols and painted images. Look within. Where is there a more grovelling idol than Mammon, and the covetousness of our heart? You need not wonder at heathens worshipping hideous idols, when you have pride, covetousness, and

above all that hideous idol self in his little shrine, hiding himself from the eyes of man, but to which you are so often rendering your daily and hourly worship. How often have you said in your heart, 'This is my god; I love it; I cannot part with it; it is too sweet and pleasant to give up; I embrace it; I adore it; I bow down to it; it shall be my god.' But when the Lord is pleased to break our hearts with a sense of our sin and misery, then we can say to the work of our hands, 'Ye shall be no more my gods, I will not worship any but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in spirit and truth.'

IV.—And then comes the last point, which crowns and puts as it were a blessing on the whole, "for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Poor fatherless children, spiritually, who have none to look to but the Lord; who have no hope or refuge but in God; "in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." "Thou art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee." And therefore, "we will render to thee the calves of our lips." When under divine influence, we say, 'we will do none of these things' (God knows how soon we may be entangled again). "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our gods; for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

135 The Blessedness Of Divine Chastening

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Tuesday Evening,
July 24, 1849.

"Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law; That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked."

Psalms 94:12, 13

What a different estimate men form of blessedness and happiness from that which God has declared in his word to be such!

If we listen to the opinions of men about happiness, would not their language be something to this import? 'Happiness consists in health and strength: in an abundance of the comforts, luxuries, and pleasures of life; in an amiable and affectionate partner; in children healthy, obedient, and well-provided for in the world; in a long and successful life, closed by an easy and tranquil death.' I think a natural man would, if he did not use the very words, express his ideas of happiness pretty much in the substance of what I have just sketched out.

But when we come to what the Lord God Almighty has declared to be happiness; when we turn aside from the opinions of men to the expressed words and revealed ways of the Lord, what do we find 'blessedness' to consist in? Who are the characters that the unerring God of truth has pronounced to be blessed? "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth; blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled; blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy; blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt. 5:3-11.) And again, in the words of our text, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law." These are the unerring words of God; and by his words man will be tried. It is not the fleeting, fluctuating opinions of worms of the earth; but it is the unerring declaration of the only true God by which these matters are to be decided.

In attempting, then, this evening to unfold what the Lord has here declared to be real "blessedness," I shall,

I. First, endeavour to shew in what this blessedness consists; "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest out of thy law."

II. Secondly, why the man thus chastened and thus taught is really blessed; "That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity." And,

III. Thirdly, what is in preparation in the meantime for the

ungodly. “Until the pit be digged for the wicked.”

I. First, then, let us endeavour to look at the spiritual meaning of the words: “Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and teachest out of thy law.” Who is this man? He is one whom God has taken in hand; one to whom the Lord has special purposes of mercy; a true-born child of his heavenly Parent; for “If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers” there is no exception, “then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Heb. 12:8). If a man, therefore, be exempt from divine chastening, his character is drawn as with a ray of light. He may congratulate himself on exemption from trouble; he may say, ‘there has no evil touched me.’ But his very exemption is only a proof of his bastardy—the hand-writing of his illegitimacy. If he were a true-born child, he would come under the rod; but not being such, he escapes these proofs of God’s eternal adoption. We may observe this naturally. The children who are at this moment disturbing us by their noise in the street, we do not chastise; they are none of ours. But if you, as a parent, were to see your child making a noise in the street, or otherwise misconducting himself, you would bring him in and chastise him. He is your child; you are interested in him; you cannot let him act as vagrant children do, because he is your flesh and blood. And therefore, while you pass the rest by, as having no concern in them, you bring your own children under especial chastening because they are your own. It is so spiritually. The wild vagrants, to whom the Lord has no regard, the children of Satan, who are filling up the measure of their iniquity, have no rod of chastisement; they are left, like these poor ragged children, to their own ways. But the heirs of promise, the children of the living God, those whom he is training to be with him for ever in bliss and glory, he will not suffer to go on in their own ways; for them he has a rod of correction.

But, we may observe in the words before us, that the Lord puts chastening before teaching. Is there not something remarkable in this? Why should chastening precede teaching? For this reason.

We have no ear to hear except so far as we are chastened. Take the case I have alluded to. Your child does something wrong. Do you instruct him first, or do you chasten him first? You chasten him first. And then, when by means of the chastisement you have brought him to submission, to a proper state of mind, you tell him how wrongly he has acted. The rod smites the body before the instruction drops into the ear. So it is spiritually. In God’s dealings with his children, he chastises first; and when by his chastisement they have received an ear to hear, a conscience to feel, and a heart to embrace the truth revealed to them, he drops his instruction into their soul.

1. The Lord has various ways of chastising his people; but he generally selects such chastisement as is peculiarly adapted to the individual whom he chastens. What would be a very great chastisement for you, might not be so to me; and what on the other hand might be a very severe stroke to me might not be so to you. Our dispositions, our constitutions, and our experiences may all differ; and therefore that chastening is selected which is suitable to the individual. It is as though the Lord had suspended in his heavenly wardrobe a number of rods of different sizes; and he takes out that very rod which is just adapted to the very child whom he intends to chastise, inflicting it in such a measure, at a time, and in such a way as is exactly fitted to the individual to be chastised. And here is the wisdom of God signally displayed.

i. The Lord, for instance, sees fit to chasten some in body. We find this in the Scriptures. In the book of Job especially it is mentioned: “He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out” (Job 33:19-21). There we have an instance of an individual laid upon a sick bed, in pain of body, distress of mind, and chastened by his gracious Lord for his good. So we find the Apostle Paul speaking to the Corinthians, who had misbehaved themselves at the Lord’s

supper; “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (1 Cor. 11:30). It was their unbecoming conduct at the Lord’s supper which had brought on them bodily sickness. The Lord chastened their body for the misconduct of their soul. So in the case of Hezekiah, we find the Lord took similar measures. The prophet was sent to him with this message in his mouth, “Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live” (2 Kings 20:1). Sickness took hold of him, and he was stretched upon the bed of death. But see how it worked in him! “He turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the Lord.” He turned away from all human help, and fixed his eyes wholly and solely on him who is able to save. It is in sickness and affliction, oftentimes, that the Lord is pleased to manifest himself to our souls, bless us with his presence, and stir up in us a spirit of prayer. I myself am a living witness of it; the greatest blessings I have ever had, the sweetest manifestations of the Lord to my soul have been upon a sick bed. Illness is often very profitable. Bodily afflictions separate us from the world, set our hearts upon heavenly things, draw our affections from the things of time and sense, when the Lord is pleased to manifest himself in them. And yet there are other times and seasons when we are laid upon a bed of sickness, and yet no blessing is given. I remember once, after the Lord had blessed my soul upon a bed of sickness, when I got a little better, and the blessing had worn off, this thought crossed me, ‘O, your spiritual state of mind was not the effect of grace; you were sick and afflicted; it was that, and not anything specially from God that brought those feelings.’ Soon after, I was laid upon a bed of sickness again; had I then the same blessed feelings, the same views of Christ, the same spiritual-mindedness in my soul? Quite the contrary; all was hard, dark, dead, and barren. Then I saw that it was not the sickness that could make Christ known, loved, or precious; but the power of God made manifest in it. And thus, sometimes, we learn from our very barrenness, hardness, and deadness, profitable lessons, and are convinced thereby that we are utterly unable to raise up one spiritual feeling in our souls.

ii. Others the Lord chastens in their families. Our children are very near and dear to us; they are our own flesh and blood, and touch our tenderest feelings. Now the Lord sometimes may pass by ourselves personally, and afflict us in our children or our partners in life. We find this in the Scriptures. We see how Jacob suffered from his children, by losing one for a time, and others proving thorns in his side, and a grief to his soul. We see this also in David, when he wept out his soul with such bitter sorrow, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom; would to God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Sam. 18:33) We see it in the case of Amnon and Tamar (2 Sam. 13). What misery was produced by his children in his own household! We see it also in the taking away of the child which he had by the wife of Uriah the Hittite; which though it cut him to the very soul, yet he saw as the chastising hand of God for his fearful transgression.

iii. Others again are chastened in their worldly circumstances. We see this in the Scriptures also. Look at Job; a man who in riches exceeded all the men of the East. But how in a moment all was struck away; his flocks, his herds, and all his possessions taken away at a stroke. Ungodly persons do not see the hand of God in these things; it is all ‘a chance’ with them, or an ‘unfortunate speculation, which did not succeed.’ But when the children of God enter into speculations, or embark their money in enterprises which are not consistent; when a reverse comes, the speculation turns out to be a failure, and the money is lost, it is their blessing to receive it as a stroke from God and as a mark of divine chastisement. Their eyes are then anointed with eye-salve to see that it is a justly deserved stroke; and though it cuts them all the more deeply, yet they receive it as from the Lord, and submit to it as a dispensation of mercy, not of wrath.

iv. Others I may say all in their measure, the Lord afflicts spiritually, in their souls. What I have hitherto been treating upon are mere external afflictions—afflictions of the body, in the family, and in circumstances. All these are the dispensations of God, and

ought to be viewed as such; and when so viewed, they work together in the soul for good. They must not be put aside; we must not say, 'The hand of God is not in them; it is all a chance.' Nothing comes to a child of God as a matter of accident or chance; it all proceeds from God, and all is dealt out in measure and for certain purposes. If the Lord touch our bodies, it is for our spiritual good; if he bring affliction through our children, it is for our spiritual good; if he afflict us in our circumstances, it is for our spiritual good. When the eye is opened to see, the ear to hear, the heart to believe, and the conscience made tender to feel, we know and confess that these things are sent from God. Here is the difference between a believer and an unbeliever. Infidelity says 'it is a chance;' for unbelief sees the hand of God in nothing: faith says, 'it is the lord;' for faith sees the hand of God in everything.

Now though a few may escape these outward troubles, yet there are spiritual afflictions which we cannot and must not escape. If we do escape them, woe be to us; we are only signing our death-warrant; only proclaiming aloud, 'We are bastards.' If we are God's children, we shall have spiritual afflictions; and these will consist, proportionately to light and life in the conscience, in painful convictions of guilt; in deep repentance and grief of soul on account of our backslidings; in a discovery of our evil ways and crooked actions; in sorrow for the many things we have done which conscience bears witness against as sinful. The denial of answers to our prayers; the shutting up of the throne of grace to our cries; the darkness of mind that we labour under; the trying thoughts we may have at times concerning our state, or the dealings of God with our souls; the inability to raise up faith, hope, and love, in our hearts—these all are to be viewed as chastisements. Is it not so naturally? Your child has done something wrong, and displeased you. Do you look upon him now as kindly as at other times? No. You keep him at a distance; you do not let him dine with you today; you abridge him perhaps a part of his food; you make him go to bed early and in the dark; and if you do not visit him with positive

stripes, you manifest by your reserved countenance and serious look that you are displeased; you will not take him upon your knee, nor embrace him like his brothers and sisters, but send him to bed without a kiss. What are all these but marks to the child of your displeasure? These are chastisements; and if the child be tender, he will go sobbing to bed because his parent is displeased with him; for he knows he has brought this displeasure upon himself. It is so spiritually.

The Lord deals with us as a parent does with his children; he does not smile upon us, does not give us a kiss, will not speak kindly to us, or look upon us as in times past with looks of favour and love, and will not, as it seems, hear us when we call. You teach your child by similar means your displeasure. When you are reserved, and keep him at a distance, he knows the reason, and he feels the reserve as a mark of your displeasure. So it is with God. When he denies answers to our prayers; shuts up his manifested mercy; leaves us to wretched, desponding, and gloomy feelings, these are all chastisements, and are to be received as such; and when they are so received, they work good effects in the soul, for they produce submission, resignation, quietness, meekness, and humility.

In these, and other various ways, of which time will not suffice to mention the tenth part, God chastens his people. The Lord chastens those whom he loves; and "blessed is the man whom he chastens." There are many afflicted, but only few chastened: many have abundance of worldly trouble; but only God's people are really chastened, so as to see and feel the hand of God in the rod, and submit to it as such. Here is all the difference between a believer and an unbeliever, between a child of God and an infidel.

2. We pass on to consider the second part of the blessedness of the man whom God chastens. "And teachest him out of thy law." We have just hinted at the reason why chastening precedes teaching. We have no ear for instruction till we feel the stroke of God upon us. It was so with the prodigal. Until he was brought to his right mind by strokes of hunger, he did not think of his father's house; he

had no heart to return; but a mighty famine sent him home. So it is with God's children; as long as they are allowed to wander in their backslidings, they have no heart to return. But let the rod come: let them be driven home with stripes; then they have an ear to listen, while God teaches them to profit, instructs them by his blessed Spirit, and speaks into their heart those lessons which are for their eternal good. "And teachest him out of thy law." We should, I think, much err from the mind of the Spirit, if we confined the meaning of the word "law," as some do, to the law strictly and properly so called. "The law" in the Scriptures has a very wide signification; it means, in the original, instruction. The word is Torah, which signifies 'teaching' or 'direction.' And as the law given by Moses was the grand instruction that God gave to the children of Israel into his holiness and purity, the word Torah, or instruction, became fixed in a definite manner to the law as given at Sinai. But the word in itself has a far higher meaning, signifying instruction generally; and thus we find, in the New Testament, that the word "law" is not confined to the law of Moses given in thunder and lightning upon Mount Sinai. For instance, we read of "the law of the Spirit of life" in Christ Jesus, which hath "made me free from the law of sin and death." Ro 8:2 The "law of the Spirit of life" there mentioned does not mean the law given on Mount Sinai. Again, "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:25). "The perfect law of liberty," does not, cannot mean the law given at Mount Sinai; it is the gospel of Jesus Christ; the instruction, the Torah, which the Spirit has given of the Lord Jesus, and therefore called "the perfect law of liberty." So, in the Old Testament, "O how I love thy law; it is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97). David was not meditating all the day upon the words given upon Mount Sinai; he was not utterly consumed with terrors by meditating upon the strictness and holiness of God as revealed in that law; but he was looking into the gospel, and in that law he delighted all the day, as beholding in it the glories of

the Lamb.

And thus, in our text, when it says, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law:" it does mean, I grant, in the first instance, the law strictly speaking as revealing the purity, holiness, and perfection of God; but we must not limit it, as some do, to the law definitely so called. A man, then, is blessed whom God teaches out of his law: that is, brings near those things which the law reveals, and seals them upon his heart. The law is a manifestation of God's purity, holiness, justice, majesty, greatness, and glory; and was given upon Mount Sinai in thunderings, lightnings, and earthquakes, to shew forth the majesty of God. Now the Lord, in the first instance, teaches his people by shewing to them out of the law his purity, holiness, majesty, the perfection of his character, his indignation against sin, and his wrath against sinners. And every feeling of guilt produced by a manifestation of God's purity, affection, uprightness, justice, wrath, indignation against sin, and direful vengeance that burns to the lowest hell—every such conviction, and every such feeling is a teaching out of his law. But there are some living souls whom God has taught, and is teaching out of his law, who because some definite words of the law have not been applied to their heart, are full of fear that they never had the sentence of the law written in their conscience.

But there is one mark, if not more, whereby we may know whether we have ever had the application of the law strictly speaking to our conscience. What is this? The law "gendereth to bondage," that is, it generates or produces bondage in the soul. Now there may be some here this evening, who may say, 'I do not know that I ever had definite words applied to my conscience—such as, "Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." 'But let us see whether by bringing your experience to the word of God, you cannot find that you have experienced what sometimes you fear you have not. Have you never felt bondage? Has your soul never been shut up,

and unable to come forth? Have you had no slavish fear of God? Have you never been as it were bound in fetters of iron, and felt that nothing but the mighty power of God coming into your soul could set you free? Have you had no slavish fears of death? We read, that there were some who “all their life-time” were subject to this fear. Have you had no fear of death when the cholera is going about? Have you had no dread lest that awful scourge might enter your door, and you might be stricken with the fearful malady? Has no groan or sigh gone up to God through the dread of it? What is this but bondage? And what gendereth bondage but the law? Not the letter, but the spirit of the law: because it genders, that is, generates, as a father, in the soul, what the dead lifeless letter cannot possibly do, a spirit of bondage. If you have felt this bondage, this fear, these doubts, these manacles and chains, which your sins have wreathed round your neck, then you have been taught “out of the law;” aye, you have felt the law; for it has produced a spirit of bondage in your soul. Let us see whether we cannot find another mark. It is this; “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” Have you any knowledge of sin? Have the sins of your evil heart ever been felt? ‘Have you ever seen the purity and perfection of Jehovah; and felt the justice of God in his holy law’? Do you ever feel that had God sentenced your soul to eternal damnation, he would be just; that you had deserved it all, and brought it on your own head? Can you say, that he would be just in condemning you to the lowest hell? If you have felt this, you have been taught out of God’s law; for “by the law is the knowledge of sin.” But we pass on to consider “the law;” in a different point of view. The “law,” as I have already noticed, signifies not merely “the law,” strictly speaking as the sentence of condemnation; but it includes also the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ—“the perfect law of liberty; the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus;” that law which was in the heart of the Redeemer, when he said, “I come to do thy will, O God; yea, thy law is within my heart.”

Now, as the Lord teaches his children “out of the law,” strictly so called, so he teaches them “out of” the gospel; and to my mind

there is something exceedingly sweet and expressive in the words “out of the law.” It seems to convey to my mind, not only that the law is a treasure-house of wrath, but that the gospel also is a treasure-house of mercy. And as those who know most of the law are only taught “out of the law;” and not the whole of the law, only a few drops as it were, out of the inexhaustible wrath of God; so out of the heavenly treasure-house of the gospel, “the perfect law of liberty,” ‘it is but a little of grace and mercy that in this life can be known. As Christ said to his disciples in promising the Spirit; “He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you” (John 16:15). He cannot take “all,” and shew it unto them; for none could live under the sight. The Spirit, therefore, takes of the things of Christ, and shews here a little and there a little; some little blessedness here, and some little blessedness there; a suitable promise, a gracious testimony, a comforting text, an encouraging word, a sight of atoning blood, a smile of his countenance, a view of his Person, a discovery of his righteousness, or a glimpse of his love. This is taking of the things of Christ and revealing them to the soul. And thus, the man whom the Lord takes in hand, he teaches “out of” the gospel by making Christ experimentally known, and revealing his dying love. And thus he teaches each and all “out of his law”—both the law from Sinai, and the law from Zion.

But, observe the connection between chastening and teaching. This is what I am wishing to impress upon you. Suppose you are in a carnal state of mind; say you are a man of business, have done a good stroke today, have got something which has wonderfully pleased your covetous heart, have been carried away by some worldly project. But you have come to chapel this evening. Are you in a fit state to hear the word of God? Is the Lord about to teach you now out of the gospel? You are not the man, nor is your soul in a fit state to receive it. But suppose it otherwise. Say, the Lord has been sorely chastening you of late; you are just recovering from a painful sickness; have lost a child; had an affliction in your family; something trying has happened today, yesterday, or the last week

in your worldly circumstances; or the Lord has set to his hand, and wrought more powerfully upon your soul than he has for months past; you have been cut up with convictions, felt your backslidings, and could scarcely bear to creep to chapel, lest you should hear your own condemnation.

You are the very person whom God is chastening that he may teach out of his law. You were not in a fit state before to hear; you were thinking how tedious the minister was, and wondering when he would finish the sermon; your mind was full of wandering thoughts, or you were cavilling at all you heard. But now you have an ear to hear; a sigh and a cry in your heart and lips when you come to chapel; and in groaning out your petition before you come, you say, 'O Lord, wilt thou speak one word to my soul tonight? Wilt thou kindly look upon a poor vile backslider? O do manifest thyself to me!' This is teaching following chastening. You must have chastening first; you must first be brought to your senses, have a heart given you to feel; have many stripes laid upon you to bring your wandering feet back to the paths of righteousness; and then the gospel is for you.

The promises of mercy, the sweet invitations, the forgivenesses with God, and all the blessings which the gospel is filled with, are for those whom the Lord brings down and chastens. And therefore, there are very few persons who are really in a state fit to hear the gospel, the precious love of God as revealed in the Person of Christ. This is the reason why we have so many hardened antinomians in our day; so many dry, doctrinal professors, whose lives, conduct, and conversation are disgraceful to the name they profess. It is because they are not chastened. And this makes them the bitterest enemies to real experimental truth, and to the men who speak out of the fulness of a believing, exercised heart. There is a connection, therefore, betwixt being chastened, afflicted, exercised, and being taught "out of the law." God does not teach, and afterwards chasten for disobedience: but he first brings down the heart with labour, and then sows in it the seeds of instruction.

II.—But we pass on to our second branch, which is, the reason why the Lord chastens and teaches his children,—"that he may give them rest from days of adversity." There are "days of adversity" coming; and these may be more serious than any one at present expects. We may have days of great adversity and troublous times as regards the country generally. We may have persecutions. We may have calamitous times as regards business, trade, and worldly circumstances; and these things affect all men. We are so linked together, so dependent upon each other, that what touches one touches all. If troublous times come, they will touch the church as well as the world. What a blessing, then, for God's people, if they have a rest from the "days of adversity;" if they have a God to go to, a Jesus to lean on, a lap to be dandled in, and a bosom to pillow their aching heads.

But, supposing the political horizon is not overshadowed; supposing worldly matters are peaceable and quiet, there may be "days of adversity" of another character. You may have a long and painful sickness, be brought into very trying circumstances; you that are now in comparative comfort may be brought down to poverty; you may have a very heavy affliction in your family; and see little else but "days of adversity." These will come, and we cannot prevent them. We can no more say "the day of adversity" shall not come, than we can say, tomorrow will not be a rainy day, or that the shadow will not attend tomorrow's sunshine. The Lord, then, knowing the "days of adversity" which are in store; knowing that sickness and death are coming, has prepared a rest beforehand; "Come, my people," he says, "enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself for a little moment until the indignation be overpast."

But how do we get this "rest?" By being chastened and by being taught. Till we are chastened, we make the world our home; and a very pleasant paradise it is. Our children, our connections, our pursuits, our worldly ease, the many airy castles that we build up, are all very pleasant to us until strokes of chastisement come,

and the Lord begins to afflict us in body, in family, or in soul. Yet how kind it is and all the kinder for being painful for the Lord to chasten us home. Our child may perhaps be from home; there is a storm gathering; the thunder is ready to break forth; and he is about to be exposed to the lightning's flash. If he loiter, are you dealing unkindly with him if you whip him home? Is not every stroke a kindness that brings him out of the thunderstorm? It is so spiritually. The Lord sees that there is a thunderstorm gathering; the lightnings are about to flash; the rain to pour; the hail to strike. Is not every stroke a kind stroke, a stroke of love that brings the wanderer home to find shelter under God's wing until this storm be overpast? We might be wandering abroad in the world with our heads exposed to the lightning stroke; we might hear the warning peal, and be yet too far from home to get there in time; but the Lord foreseeing "the days of adversity," comes with strokes and drives us home. He will not let us lie down in the green fields and flowery meadows, and sleep under the trees.

His strokes are strokes dipped in love; and, however cutting to the flesh, if blessed by the Spirit, they are made instrumental in driving us home, bringing us to our right mind, and shewing us where true rest is only to be found—in Christ, in his Person, love, blood, grace, and suitability; in all that he is and all that he has. What a wise and kind parent, then, he is to chasten us, though painful at the time, and to teach us out of his law and gospel, that he may give us rest from "the days of adversity."

III.—But we come to our third point; what the Lord is preparing in the meanwhile for the ungodly. There is no chastening for them; no teaching for them; no preparing a rest for them; or preparing them for rest. What, then, is doing for them? What a striking figure here the Lord makes use of! "Until the pit be digged for the wicked." What is the figure? Is it not this? In Eastern countries, the ordinary mode of catching wild beasts is to dig a pit, and fix sharp spears in the bottom: and when the pit has been dug sufficiently deep, it is covered over with branches of trees, earth, and leaves,

until all appearances of the pitfall are entirely concealed. What is the object? That the wild beast intent upon bloodshed—the tiger lying in wait for the deer, the wolf roaming after the sheep, the lion prowling for the antelope, or the elephant breaking through the jungle, not seeing the pitfall, but rushing on and over it, may not see their doom until they break through and fall upon the spears at the bottom.

What a striking figure is this! Here are the ungodly, all intent upon their purposes; prowling after evil, as the wolf after the sheep, or the tiger after the deer, thinking only of some worldly profit, some covetous plan, some lustful scheme, something the carnal mind delights in; but on they go, not seeing any danger until the moment comes when, as Job says, "they go down to the bars of the pit." The Lord has been pleased to hide their doom from them; the pit is all covered over with leaves of trees, grass, and earth. The very appearance of the pit was hidden from the wild beasts; they never knew it until they fell into it, and were transfixed. So it is with the wicked; both with the professors and the profane. There is no fear of God, no taking heed to their steps, no cry to be directed, no prayer to be shewn the way; no pausing, no turning back;—on they go, on they go; heedlessly, thoughtlessly, recklessly; pursuing some beloved object,—on they go, on they go; till in a moment they are plunged eternally and irrevocably into the pit.

There are many such both in the professing church as well as in the ungodly world. The Lord sees what they are, and where they are; he knows where the pit is; in what part of the wood; how situated in the jungle. God knows their steps; he sees them hurrying on, hurrying on, hurrying on. All is prepared for them. The Lord gives them no forewarning, no notice of their danger; no teachings, no chastenings, remonstrances, no frowns, no stripes; they are left to themselves to fill up the measure of their iniquity, until they approach the pit that has been dug for them, and then down they sink to the bottom. This will never be the case with the righteous. They are forewarned; they take heed to their ways; the

Lord chastens them betimes; he teaches them out of his law; he gives them right and deep views of his purity and holiness; and shews them also the refuge which he has prepared for them in the love and blood of the Lamb. Thus, in “the days of adversity;” they have a solemn resting-place in the bosom of God, in his covenant faithfulness and love.

Now do you lay these things to heart? How have you come to chapel this evening? What has God done for your soul? Has curiosity or some other motive brought you here? Or do you come hoping to hear that which will do you good, and be spiritually and lastingly profitable? Have you found anything spoken this evening suitable to your case and state? Can you find, looking back on the dealings of God with you in providence or grace, that he has been chastening you? Do fix your eyes, you that desire to fear God, on this mark; say to yourselves, ‘Lord, have I been chastened of thee? Can I see in my various afflictions the hand of God? Have they done my soul good? Have they been a voice speaking to my heart? Have they brought forth in me the fruits of holiness? Can I say, Lord, “Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest;” and I am that man?’ If so, you are not the wicked. God is not digging a pit for you; he is chastening you betimes that he may “give you rest from the days of adversity;” you have a God to go to, and a blessed bosom to lean upon when “the days of adversity” come, and the wicked fall headlong into the pit.

136 The Work Of Faith With Power

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Tuesday Evening,
July 31, 1849

“Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you,

2 Thess. 1:11, 12

There is one very remarkable feature in the Apostle Paul; I mean, the spirit of prayer which dwelt in his breast for the churches. I believe there is scarcely an epistle, with the exception of those to the Galatians and the Hebrews, where we do not find the Apostle expressly mentioning how he prayed for the church to which he was writing. The moving cause of these prayers he himself gives us, “Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” So deeply interested was this man of God in the prosperity of Zion, and the care of all the churches lay with such weight and power upon his mind, that it forced, as it were, prayer continually out of his breast. He says, therefore, in another place, “praying always for you.” (Col. 1:3.) His soul was continually engaged in lifting up itself in prayer for those who were dear to his heart as living members of the body of Christ.

But the subject matter of the Apostle’s prayers is as remarkable as the spirit of prayer itself. And would we know whether we pray aright for ourselves or for others, we should lay down our prayers side by side with those put up by the Apostle Paul for the churches; for he says expressly of himself and of his brother apostles, “We have the mind of Christ.” We may be sure, therefore, that he asked after the mind of Christ; that he prayed, as he wrote, “in the Holy Ghost;” that the Spirit of God interceded in him and for him with groanings which could not be uttered. Thus the subject matter of his petitions is deeply important, and should be well weighed and examined by us. Our prayers for ourselves, and those who are spiritually dear to us, should be compared with them, that we may gather from the comparison how far the same Spirit that wrought in Paul is working in us; and whether the same kind of prayer which that blessed Intercessor wrought in his soul is wrought in

ours by the same Almighty power.

In considering the words before us this evening, I think we may observe,

First; the subject of the prayer itself; in other words, what the petitions were which the Apostle Paul here put up for the church of God at Thessalonica.

Secondly; what would be the effect and result of these prayers being answered. And,

Thirdly; the source whence all these blessings must flow—the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I.—Let us then endeavour to dive a little into the meaning of the Spirit here when he wrought in the Apostle's breast such earnest desires for the welfare of the church at Thessalonica. There were three things that he begged of God to do for them; and we may be sure that these were three very important and very blessed things. For having access to the throne of mercy, being permitted, encouraged and enabled to spread his petitions there, we may be sure that he would ask for such things as were in themselves deeply important; and such as if answered, would prove signal blessings to those for whom the petitions were made.

i. The first branch of his petition to God was, "that He would count them worthy of this calling." Are we to gather from these words that there was anything like worth or worthiness to be found in them? That either before calling, or after calling, there was something in them which would merit the favour of God? No; if we were to conclude anything of this nature, we should entirely misapprehend the mind of the Apostle. The persons to whom he was writing had been called by the grace of God. Nay more; they were signal Christians. There is no church in the New Testament that flourished so much in grace as that of Thessalonica. In almost all the other epistles we find reproof mingled; but in those to the church of Thessalonica we find especial mention of their "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope." It cannot, therefore, mean that the Lord saw any worth in them prior to calling; and from

seeing this goodness in them as natural men and women, that he therefore bestowed upon them the riches of his grace; for they had been already called. Thus that view is entirely precluded; nor can this be meant, that because they had improved so much the grace of God; and had in every respect acquitted themselves so worthily and becomingly, therefore for that reason there would be a mighty increase of the grace of God. No; that is not it. But the meaning of the expression, I believe, we find in the margin—that "He would vouchsafe." The word does not convey an idea of worthiness on the part of the creature; but simply this, that God would "deign" to bless them; the worthiness not being in them, but in himself. So a Sovereign is said to 'deign to do this,' and 'vouchsafe that,' to 'condescend' to grant a favour; the whole spring being in the bosom of the Sovereign, he being the source of all dignity, honour, worth, and worthiness. The subject is favoured in receiving what the Sovereign bestows; the good pleasure of the King being the fountain head of every favour and dignity conferred. Thus, when the Apostle prays, that God "would count them worthy of this calling;" he means that the desire of his heart was, that God would kindly vouchsafe, would benignantly deign, would graciously condescend, to make their calling more and more manifest in their souls. There is an expression of almost a similar kind in the epistle to the Ephesians, where the Apostle prays that they might "know what is the hope of his calling;" that is that their calling might be made clear to themselves; that the fruits and benefits resulting from this calling might be made manifest to their hearts; that they might realize and know the blessings in prospect springing out of that calling; that thus they might be trained up for the enjoyment of the inheritance whereunto God had called them. It is as if he addressed them as branches of the seed royal. The heir of a crown is educated with a view to the kingdom which he is to possess; the whole tenor of his training and education being to prepare him to be king of the realm which he will be called upon one day to govern. In our country, the Prince of Wales has tutors and governors, and

an education designed to fit and qualify him for the post he is one day in the providence of God to occupy. This, then, is the meaning of the Apostle, when he prays that God would “count them worthy of this calling;” that he would ‘vouchsafe’ to give them clear views and blessed manifestations of the grace and glory to which he had called them; that thus their minds might be trained, as it were, and educated for the inheritance of the saints in light; that they might not grovel here below in the cares and anxieties of this mortal scene; but having a bright prospect of what God had called them unto hereafter, their heart’s affections might be lifted above the poor perishing things of this time-state, the trifling toys of earth, and be fixed where Jesus sits at God’s right hand.

But with respect to the word “calling,” what does it imply? That God calls them to certain blessings. We may summarily say, that in calling, God calls his people to a knowledge of himself here, and to an enjoyment of himself hereafter. When the Apostle, then prays “that God would count them worthy of this calling,” it is, that he might bless them with some testimony of what he had called them to enjoy, know, and feel in their experience below, as an earnest of what he had called them to enjoy eternally above. Thus, when God calls a man, it is to accomplish in him a certain purpose; his call is preparatory to something to be revealed in his heart. It is the first link in divine religion; it is the first budding of immortal glory; it is the first touch of the finger of God upon the conscience; it is the begetting of the soul into a life that shall never die. But when we are called, in the first instance we know little else but convictions of sin, the curses of a broken law, the terrors of conscience, the dread of hell, and the fears of eternal damnation. We can no more see what this calling is intended for, than a prince, while a babe in arms, can see he is designed to be the monarch of a mighty empire. We are blind to the future, and know not what God means by it. But as the Lord, in due time, begins to take off the shackles, and drops into our souls some knowledge of himself as he brings his precious gospel near, shews us the blood of sprinkling, gives us to

taste of his mercy, and to feel something of his favour; then our eyes become enlightened and anointed with divine eyesalve to see what we are called unto—”to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent;” to taste his love; to enjoy a sense of his goodness; to be delivered from the filth, guilt, bondage, and power of sin; and thus to experience a sense of God’s mercy and love to such undeserving wretches as we see and feel ourselves to be.

Now, the Apostle, praying for the believing Thessalonians, desires, “that God would count them worthy of this calling;” that is, would make it more and more manifest to their souls; would bring into their hearts more and more the blessings connected with it; would set before their eyes the prospect of that bright inheritance to which he had called them by grace, by giving them stronger and clearer views of their interest in the blood of Christ, laying eternal things with greater weight and power upon their minds, and showing them more and more of the riches of his mercy and love in the Person of his dear Son; and by counting them worthy of this calling, would unloose, unfetter, and deliver them from the bondage of sin in all its various shapes and forms, and the cares and anxieties of this life, and thus set their affections on things above.

This, then, appears to be the subject matter of the Apostle’s first prayer for his beloved Thessalonians.

ii. The second is, “that He would fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness.” Perfect goodness is an attribute of God. “Why callest thou me good?” said the Lord to one who called him “good Master;” as though he would take the man upon his own assumption, ‘How canst thou call any man good?’ He does not deny that he is good; but he takes the man upon his own word, ‘Why callest thou me good if thou merely believest me to be man? for there is none good but one, that is God.’ “Goodness” is an eternal attribute of Godhead. He cannot cease to be good any more than he can cease to be God. By “goodness,” I understand his kindness, his benevolence, his love, his tenderness; that disposition in him

to bestow favours fully, freely, and bounteously, because it is in his heart to do so. The “goodness” of God is made manifest in all the works of creation; it is made manifest in his various dealings and leadings in providence; but it is made more particularly manifest in sending his own dear Son to save them that believe.

But the Apostle speaks here of “the good pleasure of his goodness.” If I may use a figure to illustrate his meaning, it is as though the goodness of God were dwelling in him eternally, and yet a channel was needed through which it was to flow. We may conceive a river ever flowing, and sending down to the sea a perennial stream; but if a channel were cut from that river, the waters would issue by it and irrigate the land; then all the blessings contained in the stream would flow freely on the pastures, and “make them rejoice on every side.” Something like this seems intimated in the expression, “good pleasure of his goodness.” Goodness is in the bosom of God eternally and unceasingly. It is a part of his holy nature; an attribute of the divine essence; but there is a way in which he has seen fit to make it manifest. Angels know he is good; and that it is his very nature to be such; but sinners, redeemed sinners, not only know his goodness, but the “good pleasure of his goodness.” He has been pleased in his eternal mind to manifest that goodness in a certain way, and cause it to flow in a particular channel unto certain predestinated objects.

Thus, the Apostle does not pray that they might simply know the “goodness of God,” but the “good pleasure of his goodness,” in the channel through which that goodness is manifested, the Person, blood, love, and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the image of God. His desire was that they might know him as the divinely consecrated medium of all communication, the Mediator between God and man, through whom, as an Intercessor, all divine goodness flows into the soul. And thus, that they might know the “good pleasure of his goodness,” by the mercy, favour, tenderness, compassion, and lovingkindness of God flowing into their souls through this consecrated medium, the Person of the God-Man,

Immanuel, God with us. This is because we cannot know the goodness of God abstractedly. If we were pure as first created, we might know the goodness of God as dwelling eternally in his glorious Essence; but as fallen sinners that door is barred against us; and his goodness is now only known in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator, the only Mediator, between God and man. When Christ, then, is made in some measure known to our souls, we view him as God’s anointed One, as the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his Person. And when we see him as the God-Man, the glorious Immanuel, and feel a measure of the goodness, mercy, and love of God flowing into our hearts through him as the Mediator between God and us, this is tasting and knowing something of the “good pleasure of his goodness.”

But there is something more than this. “The good pleasure of his goodness,” not only points our eyes to the Mediator, as the divinely consecrated channel, through which all blessings flow; but it also directs our sight to the objects to whom God is pleased to shew goodness. It is “according to his good pleasure.” This goodness does not flow out to man as his goodness flows out towards angels. This goodness flows through the Lord Jesus Christ, as an Intercessor, to certain definite objects, and comes into the heart of certain chosen, predestinated individuals. When we can view the love of God not only in the Person of Christ, through his blood and obedience; but also receive it into our hearts as vessels of mercy set apart of God from all eternity, as predestinated to experience his love, then we begin to taste something of “the good pleasure of his goodness.” This is not merely to know that God is good; but to see also that there is a pleasure “in his goodness, that he delights in mercy.” This is knowing the “good will of him who dwelt in the bush.” As, then, your minds are led into this truth, that the goodness of God not only flows in a glorious channel, Immanuel, God with us; not only flows into certain hearts which have been set apart in God’s predestinating purpose and love; but

also flows at such times, in such ways, and through such means, as depend upon the “good pleasure of God;” you will then see that there is not only a person to receive, but also a time in which that goodness is to be known; that the ways and means are all of God’s devising, through which that good pleasure should be displayed. Thus, such a minister is appointed to preach such a sermon from such a text, by which the good pleasure of God is revealed to the soul; such a path is allotted in providence as unravels the “good pleasure of God;” each having his own peculiar path in which God leads, as though he were the only individual God had to guide. As, then, we receive not only “the goodness of God,” but also “the good pleasure of his goodness;” as we see the Person through whom it flows, and feel it flow into our hearts as objects of God’s mercy; as we view the various means which God has appointed to make that good pleasure known, overruling every circumstance and event that takes place in providence or grace, and opening up as it were a path for his goodness to flow into:—as we are led to see and feel these things, then God is pleased to “fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness” in our heart’s experience. This, then, is what the Apostle prayed that these believing disciples might enjoy at Thessalonica, that God would fulfil in them all “the good pleasure of his goodness;” that all those treasures of mercy which he had designed for them, the aboundings of all that blessedness and love which was stored up in his bosom and intended to issue forth at certain times, certain seasons, and in certain ways, might so flow into their heart, that God would in each individual fulfil “the good pleasure of his goodness.”

iii. The third blessing that he prayed for them was—“the work of faith with power.” What is the “work of faith?” It is that work in and upon the soul whereby faith is brought forth into living exercise. And not only so, but also the work which faith has to do when it is brought into exercise.

Thus, by “the work of faith,” we may understand two things; 1, the operation of God upon the heart whereby from time to time

faith is raised up, and brought forth into living exercise upon the things of God; and 2, the work that faith has to do when thus raised up and strengthened in the soul.

Every grain of true faith is from God. Living faith is the work of God, and stands in “the power of God.” Whatever faith we may have had in times past, or think that we have had, we have no power whatever to raise it up again in our souls. We are in this matter completely dependent upon the good pleasure of God. He that was pleased at first to give faith must communicate it afresh, raise it up, strengthen it, and bring it forth into lively exercise. And in doing all this, he fulfils “the work of faith with power.” Of this the children of God have a living testimony in their own conscience, feeling, as they all do, an evil heart of unbelief; being as unable to raise up living faith as to create a new sun in the sky; being utterly powerless to deliver themselves from the temptations that beset them, or to bring sweet and precious views of the Lord Jesus Christ into their souls. Thus all the family of God, each in his measure, are convinced that true faith is of the operation of God; and must be wrought in their soul by his almighty power. When this is felt, it cuts the sinews of all creature faith; it lays the axe to the root of freewill; it brings a man to his right place—to be a poor, dependent sinner, hanging as a pensioner upon God’s mercy and love. Until the sinews of creature faith, human strength, and legal righteousness are cut, we do not fall into our right position,—to have nothing but what God gives; to be nothing but what God makes; to know nothing but what God teaches; to feel nothing but what God inspires. Until we are brought into this completely helpless, needy, dependent position, we know nothing experimentally of the “work of faith with power.” For God is a jealous God. And until we are thoroughly powerless, we do not find the working of God in us “to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Thus, by “the work of faith with power,” we understand that operation of the blessed Spirit upon the soul, whereby he influences us to receive what God has revealed in his word; to believe in

his dear Son; to look to his blood and righteousness; to trust in his grace; to hang upon his promises; and to wait at his blessed footstool, until he in due time blesses, comforts, and enlarges our soul. And not only so; but every act of faith whereby we see our interest clear; whereby the spirit of love is brought into the soul, casting out that fear which hath torment; every real gospel hope; every blessing that works solid peace and satisfaction in the heart—all come from the same bounteous Author, the giver of every good and perfect gift.

This is “the work of faith with power;” because only so far as we feel the power of God in our souls, do we find any faith to believe. When the word of God is applied with power, it raises up faith; and when the power of God is felt, then faith is drawn forth to believe what is presented to it. But when the power of God is not put forth; when the operations of the Spirit, according to our view and feeling, are suspended, we are left (as we are often left) to grapple with the hardness, darkness, unbelief, and infidelity of our fallen nature, and feel as utterly unable to raise up a single spark of faith in our souls as to create a world. But when power is felt; when the word of God is applied; when the operations of the Spirit are experienced; when the things of God are brought near; when Christ is revealed and made precious; when the blood of sprinkling is made known; when the love of God is shed abroad; then as power is felt in the soul, faith is raised up, and we are enabled to believe, receive, embrace, and cleave unto all that God thus freely and blessedly makes known.

This is what the Apostle desired for the church of God to whom he was writing, “that he would fulfil the work of faith with power.”

But, as I before hinted, faith has a work to do. Faith can do nothing till it is raised up. To use a comparison; it is like a steam engine. Put together the wheels and the cogs, the cylinder and piston, and all the various appurtenances of the machine. But what will the engine do without steam? Take away the motive power, and what are the cogs and wheels, and all the beautiful arrangements? But

let the motive power be given, and then the cogs and wheels, rods and beams, work harmoniously together, and the effect produced is such as the designer meant when the engine was erected. So it is spiritually. The grace of faith is never extinguished in the soul. A man to whom God has given faith never loses that faith out of his heart; but it is as powerless to any operation, as to any active experience, as to any work, or bringing forth of anything spiritual, as the steam engine is powerless, except there be the motive power, steam, applied to it. But when the motive power comes, when the steam is raised, then it begins to work. So it is with faith in the soul. Faith is powerless till God is pleased to breathe upon it, and draw it forth into exercise. Then, as he works upon it, and the motive power is applied, it begins to act according to its nature, and do the work which God has appointed it to perform.

1. It is the work of faith to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. (“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”)—to believe in him as our Righteousness, our Mediator, our Saviour, our Friend, our Lord, and our God. We cannot raise up faith to see and believe he is all this to us. But if the Lord is pleased to give us faith, and draw it forth by the operations of his Spirit in our soul, then faith spreads forth its wings, lays hold of this precious Saviour, and brings him down into the heart. And this is “the work of faith with power.”

2. Again. There is a promise in the word very suitable to your state and condition. But you feel you have no power to lay hold of it. There it is in God’s word, very sweet and very suitable; but you cannot touch it; or, if you touch it, you cannot bring any sweetness, blessedness, or comfort out of it. But when the Lord is pleased to bring that promise near, to operate upon your soul with divine power, and so raise up and draw forth living faith upon the promise, what is so easy as to believe? I have often said, that faith is the hardest thing in the world, and the easiest thing in the world. There is nothing so hard, nothing so impossible, as to believe when the Lord does not give faith, is not raising it up, and drawing it forth by his almighty power. But when the Lord is doing

this, or in any measure blessing the soul, bringing the truth near, applying the promise, dropping it in with sweetness and savour, then nothing is so easy as to believe: it is then so simple, so sweet, so easy; there is no effort about it: it seems to come in and flow out freely as God gives it. And when this is the case, it is “the work of faith with power,” to receive the promise; to suck its sweetness; to take it warm into the heart, and believe that God will accomplish it.

3. So with the precepts. God has given us precepts; and we would desire to obey them. We see a beauty and a blessedness in them; we admire them, and desire our lives to be conformed to them. We dare not set them aside. On the contrary, we take them as an integral portion of God’s word; and see at times as great a beauty, as deep a necessity, and as real an importance in them as in the promises. But we are as powerless to perform the precept spiritually, as we are powerless to believe the promise spiritually, except as the Lord works in us “to will and to do of his good pleasure.” The promise is a part of God’s word; but we want faith to believe it; and the precept is a part of God’s word; but we want faith to perform it; God works in us to believe the promise; God works in us to perform the precept. “Love your enemies,” says the precept. “If smitten on the one cheek, turn the other.” Can I do either of these things? Not spiritually, except so far as faith is wrought in my heart. I may do it in the letter, or hypocritically. But what real performance of the precept is there except as the Spirit who gave the precept works in us to obey it from the heart, from spiritual motives, to do it under divine impulse, or perform it under gracious operations; and thus obey the precept, not merely in conformity with the letter, but in spirit and in truth?

4. The “work of faith” is to fight against unbelief. But how can I fight against unbelief if I have no faith, and unless God fulfil “the work of faith with power?”

5. The “work of faith” is also necessary to overcome sin, to subdue the flesh with its desires and carnal lusts; to put off the

old man, and put on the new. But, it must be “the work of faith with power:” for God must fulfil that work in me, if I am to fight to any purpose. He himself must put the sword in my grasp, must teach my hands to war, and my fingers to fight. It is, then, “the work of faith” to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts; but this can only be done by having faith brought with power into the heart. The old man can only be put off and the new put on by the manifestations of the love and mercy of God to the soul. If I abhor self, it must be by my conscience being made tender in the fear of the Lord. If I love the Lord Jesus Christ, it must be by his love being shed abroad in my heart.

Thus, we can believe no promise, perform no precept, mortify no sin, except so far as the Lord is pleased to fulfil “the work of faith with power.”

II.—But we pass on to our second point, which is, what the effect and fruit would be of God doing all this.

i. First, “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in them.” By “the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,” we are to understand everything revealed in the word of God concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, I am known by a certain name, and you the same. When my name is mentioned, all that I am in bearing that name is brought before you. So with “the name” of God. It means what God has revealed concerning himself; the character of God as made known in the Scriptures. Thus, “the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” signifies all that is revealed concerning Christ. It is the character of Christ; all that is made known concerning the Son of God. Now the effect and result of God’s fulfilling this prayer would be, “that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in them;” that is, everything which the word of God has revealed concerning Jesus would be glorified in their hearts. For instance:

1. There is the Person of Jesus, the object of our affections. Now, if the Lord “would be pleased to count them worthy of this calling, and to fulfil the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power,” then the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ

would be glorified in them. The answer that these prayers would bring into their souls would be such sweet manifestations of the Person of Christ, that the glorious Immanuel, God with us, would be glorified in them. They would see his Person by the eye of faith, and feel his glory shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost.

2. The blood of Jesus is a part of his name. It is revealed to us as cleansing from all sin. And thus, if God fulfilled the petitions, the blood of Jesus would be glorified: that is, there would be that manifestation of the blood of Jesus applied to their conscience, and sprinkled upon their heart, that they would see a divine glory in it; they would see what precious blood it was, and how it flowed from him as the God-Man; they would experience the cleansing, healing, purging, pardoning efficacy of it; they would feel it as a rich stream of atoning blood flowing forth from the glorious Mediator between God and their souls, whereby sin was for ever blotted out. Thus would “the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” be glorified.

3. His righteousness, also, is a part of his name. When the Apostle speaks of the name of Jesus, it is to set forth what he is. He is “our righteousness.” (1 Cor. 1:31.) “Thus is the name whereby he shall be called, the Lord our righteousness.” (Jer. 23:6.) Now when we get a view by faith of his righteousness, we see a glory in it; we view it as the glorious robe of righteousness with which the church is covered. And thus, when this glorious righteousness is made known to the soul, “the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is glorified” in it.

4. So with his love. This is a part of the name of Jesus—the infinite love and mercy that dwelt in him. When this is made known to the soul, and revealed to the heart, his name is glorified. There is a glory seen in that eternal love of Jesus, which brought him down to suffer, bleed, and die.

5. His suitability in all his covenant offices; his mercy, his tenderness, and all that He is as Mediator between God and man,—all this is “the name of Jesus,” whereby he is known and glorified in the soul. There is a glory and a beauty seen in it which surpasses

everything, and can only be known by being felt.

ii. But there is another effect which would flow from the petition the Apostle puts up, “And ye in him.” Not only the effect of his prayer being granted would be, “that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in them” but they would also “be glorified in him.” How does this take place? In this way. As we get a view of the Lord Jesus Christ, and behold his glory, that view conforms us to him; as the Apostle speaks, “We all beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor. 3:18.) As Moses, when upon the mount he saw the glory of God, in his face reflected that glory,—the glory shining upon him, casting its own image and reflection upon his forehead: so as we see the glory of Christ by the eye of faith, and as that glory shines into the soul, it will create a resemblance to it in our heart. There will be not only the glory of Christ shining into the soul, but there will be a conformity to the Lord and his glorious image—a changing from glory to glory. Thus, the greater the view we have of Christ’s glory, the more the mind is transformed into the same image; and by this we get separate from the world; for as we see the glory of Christ, that glory transforms us into his likeness. What then, is this poor, dying world? What are all the honours, riches, treasures, emoluments, and pleasures of this transient state? They all fade away. We only love these things as we lose sight of Christ. The glory of the world lays hold of our affections just in proportion as the glory of Christ loses its grasp upon us. Let the glory of Christ be seen; let his love be felt; let his glorious Person be made known; let the kingdom of God be set up with power; let a ray of divine favour shine into our hearts out of his eternal fulness; let us see light in God’s light—then in that light we see the true value of the world. What, then, are all the men and women in the world? Moths, worms, caterpillars, crushed in a moment. What are all its honours and popularity worth? All are as insignificant as the atoms that dance in the sunbeam. We can then write, vanity upon all, and say, ‘These things can yield us no

solid profit or pleasure: none but Christ can really make us happy.' Thus, when we see his beauty, and taste his love, we have neither heart nor relish for the creature. This is the effect and thus we are "glorified in him."

III.—And this leads me to the third point, on which I must be very brief, the crowning source of all—"According to the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ." He does not mention creature strength, creature wisdom, creature righteousness; but directs our eyes and hearts unto the fountain head of all—"according to the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace beginning; grace carrying on; and grace finishing; grace devising the original plan of redemption; grace bringing it forth and accomplishing it; grace predestinating; and grace applying predestinating mercy to the objects of the Father's choice. Thus grace must have all the glory. Grace first, grace middle, grace last. All to the glory of God's grace.

Thus feebly have I attempted to set these things before you. Now what do we know of these things? Upon what is our dependence? Upon what we are doing for God, or upon what God is doing for us? If we hope to do anything by the strength of the creature, that hope will fail; but if our hope rests upon the free grace, sovereign mercy, eternal goodness and distinguishing love of God, that hope will not fail us. Can we, then, lay down our heart's desires step by step with those of the Apostle, and feel union and communion with him? Can we sum up our desires in his? If so, how can I better take my leave of you this visit than by using the prayer of the Apostle, that God would "count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you—"in your hearts, in your lips, in your lives, in your walk, in your conversation;" that you may be glorified in him, and be enabled from day to day to depend only upon "the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, Lord's Day Morning,
Jan. 9, 1850

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

James 1:2-4

A singular race of men lived in the middle ages called Alchemists—a name still retained in the words "chemist" and "chemistry"—who spent their money, broke their spirits, and wasted their lives in a most unwearied search after three things;—First, a medicine that would cure all diseases, which they termed a "panacea;" secondly, a tincture, or, to use their language, an "elixir vitac," that would prolong life to an indefinite period; and thirdly, a powder, styled the "philosopher's stone," which would transmute lead and other base metals into gold. I need not tell you that all their laborious researches, which they pursued for several centuries, were utterly fruitless, and that as far as any satisfactory result was obtained, they might as well have tried to spin ropes out of sand, weave stockings out of gossamer threads, or twist clouds into ladders to reach the moon. Had they even succeeded, the results would have been full of vexation and disappointment. If they could have found a medicine to cure all diseases, would that have staved off old age and its attendant infirmities? If they could have prolonged life to an indefinite period, would not the grave sooner or later have closed over its victim? And if they could have changed tons of lead into gold, either the expense of the process would have swallowed up all the profits, or the abundance obtained by a cheap manufacture would of itself have destroyed its value when made.

But what they could not find in chemistry, is to be found in the gospel. Nature, however tortured in the furnace, or wooed in the alembic, could work no such miracle as they sought to wrest

from her bosom; but grace freely and without constraint has worked and still daily works them. There is a medicine which in the hands of Jehovah-rophi, the great Physician (Ex. 15:26), cures all diseases and dispels all complaints. As David speaks—"Who healeth all thy diseases" (Ps. 103:3). And what is this "panacea?" The precious blood of Christ, which "cleanseth from all sin." Is not sin a disease? And if this precious blood cleanse from all sin, must it not be a universal medicine, and all the more valuable as curing soul disease, which must be infinitely more deadly and destructive than any bodily malady? Disease struck down the alchemist amidst his extracts and essences, and with all the more deadly stroke from his sacrificing his own health in the vain attempt to cure other's sickness. But our blessed Physician has not only revealed and brought to light an infallible medicine, but himself applies it with his own hands and makes it effectual to a perfect cure. And is there not in the same blessed Jesus the true "elixir vitæ," or miraculous tincture of life? What did he say to the woman of Samaria? "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). The alchemist only sought to add a few more years to human life; but Jesus gives life for evermore. And is not his grace the true "philosopher's stone," transmuting by miraculous agency leaden afflictions into golden consolations, earthly miseries into heavenly mercies, legal curses into gospel blessings, and vile sinners into precious saints? Thus the delusive dreams of the alchemists have become solid realities, and as far exceeding what they toiled and toiled in vain to find, as eternity excels time, and heaven surpasses earth.

One of these miracles of grace we find in our text—"My brethren," says James, "count it all joy when ye fall into temptations." What a miracle must that be when a man can take into his hands a load of temptations and trials, and, by an act of faith, transmute them into joy! If you could take up a piece of lead, and by putting a

powder upon it and holding for a few minutes in a furnace, change it into a solid lump of gold, would that be a greater miracle than turning light afflictions into an eternal weight of glory? How this is done we shall, I hope, with God's blessing, see from the words of our text, in opening up which I shall direct your minds to four leading features which seem to me stamped upon them:

I.—First, the "divers temptations" into which the people of God "fall."

II.—Secondly, the effect of falling into divers temptations: that it tries faith, and that "the trying of faith worketh patience."

III.—Thirdly, the apostolic counsel, "Let patience have her perfect work," that the saint of God "may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

IV.—Fourthly, the transmuting effect of grace enabling the tried and tempted family of God to "count it all joy" when they fall into divers temptations.

I.—I must, however, with God's blessings, before I plunge into my subject, attempt to explain as plainly and as concisely as I can the precise meaning of several words in our text, that we may have a clearer view of the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost in the passage before us.

The word translated "temptations," embraces in the original a wider field of experience than the English term conveys. We must, therefore, enlarge the idea so as to embrace "trials" also; for the original word means not merely "temptations," but includes also what we understand by the term "trials." We must also further enlarge the meaning of the word "divers;" for the term in the original means not only diversified, various, of different kinds, but also many in number. So that we may thus enlarge our text, in perfect consistency with the mind of the Holy Ghost—"Count it all joy when ye fall into many and various trials and temptations." Thus we see that the words in this enlarged sense comprehend all the trials and all the temptations, however numerous, however diversified, that the saints of God may fall into. Were it otherwise,

were the text at all restricted, it would not apply to all the living family of God. Unless, for instance, it comprehended every trial, it might not comprehend your trial; Unless it included every kind of temptation, it might not include your peculiar temptation; and thus you as well as many who are deeply tried and peculiarly tempted, might be shut out of all the benefit and blessing contained in it.

I must also drop a word of explanation on the expression “fall into,” for there is something very significant in the idea conveyed by it. The idea is of a sudden fall into an unexpected danger, as, for instance, of a traveller falling into an ambush of highwaymen; for the Lord uses exactly the same word when he speaks in the parable of the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and “fell among thieves.” (Luke 10:30.) He was journeying onward, as he thought, safely; but all of a sudden, he fell into an ambush of thieves, who surrounded him, stripped him, wounded him, and left him half dead. Or the expression may refer to the idea of a ship steering its onward course with apparent safety, and suddenly striking on a reef of rocks, or caught in a whirlpool, for we have the same exact word used of the ship which conveyed Paul to Italy; “And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground.” (Acts 27:41.) Thus the word “fall into” divers temptations has a peculiar significancy, as expressing to the very life the way in which the saints of God often most suddenly and unexpectedly fall into the numerous and various temptation and trials which lie as if in the ambush as so many highwaymen, or lurk unseen as rocks and quicksands in the voyage of life. For you will bear in mind that the saint of God is both a traveller and a voyager. He has a way to tread, a road to travel in—the strait and narrow way, that leads to eternal life; and he has a voyage to make, for: “The Christian navigates a sea, Where various forms of death appear;” and it is “those that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in deep waters, who see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep.” (Ps. 107:23-24.) The road in itself is rough and rugged, and the sea stormy and boisterous; but it is the perils of the way—”The

rocks and quicksands deep. That through the passage lie”—in other words, the trials and temptations spread through the course, which make the journey and the voyage so difficult and so dangerous.

But let us look at some of these dangers and perils, these “divers temptations” of our text;

I. And first let us take a glance at the “divers trials” into which the family of God fall. Well may they be called “divers,” or many and various, as we have explained the word, for they spring from such numerous and different sources; but I shall only name four.

- 1, From above;
- 2, from beneath;
- 3, from without; and
- 4, from within.

1, Some are from above. “The Lord,” we are expressly told, “trieth the righteous.” “Search me, O God, and know my heart,” says the Psalmist; “try me, and know my thoughts.” The trial with which God himself tries his people are not only numerous and various, but for the most part of a very painful and perplexing nature, yet all precisely adapted to the nature of the case and exactly suited to the state of the person tried, as being planned by unerring wisdom, and weighed, measured, and timed by infinite love. Thus, as the God of providence, as the Maker of our bodies as well as the Creator of our souls, as the God of our families who gives and takes at will the fruit of the womb, some of his children he tries with poverty, others with sickness, others with taking away the desire of their eyes at a stroke, or cutting off the tender olive plants which have sprung up round about their table and twined round every fibre of their heart. How sudden too, how unexpected the trials! Heavy losses in business, deprivation of a situation, a sweeping away of the little all—the savings of a life—by some fraud or failure, trick or treachery, riches making themselves wings and flying away, and poverty and want coming in as an armed man to plunder the wreck; how suddenly do such strokes come! Sickness, too, and disease, how swift their attack! We are at

present in a very sickly season. Illness surrounds us on every side. New complaints, such as the fearful disease diphtheria, or revived maladies as small pox, are spreading far and wide, and making all tremble for themselves or their families; Both these diseases were then very prevalent. and as the saints of God are not exempt from their share in these afflictions, many who fear his great name are either themselves stretched on beds of languishing and pain, or are watching by the side of afflicted relatives and dying children. How suddenly, too, trials of various kind come! In one day Job, “the greatest of all the men of east,” lost all the substance which God had given; and the father in the morning of ten living children sat in the evening in his lonely house childless and desolate. How labour pangs fell suddenly on Rachel, and the impatient mother who had cried out “Give me children or else I die,” expired under the load of her coveted burden!

But these and all other temporal trials, though at times very severe to the flesh—though they need much grace to endure them with patience and submission—though often aggravated by our own fretfulness, and used as weapons by unbelief and Satan acutely to distress the mind; yet are they of little real moment when compared with spiritual trials which sink deep into a man’s very soul. These, then, are the sharpest trials among those which come from above. And amongst them we may place as the keenest of all the hidings of God’s face, as a mark of his displeasure. How David, Heman, Jeremiah, Jonah, and other Bible saints mourned and lamented under these hidings of the Lord’s countenance—”Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled.” (Ps. 30:7.) “Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me?” (Ps. 88:14.) To a saint of God, who has ever experienced the lifting up of the light of the Lord’s countenance, nothing is more painful and trying than the Lord hiding his face; for then all his comfort withers—his very evidence appear gone—the former tokens for good are surrounded with a dark cloud, and the felt displeasure of the Lord seems more than he can bear. But the blessed Lord

himself drank of this bitter cup when he cried out—”My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” And we must suffer with him if we are to be glorified together.

But the Lord also “trieth the righteous” by laying bare, and thus discovering to them the secret iniquities of the heart. It was so with Hezekiah, of whom we read—”Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.” (2 Chron. 32:31.) So the Lord, to strip us of our own pride—to crush our vain confidence—to show us that all our strength is weakness, and that grace must freely sanctify as well as fully save, subdue sin as well as pardon it—often leaves us to the discovery of what we are in the Adam-fall. This is “searching Jerusalem with candles” (Zeph. 2:12); for “the spirit of man,” that is the new man of grace, “is the candle or lamp of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly,” or heart. (Prov. 20:27). “I the Lord search the heart; I try the reins.” (Jer. 17:10.) As, then, “in his light we see light,” and “all things that are reprov’d are made manifest by the light” (Ps. 36:9; Eph. 5:13), sin after sin becomes discovered; and the teaching of the Spirit making the heart soft and the conscience tender, the soul is painfully and acutely tried by seeing and feeling these inward abominations. How markedly we see this in Job! “When he hath tried me,” said he, “I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10); but in the furnace what a discovery was made of the corruptions of his heart, which before were to himself unsuspected and unknown! They had not escaped the searching eye of Omniscience; but they had much escaped the eye of the most perfect and upright man, according to God’s own testimony, who then dwelt upon the earth. When, however this eminent saint of God was tried by afflictions and desertions, pain of body and agony of mind, then the deep and foul corruptions of his heart become manifest, and the most rebellious and unbecoming expressions found vent through his lips. You may think harshly of Job; but the greatest saint, the most highly favoured Christian put into the same furnace, would behave

no better than he. If the Lord lay “his left hand under the head,” the sharpest temporal trials can be patiently, even gladly borne. All afflictions become light if “his right hand embrace” the soul. (Song 2:6.) But if he withdraw his presence, shut out prayer, withhold the light of his countenance, and leave us to the workings of our corrupt heart, what can be the issue but fretfulness and rebellion, murmuring thoughts, unbelief, and self-pity?

2. Other trials of God’s saints are from beneath. We cannot explain the deep mystery why the Lord should suffer Satan to retain such power after Jesus bruised his head so effectually upon the cross, after he led captivity captive, and spoiled principalities and powers, casting them down from their seat of eminence, and making a show of them openly. That Satan should still be allowed to exercise such sway in this lower world, and even exercise his power against the saints who are dear to Christ as the apple of his eye, —surely, this is a mystery we cannot now fathom. But we know the fact from the authority of Scripture, the testimony of the saints, and our own personal experience, that the Lord does, for his own wise purposes, permit Satan very much to harass and distress the souls of God’s people. There is also this peculiarity in the temptations of Satan, that as he works by them on our carnal mind, we cannot often distinguish them from the sins of our own heart. We see this in Satan’s tempting David to number the people, and as strikingly in the passionate exclamations of Job. These good men did not see the tempter, though his hot breath inflamed their mind. As in a forge or foundry, the blazing coals or molten iron are seen, but not the hidden tube through whose sustained blast “the melting fire burneth;” so many a vile thought, infidel suggestion, or horrible idea blaze up in the heart, blown into a flame through the black tube of the Prince of darkness.

3. Other trials, again, arise from without. There are few saints of God who in their passage through life have not had to suffer much from outward foes. Open persecution assails some; secret slander and misrepresentation attack the character and wound

the mind of others. Their best friends, as they once thought them, have sometimes proved the most cruel enemies. Where they expected nothing but sympathy and kindness, they have met with little but harshness and neglect. How acutely Job felt this when he complained, “To him that is afflicted pity should be showed from his friend.” But instead of pity, his “brethren dealt deceitfully as a brook” dried up by the summer sun, to which “the troops of Tema looked” for supply, but it had “vanished what time it had waxed warm” (Job 6:14-20.) David had a Saul, a Doeg, and an Ahithophel; and a greater than David a Judas who kissed but to betray. Micah warns us against our fellow men; “The best of them is as a briar; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge.” “Trust ye not in a friend; put ye not confidence in a guide.” (Mic. 7:4, 5.) And Jeremiah says—“Cursed be the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm.” (Jer. 17:5.) In the face of such testimonies need we wonder that false friends are often greater trials than open foes? “Save me from my friends!” has been the bitter cry from many a heart.

4. But after all, our acutest trials are from within. Many who in the providence of God are comparatively exempt from severe outward trials, suffer an internal martyrdom. A heavy storm may be raging in the air; sleet, and snow, and hail, driven by a keen east wind, may darken the sky; and you in your warm room may see some poor traveller pelted by the pitiless storm. But you, though under shelter, may be racked with bodily pain, or be dying of slow disease, or be inwardly crushed by mental grief and sorrow. What is his trial compared with yours? What are fingers chilled with cold compared to hands burning with fever?

What is a sprinkling of snow on the clothes to a load of ice on the heart; or floods of rain without to a flood of passionate grief within? Thus outward trials are severe to the eye, but inward trials are severe to the heart. Poverty, sickness, bereavements, persecutions, do not crush and break the heart like guilt and remorse, the terrors of the Almighty, and the pangs of hell.

II. But let us now take a glance at the “divers temptations” into which the people of God fall, as distinct from the trials which lie in their path. There are many saints of God whose life is a series of outward trials; and there are others who know less of external trial, but more of internal temptation. The Lord arranges every lot, for though it seem casually “cast into the lap, yet the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” (Prov. 15:33.) He appoints to every one of his children the peculiar path which he has to tread, and the number and weight of the burdens which he has to carry. Whatever trial, therefore, or temptation comes, it is of the Lord—either indirectly by permission, or directly by visitation. Many appear to pass through life without any deep acquaintance with temptations. Job’s friends, though good men, seem to have had little or no experience of them; whilst Job, Heman, Asaph, Jeremiah, and Jonah were distracted by them. The same difference exists now.

Viewing, then, “temptations” as distinct from “trials” we may divide them into two leading branches—temptations which distress, and temptations which allure. The former are the more painful, but the later are the more perilous.

1. You might have walked for some time in the ways of the Lord without any deep experience of the infidelity, blasphemy, rebelliousness, enmity, and horrid wickedness of your fallen nature. This being the case, you were secretly lifted up with pride and self-righteousness. You had not yet had that deep discovery of yourself which was needful to humble you in the dust. You did, it is true, look in some measure to the Lord Jesus Christ, for salvation, but not knowing your utter ruin and the desperate wickedness of your heart, you looked with but half a glance; though you took hold of him, it was but with one hand; and though you walked in him, it was but with a limping foot. The reason was that temptation had not yet shorn your locks, bound you with fetters of brass, and put you to grind in the prison house. But you suddenly fell into one of these “divers temptations.” I will merely name two as specimens of their nature. Infidelity assailed your mind all in a moment as

with a cloud of the thickest, densest darkness. A veil was at once cast over the Scriptures, for you could not even believe them to be true. Objection after objection started up, and you shuddered with horror lest you should live and die a confirmed infidel. O what a trial was this! I have been here, and know what work it makes. “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” We reject the thought with horror, fly back to past experiences, muster up all our evidences, think of the faith and hope of departed saints, cry to God for help to believe; but still the poisoned arrow is rankling in the heart. Or you may have been tempted to open blasphemy—even to that dreadful crime of blaspheming God. Job and Jeremiah were thus tempted, and many a child of God has been pursued night and day with the same horrible temptation. But what an evidence it is of the deep corruption of the human mind and the power of Satan that persons, say tender females, who hedged in by the restraints of society, education, and morality, have never dropped an unbecoming expression from their lips, or scarcely heard one uttered by others, may yet be assailed, when called by grace, by the most horrid temptations to blasphemy, from the very thought of which their natural feelings revolt, and of which they would have deemed themselves utterly incapable. I have known such cases, and therefore name them, that if any here present are passing through this “fiery trail,” they may not be utterly cast down as though some strange thing has happened to them. (1 Pet. 4:12.) Many object to such things being even spoken of; but their very mention as experienced by those who fear God has sometimes put the temptation to flight, or abated its power.

But what a proof of the corruption of man—what an evidence of the power of Satan! I have stood by the sea shore and seen it spread out as calm as a mirror; and I have sailed on its bosom when not a breeze ruffled its face. But I have seen it in a storm when its billows rolled in full of foam and fury; and I have sailed over it when wave after wave dashed over the deck. But it was the same sea both in calm and storm. So the mind of man may be as

calm as a slumbering sea, or raging as the stormy wave; but it is the same heart still. The breath of temptation, like the ocean wind, makes all the difference between calm, and storm.

But let me ask, do you not fear, reverence, and adore that great and glorious name which Satan has been tempting you to blaspheme? Is not this, then, a proof that from him these suggestions come? Of all Satan's temptations this seems to be the most infernal; of all his threats, this the most deadly. If Satan could but prevail upon you to speak the word, he would triumph over you as a lost soul. Therefore he does all he can to drive you into the very pitfalls of hell. But he shall not succeed, for the "the weapons formed against thee shall not prosper." His is the sin and his shall be the punishment.

2. But there are temptations not so distressing and yet more perilous. These I have just been hinting at are seen; but there are those which are unseen. The enemy can hardly disguise his plotting hand in the former; he spreads the snare, but does not show himself in the latter. In the one he is a lion from the swelling of Jordan, in the other a trailing serpent hidden in the grass. There are temptations so thoroughly adapted to our fallen nature—snares so suited to our lusts, and Satan has such a way of seducing his victim by little and little into the trap until it falls down upon him, that none can escape but by the power of God. I am well convinced that none can deliver the soul from these snares of the fowler, except that the mighty hand which brings up out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay! Time, however, will not permit me to enter into all the diversified trials and temptations with which the Lord exercises his saints.

II.—I therefore pass on to show what is the effect of falling into these divers temptations; for that is the source of the joy which we are bidden to count them. There is no profit or pleasure in temptations and trials viewed by themselves, for "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous." (Heb. 12:11.) It is the effect they produce by which we are to calculate our gains. And

this effect is two-fold as here pointed out by the pen of the Holy Ghost. One is that it tries faith; the other that it works patience.

1. Whenever God communicates faith, he tries it. Why? That it may be proved to be genuine. Look at this in the case of Abraham. Abraham is a pattern to believers; he is therefore called "the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4:11)—his faith being so eminent, and of a character so spiritual and gracious. But see how it was tried. For twenty-five years did the Lord try the faith he had planted in Abraham's bosom. Year after year, month after month, week after week, day after day, was the Lord trying Abraham's faith. Sarah's petulance, eager craving for a child, jealousy of Hagar and then oppressing her till she fled out of the house, and their increasing years and delayed prospects, must all have deeply tried the patriarch's faith. But against hope he believed in hope, was "strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform." (Rom. 4:18-21.) Look, too, at David's case. How he was hunted like a partridge on the mountains, and was in continual apprehension of losing his life by the hand of Saul, so that he said, "There is but a step between me and death." View those two eminent saints of God; where their faith was tried to the uttermost! In fact, the stronger your faith is, the greater trials it will have to endure. The reality, the genuineness, as well as the strength of your faith are only to be evidenced by the amount of trial which it will stand. When for instance, you have been walking for some months in a smooth and easy path, and have scarcely experienced any trials for without or within, you have hardly known the strength, or indeed even the reality, of your own faith. You have been induced to take things very much for granted. You have not looked to the Lord as you should look to him; nor trusted to his strength as you should trust to it. You have been secretly leaning upon your own wisdom, resting upon a consistent profession, and mistaking ease in Zion for assurance of faith. But a trial comes. Where is your faith now? It sinks out of sight; you seem to have none; at least, none that you

can make use of, or that does you any good. “O,” you say, “I thought I could trust the Lord; but how can I trust him now that he does not appear? He hides his face; the heavens are as brass; he shuts out my cry. Why is this trial come upon me? O that I could believe! What shall I do if he do not appear? I am a lost man without him. O that he would manifest himself in mercy to my soul!” The Lord is now trying your faith—whether you can trust to him in the dark as well as in the light—whether you can look to Jesus at the right hand of the Father with a single eye—whether you can rest the whole weight of your soul upon his blood and righteousness; or whether you want something in yourself to win the favour of God and recommend you to his notice. Thus the Lord tries your faith by putting a strain upon it. It is like the mode in which the strength of cannon is tested; the guns are doubly or trebly charged, and if they do not then burst, they are considered equal to anything that may be afterwards required of them. Or as cables are tried in the Queen’s service; they are subjected to a strain very much greater than any they will be called upon to endure in actual use, and if they stand that heavy strain they are deemed fit for sea. In fact, not a sword or musket is entrusted to the soldier which has not been submitted to the most severe trial; or what would be the consequence? They might fail in the day of battle. Thus when the Lord calls a man to be a soldier and puts faith into his hand, he gives him a faith which he himself has tried, according to his own word;— “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.” He will not put into the hand of his soldier a sword that will break to pieces when he meets the enemy, or a weapon that shivers in the hand at the first onset, but one with which he shall be able to fight, and wherewith he shall come off more than conqueror; and that is, tried faith, his own gift and work. I extend the word to all your temptations as well as your trials. You will one day see, if not now, how every one has worked to this end; to try your faith, of what sort it is—whether your heart is right with God—whether you are sincere before the heart-searching Jehovah—whether you

believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with a faith of a divine operation, or whether your faith and hope are merely of nature’s manufacture, put into your hand by self and Satan, to ruin you under a guise of religion.

II. But the effect of this trial is pointed out by the Holy Ghost; it “worketh patience.” By “patience” we are not altogether to understand the word in its usual signification. The word “patience” in Scripture means rather endurance. It does not so much signify that quietness of soul—that calm and silent, that uncomplaining, unrepining submission to God’s will which we understand by the word “patience” as that firm and lasting endurance of all that God may see fit to lay upon us. It is a soldier’s virtue rather than a hermit’s; a stout man’s fortitude under pain rather than a quiet woman’s passive submission under suffering. “Ye have heard,” says James, “of the patience of Job.” Look at the context. “Behold we count them happy which endure.” What follows? “Ye have heard of the patience of Job.” Now it is just the same word in both expressions in the original, and should therefore have been rendered the “endurance” of Job; for not all his trials and temptations made him give up faith and hope.

1. Faith, then, viewed as the gift of God, and as proved by all the trials and temptations that he sends to exercise it, “worketh” the soldier-like endurance of which our text speaks. For how is a soldier made? Send him to the Crimea or to India; that will make him a soldier. He does not learn the stern duties of his calling by being paraded upon Aldershot heath or by going through his drill upon Southsea common. He must go into actual war; he must hear the cannon roar and see the sabres flash in his face; give and take cut and thrust; lie all night upon the battle-field; rush up the steep breach amidst the groans of the wounded, and press on determined to conquer or die. Alma and Inkerman make the soldier—the experience, not the theory of war. How is the Christian soldier made? By going to chapel —by reading the Bible—by singing hymns—by talking about religion? Just as much as the veteran

warrior is made at Aldershot or Southsea. He must go into the battle and fight hand to hand with Satan and the flesh; he must endure cruel wounds given by both outward and inward foes; he must lie upon the cold ground of desolation and desertion; he must rush up the breach when called to storm the castles of sin and evil, and never “yield or quit the field,” but press on determined to win the day or die. In these battles of the Lord, in due time he learns how to handle his weapons, —how to call upon God in supplication and prayer, to trust in Jesus Christ with all his heart, to beat back Satan, to crucify self, and live a life of faith in the Son of God. Religion is not a matter of theory or of doctrine; it is to be in the thick of the battle, fighting with the enemy hand to hand, foot to foot, shoulder to shoulder. This actual not sham warfare makes the Christian soldier hardy—strengthens the muscles of his arm—gives him skill to wield his weapons, and power sometimes to put his enemies to flight. Thus it “works endurance,” makes him a veteran, so that he is no longer a raw recruit, but one able to fight the Lord’s battles and “to endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” What then have been your best friends? Your trials. Where have you learnt your best lessons? In the school of temptation. What has made you look to Jesus? A sense of your sin and misery. Why have you hung upon the word of promise? Because you had nothing else to hang upon. Thus, could you look at the results, you would see this—that trials and temptations produced upon your spirit the two effects of which the text speaks; that they tried your faith, and that sometimes to the uttermost, so that in the trial it seemed as if all your faith were gone; and yet they have wrought patience—they have made you endure. Why have you not long ago given up all religion? Have your trials made you disposed to give it up? They have made you hold all the faster by it. Have your temptations induced you to let it go as a matter of little consequence? Why, you never had more real religion than when you were tried whether you had any; and never held faith with a tighter grasp than when Satan was pulling it all away. The strongest

believers are not the men of doctrine, but the men of experience; not the boasters but the fighters; not the parade officers in all the millinery of spotless regimentals, but the tattered, soiled, wounded, half-dead soldiers that give and take no quarter from sin or Satan.

I. But the word has another meaning, one in more strict accordance with the word “patience;” that is submission to God’s will. When the Lord puts us in the furnace, we go in kicking and rebelling. Our coward flesh shrinks from the flame. But when we have been some time in the furnace and find that we cannot kick ourselves out, and that our very struggling only makes the coals burn more fiercely, —at last, by the grace of God working in us, we begin to lie still. It was so with Job. How he fought against God! How his carnal mind was stirred up in self-justification and rebellion till the Lord himself appeared and spoke to his heart from heaven. Then he came to this point—”I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eyes seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.” Then the Lord accepted him and delivered him; turned his captivity, pardoned, and blessed him. So with Abraham, when he submitted to sacrifice Isaac, God appeared to deliver him. So with David, when he submitted to the Lord’s chastening hand, he brought him back to Jerusalem. But this will be more evident in our next point, to which I now hasten.

III.—”Let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” There is a work for patience to perform. Every grace of the Spirit has a certain work to do. As in a large manufactory, every hand knows his place and the work he has to do, so in the wonderful piece of divine machinery—the work of God upon the soul, every grace of the Spirit has its separate work to perform. Faith does not do the work of love, nor hope that of faith, nor love that of patience. Each several grace, like separate wheels in some beautiful machine, has its own place and its own work. Patience then has its work; and what is that? Twofold, according to my explanation of the word.

1. To endure all trials, live through all temptations, bear all

crosses, carry all loads, fight all battles, toil through all difficulties, and overcome all enemies.

2. To submit to the will of God—to own that he is Lord and King—to have no will or way of its own, no scheme or plan to please the flesh, avoid the cross, or escape the rod; but to submit simply to God's righteous dealings, both in providence and grace, believing that he doeth all things well, that he is a sovereign "and worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will." (Eph. 1:11.) Now until the soul is brought to this point, the work of patience is not perfect; it may be going on, but it is not consummated. You may be in the furnace of temptation now, passing through the fiery trial. Are you rebellious or submissive? If still rebellious, you must abide in the furnace until you are brought to submission; and not only so, but it must be thorough submission, or else patience has not its perfect work. The dross and slag of rebellion must be scummed off, and the pure metal flow down. It is all of God's grace to feel this for a single moment. But are there not, and have there not been, times and seasons, in your soul, when you could be still and know that he is God? when you could submit to his will, believing that he is too wise to err—too good to be unkind? When this submission is felt, patience has its perfect work. Look at Jesus, our great example; see him in the gloomy garden, with the cross in prospect before him on the coming morn. How he could say—"Not my will, but thine be done!" There was the perfect work of patience in the perfect soul of the Redeemer. Now you and I must have a work in our soul corresponding to this, or else we are not conformed to the suffering image of our crucified Lord. Patience in us must have its perfect work; and God will take care that it shall be so. As in a beautiful piece of machinery, if the engineer see a cog loose or a wheel out of gear, he must adjust the defective part, that it may work easily and properly, and in harmony with the whole machine; so if the God of all our salvation see a particular grace not in operation, or not properly performing its appointed work, he by his Spirit so influences the heart that it is again brought to work as he designed

it should do. Measure your faith and patience by this standard; but do not take in conjunction, or confound with them the workings of your carnal mind. Here we often mistake; we may be submissive as regards our spirit—meek and patient, quiet and resigned, in the inward man, yet feel many uprisings and rebellings of the flesh; and thus patience may not seem to have her perfect work. But to look for perfect submission in the flesh, is to look for perfection in the flesh, which was never promised and is never given. Look to what the Spirit is working in you—not to the carnal mind, which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be, and therefore knows neither subjection nor submission. Look at that inward principality of which the Prince of peace is Lord and Ruler, and see whether in the still depths of your soul, and where he lives and reigns, there is submission to the will of God.

But it adds, "that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." The word "perfect" in the Scripture does not mean, as applied to a saint of God, anything approaching to the usual idea of perfection, as implying spotless, sinless holiness, but one who is matured and ripened in the life of God—no longer a child but a grown man. As a tree grown to its full stature is said to have attained perfection; so when the Lord the Spirit has brought forth the work of patience in your soul, as far as regards that work you are perfect, for it is God's work in you; and so far you are "entire," that is, possessing all which that grace gives, and "wanting nothing" which that grace can communicate. To submit wholly to the will of God, and be lost and swallowed up in conformity to it, is the height of Christian perfection here below; and he that has that wants nothing, for he has all things in Christ. What, then, is the greatest height of grace to which the soul can arrive? Where did grace shine forth so conspicuously as in the Lord Jesus Christ? and where did grace manifest itself more than in the gloomy garden and on the suffering cross? Was not the human nature of Jesus more manifestly filled with the Spirit, and did not every grace shine forth in him more conspicuously in Gethsemane and on Calvary than when

enraptured upon the Mount of Transfiguration? So there is more manifested grace in the heart of a saint of God who, under trial and temptation, can say, “Thy will be done,” and submit himself to the chastening rod of his Heavenly Father, than when he is basking in the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness. How often we are mistaken in this matter—longing for enjoyment, instead of seeing the true grace makes us submit to the will of God, whether in the valley or upon the mount!

IV.—But to come to my last point, which is the grand key of the whole, and on which I need not tarry long, as I have already anticipated it; we are to “count it all joy” when we fall into divers temptations. I have been setting before you a problem in arithmetic—a sum in compound addition; run it up or down, and look at the sum total—”Joy.” Take all your trials and put them down; next add all the temptations with which your mind has been exercised—make a row of them; now cast them up, and what is the full amount? A word of three letters—a sum more valuable than if it were three figures, and each figure a nine—”Joy.” That is the sum total, according to the calculation of the Holy Ghost of all your trials and all your temptations. You are to “count it all joy.” What mysterious arithmetic! How unlike the ciphering taught in schools! How different from the sums and problems set on slates and copybooks! How different, too, a result does the Lord the Spirit bring out from your own calculations when you looked at them one by one, without casting up the whole sum! Then “count it all joy” when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing that their effect is to wean you from the world—to endear Christ—to render his truth precious, and to make you meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Are you satisfied with the solution of the problem? Can you write down your own name at the bottom of the sum and say, “it is proved; I carry the proof in my own bosom?”

138 The Promise Of God To His Afflicted Church

“O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones”

Isaiah 54:11,12

There is a promise made in the text to a certain personage. It will be desirable to ascertain who this is. We will look first at the internal evidence: it is to the things that are said about her, and the character given her: and if we look at the internal evidence of this chapter, we must come to the conclusion that the person addressed is the church of the living God, for of no other personage is either the description or the promise true, except of the church of the living God. But besides this internal evidence, which is indisputable, we have also the advantage of having certain texts in this chapter quoted in the New Testament, with express reference to the church of the living God, so as not only to give us internal evidence, but also additional proof. For instance, we find the apostle Paul quoting the first verse in this chapter in the fourth chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians, where he says, at the 27th verse, “For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.” Now to what does the apostle apply this quotation? He applies it to the heavenly Jerusalem. He says in the preceding verses, “For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” Then this clause of the verse evidently connects “Jerusalem which is above” with the personage to whom the promises are made in Isaiah, “For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not;” and so on.

Thus it is evident this Jerusalem which is above is the church of the living God, from an expression of the apostle Paul in his

Epistle to the Hebrews, in the twelfth chapter, where he says, “For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched but ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven.” There we have the connection, the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, with the heavenly Jerusalem, implying that it is one and the same. But in another verse, we find this prophecy also quoted by the Lord Jesus Christ, where he says, “It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.” Here our Lord quotes this very verse, “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord.” Who are the children, but the children of Zion, the children, the church of the living God?

Thus we not only from internal evidence, but also from expressions quoted in the New Testament, have fixed in a positive and definite manner, that the church of God is addressed in this chapter. All that is said of her, is said to the church of the living God. All the promises in this chapter are made to the church of God.

If we look at our text, we may observe two leading features therein: I. First, the description which God here himself gives of his suffering church. He addresses her as a sufferer. He says to her, “O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted.” This seems to be the first leading feature of the words before us, namely, the description of the church of God as a suffering church.

II. The second leading feature is the promise that God makes to her, that he will lay her stones with fair colours, and her foundations with sapphires: “Behold, I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.”

In this way, I hope, with God’s blessing, to consider the words this evening, attempting, as the Lord shall enable me, first to point out the character of the church of God here described by the

pen of inspiration, as afflicted, tossed with the tempest, and not comforted. Then pass on to consider the promises, the sweet and glorious promises made to her by the mouth of God.

I. First, the description of the suffering church of God. “O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted.” See how our Lord addresses his church here below, how he describes her in her true character, how he tells her from his personal knowledge of her, what she is, how this corresponds for the most part with the feelings of God’s people concerning themselves, with the state, case, character and condition in which they find themselves to be. “O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted.”

Let us look at these three distinct epithets, these three descriptions of the suffering church of God.

i. The first mark that God gives of her, is, that she is afflicted. “O thou afflicted.” Now this is her promised lot here below; her Lord was afflicted before her, and the promise is, that we are to be glorified with him, if we suffer with him. The promise is, that we are to be conformed to his likeness, his image; and if we are to be conformed to his likeness, his image in glory above, we must be conformed to his suffering image on earth below. As the Head, so the members; as the Bride-groom, so the bride; as the Shepherd, so the sheep. He was a man of sufferings, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and his people in their measure must have the same. The Lord has appointed it should be so. He hath chosen his Zion in the furnace of affliction. There is no escape. And if a man thinks he has escaped, his lot is that of a bastard at least. There is nothing manifest of his being in the bond of the covenant. But the afflictions the Lord sends on Zion are of varied kinds. The Lord sees necessary to send afflictions suitable to the case, state and condition of each. What might be an affliction to one might not be so to another. Each must carry his own affliction. Each must bear his own load, and each endure his own appointed lot. So a wise God sees exactly what affliction to lay on each and all, when it shall come, where it shall come, whence it shall come, and how

it shall come; how it shall work, and what it shall work; how long it shall endure; when it shall be put on and when taken off. In these matters the Lord acts as a sovereign. As we did not choose of what parents we should be born, nor our situation in life, neither had we any choice of our stature, complexion, and so no choice as into what family we should come. The Lord appointed all our afflictions for us, and when he puts them on, no human arm can take them off. He knows our constitution and besetments, our characteristics and the minutest things relating to our situation in life. The Lord knows all our concerns; he sees exactly what we are by nature and by grace; therefore he lays on each individual the very affliction he sees that individual needs; no greater, no less: exactly the very affliction which shall bring about the very appointed purpose intended by God to be brought about, which shall be for the soul's good and God's own glory.

In just glancing at these afflictions of the Lord's people, perhaps we may divide them into two great branches: afflictions temporal or providential, and afflictions spiritual. Now all the Lord's people have more or less a share of these afflictions. For instance, bodily afflictions; very few of the Lord's people seems to escape these. How profitable they are often made. A sickly tabernacle, a poor weak, nervous, debilitating fame, the Lord sees fit to send on many of his people. Very few that I am acquainted with, enjoy what may be called a sound state of health. There may be some that do, but for the most part, the best are those who are most exercised. The most savoury are those who feel most the infirmities of this poor diseased tabernacle we carry about with us. Others of the Lord's people, the Lord sees fit to exercise with providential afflictions. Many of the Lord's people have to wade as it were up to the very neck in poverty, and find it a hard matter even to get the bread that perisheth. Others of the Lord's people are tried with family afflictions, sickness in their families, children taken away, the husband taken, or the wife taken from the fond affectionate embrace of the husband. Or if children grow up, they grow up

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only to be a plague and a torment to their parents. How many of the Lord's people have waded through these family afflictions and troubles.

But if there are any exempt from providential afflictions, none are from spiritual trouble. We may safely say, if any of the Lord's people go through any long period of their lives without temporal troubles, they shall never go any long period without spiritual trouble. "O thou afflicted." They are afflicted when the Lord begins a work of grace in the heart; afflicted when convictions begin; the burden of guilt on the conscience; many doubts and fears as to their state before God; many painful trials and exercise as to what the result will be; how it will prove on a death bed? Whether they will prove to be vessels of honour or vessels of wrath. These afflictions none are exempt from, though some may wade in these troubles more deeply than others.

Afflicted most of the Lord's people are, sooner or later, Satan laying some trap or snare for their feet, with which they get entangled, to their shame and sorrow. Again, the working of the corrupt passions of their fallen nature, Satan shooting his arrows of obscenity, blasphemy or infidelity into their carnal mind, stirring up the rebellion of their heart against God and godliness. These are felt to be afflictions, because where the conscience is tender in the fear of God; where there is a holy reverence of his great name; where there is a desire to please him, and a fear to offend him; where there is a solemn impression of his dread majesty; where there is an inward knowledge that he is a heartsearching God; that he sees into every corner of the heart: then to be the possessor of these hateful, filthy, obscene, infidel, rebellious, blasphemous thoughts, without any power to control or remove them that they seem to run into the heart, as troops into cities where there is neither gates nor walls, this is indeed an affliction. Oh, when the soul really has the good fear of God, and knows how hateful these things are in his holy and pure eyes, that he would not have a single thought dishonouring to his glorious majesty, yet feels how these things

come and go, that he has no control over them; how his poor soul is afflicted, tortured, grieved, harassed and distressed.

And added to all this, the Lord's people are afflicted with a body of sin and death, a vile heart, a corrupt nature, with a mind that is always, except kept by the mighty power of God, prone to backsliding, going out after the evils of this life; a heart going out after wickedness. When the conscience is made tender, the fear of God really at work, the soul having a sense of God's holiness, purity, majesty, and greatness, when there has been some sweet touches of his love, some manifestations of his mercy, loving-kindness and tender favour; then to feel we have such a heart, that still looks at and cleaves to earthly things, things that are too base to mention, for this heart to go out after evil, a heart that goes out after things that are God-dishonouring, to have a heart prone to indulge in these things, is heart breaking and soul-afflicting. It is indeed grievous when the poor soul has to grapple with this vile heart, continually backsliding from God, departing from him, going after the things conscience condemns, and which the soul knows God hates with perfect hatred, this is indeed affliction.

What is bodily affliction to this? We may have bodily affliction, and yet be sweetly blessed in soul. Bodily affliction is nothing, when the Lord's presence is enjoyed. When the Lord is pleased to bless us in our soul, if in sickness, what is it? The sickness is made endurable. I would rather be sick and afflicted, with the Lord's presence and blessing, than be well and in a state of health, without it. I remember on my birthday, many years ago, being ill and on a sick bed, but so filled with the Lord's presence and blessing, that it was the happiest birthday of my life. So as to sickness and bodily affliction they are nothing, when we have the Lord's blessing on the soul.

Again, temporal trials, what are all the reproaches of the world compared with the favour of God? A man may have only a crust of bread and a drop of water, yet with the blessing of God in his soul, enjoy a feast indeed. A man may have the deepest family trials,

may lose his wife, or the wife a husband, a mother her child, and a child her parent; yet the Lord may make up this trouble by his presence and blessing as some good man once said upon losing a child, that he could lose a child every day of his life, if the Lord so blessed his soul under it, as he had under the loss of that one. Thus temporal afflictions become light when supported by the blessing of God. Not so with spiritual afflictions: when the soul is filled with temptations, the assaults of the devil, the fiery darts of Satan, his innate wickedness, Oh, the sorrow and grief produced thereby seems to shut out the sweet presence of God, and set the soul far from his blessing.

Thus put all temporal afflictions together, they are but as a drop in a bucket, compared with spiritual afflictions, spiritual sorrows, spiritual exercises and spiritual griefs. What are all the afflictions of body, of circumstances and of the family, put them all together, compared with spiritual; they seem as a drop in a bucket, or as the dust in a balance. Now the Lord knows his people are afflicted, "O thou afflicted." Thus he addresses his Zion, he sympathizes with her, in all her affliction he was afflicted; he knows every pang of her heart, and feels every groan of her soul; he has passed through all these things before; there can be no temptation with which she may be tempted, that he was not tempted with before; she can have no sorrow, suffering or trial, that he has not experienced to the utmost; we only drink a few drops of the bitter cup of suffering, he drank it to the very dregs; he says, "O thou afflicted." ii. He tells her she is afflicted, he sympathizes with her, that she may be conformed to his image, he lays his everlasting arms closer, underneath and round about her; but he also adds, "Tossed with tempest." This is an illusion to the figure of a ship at sea; there is something suitable in the comparison. If we look at a ship at sea, we know she has left one port, and is on her way to another; but before she reaches the destined harbour, a great tempest often lies upon her. Is not this very descriptive of the state of a quickened soul? The soul made alive to God has left one harbour, the harbour of the world, the

dead sea, the harbour in which gallant ships ride; she has left that dead sea, that dead harbour, and is bound for another, the haven of eternal rest, the harbour of eternal peace and joy. But before she gets there a great tempest lies on her, contrary winds stop her passage, she is unable to make head against them, therefore she is tossed with tempest; not only does the wind blow right in her teeth, but winds and waves start up, and toss her to and fro, so that she reels and staggers like a drunken man, and is at her wits' end. Does not this describe the state and case of a poor soul tossed with tempest? The heavenly country is often not in sight, mists and fogs are raised over the heavenly harbour, which lies across the dead sea. While on their passage tempests fall on them, contrary winds blow, waves rise, and they are tossed up and down on the stormy billows. They cannot turn the ship back; they have no wish to go back, knowing death and condemnation are there. Their desire is to go forward but still the wind is so contrary, the tempest so strong, the waves and billows so boisterous, it would seem as though they made no way at all.

How descriptive this of a poor soul tossed with tempest. Are not you sometimes tossed up and down on these waves and billows, scarcely knowing where you are, or what you are? You are not in the world, you have no rest there, you are not satisfied in your former state, you have left your dead, lifeless, careless, godless profession, and are endeavouring to pass on; yet the future seems obscured in mist, the heavenly harbour is not in sight; you are tossed up and down in your soul with doubts, fears, misgivings, exercises and temptations. Every thing seems opposed to you; every thing seems done with such struggling, such opposition, such continual struggling of soul against every thing you desire to have. If you seek the Lord in secret prayer, opposition; if you try to read the Word of God, opposition; if you try to groan out the distress you feel in your soul, opposition; if you try to hear the Word, opposition. Some storms, some gusts, contrary winds, some waves, some billows, tossing you up and down. If you try to do

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something you really ought to do, or which you know is desirable should be done, opposition.

Now this is being tossed with tempest; you think you will never reach the shore; that your poor soul will never be saved; such opposition, such conflict, so many struggles, such hard work, such a rough passage, such contrary breezes, such roaring waves and billows, your own heart harassing you; there you lie, tossed up and down in a sea of doubts, corruptions, temptations and oppositions. Why, is not this Zion's case?

“O Zion, afflicted with wave upon wave,

Whom no man can comfort, whom no man can save.”

Was not this the case of old? One said “all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.” (Psa.42:7) Was not the case and complaint of Jonah in the whale's belly? When he said, “Out of the belly of hell cried I ... The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever.” (Chap.2:2-6) The saints of old have travelled this path before you. If you are tossed with tempest like Paul's ship, which was tossed up and down the Adriatic, so that “neither sun nor stars in many days appeared,” (Acts 27:20) you are only where Zion is; you are only pursuing the voyage in which Zion is embarked; you are only partakers of the afflictions that belong to the suffering church of Jesus Christ; only having fellowship with the saints of old, the noble army of martyrs. Were you not tossed with the tempest, it would be against you. If all was calm, nothing but fair winds for the soul, the wind always in one direction, no tides against you, no billows and waves tossing you up and down, then your case would be doubtful. But if tossed with the tempest, exercised and afflicted, this is not against you; this work belongs to Zion; you are sailing with her on board of that ship which is bound for the heavenly country. When the disciples were tossed at sea, the Lord was with them in the boat. The saints who have gone to heaven crossed this rough sea. Do

you think that the saints with Jesus in glory always had a smooth sea? Always fair winds? Always calm, like steam boat sailing? No, they had their trials; many of them had to wade through seas of trouble, through the crimson waves of martyrdom, before they reached the heavenly country. Are we to be fair weather mariners? Stay at home voyagers? Chimney corner sailors? Like persons who go upon pleasure excursions sailing in a yacht? Or are we to be embarked with Zion? If so, we shall be tossed with tempest, and only brought by the Lord's power and wisdom safe to land.

iii. "And not comforted." Here is the third mark. People say, what a comfortable thing religion is; I feel so comfortable; I have been so comfortable ever since I embraced religion. This is not God's religion. There are comforts in God's religion. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed" (2 Cor.4:8). We are perplexed with difficulties, as the apostle Paul says, "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." (2 Cor.1:4-5). God's religion is not an easy slip shod, fair weather comfortable religion. The religion that is always easy and comfortable is wrong; it is Satan's religion. To be always comfortable, always pleased, always easy, and always pleasant; finding no inward struggles, no opposition from the devil and the world, is when the heart is like the place of a strong man, whose goods are in peace. This is not the warfare of a Christian; he has to fight. The Christian has a race to run. The Word of God speaking of the course of a Christian employs various figures, such as a struggle, a warfare, a conflict and opposition.

"And not comforted." This is Zion's peculiar spot, Zion's peculiar mark, to take comfort only from God himself. Other people can take comfort anywhere. "Surely," they say, "all is right as the minister thinks well of me." The minister thinks well of the people; and the people are quite satisfied and think well of the minister, without any of these inward struggles. Then I can say, they are

only double-dyed hypocrites; nothing but pharisees. Though they think very high of what their minister says; that he is very much in their favour; he is not so severe as some. Therefore in this sort of comfortable religion they take things for granted; because they think well of themselves, they think God does. But this is not the God of Zion, Zion's king. None but God can make Zion feel her guilt; and none but he can take away Zion's sins. None but God can deliver from temptation; none but God can deliver Zion out of her trials; and none but the Spirit of God can bring her out of the trouble under which she labours; therefore, she is not comforted. Zion's religion is not this comfortable, easy, slip-shod religion. Her religion is in exercises, trials, sorrows and conflicts. This is Zion's peculiar mark: except when the Lord comforts her, she will not be comforted. But when God comforts her, then she is comforted indeed. Now, how do matters stand with your soul? Can you take comfort from any thing? Are you very easy, or very difficult to be comforted? Are you very nice, very choice in your food? That in eating it must be Zion's dainties? That you cannot but feed only upon nice things? Every thing you have must be applied by God himself? Brought into your soul? Made over to you as a special gift? Brought warm into your heart from the very mouth of God himself? And if you take comfort in any thing short of what God brings, if you belong to him, depend upon it, you will be brought off all this comfortable religion; because God brings all his people off this luke-warm, slip-shod, every-day comfortable religion. He unsettles them, that he himself may establish them; he brings them off this easy religion, that he himself may comfort them with his own consolations and when he does this it will be to some purpose.

Now do your trials correspond to this description? Looking at your daily walk, at what you have passed through, do you find these three things descriptive of the state of your soul? Say you, I am afflicted; if not in body as some, in my family as others, or in circumstances as many, yet I have a daily cross, a daily burden, a daily affliction. It is my dreadful heart, my carnal mind, my

corrupt nature; sin dwelleth in me; my unbelief, my infidelity, my worldly mindedness, my backsliding, my deceptive, adulterous, idolatrous heart: the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. My inward diabolism, with which I am filled, daily makes me deeply groan, draws forth many a sigh, and makes me mourn before God, that I have such a wicked hard heart. My sins, my backslidings afflict me, and deeply grieve me. Then this is a mark in your favour; it is some blessed testimony that you belong to Zion. If the fear of God is in your heart; if your conscience is tender; the Lord himself is at work in your soul; your case is that of a child of God generally; and each one may take it home to himself, if his case answers to the description I have given. For if you can say, I am tossed with tempest; what a tempest there is in my heart, what doubts, what fears, what misgivings, what exercises and temptations, what tossings up and down I feel going on; if this is your case, then you are tossed with tempest. Say you, I do not know how it is; I find other people get their comfort so easy; I cannot. They seem so satisfied with their religion; I am not satisfied with mine. They can hear well so often; I cannot. It makes me sigh and mourn, when I think how some seem filled with Christ, that every thing they say is from God. If a text of Scripture occurs to their mind, they take it for granted it is applied by God to their soul. I cannot do this. I want something strong and powerful something that God himself must speak to my soul. If it is not in that way, I have nothing, say you; all my religion for a time seems to be gone; I cannot find a grain; it seems all swept away; sin, the devil and self seem not to have left a grain. Here I am, say you, sometimes standing before the God of heaven and earth, before a holy heart-searching God, and can scarcely feel a single grain of religion in me, so crossed, empty, needy and naked, as though I had never felt any thing spiritual, never seen Jesus, never felt his presence, never known his love, never tasted his blood and righteousness. I seem so empty and destitute, as though I had never heard of him, as though my soul never had any desire towards God. I seem

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 nothing less than a hypocrite and a deceiver. This is indeed not being comforted.

So these three marks seem to be found some way or other. I seem as if I could say with an honest conscience, whatever my religion be, I can say this of myself, that I feel these things. I can say from my soul, I feel and know whatever I be, whatever I have, or am, I know something of this inward work, you have been describing in my soul. Then if the Lord speaks to you, never mind what other people think, or what you think about yourself. Whatever other people think about your disease will not alter God's thoughts; his thoughts are not man's. If God thinks well of you, it is no matter how bad you think of yourself, or what others think of you; depend upon it, neither they nor you, think as bad as you may, will ever think half so bad of you as you really are.

II. I pass on to consider the promises made to these people. The Lord comes down to Zion; he is very tender of her; he loved her from eternity; he knows all her sorrows, her sufferings, and her exercises; he does not cut her off. He neither casts her down, nor tramples her as mire in the streets; he is very pitiful; his heart is full of compassion; he stoops to hear her whom men reject. What does he say to her? He makes very sweet promises. What are they? "Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones."

Now the Lord seems here to compare Zion to a building, which we know is a frequent figure in the word of God. Zion is compared to a building, "The Lord shall build up Zion" (Psa.102:16). Zion is compared to a temple; she is also called a spiritual house, a palace for the King of kings. Thus the Lord speaks of her here under the figure of a building, saying what he will do for her under this figure. He says he will build her up of the choicest materials; there shall be nothing common about her; and what he does for her will be of a most precious character. Here you see the emptiness

of the creature, and the fulness of God. What the Lord does, he does in a manner worthy of himself. Though he brings his Zion down, it is for the purpose of raising her up; though he fills her with affliction, confusion and sorrow, it is for the express purpose of establishing her in beauty and glory. It is wonderful to see how the Lord depresses Zion, then raises her up; how he brings her to the lowest ebb, that he may have all the glory in establishing her in peace and righteousness, proving the truth of what one says, "God is in the midst of her" (Psa.46:5). She shall never have common fare; no, says the Lord, she shall have the choicest dainties; she shall not be built with common stones; no, says the Lord, there shall not be a common thing about her, but all uncommon; nothing contemptible or vile, but all precious and rare. "I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones."

Let us look at these promises each in its order, and see whether there is not in them something spiritual, heavenly and suitable.

i. The first promise is, "I will lay thy stones with fair colours." This may be a general description, preceding a particular one. The Lord may say generally, "I will lay thy stones with fair colours," before he goes on to specify the way. These words allude to a custom in ancient buildings, and in some of which whose ruins have been uncovered in this country, old Roman pavements have been found. The ancients used to have tessellated pavement, which were in mosaic, that is, a number of beautiful stones of different colours set in mortar, so beautifully contrasted, as to form a picture. Thus when the Lord speaks of laying her stones with fair colours, there may be an allusion to this kind of pavement. Lately, in the ruins of Nineveh, some of these beautiful bits of granite have been found. At least, this was known in the time of the Jews, who used this granite for pavement; it was very beautiful. Thus Zion is not to be built with common materials, but inlaid with beautiful tessellated work,

ii. "And lay thy foundations with sapphires." Now the very foundation shall not be of common materials. You know usually the worst and roughest stones are put into the foundation. But not so in Zion, her very foundation is sapphires, precious stones. What is Zion's foundation? Is it not Christ? "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor.3:11). When Christ is made known to the soul, when he is brought with divine power in the heart; is this not laying the foundation with sapphires? What a beautiful representation is this of Christ, a sapphire, a precious stone of a blue colour, laying the foundation with sapphires: what is it spiritually? Laying the foundation of Christ to the soul. Every visit from Christ, every manifestation of Christ, every promise from Christ, every opening up of his glory and beauty, every solemn visit from him is laying the foundation with sapphires, laying Christ in the heart, inlaying Christ in the soul. God is in this way continually laying the foundation in a sinner's heart. Christ is the foundation. Every view of Jesus, every testimony of interest in his atonement, every sweet smile of his blessed countenance, every laying of the foundation in the soul for eternal glory: this is laying the foundation with sapphires; because in Jesus every thing is precious. As in this precious stone we see every thing desirable; in this precious sapphire is every thing beautiful. And as this precious stone is very bright, so in this precious stone we see these three distinct characteristics of the Person of God's Son. Who so beautiful as Jesus? Who so adorable as Jesus? And who so precious as the Lord of life and glory? What a precious temple. Who so precious, or what so precious, as a precious Christ! Every time we have a view of Christ; every time we have a manifestation of Christ; every time we have a visit or a word from Christ, is laying the foundation with sapphires, sparkling, bright and brilliant, standing up and shining forth as a precious stone in the heart.

You see Zion's foundation must be tumbled upside down, before laying the foundation with sapphires. God does not mix Christ

with works, Christ with the creature, Christ with human piety and creature religion. This is all turned out to lay the foundation with sapphires, to inlay a precious Christ into the soul, to bring anything of Jesus' presence, love, blood and mercy into the heart. This is laying the foundation with sapphires. What a beautiful building it must be, when the very foundation which in common buildings is rubbish and rough stones, is in this foundation precious stones, sapphires, worth one, two, or thirty thousand pounds. Besides, what a sapphire is laid in the foundation; it is as though the Lord would never give any thing more, nor any thing less, than Christ. He never does; he can give nothing but what is worthy of himself; he gives as God; he has given us his dear Son as a free gift; then when Christ is made known to the soul, it is laying the foundation with sapphires.

iii. "And I will make thy windows of agates." Zion then has windows. These are not made of glass; glass was not known at that time for windows; it was known for ornaments, but not for windows; God has his windows for his Zion made of agates. What is an agate? You that are acquainted with it, know it is a kind of precious stone; not exactly so; this agate is more of a semi-transparent, not quite transparent, but what is called a semi-transparent, clouded over, very beautiful, partly shining with a degree of cloudiness. What do these windows denote, or seem to set forth? They set forth the prospect for Zion. Is it not out of our windows we see the prospect? I live in a very pleasant situation when at home, and can see a pretty prospect before me. When I want to see the prospect I look out of the windows. So these windows of Zion are said to be of agates; they seem to represent the prospect the soul has of Christ, which is indeed only a semi-transparent, only a cloudy view of Jesus, as the apostle says, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face." Seen through agate, not perfectly clear, as the bride says, seen through the lattice (1 Cor.13:13, cf. Song of Sol.2:9); like to a person passing by, seen through the lattice, see them for a moment and then they are gone. So Zion's windows made of

agate; a sweet prospect of Jesus; a prospect of the heavenly country and eternal things; a prospect of the immortal glorious palace. Immortal beyond the skies, yet often cloudy; faith takes a look; sees as in a glass darkly, not quite a bright view; as the pilgrims on the delectable mountains, when the shepherds gave them the glass to have a view of the celestial city, their hands trembled, so that they only got a dim view. So it is with Zion; she looks through the windows, they have a cloud over, not so bright or transparent as they will be, yet very sweet, raising up the feelings within, enough to set her affections on things above.

Sometimes, when the soul has had a sweet visit from Jesus, or in reading his Word, his Word is made sweet and precious to your soul, both heart and affections cleaving to things above, what a view of the heavenly country, so that you are led to say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth I desire beside thee" (Psa.73:25). Have you not had to lament how short this prospect was? How soon unbelief, and darkness of the mind, seem to raise a mist over this beautiful prospect, to hide it from your view; how strange it is. We say sometimes, we have seen things as plain and clear, as though we had seen them with our bodily eyes. Have we not seen the God-head of Christ? I remember once on my bed, having such a view of the Person of Christ. How clearly I saw his Godhead, and his manhood; as a divine person, what a sweetness and blessing rested on my soul; how I received him into my heart as God, yet what infidelity lurked in the midst at the time as to his deity! What unbelief as to him altogether. How soon his Person, blood, and work, all seemed swept away and out of sight. I could see no Creator, no God-man, no atoning blood, nothing in him, and nothing in myself. Contrast this with other times, when our faith has been raised up, our eyes anointed with eye-salve, we have had some sweet discoveries of the love of Jesus to the soul. Do we doubt them? No! Then how plain, then how clear; no more doubts; the day begins to break, the light shines forth, increasing from glory to glory; it reaches the soul, and warms the heart.

There are no doubts then, they are all gone, and the soul feels as a temple sanctified, a dwelling for the King of kings; a principality for the Lord of Hosts to come down to dwell in, and take up his abode, and perhaps before half an hour has gone, all these views have gone with it, beclouded, dimmed, and out of sight. Little felt but the workings of unbelief and sin; yet what a mercy to have windows of agate, to give these prospects, now and then, to gaze on the heavenly country where Jesus is.

iv. Zion has gates also, and these gates are made of carbuncles. A carbuncle is a precious stone of a blood-colour, as a bloody red. Now gates, we know, are for exit and entrance. It is by the doors we come into the chapel, and by the doors we leave it. Thus Zion has gates, and these gates are for Zion's exit and entrance; out of these gates Zion's prayers, Zion's tears, Zion's desires, and Zion's breathings flow. Through these gates Zion's mercies, Zion's favours, Zion's promises, and Zion's visits come. There may be something else, I do not say it positively, there may be something else, perhaps here it has a sweet allusion to Christ's blood. The carbuncle is of a red colour, as red as blood. It was through these gates of carbuncle prayers went up. Through these gates answers came down. How do our prayers go up? Through the blood of Jesus. How do the answers come down? Through the blood of Jesus. Through these crimson gates the desires go up, and through these crimson gates the answers descend.

Zion has gates then as well as windows; through these gates our desires ascend, and through these gates there is an entrance for the fulfilment of the longing, hungry soul. These gates are of carbuncles, the Lord would not leave us without them; she could not live without. Zion is a praying city. Prayer is her breath; as long as she lives she prays, and so long as she prays she lives. What a sweet thing it is! Through the gates prayer ascends to God, perfumed with the incense of Christ's intercession; washed in his blood, redeemed with the merits of his priestly office. What a mercy it is that all favours, all blessings, and visits, come through

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these gates! That God can still be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

v. "And all thy borders of pleasant stones." There is to be nothing common about her; her very borders and walls round about; her fences by which she is surrounded; her very courtyards that bound her length and breadth, all these are precious stones; they do not have any common materials about her borders. What then are her borders? Many of God's poor children, poor people, who cannot come into Zion's inclosure, but walk round about her and count her towers. They are not yet brought by the Spirit's application into Zion's pleasant things, they are borderers, they hang about Zion's gates, they look at her towers, admire her comeliness and beauty, which makes them long to be brought into the sweet enjoyment of Zion's provision, Zion's refreshments. Her very borders are pleasant stones, nothing vile, nothing common about her. She is a queen and all her apparel shall be queenly, all her raiment is queenly, her very gait is queenly, for her husband is the King of kings, and he has determined as a great king that his queen shall be clothed from head to foot, from top to toe, yea, apparelled in queenly garments. The King of kings and Lord of lords has his Zion decked in queenly apparel. Sometimes the borders of the palaces of earthly monarchs are not so very comely, there is some stabling or mews near to the palace of our queen, but it is not so with Zion. Her borders and courtyards, her bordering walls, everything belonging to her are all built of pleasant stones.

The enemies may go about her but they shall not, and are not able to put their finger on one bit of free-stone, one bit of granite, all her borders are precious stones. They may envy and hate her, but they shall never be able to say this is worthless, common or unbecoming and not fit for Zion. No, they shall not be able to say there is anything common, cheap, or worthless, about her borders. "All thy borders of pleasant stones." Whatever low place Zion may take as regards her feelings, the Lord does not think lightly of her. Though she says of herself, there is none so vile or black as she,

yet the Lord will not say so, he says she is all fair, without spot or blemish; she says she is black but comely; the Lord says she is the fairest among women. Why so fair, beautiful, and comely? Not so in herself, but because she is washed in his blood, clothed in his righteousness, and decked with his ornaments. Thus he has prepared her as a queen for himself, adorned her as a bride for her husband, a building for himself, a chosen temple, where she shall be delighted with his presence and glory, wherein she shall shine to all eternity, brighter than the sun, fairer than the moon, and more beautiful than the stars, shall be for ever a palace for the King of kings, a habitation for God. This is her comfort. This is God's glory, that she shall be a palace for the King of kings, a habitation worthy of himself.

Now, have you any hope, any seal that you belong to Zion? Remember this, you must sink before you rise; you must have the bitter before the sweet, as Christiana said to Mercy: affliction before joy, shame before honour, self-loathing before light and beauty, the spirit of heaviness before the garment of praise and robe of righteousness. Afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted before he lays the foundation with sapphires, the windows of agate, the gates of carbuncles, and all the borders of pleasant stones. So sure as the Lord has done the one, so will he do the other.

If in the Lord's providence, and the Lord's grace, you correspond to Zion's character, as afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, as he has given the description, and has also given the promises in his Word, if that answers the description of the things at work in your soul, he will be sure to accomplish that promise. Thus there is every comfort for a poor child of God; every thing to cause him to hope, every thing to bring him to anchor in a precious Christ. At the same time there is no hope given for anybody else, whilst there is the sweetest hope of salvation for the self-condemned, self-aborred, afflicted, tempest-tossed, and not comforted; there is no hope for the self-righteous in God's Word, no hope for those who are not exercised, who are not taught by the

Spirit, who are not brought into self-condemnation, repentance, and faith, hope, and love. Whatever hope they may have in themselves, they have no solid ground in the Word of God, and by that Word we are to be justified, and by that Word we must be condemned.

139 A Waiting Soul and a Gracious Lord

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Lord's Day Evening,
July 21, 1850

"Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee."

Isaiah 26:8

These words form a part of "the Song" that is "to be sung in the land of Judah." This song is a hymn of praise, a song of deliverance; and in it the church recounts the Lord's dealings with her, with the fruit of those dealings, and blesses him for all his gracious acts towards her.

Time and opportunity will not allow me to enter into the general drift of the Song; I shall, therefore, this evening, chiefly confine myself to the words before us.

We may observe, I think, two leading features in them, corresponding to the two clauses of the text.

I.—First, the past experience of the church; and

II.—Secondly, the present experience of the church.

Her past experience we find in the words, "Yea in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee."

Her present experience is contained in the expression, "The desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee." In this twofold way then, I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour to take up the subject.

I.—The church speaks here of God's "judgments." What are

we to understand by the word? We must not be misled by the sound. The word “judgments” in our language generally signifies the manifestations of God’s displeasure. When anything striking befalls an ungodly man, it is spoken of as ‘a judgment;’ and we are so much in the habit of attaching that meaning to the word, that we can scarcely divorce our minds from that signification. But it has, in the Scriptures of truth, a far wider and more comprehensive meaning. It is true, that the manifestations of God’s displeasure are called in Scripture “judgments:” “When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants thereof will learn righteousness.” But there are many passages in the word of God, and especially in Psalm 119, in which it would be the greatest absurdity to suppose that by the word “judgments” nothing is signified but the manifestations of God’s displeasure. For instance, in the 20th verse of that Psalm, we read, “My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.” Was David’s soul “breaking for the longing” that it had unto the manifestations of God’s displeasure? That cannot be. We read in the 39th verse, “Turn away my reproach which I fear; for thy judgments are good.” David would not call the manifestations of God’s displeasure “good.” He says also in another verse, “I have hoped in thy judgments.” The manifestations of God’s displeasure rather produce fear or despair than hope. “Correct me,” says the prophet, “but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.” (Jer. 10:24.) There “judgment” is spoken of in direct contrast with wrath and anger. In fact, the word “judgments,” in Scripture, means commonly, the righteous dealings of God—the declaration of his righteous character. It is true, that this is often in a way of displeasure; but it is also in a way of mercy. The righteous character of God is displayed not only in wrath, but in “justifying the ungodly,” that “He might be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.” Thus, the word “judgments” in our text seems to signify God’s righteous dealings. It is used in a similar sense (Prov. 8:20), “I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment.” And again (Psa. 72:1), “Give the King

thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the King’s Son.”

Now, it is in “the way” of these righteous dealings that the church declares she had waited for God.

Apply this to ourselves. Until the Lord is pleased to give us light and life, and work a work upon our souls, we know nothing, believe nothing, and feel nothing of the righteous character of God. We rather view him as unjust; for the carnal mind being enmity against God, the heart being alienated from the life of God, and wrapped up in the clouds of densest ignorance as to the character of God, we know him not, we see him not, we feel him not to be a righteous God. But when the Lord is pleased to quicken the soul into spiritual life, and send that word into the heart of which we read that “its entrance giveth light,” this conviction flashes into the mind, and this truth is ever after sealed upon the soul—that God is a righteous God—that all his acts are acts of righteousness, and all his dealings in strict consistency with his holy and righteous character. We now come to know something of God’s “judgments;” that is to say, as the righteous character of God is opened up to the soul, we see and feel that everything that God does must be consistent with that righteous character; that all his dealings are dealings in righteousness, and all his ways are ways of righteousness.

But now comes the opposition; because this righteous character of God is strictly opposed to our unrighteous nature, and these righteous dealings of God are diametrically contrary to the unrighteous thoughts of our heart, the unrighteous words of our mouth, and the unrighteous actions of our hands.

Yet God means to bring us to submit to his righteous dealings; and therefore he surrounds us with them. The text says, “In the way of thy judgments;” as though God’s righteous judgments surrounding us on every side, and we walking in the midst of them, as in a cloud, it brought these righteous judgments into direct opposition to the workings of our carnal mind.

Now here we see something of the work of grace upon a man’s

conscience. He is surrounded with the righteous character of Jehovah: the righteous dealings of God enclose him on every side; that righteous character is opposed to his unrighteous character; and every righteous act of the Lord is opposed to the unrighteous actings of his heart; yet he is compelled “in the way of these judgments” to wait upon God.

But let us come a little into particulars. It is in particulars that the life of experience and religion consists. We will not then lose ourselves in the mist [midst?] of generalities; we will come down to particular dealings of God upon the soul, and see how we still have to wait upon him “in the way of his judgments.”

1. The Lord finds us sinners; he does not find us saints, holy people, prepared for heaven. He finds us sinners, and sinners, too, of the deepest, blackest dye. Sinners in heart, in lip, in life; sinners without, sinners within. For sin is engrained into our very being, in fact, our very selves. Then, if this be the case, these “judgments,” or righteous dealings of God, must be altogether opposed to every breath of our carnal mind, every wish of our fallen nature. This we have to learn by the application of God’s righteous law, by the manifestation of his purity and holiness, and by a sentence from his presence coming with a divine power into the conscience, to manifest and to condemn sin. And this brings us to his feet; because in all these things we are obliged to recognize the righteous character of God. If he send us headlong to hell, he is righteous. If he cut us down at a stroke, he is righteous. He cannot err, he cannot act unjustly. If he never hear a cry for mercy, he is still righteous: if he never bestow a look of love, he is still righteous: if he afflict us with every suffering here, and crush us with eternal damnation hereafter, he is still righteous. Now this is painful work; this is being betwixt the upper and nether millstone, ground, as it were, between the righteous character of God and the carnal mind; the soul lying under the righteous character of God, as the wheat under the upper millstone.

2. But again; the righteous dealings of God are against all

our idols; for we are dreadful idolaters. Idolatry is imbedded in our very nature; a part of our very being; a second self. Idolatry is the worship of anything that the carnal mind intensely loves. Now, the righteous character of God and the righteous dealings of God, must be directly against idols and idolatry. He is a jealous God. And as such, nothing provokes him more than idolatry. How in Old Testament times the displeasure of God was manifested against his people for this! What provoked him to indignation so much as their departing from him to worship idols? We too have our idols. Who is without them? The man who thinks he is without an idol, knows not what an idol is. The man who thinks his heart is free from idolatry, is an idolater, though ignorant of the idols he worships. Wife, property, children, name, respectability, ease, sensual lusts—O, the idols, the forest of idols in a man’s carnal mind! But the righteous dealings of God are against them all, and especially against that heart-idolatry whereby these idols are so fondly worshipped.

3. But again. There is in our carnal mind a determination to have our own way. We are desperately selfish; we are determinedly obstinate; we do not choose the Lord’s way very soon or very easily; we love to have our own will and our own way, and this in a thousand different forms, but all opposed to the righteous dealings of God. Still his righteous character, his righteous dealings must have the preeminence. If our will be unrighteous, and God’s will be righteous, which must prevail? which is to stand? which to gain the day? If our will be opposed to God’s will, our will must come down. It may be very hard work for our will to come down; but come down it must, come down it shall. The “judgments” of God will bring it down. You will find that the righteous dealings of God will never be brought into conformity with the will and way of your carnal mind. Thus, our will must give way, and our mind be brought down; that God’s will and way may stand. This is no pleasant, no very easy, no very comfortable work. It is very trying, wonderfully trying—when I want one thing, and God wants another: when I

will this, and God wills that. But God's will must and shall stand. It is very trying for my will to have to give way; yet, give way it must, if I am the Lord's; because he will bring me to that spot where I shall put my mouth in the dust, and say, "Thy will be done!"

4. Our high looks is another thing that must be brought down; our proud heart another thing that must be humbled; our self-righteous nature another thing that must be crushed; our worldliness another thing that must be subdued. Yes, everything in us contrary to God and godliness must be laid low and effectually brought down. And they are all brought down and laid low by God's "judgments," in other words, by God's righteous dealings, and the manifestation of God's righteousness thereby.

Now when we get surrounded by these righteous dealings, then we are "in the way of God's judgments." Have you never found that God's righteous dealings stand in the way of your sins, of your idols, of your worldly-mindedness, of everything that your earthly nature cleaves to? If so, there has been a wonderful struggling in your mind; there has been some painful work in the court of conscience; you have not found religion to be as Dr. Watts speaks—

"Religion never was designed
To make our pleasures less."

You have found religion to be a very trying thing, because it has so cut you to the quick and so come into your heart and conscience, as to lay the axe to the root of all your worldly happiness and every desire of your natural heart.

But until we get into something of this path, there is no "waiting for God;" for the church declares that it was "in the way of God's judgments" that she "waited" for him. It was being hedged up, surrounded, and encompassed with these righteous dealings of God that made her wait for him. She could not get out of his hands; she could not escape his strokes; she could not get away from his righteous character; she could not flee from his righteous dealings in her soul. She had therefore no alternative, (and grace made her willing) than to wait upon God, and to wait for him "in the way of

his judgments." If she could have found refuge anywhere else, she would have hid her head in a refuge of lies. Could she have got hope from any other quarter, she would have pillowed her head upon a false hope; and could she have obtained help from any other source, she would have rested in a delusion. But the righteous character of God having been revealed in her soul, and the righteous dealings of God surrounding her on every side, she could not get out of his hand; and therefore, amid all the strugglings of unbelief, infidelity, rebellion, and murmuring, she was bound fast, held down, and she had no alternative, but to wait upon him who could in his own time relieve, deliver, and bless.

But, besides this necessity of compulsion, there was mingled with all a blessed feeling, whereby she waited not merely from necessity, but also because the Lord was pouring out upon her the spirit of grace and of supplications, and enabling her thus to "wait." But what a strange intermixture of exercises and feelings this makes in the soul! Sometimes driven, and sometimes drawn; sometimes compelled, and sometimes, like Japhet, "persuaded;" sometimes from having no other hope, sometimes from wishing to have no other; sometimes from there being no other refuge, and sometimes from not desiring that there should be any other. Sometimes from bitterness, and sometimes from sweetness; sometimes from sorrow, and sometimes from joy; sometimes by threatenings, sometimes by smiles; sometimes by frowns, and sometimes by favours. And yet, all so wonderfully blended, and so strangely intermixed, that without hardly knowing at times whether it be from compulsion or from choice, from being driven or drawn, from the necessity of the case or the sweetness of the mercy, the soul is still brought to this point, "in the way of thy judgments have we waited for thee, O Lord."

But what is it to "wait?" Chiefly, by prayer and supplication and begging of God to appear. To cry, sigh, beg, supplicate, implore, long, and breathe out the soul's desire; to take no denial, the case being so necessitous; heaven or hell being at stake; the soul's

interest lying so close to the heart—this is to “wait” upon God, and to “wait” upon him “in the way of his judgments,” surrounded and encompassed with his righteous character and dealings.

It is a great thing to see God’s righteous character, and to believe that his dealings are dealings in righteousness. It requires faith to believe it; because to our sense and reason, to our unbelieving minds and infidel hearts, these dealings of God often seem directly the contrary. This indeed is the trial—to believe that they are righteous dealings, and yet not to be able to see that they are such; not to dare to murmur, and yet have every disposition to fret; to be kept from open rebellion, and yet feel its miserable workings; to believe that God cannot act unjustly, and yet to be sadly tempted to believe he is not acting justly. And yet to be so overpowered by the righteous character of God as to be compelled to lie at his feet, and wait “in the way of his judgments” till he clear up the mystery, till he appear for the soul’s good, till he remove the cloud, and shine forth in beams of mercy and love.

II.—But we pass on to consider, secondly, what the church speaks of as her present experience. I do not mean to say, that there was not much in her present experience mingled with the past; and much in her past experience mingled with the present. But as there is a distinction of tenses in our text, we will adhere to it.

“The desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee.” God’s righteous dealings had broken her down at his feet; they had taken away her idols, and brought her into submission to his righteous will; and with it all there was some manifestation of the Name of God. By the “Name of God,” we are chiefly to understand the Lord Jesus Christ; for when God sent him as his angel before the children of Israel, he said, “My Name is in him.” By the “Name of God,” then, we understand him by whom God is made known—in whom the love and mercy of God are revealed—who has in himself all the perfections of Godhead—“In whom, dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”—in a word, the glorious “Immanuel, God with us.”

Now after the Lord has been pleased to exercise the soul with these righteous dealings, and made it submit; when he has given it to feel that he would be just if he sent it headlong to hell, he generally reveals something of the Son of his love, something of that great and glorious Name which he manifested to Moses when he put him in the cleft of the rock, and his glory passed by before him, and he declared that he was a God “forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin,” in the Person, work, and blood of Immanuel. The Lord usually, then, after he has exercised our souls with his justice, manifests somewhat of his mercy; when he has taught us out of his law, he goes on to teach us out of his gospel; when he has shewn us something of his righteousness in himself, he shews us something of his righteousness in the face of Jesus Christ. And these manifestations of the Lord Jesus Christ to the soul, this bringing of the gospel into the heart, raise up a desire unto, and a love towards his Name. Thus, the church says, “The desire of our soul is to thy Name.”

How sweet and expressive is the phrase, “The desire of our soul!” How it seems to carry our feelings with it! How it seems to describe the longings and utterings of a soul into which God has breathed the spirit of grace and mercy! “The desire of our soul,”—the breathing of our heart, the longing of our inmost being; the cry, the sigh, the panting of our new nature; the heavings, gaspings, lookings, longings, pantings, hungerings, thirstings, and ventings forth of the new man of grace—all are expressed in those sweet and blessed words, “The desire of our soul!” And what a mercy it is, that there should ever be in us “the desire” of a living soul; that though the righteous dealings of God are painful and severe, running contrary to everything nature loves; yet that with all these, there should be dropped into the heart that mercy, love, and grace, which draw forth the desire of the soul toward the Name of God. This is expressed in the words that follow, “With my soul have I desired thee in the night!” If you can say no more about the work of grace upon your heart than that—can you really use these words

as descriptive of feelings experienced within, “With my soul have I desired thee in the night?” Is your soul longing after the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it ever in the night season panting after the manifestation of his presence? hungering and thirsting after the dropping-in of some word from his lips, some sweet whisper of his love to your soul? These are marks of grace. The carnal, the unregenerate, the ungodly, have no such desires as these; there is nothing in their heart corresponding with “the desire of the soul” unto the Name of God. But it is the case with all the righteous, for “the desire of the righteous shall be satisfied.”

And what do you desire, when you can say, “the desire of my soul is to thy Name?” Is it not, that he will manifest himself to your soul with some sweetness and blessedness; and thus give you power to lay hold of him and bring him into your heart that you may clasp him in the arms of faith and affection, be enabled to breathe forth the language of your bosom into his ear, and say, “My Lord and my God?”—’Thou art mine, and I am thine, and shall be thine when time shall be no more.’

Now this is having the desire of your soul to the Name of God—a longing after the Lord Jesus Christ in the manifestations of his Person, blood, work, and love. I never can believe there is such a desire in the heart of a hypocrite. There may be, and is perhaps, in him a desire to escape “the wrath to come;” but a single, simple, secret, fervent, heart-felt, panting desire—when no eye sees, no ear hears but the eye and ear of Jehovah—I cannot think that such a simple, sincere, filial, breathing is to be found in any but a regenerate heart. At any rate, it is set forth in the word of God as the experience of the church, “The desire of our soul is to thy Name!” ‘Lord, we want thee; none but thee; nothing short of thee; thyself, in thy beauty, in thy loveliness, in thy preciousness; for nothing short of thee can make the soul happy or holy. Without thy presence, there is no solid peace; without thy smiles, there is no real happiness; without thy favour, all is darkness and death; and therefore, “the desire of our soul is to thy Name;” for, in having

thee, we have everything that can satisfy, bless, comfort, and save.’

“And to the remembrance of thee.” By these words we may understand, either to remember the Lord; that is, to have his Name, blood, grace, and love deeply engraved upon our heart—and all to have an abiding place in the chamber of our memory; or else to have a sweet recollection of what the Lord has been to us in times past. The words may comprehend both of these significations. We will look at them separately.

1. “To the remembrance of thee.” O, what short memories we have as to the precious things of God! How feeble, how transient, for the most part, are our impressions of heavenly realities! We can remember childish follies years ago, and sins, which we can only think of, or should only think of with shame and confusion of face. There is no difficulty as to having these things in remembrance. But the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ; his sufferings in the garden of Gethsemane, and upon the cross; his dying love, his bleeding sorrows, and what he is to the church of God—O, how hard, O, how impossible to keep these things in firm remembrance! Who is there that goes through the day carrying about in his bosom the Lord Jesus Christ; treasuring up in his memory the words of the Lamb; and sweetly meditating upon his work and sufferings? You can embrace a thousand vanities and follies. Self you can always carry in mind, with its sensual, idle wants; but the dear Son of God, the precious Lamb; the Lord of heaven and earth, the dying, risen Jesus—who is there that carries him enshrined in the tablets of his memory, is refreshing his soul from hour to hour by looking at, thinking upon, and living out of the fulness of the Lord Jesus Christ? And yet, we would hope, “the desire of our soul” is to these things. We have not much grace unless it be so. It is true, we cannot carry about in us the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Apostle speaks of himself; but we would fain hope we can say, that “the desire of our soul is to the remembrance” of him. We do not, we would not, forget him willingly. It is true, that the world comes with its huge sponge, and too often effaces his name and

memory, and our carnal heart is, as it were, continually defiling the characters drawn upon it by the finger of the Spirit: and yet one would fain hope that there is a “desire” in the soul toward the remembrance of him, so that we cannot be happy without him. We are not satisfied with being worldly and carnal; but would fain have now and then a little setting apart of communion with him, a looking unto and breathing after him. We would hope that there are gracious intervals, solemn moments, awakened feelings; living, breathing, earnest cries and desires, by night and by day, after the Lord Jesus Christ, in the sweet visits of his love. If we have this—this is not unlike “the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee.”

I would hope that your religion is not like your Sunday coat, put on on a Sunday morning, and laid aside on the Sunday evening, but never worn through the week. That is a poor religion; that is not the religion of the Holy Ghost; that is not “putting on the Lord Jesus Christ” as your daily raiment. Whatever we are, we cannot call ourselves very thriving, very healthy, or very lively Christians, if we can do without the Lord Jesus Christ for whole days together. It does not seem very much like the experience of the church, “the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee.”

2. But the words may also signify a remembrance of the past. We get into strange places. Carnality and death seem fearfully to prevail; and yet, we would not, we would fain hope, utterly forget the past;—the day of espousals; the seasons of love; the times wherein the Lord was gracious, when there was some sweet communion with him, and enjoyment of his grace and presence. Have we no Ebenezers—no times to which we can look back, when the candle of the Lord shined upon our head, and by his light we walked through darkness, when we could say, ‘Jesus is precious?’ Now if our soul has had any of these seasons, there will be “a desire to the remembrance of thee.” We shall want a revival of the remembrance; a bringing back of sweet recollections and of heavenly feelings that flow out of these reminiscences, when the

blessed Spirit leads us back to the days that are past, and drops anew some drops of the mercy and favour of God into the soul. If we can but find something of this in our hearts, it seems to correspond with the language of the church, “the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee.”

But observe the connection. How the past and the present are linked together! “In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee.” It is “in the way of the Lord’s judgments” that we have to wait for him; but when in his righteous dealings, we have to wait, without seeing the issue; to beg, without receiving an answer; to wrestle, without getting the victory; and yet have to “wait,” plead, and beg; then, ever and anon, rising up as it were out of the ruins of self, through some discovery of his grace and mercy, springs up, “the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee.” What a strange intermixture there thus is in the soul really and rightly taught of God! fearing his judgments, hoping in his mercy, trembling at his wrath, desiring his favour, crouching beneath his frown, drawn up by his smile, yet still waiting in the way of his judgments, the desire of the soul being towards his Name, and to the remembrance of himself!

Do you find this strange intermixture? “Judgment and mercy” was David’s song. “I will sing,” he says, “of mercy and judgment.” And the church, in ancient days, speaks of waiting upon God in the way of his judgments; and yet “the desire of her soul was towards his Name, and to the remembrance of him.” We cannot always put these two things together, and yet God has put them together. How there can be a waiting upon God “in the way of his judgments,” and yet a desire towards his Name; how these two things can be consistent (and consistent they are); how these things can dwell in the same heart (and yet in the same heart they dwell)—how to reconcile these paradoxes, and put together these seeming contradictions, we sometimes know not. And yet, if there be, as there appears to be, this jarring work in our soul, it is harmonized

sweetly in the word of God and the work of the Spirit on the heart. For we need both. We need the righteous dealings of God to lay low, and we need the merciful dealings of God to raise up; we need the righteous dealings of God to keep from presumption, and we need the merciful dealings of God to preserve from despair; we need the one to afflict, and the other to comfort; we need the one to awe, and the other to bless. And thus, by this strange intermixture the soul is made right, and kept right; made tender, and kept tender; made humble, and kept humble; made to wait at the Lord's feet, and yet to look unto him with a desire towards his Name, and to the remembrance of his mercy, love, and truth, as felt, enjoyed, and experimentally realized.

140 The Wilderness and its Fruits

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, Hempstead Road,
on Lord's Day Evening,
July 28, 1850

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

Hosea 2:14, 15

The prophecies of the Old Testament are often very obscure, and some almost unintelligible. This arises partly from the very nature of the subject, and partly from the highly figurative language in which they are couched. But, what adds to the difficulty, is our ignorance for the most part of the circumstances under which they were delivered, of the times to which they apply, and of the events which they dimly foreshadow.

But taking a broad view of prophetic Scripture, I consider that it admits for the most part of three distinct interpretations:

historical, experimental, and unfulfilled; corresponding with the three times—past, present, and future.

1. Many prophecies of the Old Testament are already fulfilled; such as the sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; the casting off of Israel; the calling of the Gentiles; the dispersion of the Jews. These prophecies have been fulfilled, their interpretation is strictly historical, and relates altogether to the past.

2. But there is a large portion of prophecy which is still unfulfilled; such as the calling of the Jews; the second coming of Christ; and that glorious period still future, when “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

3. But, besides the interpretation of those prophecies which are past and therefore fulfilled, and those which are future and therefore unfulfilled, there is that which bears more immediately and directly upon the present—experimental interpretation. And indeed, without this, this part of God's word would be to us a dead letter. If it did not bear upon our own experience; if there were not a spiritual interpretation as well as a literal; if prophecy were not descriptive of God's dealings with the soul now, we might as well put our Bible into the drawer. We might almost take a thread and needle, and sew up the prophetic part of God's word; or tear it out of the Bible, if it have no reference to us. To the past we look back with admiration; to the future we look forward in hope; but the present, the spiritual and experimental interpretation of prophecy as bearing upon our own soul, is that which most deeply concerns us. Living under the dispensation of the Spirit, we need a spiritual interpretation.

These three interpretations we find sometimes in the very same chapter. We have an instance in the one before us. (Hos. 2.) In it we find a prophecy already fulfilled; “I will cause all her mirth to cease, her feast-days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts; and I will destroy her vines and her fig-trees,

whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me; and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them." The present state of Judea stands forth as a literal fulfilment of these words. The new moons, the sabbaths, and solemn feasts of Israel have ceased in the land, and her vines and fig-trees are destroyed. But we have reason to believe that this chapter also contains prophecies which one day will be literally fulfilled; that when the Lord brings back his captive Zion, he will "betroth her unto him for ever in righteousness, in judgment, in lovingkindness, and in tender mercy; he will betroth her unto himself in faithfulness, and she shall know the Lord." And, united with these two, we have the spiritual, experimental interpretation shining throughout the whole chapter, as bearing upon the experience of God's children. It is in this latter point of view, that I shall, with God's blessing, now consider the words before us. We may observe in them two leading features.

First; the bringing of Israel into the wilderness.

Secondly; what God does to her when he has brought her there.

I.—"Behold," he says, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness." But what are we to understand by "the wilderness?" I think we may understand by it two things. First, the world; secondly, the human heart. For, we shall find, if the Lord enable, that to a child of God both the world, and the human heart as dissected and laid bare by the Spirit of God, bear marks and characters of "a wilderness."

i. But what is "a wilderness?" We must comprehend the word literally, before we can understand it spiritually.

A "wilderness," then, is, first, a place where no corn grows. That is the very character of the Arabian desert. No grain grows there fit for man. But secondly, it is a place where no corn can be made to grow. Now, you know, in this country there are commons and heaths that do not bear grain in their present state; but they might be brought under cultivation and made to produce it. But there are wild, waste districts in the Scottish Highlands, which could not by

any cultivation be made to grow corn. So with the "wilderness." You might plough, sow, harrow, and roll it, but you would never have a crop. The sun would dry it up; there is no soil in which the plant could grow. It might spring up for a time; but with all our attempts, it would soon utterly wither away. And the third idea to make up a desert, and flowing out of the two former features, is, that it is a place of which the inhabitants are always rovers, without a settled habitation. They have no home, house, nor building, but live in tents; and are continually shifting the spot on which for a time they dwell.

Do not these three ideas very much make up the figure of a "wilderness?" See whether they are not applicable to two things in the experience of a child of God—the world, and his own heart.

1. The world is not "a wilderness" to a worldling. To him it is a beautiful estate, enclosed in a ring fence, with land easily cultivable and soil of the best quality, producing the richest crops, laden with golden harvests. But to a child of God, as I shall show you by and by, (if led into it,) the world is but a "wilderness;" from which no crop grows to feed his soul; from which by no exertions of his own can food be made to grow; and in which he is, and ever must be, a wanderer, not a settled inhabitant.

2. And this, too, with the human heart. We shall find, I think, these three ideas of "a wilderness" meeting also in the human heart, as laid bare by the keen dissecting knife of the Spirit to the spiritual eye of a child of God. Out of his heart no bread can come, for "in him, that is, in his flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" there is no food in it for his new nature; nothing of which he can say, "This is what my soul can feed upon." And though he may seek to cultivate it, and is bidden and chidden to do so; and though he has tried often to put in the plough, to clean it with the hoe, to rake it with the harrow, to sow good seed, and to water it perhaps with the waterpot, yet, after all his attempts, the harvest is only a heap in the day of desperate sorrow, the soil being absolutely barren, totally uncultivable and unproductive, with all his fairest exertions. He is

tossed up and down, in consequence, as the locust, finding nothing in his heart on which he can set his foot, on which he can build for eternity, or in which he can safely and happily dwell, as a fixed resting-place.

Now, bear these things in wind, and when I come to the “wilderness,” as the Spirit of the Lord has promised to bring his people there, you will then see whether you have an experimental knowledge of these two things for yourselves.

ii. The Lord says, “Behold, I will allure her.” Does this mean the first work of the Spirit upon the soul? I believe not. The first work of the Spirit, we read in Scripture, and we find confirmed by experience, is, to convince of sin, to prick to the heart, to wound, to make the soul sensible of its state before God, and its utter alienation from him. Therefore, the word “allure,” cannot apply to the first work of the Spirit upon the soul. Men may talk of being drawn by love; but what is the religion of those who are thus drawn by love? What depth, what reality, what power, what life, what godliness is there in it? The word “allure” is not applicable, then, to the first beginning of a work. That usually commences with conviction, a sight and sense of sin, a cry for mercy, a feeling of wretchedness and ruin, and a despair of salvation in self.

But after the Lord has been pleased thus to pierce, to wound, to convince, and bring down, he often, perhaps usually, drops down some sweetness, blessedness, and consolation into the soul. He gives it to taste a few dewdrops of his love, some honey-drops from the Rock of Ages. This I call the Spring of the soul. You know what a beautiful season spring is; when the leaves are clothing the trees, when the birds are singing upon the branches, when the flowers are springing out of the ground, when the chilly winds of winter are gone, when the balmy breezes blow from the south, when the sun rises high in the sky, and sheds gladness over the face of the renewed earth. Thus the soul has, generally speaking, a Spring; and, as there is but one spring in nature, so for the most part there is but one spring in grace. As regards our natural life, it is only

once that we are young; and it is so spiritually; we only once enjoy that sweet season of which Job speaks, “As I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle.” (Job 29:4.)

During, then, this youth of the soul, this Spring season, this “day of espousals,” there is an “alluring” of the heart unto God. Now this we need. And why? Perhaps we are bound up with carnal companions, or by snares we cannot break; hampered by worldly relations, and their persecutions we cannot face; tied down with lusts and sins, and the chain of these we cannot burst; in the world, and unable to come out of it. Notwithstanding all the frights, terrors, alarms, and convictions that the soul may experience, (though these for a time may operate, and that powerfully); yet when their effect has ceased, it slips back into the old spot; it is not fairly or fully brought out. We want something beyond law and terrors to do that; we need something besides thunder and lightning to bring the soul fully unto God.

There is an old fable of the sun and Boreas, or the North wind, once having a strife as to which could first make a traveller throw aside his coat. The North wind had the first trial. But though he sent forth his chilling blasts, trying to blow the traveller’s coat off, yet the more that lusty Boreas blew, the tighter and closer did the traveller wrap his cloak around him. But when he had blown his worst and last, and was defeated, then the sun tried what he could do. He burst from the clouds in all his warmth and brightness, and shot his rays with such fervour, that the traveller soon threw aside his cloak, and fled to the wood. I dare say, the fable was meant to illustrate the difference between harshness and kindness; but it seems to bear upon our subject also. Law terrors, convictions, and alarms—these are like old Boreas, with his blustering cheeks; they will not bring the great coat off; you wrap the old cloak tighter round you. Something melting is wanted; something warming, cheering, reviving, comforting, and blessing. And when the Sun begins to shine, and a few rays of righteousness, warmth, light, life, and love beam upon the heart, then it does in a moment what law

and terrors could not do in a century—it melts off the old garment, brings the soul unto Jesus, and into sweet union and communion with him. There is felt and seen, then, a beauty, a blessedness, a reality, a sweetness in the things of God, which the tongue cannot describe. By it the heart is drawn unto the Lord Jesus, to the truth as it is in Jesus, to the people of Jesus, and to the service of Jesus. World, friends, foes, relations are all disregarded; neither frowns nor smiles have any effect. There is such a sweetness then felt in the things of God, such a blessedness and reality, that the soul is “allured” by them out of everything that before held it back from union with a living Head.

Under these blessed feelings, a soul will do anything for Christ; will make any sacrifice, give up anything, bear anything, endure anything for the Lord Jesus. The Spring of nature is beautiful to see; but the Spring of grace is more beautiful to feel. Early days, if not the most profitable, yet are often the best days in our feelings.

Now, by these “allurements,” sweetness, and blessedness, the Lord draws the soul into a profession of religion, into perhaps joining a church, taking up the cross, walking with the people of God, putting itself forward, and that in the utmost sincerity, to serve the Lord Jesus. And perhaps, we think, we shall enjoy this all our days. At this season, when we see old professors carnal and worldly-minded, and we feel full of life and zeal; some mourning and sighing, and we singing and dancing; others complaining of their bad hearts, when we scarcely know that we have a bad one; others cast down with temptations, and we not exposed to them; or groaning under trials, and we ignorant of them; we think that they must be deceived. We say, ‘This is not religion; the religion we have is a very different thing; there is a sweetness in ours; there is a comfort, a blessedness in it.’ Perhaps we write very hard things against these old professors; think they have been doing something very bad, and have sinned away their comforts; or that it is their own fault they are not so lively, so happy, and so comfortable as we. But we do not know what the Lord is doing by this “alluring,”

nor what his purposes are; that all this is to bring us “into the wilderness.” And when he has got us there fairly and fully, then to shew us what the “wilderness” really is.

iii. But how does this take place? A “wilderness,” I endeavoured to show represents generally two things—the world and the human heart.

Now, I dare say, when your soul was flourishing, the world in a measure flourished with you too. The Lord, generally speaking, calls his people young: being young, they have not many worldly trials: and therefore, very often natural youth and spiritual youth go hand in hand. There is a buoyancy, then, naturally, and spiritually, and the two are often closely united. But now comes the “wilderness.” Now comes the world, as opened up in its real character. Trial often begins with some heavy stroke of a worldly nature. This is sometimes the first stab that the soul gets when it comes into the “wilderness.” Perhaps some illness robs us of health for life; or some stroke in providence casts down all our airy Babels: or some disappointment, it may be of a very tender nature, lays all the youthful hopes of the heart prostrate in the dust. Now, up to this time earth was not manifested as a “wilderness” world, nor was our heart altogether divorced from it. And though the Lord was sweet and precious, yet there were worldly things indulged in; worldly society perhaps not fully given up; worldly practices that the heart was not weaned from; worldly connections not fully broken through. John Newton speaks of his enjoying in early days the presence of the Lord sweetly in the woods, and yet spending the rest of the evening in carnal company. Now that seems very strange; yet perhaps you and I might have done something of the same kind. When I was a Fellow of my College at Oxford, soon after I felt the weight of eternal things, I have sat in the Common Room after dinner with the other Fellows, and amidst all the drinking of wine, and the hum and buzz of conversation, in which I took no part, have been secretly lifting up my heart to the Lord. But I could not go amongst them after I got into the wilderness.

The reason was, I was not fully brought out; though there was a blessedness felt in the things of God, yet the evils of the world were not clearly manifested; temptation was not powerfully presented; and therefore, the danger of it was not felt nor feared. But now, the world begins to be opened up in its real character. Once it was your friend; now it has become your enemy: once it smiled upon you; now it frowns: once it did you good; now it slanders you, and does you all the evil it can: once you could enjoy it, but now it palls upon your appetite; disappointment, vexation, and sorrow embitter all; and you find the world to be what God declares it, “a wilderness.” No food grows in it; nothing that your soul can really be satisfied with; “vanity and vexation of spirit,” are written upon all. Though you may try to get food out of it, all your attempts are blighted with disappointment; and you in consequence, finding no solid footing, become a wanderer, a pilgrim, and a stranger, tossed up and down in it, and having in it neither heart nor home.

2. But again. The human heart, as opened up to a child of God, is a “wilderness,” too. You did not know this formerly; you did not know you had so bad a heart. When the Lord was first “alluring” you into the “wilderness,” you could not see that you had no strength, no holiness, no wisdom in yourself; that your heart was a cage of unclean birds; that there was nothing spiritually good in it. In early days, we cannot discern between the Lord’s strength and our own; between natural and spiritual feelings; between the zeal of the flesh and the life of the Spirit. Nor do we understand these things until our senses are exercised to discern good and evil. A clear line is not drawn at first in our soul between nature and grace; and therefore, our hearts in early days are not to us a “wilderness.” We think we can cultivate them; why should we not? Cannot we encourage a spirit of prayer? Cannot we read God’s word? Cannot we go to hear good men preach? Cannot we arrange certain seasons and hours in which to seek the Lord’s face? Cannot we watch against besetting sins? Cannot we keep the door of our lips? Cannot we keep our eyes and hearts fixed upon the Lord Jesus Christ? We are told to

do these things; to cultivate grace; and we make the attempt. Are we successful? If we are, it is our ignorance that makes us think so. Let us have light to see, life to feel, and spiritual discernment to know what is of God, and what is of man; what grace is, and what the work of the Spirit is; what divine feelings are, and how distinct these are from the work of the flesh; then we shall find that our heart not only does not bear food that we can feed upon to our soul’s satisfaction; but cannot be made to bear it. It is a “wilderness,” a wide waste, a barren sand, a desert, blown over by the Sirocco, parched by the sun, dried up and desolate, absolutely sterile and uncultivable.

Now, here in the “wilderness,” we get stripped to the very bone; here we lose all our goodness, all our wisdom, all our strength, all our creature holiness, all our rags of fleshly righteousness. It is in the “wilderness” we get stripped; and till we come there, we do not know what stripping is. Then we feel poor creatures, ruined wretches; desolate, forsaken, abandoned, almost without hope or help; in self lost and undone. We look upon the world—all is vanity, vexation, and sorrow. We look within—all is dark, wild, and desolate; nothing but sin, and that continually: unbelief, infidelity, obscenity, filth, and blasphemy; everything hideous, every thing vile; nothing but evil without and within. This is stripping work; this is “the wilderness;” this is bringing a man to his senses; this is laying the creature low; this is making him know the depth of the fall; this is plucking up his fleshly religion, tearing out by the roots all his carnal hopes, leaving him naked, empty, and bare. All his holiness gone, all his zeal withered, all his strength turned into weakness, all his comeliness into corruption; and he standing before God utterly unable to work one spiritual feeling in his own heart.

Are you here? Have you ever been here? Is God bringing you here? Here we must come to learn what true religion is; here must we come to see the end of all perfection, and to feel that “the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.” But does the Lord

leave his people here? No.

II.—Which leads us to our second point. The Lord brings his people there to do them good; to give them blessings; to work grace in their hearts; and to extend to them favour and mercy in a measure and degree hitherto unfelt.

But let us look at the catalogue of blessings provided for Israel when she comes into the “wilderness.”

i. The first is; “I will speak comfortably unto her.” It is in the margin, (and so it is in the Hebrew) “to her heart.” I shall take the two renderings: first, “to her heart;” secondly, “comfortably.”

1. It is in the “wilderness,” then, that we learn heart religion. If you want God to speak to your heart, you must go into the “wilderness” for it. It is often headwork very much till we get there. Into the wilderness of human nature must we go, if God himself is to speak to our heart. And when you begin to feel what a heart you have, you will find the necessity of God speaking to it; for only so far as he speaks, have you any feeling, any life, any power in your religion. And O, when a man begins to find and feel what a “wilderness” heart he has—how anxious, how desirous he is that God would speak to his heart! How this shuts up his religion into a very narrow compass! How it cuts off the flesh of it, and brings him and his religion too into a nutshell! How it hacks to pieces all the ornaments that have been hung around it by self and the devil, and brings him to this point, (and a very trying point it is to be brought to), ‘I have no religion of self; I cannot work a grain in mine own heart; I am dead, dark, stupid; God must speak to my soul: and if he do not speak, I am utterly destitute; I have no feeling, no life, no faith, no love, no strength, no holiness; I have nothing; I stand,’ says the soul, ‘before God without a thread.’ ‘Lord,’ (the poor man cries under these painful exercises, toiling and struggling in the wilderness), ‘speak to my soul; drop a word into my heart.’ And how anxious he is for God to speak! But how many sleepless nights have you passed because God does not speak to your heart? How many times do you roll backwards and forwards upon your bed

because you cannot get the Lord to speak a word into your soul? Do you ever go groaning and sighing along the street because the Lord does not speak to you? or, are you gazing with a fool’s eye into every picture-shop?

Now, if you are in the “wilderness,” you will want the Lord to speak to your soul; and you will feel all your religion to hang upon this—that you have no more religion than springs out of God’s word and work in your heart. And here you will look and wait, long, beg, and pray, ‘Lord, in mercy speak to my poor soul.’ The Lord has promised to do this; but he will not speak till he brings you to the spot where he has promised to do so. When he has “allured” you along into the wilderness, and got you fast there, he will now and then drop a word, give a promise, speak with soft melting whispers, make his word sweet and precious; and thus fulfil his promise, ‘I will speak to her heart.’

2. But the word also means “comfortably.” Now when the Lord was “alluring” your soul in the way I have described, you did not know much about comfort springing out of the Lord’s speaking to your soul. You could hardly tell whence your comfort came. It did not come direct from the mouth of God; the Lord did not mean it at that time to come so. Every sermon seemed at that time blessed; but now perhaps it is only one word out of it. At that time, when you went upon your knees, it seemed as though you had sweet access to the throne of grace; every hymn was full of beauty; and every child of God you could take in your arms, embrace, and feel sweet communion with. And yet, all the time, when you look back, you cannot say this sprung out of any special words or promises that God applied to your soul. There was a general sweetness, but not a particular one. It was more in the truth, in the people of God, in the blessedness of the things of God, in the doctrines of grace, than it was in special promises, or special applications of blood and love. But when you get into the “wilderness,” you cannot do with what did very well in times of old. There are many children of God who love to hear a minister trace out evidences. ‘O,’ they say, ‘this

just suits me; I love to hear evidences.' But you get, after a time, beyond evidences. They will do for a babe; they will suit a child; but a man wants meat; a man can pick a bone. And so (I address myself now to those who know the "wilderness") you want something stronger, more solid, more weighty, more real, more effectual; you want testimonies, words, manifestations, a sweet discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is by being stripped in the "wilderness," that we are brought to look and long for the Lord's own special comfort; for we are brought to stand in need of it; and as we cannot get a drop of comfort by cultivating our own graces, we are obliged to beg for a few grains of comfort from the Lord himself. And what a mercy it is, that he has promised to speak "comfortably;" that when nobody else can speak comfort, when we cannot speak it to our own souls, and cannot get consolation from anything, the Lord can and does, according to his promise, speak "comfortably." He whispers peace, and blesses the soul with some testimony of its interest in the precious blood and love of his dear Son. That is the first thing the Lord has promised to do.

ii. The next is: "I will give her her vineyards from thence." A strange place! We should not go to Bagshot Heath or Woking Common to find "a vineyard;" and I am sure we should not go to the great Sahara, or the Arabian desert, to find grapes growing. But we might as well expect clusters of grapes upon Bagshot Heath, as fruitfulness by nature in the human heart. Here, then, is the wonder. "I will give her her vineyards from thence." What! in the wilderness! when she has been trying to bring something out of her heart to please God and self with, and all her efforts are baffled! What! to give her vineyards there! Why, that is the mystery; that is the beauty; that is the blessedness; that is the sweetness—that the Lord can and does make the barren heart fruitful in the "wilderness."

Now, perhaps you have been toiling, tugging, working very hard to produce some fruit. 'Come,' say you, 'it will not do to go on like this. I must do something; I must pray more, read the word of

God more, watch over my heart more, and seek the Lord more. I will do it too; nobody shall hinder me.' So some Monday morning, you begin and set to work, and take the Bible down. 'Yes,' say you, 'I will read two or three chapters this morning; I will go to prayer, and I will try if I cannot do something to be a real Christian.' All very good. But what do you get from it? What power, sweetness, or blessedness can you put into the word of God? What life and feeling can you put into your soul? Well, you have tried it again and again; and when you have cast up the account, it is nil, nothing, nought. Zero is the full amount! And you wonder where the fault is, till at last you begin to despair, and feel and say, 'I am a wretch, and ever shall be. God be merciful to such a wretch! Lord, look in tender compassion on such a monster, such a filthy creature that has done nothing, and can do nothing but sin.'

Now when the Lord is pleased to speak a word to the heart, and bless your soul with real comfort, what is the effect? It makes you fruitful. Then you can read the word of God—aye, and with blessedness too; then you can pray, and with sweet satisfaction too; then you can look up, and with eyes of affection too; and then you can be holy, and that by the real sanctifying operations of the Spirit too. This is the way whereby all fruitfulness is produced; not by roller, plough, and harrow; seed basket and hoe; turning up the desert, and casting good corn there, to be like Pharaoh's ears only blasted by the East wind; but to be in the "wilderness;" to feel a needy, naked wretch, without hope or help in self, and to wait upon the Lord for him to speak a word to the soul, by his own blessed breath breathing into us a fruitfulness that our heart never could produce in itself. Here is genuine spirituality and true holiness: here is real fruitfulness. These are the graces of the Spirit, not the perishing works of the flesh.

What is thus wrought in the soul by the power of God is to the glory of God. "I will give her her vineyards from thence." Now, if you had never known the "wilderness," what a barren heart and desperately wicked nature you have, you would not have wanted

fruitfulness to come from God's own mouth into your soul. The starved, withered crop that nature produces would have been reaped and gathered into your garner, and you would have been pleased with the sheaves, though they were but straw and chaff.

As time is running on, I must just hastily skim over the other blessings which God has promised in the "wilderness."

iii. "The valley of Achor for a door of hope." Now the "valley of Achor" signifies the 'valley of trouble.' It was the valley in which Achan was stoned. And why stoned? Because he had taken the accursed thing; because his eye had been captivated by the Babylonish garment and golden wedge, and he had buried them in the tent. This may throw a light on what "the valley of Achor" is spiritually. Perhaps you have been guilty of Achan's sin; you have been taking the accursed thing; have been too deeply connected with the world; have done things that God's displeasure is against. Let conscience speak in the bosom of each. The consequence has been, that you have got into the "valley of Achor!" Trouble, sorrow, and confusion are your lot; and you do not know whether the lot of Achan may not wait you there.

Now it is in this "valley of Achor," or sorrow, confusion, and fear, that the "door of hope" is opened. And what is "a door of hope?" What is a 'door' literally? Is not "a door" a place of exit and a place for entrance? By "a door" we go out, and by "a door" we come in. So "a door of hope" admits the visits of the Lord to the soul; and "a door of hope" admits the going out of the soul's breathings after God. Thus, every glimpse of mercy, every beam of love, and every ray of comfort; every sweet promise that drops into the soul, every intimation from God, every testimony of interest in Christ; every dewdrop, every honey-drop that falls into a parched wilderness heart—this is opening up "a door of hope."

But why "in the valley of Achor?" That we may cease to hope in self; that a sound and true gospel hope may enter within the veil as an anchor sure and steadfast, and there be no hope but in the precious blood of the Lamb, and in a sweet manifestation of

that blood to the conscience. This is "the door of hope" through which the soul looks into the very presence of God; sees Jesus on the throne of grace, the sprinkled mercy-seat, and the great High Priest "able and willing to save to the uttermost."

Through this "door of hope," by which Christ is seen, the soul goes forth in desires, breathings, hungerings, and thirstings after him; and through this "door of hope" descend visits, smiles, tokens, testimonies, mercies, and favours. And thus, there is a "door of hope;" no longer barred, closed, and shut back, but thrown wide open in the bleeding side of an incarnate God. And this is opened "in the valley of Achor," where we deserve to be stoned to death because we have touched the accursed thing; where we deserve nothing but damnation, the eternal vengeance of God, and to be made as Achan a monument of eternal wrath; yet, in this "valley of Achor," is opened up a blessed "door of hope."

iv. "She shall sing there as in the days of her youth, as in the day when the Lord brought her out of the land of Egypt." Spring again! only a better spring. Youth again! "They shall renew their strength as the eagle." Here is a renewing of visits almost despaired of; of joys that seemed never to return; of hopes almost extinct; of consolations remembered, but remembered almost with fear, lest they should have been delusive. "She shall sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came out of the land of Egypt."

But what a place to go and get into, to learn religion. How much more pleasant it would be to the flesh to take our Bible down, get a quire of paper, have a new pen, put some fresh ink into the ink bottle, and then to draw out our religion from the Bible; to believe all we read, take down all we see, and transplant it into our heart. But that is not the way; that would only stand in the letter. It would not do for eternity, nor for a dying bed. It would exalt the creature, but would depress the Creator. It might do for an hour, but it would not do for the judgment-day. And therefore, we have to learn our religion, if we learn it at all, in a way clean contrary.

Have you learned your religion thus? If you have, it will stand. There is a reality in it; it bears marks of God's grace and teaching. But if we have learned it except in this way, what reality, what power, what blessedness is there in it? None. We shall have to part with it when we want it most. When we lie upon a death-bed, all our false religion will make to itself wings, and fly away; and when we stretch forth our hands for a little true hope, it is all gone.

Thus, we want something solid, real, spiritual, abiding; something of God and godliness, divine, heavenly, and supernatural; wrought in the soul by the almighty power, and breathed into our heart by the very mouth of God himself. That will stand, and no other will.

If the Lord has led you in his path, you have an evidence in your soul that these things are so; and you will know that this is the way; not because I say, so, nor because the Bible always says it, but because you have felt, experienced, and known these things by divine teaching and by divine testimony.

141 Reconciliation by Death, and Salvation by Life

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on Tuesday Evening,
July 30, 1850

“For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

Romans 5:10

The grand object of the Epistle to the Romans is to set forth and exalt salvation by grace. In order fully to do this, the Apostle shows, first, its necessity; and secondly, its nature.

1. He shows its necessity by drawing, in the first chapter, an appalling sketch of the practices of the Gentile world; by proving, in the second, that the Jew derived no benefit from his outward privileges, if he were a transgressor of the law on which he rested;

and in the third, brings in all mankind guilty by the sentence of God's holy law, laying the whole human race under this solemn sentence of condemnation: “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” And again: “There is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” He thus shows the necessity of salvation by grace; and that if man is, as he proves him to be in this fallen condition, in this desperate state, nothing short of salvation by grace can either suit or save him.

2. But when the Apostle has thus established the necessity of salvation by grace, he goes on to show the nature of it: that God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, that grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life.

In the chapter before us, he draws a striking contrast between the doings of man and the doings of God. He says, in the verses almost immediately preceding our text, that “Scarcely for a righteous man will one die;” taking here a character universally accounted righteous, that is, a man upright, just, and sincere in all his doings. Find, he would say, such an one—can you shew me a man that would die for him? Will his justice, uprightness, and sincerity of conduct and character so influence any one individual man as to induce him to lay down his life to redeem him? And he adds, by way of parenthesis, “Peradventure for a good man,” that is, not a gracious man in the gospel sense, but a benevolent man, a man of kindness and philanthropy, a man who had gained the affections of men generally by his amiable conduct—for such “a good man,” he says, “some would even dare to die.” But contrast, he would add, the love of God with these two instances. Those for whom Christ died were neither just nor good. Viewed in a gospel sense, man has no righteousness in him to make him righteous; and viewed in a spiritual light, he has no goodness to constitute him good. What, then, is his character? An enemy, ungodly, without strength—a wretch, and a rebel. And thus he heightens and magnifies the exceeding riches of God's grace, by shewing, that whereas upon

mere human grounds and natural principles, we could not find any individual who would lay down his life for a just man, and scarcely for a good man, “yet God,” he says, “commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”

Having shewn the death of Christ for sinners, he passes on, by way of encouraging the children of God, to say, that the love of God in giving his Son did not terminate in Christ’s death, but went on to Christ’s resurrection, and still goes on saving to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Therefore, he says, “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him,” adding the words of the text: “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

We may observe two prominent features in our text.

I.—First. The reconciliation of enemies.

II.—Secondly. The Salvation of friends. And these two points I shall, as the Lord may enable, endeavour to unfold this evening; looking up to him who can make his strength perfect in weakness, and from whom alone cometh the blessing.

I.—The reconciliation of enemies. By the reconciliation of enemies, I understand two things. I understand their real reconciliation by the actual death of Christ; and their spiritual and experimental reconciliation by the application of the death of Christ to their consciences.

But before we can enter into the beauty and blessedness of reconciliation, we must see in what state the people of God are; for to them the Apostle is speaking. What word does he use to point out their state by nature? “Enemies.” Enemies to whom? To that great, glorious, and ever-living God, “in whom they live, and move, and have their being;” the God of heaven and earth; that called them into existence, and upon whom they depend for every breath they draw. What an awful state must they be in to be “enemies” to such a God! Unless we know who God is; unless we have some spiritual apprehension of his dread Majesty; unless we have some

experience of his greatness and power, tremble before him, we cannot duly enter into the meaning of this word “enemies.” There could not be a more dreadful word written. The Bible itself scarcely contains a more awful term. “Enemies of God!” who could crush them with a frown into the dust; who by one look could hurl them into hell; who could trample upon them in his righteous wrath, as I might trample upon a beetle beneath my feet.

But how are they “enemies?” They are enemies in a threefold sense. 1. They are enemies by birth! 2. They are enemies by nature! and 3. They are enemies by practice!

1. They are born enemies. As a toad is born a toad, and as a viper is born a viper, so man is born an enemy to God. Like can only beget like. An enemy to God can only beget an enemy to God; and therefore, we are enemies to God by birth. We are conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity; and therefore we come into the world, so far as we stand in the Adam fall, enemies to God.

2. We are enemies, also, by nature. “The carnal mind,” we read (and what are we but carnal minds, as fallen children of a fallen parent?) “is enmity against God.” That is a stronger word still. An enemy may be reconciled, but enmity cannot. Thus, our very nature is intrinsic, abstract, irreconcilable, enmity against God; hating him, hating his ways, hating all that is God and Godlike. And O, what a fearful condition! Not only to be born enemies, but to grow up enemies; to be woven throughout in enmity to God; as full of enmity, as a sponge dipped in water is full of the element in which it is dipped; every nerve, every fibre, every power, principle, faculty and passion at enmity with God, warring against the Most High.

3. But, besides this, there is the enmity of works—enmity by practice. We are “alienated from the life of God”—“enemies in our mind by wicked works.” (Col. 1:21.) We go astray, speaking lies from the womb. All our acts in babyhood, in childhood, in youth and manhood, (though they may not at the time be known as such), are all acts of daring enmity against God; they all shew forth

the enmity of the human heart against the blessed Jehovah. O, how deeply dyed in enmity must man be when he has this three-fold enmity, and is by birth, nature, and practice utterly alienated from the life of God!

And why does not the anger of God burst forth against such wretches? Why are they not all dealt with like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, whom the earthquake swallowed up? Why are they not all like those slain by the Levites in the wilderness? Because the Lord is a God of grace, of infinite mercy, compassion, and love; because he is determined to have a people in whom he will be eternally glorified; because, in other words, salvation by grace was fore-determined in his eternal mind; and therefore a reconciliation was to be brought about.

You observe, it is man who is to be “reconciled.” I do not object to the expression of God’s being “reconciled;” but the Scriptures seem certainly to speak more of reconciliation on the part of man; “Who hath reconciled us to himself.” So here: “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God.”

Now we could only be “reconciled” to God by this enmity being put away. It is in grace as in nature. Here are two friends who have been long walking together as brothers. A division takes place; enmity breeds in the heart of one or of the other; they are sundered, and perhaps become enemies. They may be reconciled; but only effectually by the enmity being taken out of the heart. All other reconciliation is to patch up the breach; it is hollow and insincere; there is no reality, no depth in it. The enmity must be taken away before there can be any real reconciliation. So with man and God. Unless the enmity be taken away, there can be no reconciliation. Thus we see the futility and fallacy of a few works of righteousness doing away with our fallen state by nature. They cannot take away the enmity; they are like the blood of bulls and goats, they never can atone for sin; like the ashes of the red heifer, they may sanctify to the purifying of the flesh; but here they fail. Something more was wanted, something which God himself

provided, and that was the death of his own Son: “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.” His dear Son coming into our place and stead; taking our nature; bearing our sins in his own body on the tree: obeying the law that we had broken; fulfilling a righteousness which we were altogether deficient in; enduring the curse, and suffering the penalty; in this way, by death, he reconciled the enemies unto God; he obeyed the law which stood in the way; he satisfied God’s justice; he removed the transgression, and thus took away the enmity.

But I hinted that the reconciliation was of a two-fold nature. The actual reconciliation took place when Christ died upon the cross: the spiritual reconciliation takes place when this is applied to the conscience.

I think I may thus illustrate it. Here are two friends who are sundered, enmity being in the heart of one or the other. One of them comes to a death-bed; his friend is not reconciled; but on the death-bed his heart is softened; the enmity is removed; he sends by some friends or acquaintance a message of love to his former friend, and dies in happiness, blessing and praising God. The friend at a distance has still, perhaps, enmity working in his heart against the friend whose death he yet knows not. The dying friend is reconciled; the living friend is where he was before. But the message comes; the letter is received; the tidings are brought; and when this is received into the heart, it takes away all former enmity, and immediately a sweet reconciliation takes place. His friend has passed into eternity, but all the enmity is gone; and he feels, as before, love and union reigning in his heart. I have experienced this; and therefore I know it. It is not a fancied illustration, but a fact; the case having occurred to myself—at least, something like it. I merely throw it out, to shew you, there may be an actual reconciliation on a certain day, and yet the felt reconciliation may not take place till days or weeks pass over. My friend indeed was reconciled to me, and wrote to express it a few days before he was taken for death, but received my friendly answer on his death-bed,

and sent me his dying love. Thus, the actual reconciliation was wrought out by the death of Christ; the felt reconciliation must be wrought out in the soul by the application of the death of Christ to the conscience.

But before we can experience this reconciliation, we must be brought to feel the enmity. Reconciliation is only of enemies; and we must therefore know ourselves to be enemies before we can feel reconciled.

But what a fearful spot it is to be in—to feel and fear oneself an enemy to God! I think it is one of the most painful feelings that ever passed through my breast, to fear I was an enemy to God. For what must be the consequence if a man live and die having God for his enemy? In that warfare he must perish. If God be his enemy, who can be his friend? Such sensations in the bosom are well-nigh akin to despair. Let a man fully feel that he is God's enemy, where can he hide his head? Hell itself seems to afford him no refuge.

But he must be exercised with something of this before he can prize reconciliation. He must see himself to be an enemy to God by birth—that he was born in what our Reformers called “birth sin;” and that his carnal mind is enmity against God. O the painful sensations of the carnal mind being enmity against God! It is bad enough to be God's enemy; but that every fibre of our nature should be steeped in enmity against God, that holy and blessed Being to whom we owe so much, and to whom we desire to owe everything; that our carnal heart in all its constitution, in its very blood, should be one unmitigated mass of enmity to God, O it is an awful thought! If you are made to experience that enmity in your bosom, and to feel more or less of its upheavings and raisings—that will cut to pieces all the sinews of creature righteousness; that will mar all your comeliness, and turn it into corruption.

Thus all our evil works are all marks of enmity to God. Every sin that you commit (and you sin with every breath you draw) is steeping you more deeply in enmity to God, and manifesting more that you are in this condition.

Now, when a man is thus exercised, it will make him look out, if he has any root of spiritual feeling, for a remedy. God has provided such in the sacrifice of his dear Son, in the blood of the blessed Jesus.

Now when this is opened up in our soul by the Spirit of God; when faith is given to receive it; when the Holy Ghost applies it; when it is received into the heart (for the Apostle says, “we have received the atonement”) then a felt reconciliation takes place; we are then reconciled to God; love takes the place of enmity, praise of sighing, and blessing his name instead of writing bitter things against ourselves.

This reconciles the heart, which nothing else can. The law cannot; that engenders bondage, works wrath, stirs up enmity. It is the very nature of the law to do so; the law never did anything else. You never felt the law, if it wrought anything else but that in you: you did not know it spiritually; it never came into your conscience if it wrought anything but bondage, death, and enmity towards God, and bitter thoughts against him. When men set the law before their eyes as a way of salvation, they are only setting up that which when felt in the heart, stirs up enmity and disobedience. This is man's nature. God says, “Do this.” ‘I will not!’—answers the carnal mind. ‘But I charge you to do it; hell will be your portion, if you do not.’ ‘Well, I will brave it; I will sin in spite of hell; I will do this if I am damned for it.’ That is human nature; that is the heart of man; and these are the workings of the carnal mind under the law. The more you try to keep the law, and the more it comes into your conscience, the more you will find such workings till you are fairly horrified. Such poor souls are ground as between the upper and nether millstone; the law above, and the carnal mind beneath, and they ground between the two; desiring to be holy, wishing to obey the precept, and yet finding that eternal devilism in their heart which kicks against all, will not submit, will not obey. The heart has to be conquered by kindness; enmity has to be killed by love. It is the gospel that is to do the deed. And when Christ is viewed

by the eye of faith; when his death is felt in the soul, and his blood applied to the heart, then reconciliation is effected. The soul, then, does not find it hard work to serve God; does not drag a mill-horse round of tiresome duties; is not making ropes of sand, nor drawing water up with a bucket of which the bottom is knocked out; but it finds the service of God perfect freedom, and the gospel of Christ a sweet constraining to obedience. This is being reconciled to God; loving God, and feeling a desire to serve him and to obey him from a principle of affection; being upheld by a free spirit, and not a legal one.

Do you think you can trace three things in your soul? Enmity by nature; the work of the law in stirring up the enmity; reconciliation by the blessed gospel revealing the love and blood of Christ to your heart? And all this sensibly known, felt, experienced, realized, and enjoyed? Here is the cream of religion; here is the marrow of vital godliness; here is the sum and substance of divine teaching. Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! He is only really taught of God, who knows and feels that there is nothing else worth having or enjoying.

II.—But we pass on to our second point, which is, the salvation of friends. Before we are reconciled, we are enemies. When reconciliation is brought about, we become friends. “Henceforth I call you not servants,” says the Lord, “but I have called you friends.” “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” “Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Thus we become friends when we are reconciled. It is then, as Hart says,

“When thus we’re reconciled,
He sets no rigorous tasks;
His yoke is soft and mild,
For love is all he asks.”

But does all end here? The apostle says, “Being reconciled, we are saved by his life.” Then there is the salvation of friends by life, as well as the reconciliation of enemies by death. Christ died; Christ

rose again; Christ now lives at God’s right hand. And does he live there for nothing? Has his work ceased? Is his love gone? Has he no regard for his suffering children here below? The apostle sets before our eyes that we have the same, or almost the same necessity for Christ’s life, and the benefits of Christ’s life, as we have for Christ’s death, and the benefits of Christ’s death.

Let me open this a little. Perhaps, when the Lord was pleased to bless your soul with some sense of reconciliation, you thought you should walk happily from earth to heaven. Like the children of Israel, you saw your enemies dead upon the sea-shore, little thinking, little dreaming of the wilderness before you. But after a time you began to lose your sweet and blessed feelings; sin, which seemed dead, like the host of Pharaoh, began to revive, to lust, to crave, to work, to seek its objects. The carnal mind lies still and dead when Christ is present; sin has little power when he is there; these beasts of the forest then retire into their dens. But let the Lord withdraw himself; let him leave us to prove a little (as he left the Apostle Paul) what our strength really is; let him give us a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet us, and we shall then soon find what we are.

There is one thing which has often harassed and puzzled many—that all they have experienced and enjoyed has made no change in their carnal mind. This is a deep mystery—the mystery of ungodliness, I may well call it, that the carnal mind, the old man, undergoes no change. He may be subdued, and withdraw himself into some dark recess; for the human heart is full of caves and grottos; and in these dens, “hideous monsters sit.” But these hideous monsters withdraw themselves in the light of day. The human heart is very deep; and these grottos and caves lie so out of sight, that we know not what these monsters are about; but there they are, and creep forth when night comes on. Why is this? To teach us our dependence upon a living Christ. A dying Christ is not enough; we want a living Christ. You will observe how through all the Epistle to the Hebrews the Apostle dwells upon this point

chiefly, that Christ sits at God's right hand as the great High Priest over the house of God; he tells us, that "He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him;" he sets him forth as sitting on a throne of grace, knowing that we need him as such, that we need him as much as a living Jesus as a dying Jesus, because when sin works (as sin will work) we want a present deliverance, a present, real, actual salvation.

Look at the words: "We shall be saved by his life." It might be said, 'Are we not saved by his death?' But here we are said to be saved by his life. And why? It is in an experimental, in a living, in a daily way. Here is the great mystery—to be receiving a living Christ into our soul; to have union and communion with a risen Jesus. "The life," says the apostle, "that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God."

Now, in being "saved," we must be saved from certain things—things that would otherwise destroy us—that is evident. Sin, then, in its workings in our nature is that from which we are saved by Christ's life. Let me open up this. As regards sin in its workings I think we may say there are five things from which we need a living Christ to save us. There is, 1, the guilt of sin; 2, the filth of sin; 3, the love of sin; 4, the power of sin; and 5, the practice of sin. Sin, in these five devilisms, we need the living Saviour to save us from.

1. Now when we are entangled, as we often are, in sin, (and who dare say he is not? none but a pharisee) what is the first thing felt? The guilt of sin upon the conscience. What a heavy burden is guilt upon a living conscience—a sense of having sinned against God, how painful, how piercing it is!

2. But there is not only the guilt of sin upon the conscience, there is the filth of sin defiling the imagination; because sin defiles, as well as brings guilt upon the conscience. You who live in the country (and I dare say in town as well) see sometimes oozing out of a dunghill what the farmer calls 'liquid manure;' and you see, wherever this filthy stream takes its course, it defiles all it touches. Such is sin; it defiles the imagination, by oozing forth out of our

dunghill heart, as the liquid manure oozes forth out of the natural dunghill. Do not your sins sometimes come into your mind, and pollute your imagination, by being acted over again, and defilement thereby produced; so that you fall down before God in self-loathing and self-abhorrence, as the vilest monster that he suffers to live; sin so defiling throughout, and rendering you an object of abhorrence to yourself? This is what Job expresses; and I wish our pharisees had Job's experience written upon their souls: "If I wash myself with snow water," (said that tried saint) "and make myself never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me into the ditch (of liquid manure), and my own clothes shall abhor me," as they would if you fell into a cesspool, or got a roll into the Thames' mud. How glad would you then be to get every rag off you, and to be washed from head to foot, your own clothes abhorring you, and you abhorring them! Such are the feelings when sin defiles and pollutes the heart, rendering us objects of self-abhorrence.

3. But there is besides this, the abominable love of sin. I am not fond of using strong language; but if a person were to tell me he did not love sin in his carnal mind, I should be strongly tempted to apply a strong word in our language to him: at any rate, if I did not use the word, I could say with all mildness, "You do not speak the truth." If your carnal mind does not love sin, why do you think of it? why do you in imagination secretly indulge in it? why do you play with it? why do you seek to extract a devilish sweetness out of it? O, what a mercy it would be, if there were not this dreadful love of sin in our heart! This is the struggle—that there should be this traitor in the camp; that our carnal mind should be so devilish as to love that which made the blessed Jesus die; as to love that which crucified the Lord of glory, and to love it with a desperate love! Do we not want saving from that? If there was nothing else, we should want to be saved from the hideous love of evil.

4. Then, there is the power of sin. "Sin shall not have dominion." But over whom? Those who "are not under the law, but under grace." Set the law before you; try to keep it; and you will find sin

will have dominion: and the more you try to keep the law, the more power you put into sin. Now, wherever there is the love of sin in the carnal mind, there will be the power of sin; for the power of sin is ingrafted as it were into, and springs out of the love of sin. Let me illustrate this. I will take, first, the case of a drunkard. Why has strong drink such power over him? Because he loves it. Take away the love of strong drink, and you destroy its power. Take again the man who loves smoking, (though I do not condemn both practices alike); why does he say, 'My pipe has such power over me?' Because he loves it. Take away the love of the pipe, and you destroy the power of the pipe. (Though I class smoking and drinking together here, I am not pronouncing a judgment upon them in a similar way. The one is to be utterly condemned; the other I leave.) So, if there were no love of sin, there would be no power in sin. Sin does not come with a strong hand, seize us by the throat, and say 'Obey me;' but sin insensibly creeps into our heart, catches hold of our carnal mind, insinuates itself into our vile affections, and thus encloses us in the things we desire to abhor. Thus, the power of sin is engrafted upon love of sin. May God keep us from the love, the power, and the practice of sin; and, above all, from the last, the doing of anything which is dishonouring to, and inconsistent with the profession of the gospel we make.

5. For we shall find as we journey onward, that we need the life of Christ to save us from the actual practice of sin. We need the life of Christ, and the application of his precious blood, to take away the guilt; we need the Spirit of Christ to sanctify, and to wash the soul in the fountain from its defilement. We want the love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts to take away the love—we want the power of Christ to rescue us from the dominion—and the grace of Christ to preserve us from the practice of sin. All this we have in Christ; nor is there salvation from sin in any other way, by any other means, or through any other channel. It is in vain to look to any one but to him whom God hath set up. All other seeking will prove vain. You cannot wash the Ethiopian white, nor make the leopard

change his spots; God never has appointed Moses to bless or save. Christ is the God-Man, the Saviour of his own appointments, who only does, and who only can do these things. What a mercy that he has reconciled us to God by his death, and is thus able to save us by his life! It is feeling sin in its various workings (and chiefly in these five points), that makes us value a living Christ. Strange mysterious way! A man that sets up his own righteousness can do without Christ's righteousness. A man not plagued, not exercised, not tried with sin, can do without a living Jesus; his strength is his own; he derives it not out of the fulness of a living Head. O, strange path! that to be exercised with sin is the path to a living Saviour! that by the miserable feelings which the soul suffers, the sinner is made to value, not only reconciliation by death, but salvation by life. It is thus we come to know a living Christ. We do not go to the sepulchre to find him there. "He is risen!" and when we know he is risen for us, our affections rise with him, and are set upon heavenly things with him at God's right hand. This is being saved by Christ's life.

Try this by your own experience, you that have any. When your soul is not plagued nor exercised with sin, cannot you do without a living Jesus? What sighs, what cries, what groans, what prayers, what longings for his manifested presence, love, and power to be felt in your soul! When not exercised, the world is uppermost, self is all alive, not Christ: but when you are brought to a spot where you are exercised and tried with a body of sin and death, with sin working and no power to restrain it; 'Blessed Jesus,' you cry, 'look upon me; visit my soul; come into my heart; leave me not; let not Satan thus tempt; let me not fall; hold me up; keep me as the apple of thine eye!' Here is heart work; here are living dealings with a living Jesus; here is no notional, formal religion wrapped up in a mass of duties; but a living Christ in a living soul; a living breathing after a living Saviour. This brings Christ and the soul near; this gives us a daily experience; this puts us into a place where Christ is our all in all. Very painful, very mysterious, very inexplicable—

that the more you feel yourself a wretched, miserable sinner, the more you long after Jesus; and the lower you sink in the depths of the fall, the higher your soul rises up to that Saviour, who is able to save unto the uttermost.

Thus, we shall find, if the Lord be our Teacher, that we want all that Christ is. He is no little Saviour; for we are no little sinners. He is a Saviour, and a great one; and we (I speak for myself) are great sinners. I do not know a greater sinner than he that now speaks to you this evening—the “chief of sinners,” and “less than the least of all saints”—and that makes him want such a Saviour as Jesus is: and to be reconciled not only by his death, but to be saved, and that well-nigh every day, by his life. O what a mercy that he who was dead lives at God’s right hand! that he lives as a risen head; that he is not a dead Saviour; but a Saviour that lives for evermore; that can and does bless; that can and does comfort; that can and does bring the soul safely through all. He is not a Saviour that stands as it were upon the brink of a river, and pulls us out when we have swum half way out ourselves: he is not a Saviour that will take us half way to heaven, and then, as Rutherford says, let us ‘fend’ or shift for ourselves. He must take us to heaven throughout. We are nothing, we have nothing without him. He must be, as he is, our, “all in all.” We value him in his death; nothing but his death could reconcile: we value him in his life; nothing but his life can save. We want salvation now; salvation in the heart: a spiritual salvation revealed in and unto the soul: a salvation worthy of the name, wholly, fully, completely, finally, and everlastingly to the praise of superabounding grace; a salvation indefeasible, never to be lost; worthy of God, worthy of the God-Man: adapted to every want of the soul, coming into every trial of the heart, and able to save the vilest and the worst, “without money and without price.”

Be this religion mine. I want no other: I trample all other under my feet as filthy rags. Any other is no more fit to be taken up than a worn-out shoe in the street. It is, as the Apostle says, but “dung;” off-scouring trash; unworthy of the name of religion.

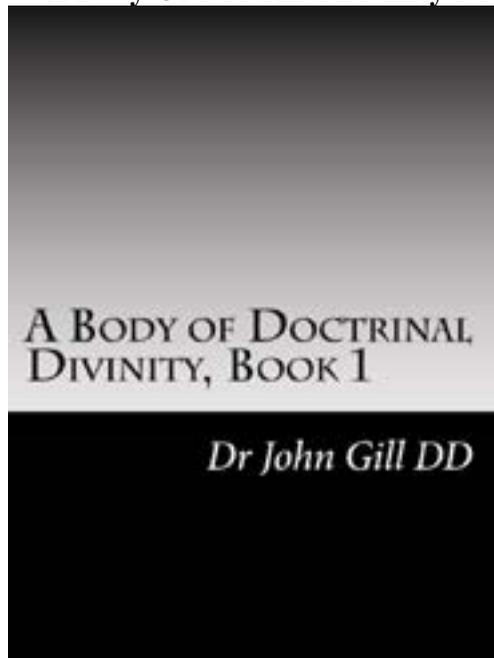
There is no religion but what is wrought in the soul by the power of God; and that religion is worthy of the name. It comes from God; it leads to God. It is given us in Christ; yea, it is Christ in the heart, “the hope of glory.” Such a religion will do to die by, as well as to live by. Thousands have found it so; it has never left them upon a dying bed; it has soothed the aching heart, sweetened the bitter draught of death, and received their souls into a happy eternity. Would to God that every heart who desires to fear his name, could beat responsively, ‘Be this religion mine!’ And may we, with God’s blessing, desire to know nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified. No other will do in a dying hour; and why should any other do in a living hour?

I cannot conclude without just leaving this testimony behind. My desire is, for you and myself to be led into the very experience of these things, in the sweet enjoyment of them; for I am well convinced, that nothing but the sweet experience and blessed enjoyment of these things, can ever be for our present profit, or ever contribute to our future peace.

May the Lord, in his infinite mercy, give us to experience and enjoy much of this; and to him will we cheerfully give all the praise.

Other Publications

A Body Of Doctrinal Divinity Book 1



A System of Practical Truths

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4 Of The Nature Of God

5 Of The Attributes Of God In General, And Of His Immutability In Particular.

6 Of The Infinity Of God,

7 Of The Life Of God.

8 Of The Omnipotence Of God.

9 Of The Omniscience Of God.

10 Of The Wisdom Of God.

11 Of The Will Of God And The Sovereignty Of It

12 Of The Love Of God

13 Of The Grace Of God.

14 Of The Mercy Of God.

15 Of The Long suffering Of God.

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25 Of The Blessedness Of God.

26 Of The Unity Of God.

27 Of A Plurality In The Godhead, Or, A Trinity Of Persons In The Unity Of The Divine Essence.

28 Of The Personal Relations; Or, Relative

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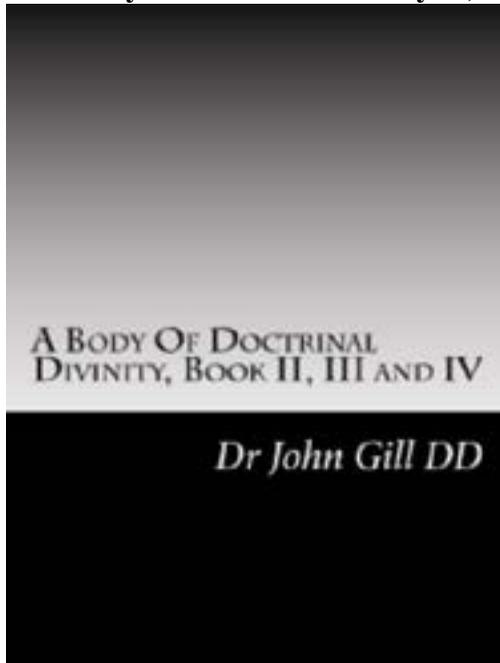
29 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of

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The contents of Book II treats the subject of Of The Acts and Works of God

Chapter I Of The Internal Acts And Works Of God; And Of His Decrees In General

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Chapter III Of The Decree Of Rejection, Of Some Angels, And Of Some Men.

Chapter IV Of The Eternal Union Of The Elect Of God Unto Him.

Chapter V Of Other Eternal And Immanent Acts In God, Particularly Adoption And Justification.

Chapter VI Of The Everlasting Council Between The Three Divine Persons, Concerning The Salvation Of Men.

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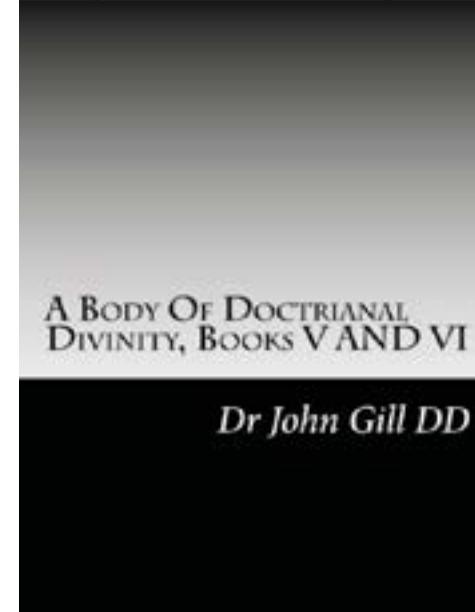
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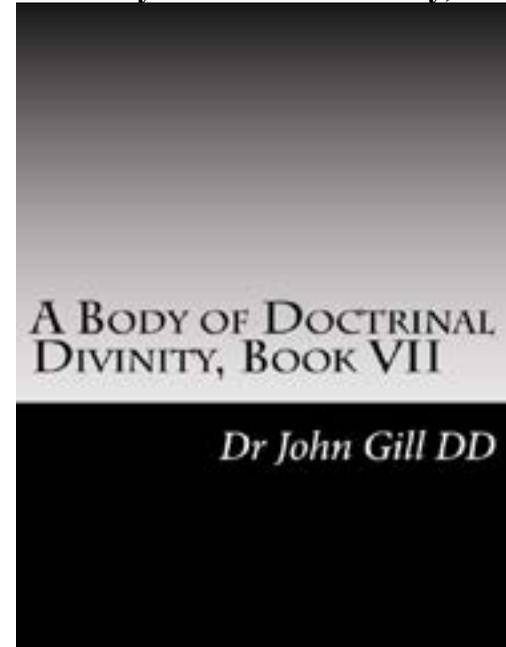
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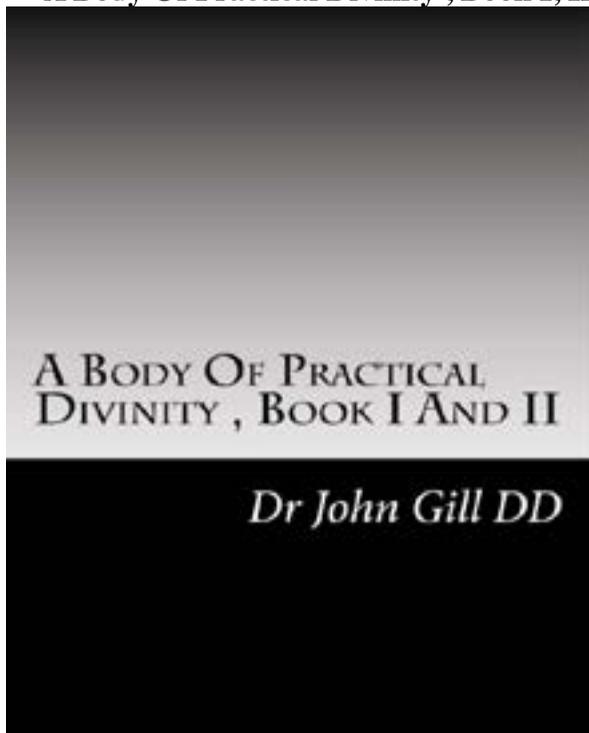
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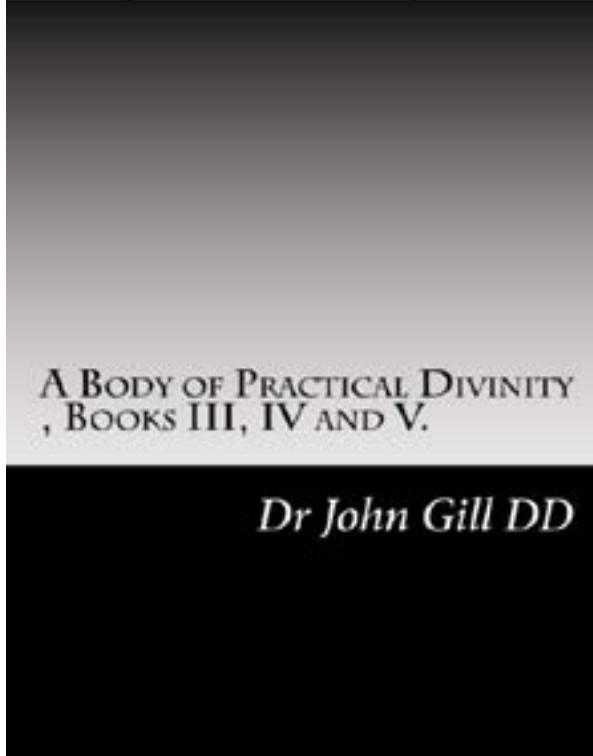
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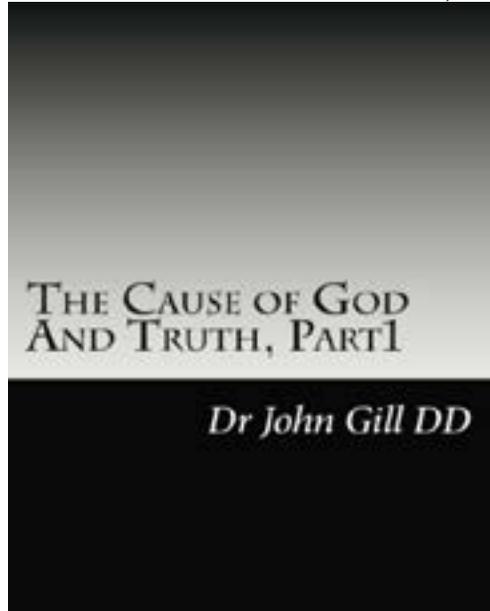
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The following work was undertaken and begun about the year 1733 or 1734, at which time Dr. Whitby's Discourse on the Five Points was reprinting, judged to be a masterpiece on the subject, in the English tongue, and accounted an unanswerable one ; and 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.

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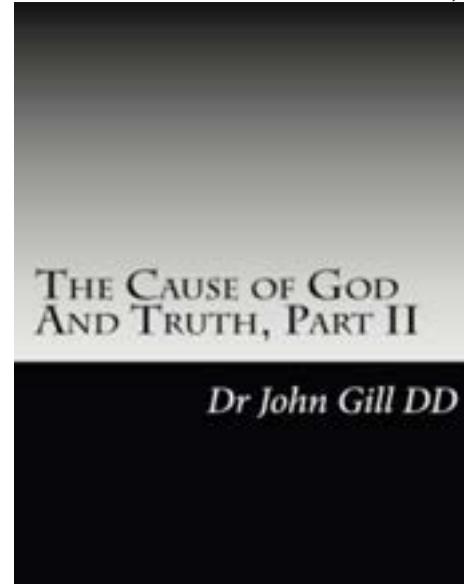
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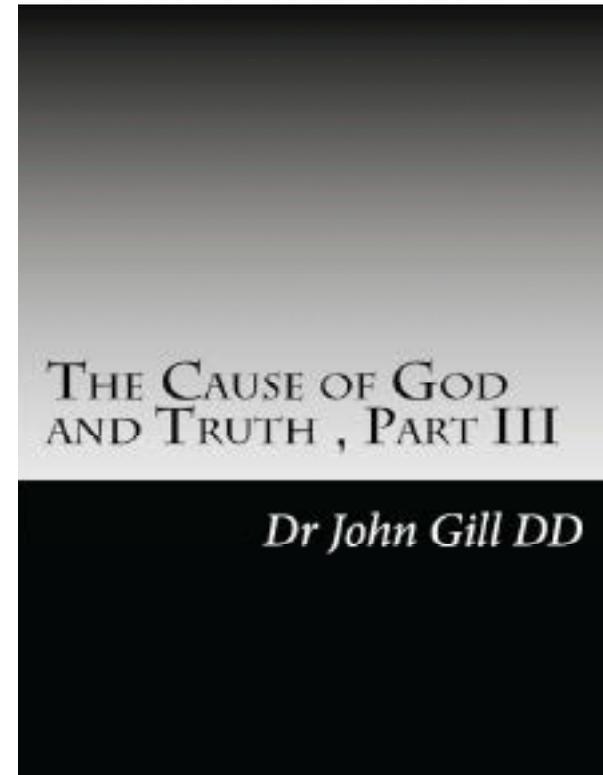
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 Jeremiah 32:40.
 John 14:16.
 John 10:28.
 1 Corinthians 1:8, 9.

The Cause of God and Truth Part III



The Doctrines of Grace

Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Authored by David Clarke
 CetEd

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BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

This book contains John Gill's answers to Dr Whitby objections to The Doctrines of Grace under the following heads.

Chapter 1
 OF REPROBATION
 Proverbs 16:4.
 John 12:39, 40.
 1 Peter 2:8. 10
 Jude 1:4. 1
 Revelation 13:8. 1
 Chapter 2
 OF ELECTION
 1 Peter 2:9. 16
 Romans 9:10-13.
 Colossians 3:12.
 Ephesians 1:4.
 Romans 8:28, 29.
 John 6:37.
 Acts 8:48.
 Romans 8:29, 30.
 2 Timothy 2:19.
 Romans 5:19.
 Chapter 3
 OF REDEMPTION
 Matthew 20:28.
 John 10:15.
 John 17:9.
 Romans 8:34.
 Romans 8:32.
 Romans 5:10.
 John 15:13.
 Chapter 4
 OF EFFICACIOUS GRACE
 Ephesians 1:19, 20.
 1 Corinthians 5:17.
 John 3:5.
 Ephesians 2:1.

1 Corinthians 2:14.
 2 Corinthians 3:5.
 John 15:5.
 John 6:44.
 Acts 11:18.
 Acts 16:14.
 Jeremiah 31:18.
 Jeremiah 31:33.
 Ezekiel 11:36:26.
 Philippians 2:13.
 1 Corinthians 4:7.
 Ephesians 2:8, 9.
 Chapter 5
 OF THE CORRUPTION OF HUMAN NATURE
 John 14:4
 Psalm 51:5.
 Genesis 6:5.
 John 3:6.
 Romans 7:18, 19.
 Romans 8:7, 8.
 Chapter 6
 OF PERSEVERANCE
 John 13:1.
 John 17:12.
 Romans 11:29.
 Matthew 24:24.
 John 6:39, 40.
 Romans 11:2.
 Romans 8:38, 39.
 Ephesians 1:13, 14.
 1 Peter 1:5.
 1 John 2:19.
 1 John 3:9. 87
 Isaiah 54:10.

Isaiah 59:21.

Hosea 2:19, 20.

Jeremiah 32:40.

John 14:16.

John 10:28.

1 Corinthians 1:8, 9.

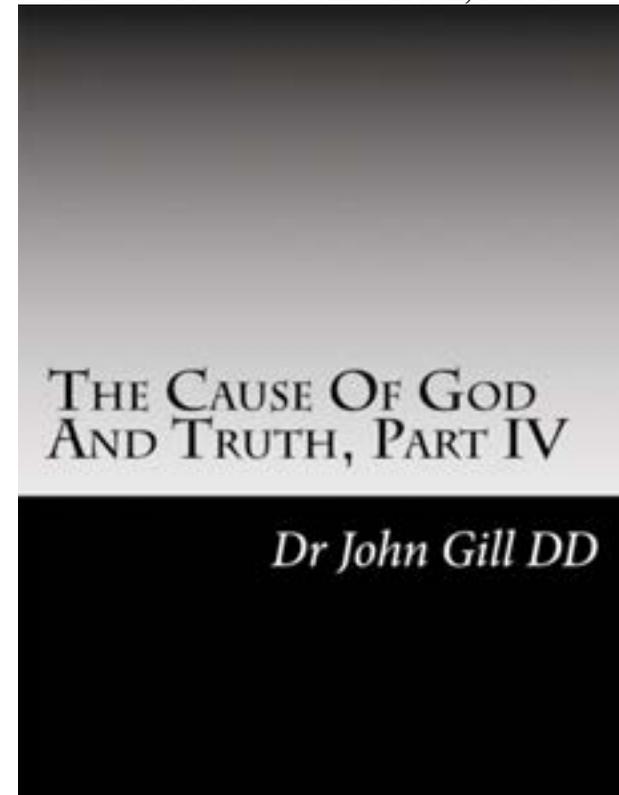
The following work was undertaken and begun about the year 1733 or 1734, at which time Dr. Whitby's Discourse on the Five Points was reprinting, judged to be a masterpiece on the subject, in the English tongue, and accounted an unanswerable one ; and it was almost in the mouth of every one, as an objection to the Calvinists, Why do not ye answer Dr. Whitby ? Induced hereby, I determined to give it another reading, and found myself inclined to answer it, and thought this was a very proper and seasonable time to engage in such a work.

In the year 1735, the First Part of this work was published, in which are considered the several passages of Scripture made use of by Dr. Whitby and others in favour of the Universal Scheme, and against the Calvinistical Scheme, in which their arguments and objections are answered, and the several passages set in a just and proper light. These, and what are contained in the following Part in favour of the Particular Scheme, are extracted from Sermons delivered in a Wednesday evening's lecture.

The Second Part was published in the year 1736, in which the several passages of Scripture in favour of special and distinguishing grace, and the arguments from them, are vindicated from the exceptions of the Arminians, and particularly from Dr. Whitby, and a reply made to answers and objections to them.

The Third Part was published in 1737.

The Cause Of God And Truth, Part IV



Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Created by David Clarke CertEd

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BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

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The Third Part was published in 1737, and is a confutation of the arguments from reason used by the Arminians, and particularly by Dr. Whitby, against the above doctrines ; and a vindication of such as proceed on rational accounts in favour of them, in which it appears that they are no more disagreeable to right reason than to divine revelation ; to the latter of which the greatest deference should be paid, though the Rationalists of our age too much neglect it, and have almost quitted it ; but to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them.

In this part of the work is considered the agreement of the sentiments of Mr. Hobbes and the Stoic philosophers with those of the Calvinists, in which the difference between them is observed, and the calumny removed ; to which is added, a Defence of the Objections to the Universal Scheme, taken from the prescience and the providence of God, and the case of the Heathens.

The Fourth Part was published in 1738, in which the sense

of the ancient writers of the Christian Church, before the times of Austin, is given ; the importance and consequence of which is shown, and that the Arminians have very little reason to triumph on that account.

This work was published at a time when the nation was greatly alarmed with the growth of Popery, and several learned gentlemen were employed in preaching against some particular points of it ; but the author of this work was of opinion, that the increase of Popery was greatly owing to the Pelagianism, Arminianism, and other supposed rational schemes men run into, contrary to divine revelation, This was the sense of our fathers in the last century, and therefore joined these and Popery together in their religious grievances they were desirous of having redressed ; and indeed, instead of lopping off the branches of Popery, the axe should be laid to the root of the tree, Arminianism and Pelagianism, the very life and soul of Popery.

This is Part 4 of 4 parts, and a new edition, with some alterations and improvements, is now published by request.

This work contains:

Chapter 1 Of Predestination

Chapter 2 Of Redemption

Chapter 3 Or Original Sin

Chapter 4 Of Efficacious Grace

Chapter 5 Of Perseverance

Chapter 6 Of The Heathens

A Vindication of The Cause of God and Truth

This work contains:

Chapter 1 Of Predestination

Chapter 2 Of Redemption

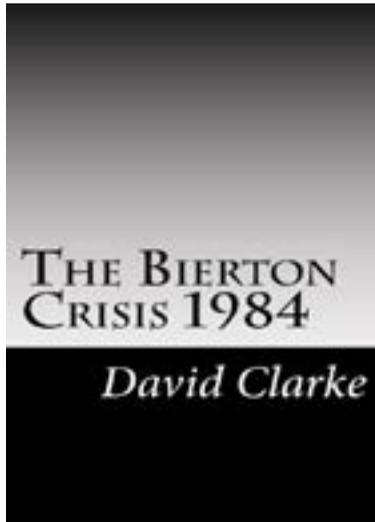
Chapter 3 Or Original Sin

Chapter 4 Of Efficacious Grace

Chapter 5 Of Perseverance

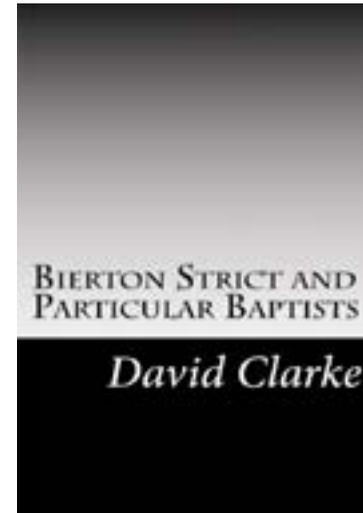
Chapter 6 Of The Heathens

The Bierton Crisis 1984



The following pages contain a collection of recorded events, which seek to explain the reason for my secession from the Bierton Strict and Particular Baptist Church. Bierton is a village near Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire. The Bierton Church was a society, in law, called Strict and Particular Baptists, formed in 1831 and was presided by the son of John Warburton of Trowbridge, Wiltshire. It and became a Gospel Standard listed church in 1983. My succession from this church was not a separation from any other Strict Baptist church just the Bierton Church. I was not the subject of church discipline but rather I withdrew from the communion as a matter of conscience. And according to our church rules practice I am still a member. Conscience Free My voluntary leaving of this society leaves me free in conscience to relate my experiences, being bound only by the Law of Christ and not the rules of that society. The date of my secession was the 26th of June 1984. This is written believing this may help any persons finding themselves in similar situations and to point out the ignorance of some religious people.

Bierton Strict and Particular Baptists



My Testimony Being Set for a defence and confirmation of the Gospel Kindle Edition

by David Clarke (Author)

There are three separate accounts in the New Testament of a man who had been possessed with devils. He had been living among the tombs and the people had attempted to bind him with chains and fetters but he broke them so he would not be bound. People were afraid of him and avoided him. He had no house and wore no cloths and the devil drove him often into the wilderness.

And Jesus had just demonstrated his authority over the wind and the tempest to his disciples and now had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man and gave leave for the legion of devils to go into the swine and as a result the man was found at the feet of Jesus clothed in his right mind. The man wanted to be with Jesus and go with him, but Jesus said no but rather got to his own city and tell of all that the Lord had done for him. And straight way he went and published throughout the whole city of all that Jesus had done for him.

This book is a record of the personal testimony of the author in which he tells of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for him it was

first published on 11th February 2001 under the title *Converted on LSD Trip*. It is not written to glorify his past life but written as a testimony to what the Lord has done for him, despite his past sinful and criminal life. In this he tells of his early life before his sudden conversion from crime to Christ, him learning the doctrines of the grace of God and him joining the Bierton Strict and Particular Baptists church, in 1976. He tells of his succession from the church over matters of conscience, in 1984. These matters are told in detail, in his book *The Bierton Crisis 1984*

Even the apostle Paul told of 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 touting 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 Road 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 that Lord Jesus has done for him and to point out those important truths of the gospel of Christ.