

J.C. Philpot

Sermons

Volume 9

August 1850 to August 1856

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.

142 Four Links in the Chain of Grace

11

August 1, 1850

“These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.”

Psalm 106:27, 28, 29, 30

143 The Battle is the Lord’s

28

July 29, 1851

“O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee.”

2 Chronicles 20:12

144 The Whole Armour Of God

45

August 3, 1851

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

Ephesians 6:13

145 The Prayer Of Solomon

62

August 3, 1851

“That thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldst put thy name there.”

2 Chron. 6:20

6	Contents	
146	The River Of Life And The Trees On Its Banks	77
	August 12, 1851	
	<i>“And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.”</i>	
	<i>Ezekiel 47:12</i>	
147	Idolatry	95
	April 1852	
	<i>“For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God: and to whit for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead. even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”</i>	
	<i>1 Thess. 1:9, 10</i>	
148	The Marks Of Grace	111
	April 20th, 1852	
	<i>“For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come”</i>	
	<i>1 Thess. 1:9,10</i>	
149	Zion’s Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders	127
	August 1, 1852	
	<i>“O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted,</i>	

	Contents	7
	<i>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.”</i>	
	<i>Isaiah 54:11, 12</i>	
150	Israel Blest And Kept	142
	August 17th, 1852	
	<i>“The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”</i>	
	<i>Num. 6:24-26</i>	
151	The Weak Hands Strengthened And The Feeble	
	Knees Confirmed	159
	July 24, 1853	
	<i>“Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you.”</i>	
	<i>Isaiah 35:3, 4</i>	
152	Shaking Of Things Made, And Firmness Of	
	Things Given	176
	July 24, 1853	
	<i>“And this word. Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with</i>	

Hebrews 12:27, 28

153 The Way-Worn Pilgrim's Hiding Place 190

July 31, 1853

"And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken."

Isaiah 32:2, 3

154 Suffering And Its Benefits 207

August 1, 1853

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."

1 Peter 5:10

155 Zion's Wayfarers And Their Earnest Resolve 222

March 21st, 1854

"They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."

Jeremiah 50:5

156 Israel's Sun And Shield 237

July 9th, 1854

"For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that

Psalms 84:11, 12

157 The Power of the Gospel 254

October 29, 1854

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance."

1 Thessalonians 1:5

158 A Spiritual Death And A Hidden Life 269

July 20th, 1856

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."

Col. 3:2-4

158 The Riches Of God's Mercy 285

July 27th, 1856,

"And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 2:3-6

159 Precious Faith, With Its Benefits And Blessings 301

August 10th, 1856

"Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through

10 Four Links in the Chain of Grace
the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.

2 Peter 1:1, 2

Other Publications

A Body Of Doctrinal Divinity Book 1	318
A Body of Doctrinal Divinity II, III, IV	320
A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, V, VI	323
A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, Book VII	325
A Body Of Practical Divinity , Book I, II	326
A Body of Practical Divinity , III, IV, V	328
The Cause of God And Truth, Part 1	330
The Cause of God And Truth, Part II	333
The Cause of God and Truth Part III	337
The Cause Of God And Truth, Part IV	341
The Bierton Crisis 1984	344
Bierton Strict and Particular Baptists	345

Four Links in the Chain of Grace 11
142 Four Links in the Chain of Grace

Preached at Trinity Chapel, Trinity St., Southwark, on Thursday Evening,

August 1, 1850

“These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.”

Psalm 106:27, 28, 29, 30

Jehovah is the God of nature, the God of providence, and the God of grace. In these three distinct departments, as regards his general government, there exists a striking analogy. The analogy is this: the existence and intermixture of good and evil in each, with general good as the result of the whole. Let me explain my meaning a little in detail.

In nature we see darkness and light, winter and summer, seasons barren and fruitful, creatures deformed and beautiful, animals noxious and useful; and yet good educed and evolved out of creation as it at present stands. Night and day, winter and summer, sun and storm, all work together to produce as the result a general benefit to the inhabitants of the earth.

In providence, we see sickness, health; adversity, prosperity; poverty, wealth, continually intermixed, and often succeeding each other; and yet, out of this strange intermixture good evolved to the objects of God’s mercy.

And when we come to the department of grace, we view the same analogy. We see sorrow, joy; darkness, light; death, life; conviction, consolation; hidings of God’s face, manifestations of mercy; despondency, hope, unbelief, faith; enmity, love—good and evil in the department of grace, as well as that of nature and of

12 Four Links in the Chain of Grace
providence; and yet, all in a mysterious manner working together for good to those who love God.

Living, as we do, in a fallen world, there exists a necessity that there should be this good and evil. If there were no evil, it would not be a fallen world; if there were no good, God would cease to be the governor of it. But if evil so prevailed as to overcome good, God would be thrust out of his own sovereignty, and Satan would successfully usurp his throne.

These remarks may perhaps throw some little light upon the passage before us, inasmuch as the words taken literally seem rather to refer to the works of creation and providence than to the work of grace. For the Psalm dwells much upon the glory of God in creation; and immediately preceding the words of our text, speaks of “the great and wide sea wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships; there is that leviathan whom thou hast made to play therein.” Then, turning to the great Creator and Preserver of all, the Psalmist bursts forth in the words of our text, extolling his providence, “These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season,” &c.

But, viewing the analogy which I have been endeavouring to shew, may we not apply these words in a spiritual, experimental sense to the work of grace upon the soul? I think, if the Lord enable me to open up the words as I see them, we shall find that there is in them a sweet applicability, not only to the departments of creation and providence, but also in a special manner to the department of grace.

We may observe in the words before us four distinct features, corresponding with the four verses of which the text consists; and those I shall briefly name.

I. Waiting. II. Giving. III. Withdrawing. IV. Renewing.

I.—Waiting. “These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.” It is true, literally, that all the created beings of God’s hand wait upon him. Upon him they are

Four Links in the Chain of Grace 13
dependent for life and breath, and all things. But do they wait upon him in a way of intellect or consciousness? Is not their waiting a mute waiting? Must we not, then, rather adapt the words to the state, posture, and experience of the children of God? “These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.” How true of, how applicable unto, the experience of God’s family! For you will see, if the Lord enable me to draw out the words of our text, a chain running through the whole. You will find the work traced out from the beginning, and carried on through its successive changes, so as to embrace and comprise the whole work of grace upon a saved sinner’s conscience.

“These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.” Until the Lord is pleased to begin a work of grace upon the soul, we know nothing of what spiritual “meat” is. Having no spiritual appetite, we cannot long after spiritual food. The things of time and sense, the charms of sin, the occupations of life—these are the food of our natural mind. We have no sight to see, nor taste to relish the food that God has in reserve for his hungry and thirsty people. The Lord, therefore, in the opening up of his ministry laid this down as one of the first marks of spiritual life; “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness;” implying that to hunger and thirst after righteousness is one of the first things that God bestows upon the soul. Now until this spiritual appetite is given, till the eyes are opened to see, till the heart is divinely wrought upon to feel, we have no spiritual hungering and thirsting after the provisions of God’s house. But it is with the quickened soul as with the awakened and returning prodigal; “a famine arose in that land, and he began to be in want;” and when the famine came, and he began to be in want, “he would fain have filled his belly with the husks which the swine ate.” Yet he could not do so; a new appetite was given him; he hungered after solid food; and he remembered there was “bread in his father’s house and to spare,” whilst he was “perishing with hunger.” Thus one of the first marks and evidences of spiritual life, one of the first

effects of a divine work upon the soul is to hunger after heavenly food. This food is Christ, for he is “the bread of life;” and the soul really convinced of sin, stripped of all righteousness, brought down into the dust, and made to long, hunger, and thirst after the manifestations of Jesus, is waiting upon God for “meat” which he alone can give. This the text expresses, pointing out thereby the first work of grace upon the soul: “These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.”

But God has appointed to give this “meat” at a due season; that season cannot be hurried nor delayed; no human power can bring it forward, and no human power can keep it back. Knowing this, and not being able to bring food into his own mouth, to make Christ precious to his own soul, or feed upon the manna till God brings it into his heart, a convinced sinner is one that waits upon God. “These wait all upon thee.” And they wait upon him, knowing that he is able to give them that “meat” which their souls hunger after. They wait in secret prayer; they wait with many a sigh and cry at the footstool of mercy. They wait with many longings, breathings, and supplications; and they wait until often their eyes seem to fail with weariness. The Lord has declared these “blessed;” but the blessing seems so long before it reaches them, that despondency will often work in their minds whether the blessing will ever come to their souls. But knowing that nothing short of the blessing can really satisfy or save, that God must be the sole giver of it, and being encouraged by the promises, and by the blessed Spirit in their heart as “the Spirit of grace and supplications,” to pour out their soul before God, they are brought to wait, to look, long, beg, and supplicate till the Lord graciously appear.

Now these early dawns of grace upon the soul; these waitings upon God for him to be gracious; these hungerings, thirstings, pantings, and desires, seem, to my mind, set forth in the first words of our text: “These all wait upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.”

And in what a gracious posture does it represent the children

of God—waiting upon him! If they wait upon him, they must have faith; because without faith they cannot believe he is a God able to bestow this food upon them. If they wait, they must have perseverance; for they have to endure repeated and heart-oppressing disappointments. If they wait, they must have patience; for patience in this, as in other respects, must have its perfect work. If they wait, they must have the spirit of prayer; for only by a spirit of prayer are they enabled to wait. If they wait, they must have some hope that in due season God will confer the very blessing upon them; though “hope deferred maketh the heart sick.” They must also have a measure of love for the food they are longing after, or else they would not desire that God Himself would put that food into their mouth. And thus, though not themselves able to trace out the work of grace in a clear, definite manner, yet we see—as in the case of an infant, all the members of a man—so in these infants, these babes of grace, all the members of the new man, which are afterwards more completely developed.

II.—I pass on to our second point, which is Giving: “That thou givest them they gather. Then openest thine hand, they are filled with good.” This is true in providence. The beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, the fishes of the sea, all have food appointed for them. None die of hunger; and what God gives them, in that sense they gather. But how much more true is this of the spiritual and experimental food given to and gathered by a child of God?

Two things, I think, may be seen as connected with this giving: first, the first droppings of mercy, favour, and love upon them: “That thou givest them they gather.” And secondly, the more open hand of God, when the blessing comes into their soul in a fuller, more blessed, and wider sense: “Thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good.”

1. “That thou givest them they gather.” There is some allusion perhaps to the manna in the wilderness as descriptive of the way in which he drops tokens, favours, smiles, glances, and glimpses on his waiting people. “That thou givest they gather.” Nothing

else: they cannot take any consolation from man; they cannot feed upon anything that the creature produces: their long famine has completely famished them out of house and home. Gifts, abilities, creature righteousness and native strength, human wisdom, fleshly holiness, these are the husks which they cannot feed upon. Christ alone in his sweet manifestations, in his dying love, in his beauty, and blessedness, in his rich suitability, is the food God has provided for them; and as they wait upon God, from time to time he lets fall out of his eternal bounty crumbs and drops, sips and tastes of the mercy that he has stored up in Jesus. Thus sometimes a sweet promise comes into their heart; sometimes their case is described in a sermon; sometimes at the throne of grace they find liberty and unexpected access; the word of God is opened up in some special manner; or some melting feelings are produced in their soul, perhaps on a sudden, by a discovery of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now this God “gives.” His truth falls; a word drops; a blessing comes with it; there is a sweetness in it to their taste; a reality, a light, a life, a power, a blessedness, a heart-melting, soul-softening suitability accompany God’s truth. This they “gather” reverentially, believingly, humbly, affectionately, hopefully, lovingly; they store it up in their heart; they ponder over it; they feel a blessedness in it; they take it home with them; it goes to sleep with them; it rises in the morning with them; it takes them through the day; they have got, felt, enjoyed something; some liberty, some love, some assurance, some manifestation, some testimony, something which has come from God into their souls, something really felt as a blessing in their hearts. This God has given perhaps when they least expected it: when almost worn out with waiting, despairing and fearing the blessing would never come; but it comes unexpectedly, overwhelmingly; and being given, they “gather” it gratefully and happily, and their hearts are softened, blessed, and melted by the goodness and felt mercy of God to them.

2. But this is not all. “Thou openest thine hand.” What the Lord has yet given (if I may use the figure) he gives but with his fingers;

he drops a little here and there; but the great blessing is in his hand, lodged and locked up there; and they unable to obtain it. Yet they try hard; they say, ‘I am not satisfied; these sips, these tastes, drops, glimpses, glances, breakings in, meltings down, are not sufficient.’ ‘O,’ they say, ‘this is not a complete deliverance; this does not break off all my legal chains; this does not fully assure me that I am one of the Lord’s people; it is so soon gone off; the feeling did not last; it was too transient; I want something greater, more powerful, more abiding, more heart-assuring, something of which I can say more certainly, This is indeed of God.’

“Thou openest thine hand.” And when at last the Lord opens his hand, gives largely out of it, and blesses the soul fully, completely, and perfectly, he pours out of his hand all that is contained there, which is, Christ in his blessedness, in his fulness, blood, righteousness, and love. When God opens his hand, and gives thus fully, liberally, largely, and blessedly, then they are “filled with good;” they seem to want no more; the Lord has filled and blest their souls; they are overwhelmed with a sense of God’s goodness; they feel they have all they want; enjoy, if possible as much as they can enjoy; and their souls are exceedingly happy and blessed in the Lord.

III.—But is this to last? Are they to swim down this sea of prosperity? Does the Lord mean this to be their happy lot unto the end? Now comes the change. I observed in my outset that in the ways of grace, as well as in nature and of providence, there were changes. Good and evil, light and darkness, life and death, and these intermixed and blended. So there is a withdrawing, our third point. “Thou hidest thy face.” The Lord withdraws himself; he suspends his favours; he does not manifest himself as in times past; he withholds the light of his countenance. And what is the consequence? “They are troubled.” The soul has lost its God, lost its Christ, lost its happiness and blessedness; therefore no wonder that it is troubled. If God hide his face, a soul must needs be troubled that knows his presence and smiles.

1. But what makes God hide his face? He does not always give us the reason of these matters; but, generally speaking, it is the intervention of some sin twixt God and us. I do not mean open sin. God forbid; but some backsliding of heart, some idol set up in the chambers of imagery, some departing from the fountain of living waters to hew out the broken cisterns that hold no water. At any rate, whether it arise from this or not, whether it be the exercise of pure sovereignty on the part of God, or traceable to anything provoking in us—whatever be the cause, the change does come; he does hide his face. And when God hides his face, the soul is troubled, because it has lost everything that makes life happy and blessed; it has lost everything that really made life worth living for, and death worth dying for.

It is a good thing that the soul is “troubled;” it shews the reality of the work of grace upon the heart, that the hidings of God’s face, and the withdrawals of his favour, do give trouble. It shows a tenderness of conscience, a singleness of eye to God’s glory, and that the visitations of God’s favour make up the soul’s only happiness. One cannot understand a man’s religion who feels no trouble when God hides his face, when he has no access to his throne. If he can be as happy without God as with him, as happy in God’s absence as in his presence, in darkness as in light, it does not seem as if he knew much of a present God—a God of light, and liberty, and love—as though he knew much of communion with God, access unto him, intercourse with him, making him his all in all. Where money is a man’s god, he does not part with that so readily. Disappointments in worldly things are not taken so coolly. If a clerk go to a merchant or stockbroker, and tell him of a heavy loss, he does not take it as a matter of indifference, as a professor would take the loss of God. “Where the treasure is, the heart must be.” If the soul is really healthy to God, thirsting after him, or has ever enjoyed him, it must needs feel the withdrawing of his presence, the hiding of his countenance. Thus, when the Lord hides his face, they are “troubled.”

2. But there is another expression, which at first sight seems scarcely applicable to the work of grace; and yet I do not see how we can carry out the chain without taking this too into consideration. And I can myself, I think, see a light in it in which the dealings of God seem reflected. “Thou takest away their breath; they die, and return to their dust.” Is not God our life? Is he not the author of our spiritual breath, as well as of our natural breath? But when he takes away the spirit of prayer, when he removes the enjoyment of his presence in the heart, when he takes away himself who is the breath of our very life, then we die; the soul sinks in its own feelings, into sensible death; it dies as to any enjoyment of God’s presence, as to any feeling realization of his favour. Compared with its former lively feeling, its feelings are now those of death. “Free among the dead,” the Psalmist says, “like the slain that lie in the grave.” If God’s presence be life, his absence is death. If the enjoyment of God’s favour be the breath of the soul, the denial of God’s favour is the death of the soul. If he take away our breath, in taking away himself—if he take away our life, in taking away his presence—if he take away our enjoyment, in taking away the source of the enjoyment, we die. And, in a state of death, we are no longer living and lively as before. There is not that going out of living desires from the soul; there is not that living communion with God; there is not that breathing in his presence; there is not that moving in the enjoyment of his mercy. “We die” in that sense, and “return unto our dust.” This is true of man, naturally and spiritually, returning in death to his dusty nature, his corruptible material. When the soul then dies down, there is an opening up of its corruptions before unknown, of its dusty nature before unfelt; of the dryness, hardness, barrenness, and wilderness state of the human heart before unseen. This is a returning to its dust, a falling back upon nature, a sinking into the dust of death; “a putting our mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope;” an acquaintance with our base original; a sight and sense that if there be any good, it is wrought by God in the soul; if there be anything heavenly, it

must come direct from heaven. Thus, in grace as in nature, when God withdraws our breath, “we die, and return unto our dust;” and there we lie as unable to revive and renew our own souls as we were unable in the first instance to quicken or regenerate them.

But what a close and thorough dependence upon God does the text bring out! How it casts the creature into that position where God is everything! How it makes the soul hang upon God as the needle hangs upon the magnet! How every movement of the heart is here referred to God! If it have food, it must be by “waiting” upon God; if it gather food, it is by the “giving” of God; if it be filled with food, it is by the “opening of God’s hand.” It is wholly a pensioner upon him! the creature is nothing, and meant to be nothing; it is dependent upon him, in whom it lives, moves, and has its being. So he that gives the breath, takes away the breath; he that grants the life, withdraws the life—not fully, not finally, but in a spiritual, experimental sense, in the feelings of the soul, in the exercises of the mind, in the conclusions we draw, in the workings of our heart. We die not actually (for God is unchanging and unchangeable; his love fails not, and the work of grace upon the soul fails not; the ebbings and flowings are in us, not in him); but as regards our feelings, and the experience of the saints, there is that death in the soul, that sinking into the dust of carnality and corruption as if all grace had perished within. This made Heman feelingly cry, “Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction?”

Thus, though this view may appear at first sight rather a wresting of the passage, as though the taking away of the breath could only refer to the withdrawal of the natural breath, and the dying spoken of could only be the death of the body; yet, when you view the whole in a spiritual sense, when you see in it the links of one extended chain, you will observe (I can; and if I do not convey the meaning of it, the failure is in me) how they are connected. But if we do not apply these words in an experimental

manner to the withdrawing of life and feeling, and of that breath of God whereby the soul living under the power of the Spirit lives upon him, this passage seems to come into the text in a manner utterly isolated from the rest, and to have no reference to the work of God upon the soul.

IV.—We pass, then, to our fourth point, which is, the Renewing: “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth.” This does not bear a literal meaning. Take these words as applicable to God’s dealings in nature, can you make them tally with the preceding verse? “Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created.” Have you seen that in creation? When you have lost a son, a daughter, a wife, a husband; when God has taken away their breath, and they have died, and returned to their dust, have you seen God send forth his spirit and recreate them? No: you commit their mortal remains to the earth in the hope one day of a better resurrection. But, taking the passage spiritually, viewing the whole in an experimental light as descriptive of the work of grace upon the soul, as one extended chain, we then see the revival of the soul out of that state of death into which it has fallen.

Bear with me a few moments while I trace out these links; it is the harmony of the links that makes the beauty of the chain. First, the soul is wrought upon by the Spirit of God, and “waits” upon him. Next, there is “the giving of food” to that waiting soul; and the blessed feelings that spring up in the heart when God “opens his hand.” The third link in our chain is God’s hiding his face, “withdrawing” his presence, removing his favour, taking away the sense of his love, with its effect upon the soul, which is to make it die away, to feel all life and happiness gone, and return to the dust of corruption in which to lie, putting its mouth there, and feeling little else but the workings of an earthly, dusty nature. But we cannot leave the soul there; therefore comes in the fourth link, which completes the chain, “the revival” of that soul from which the breath has thus been withdrawn. In experience, it is one consistent

chain: we see the separate links. Viewed naturally, the chain is broken: viewed providentially, there is at present little connection. But view it spiritually, as descriptive of the work of grace upon the soul, we then see the four beautiful links—the waiting, the giving, the withdrawing, the renewing—these all forming one consistent chain. I am compelled, therefore, by the necessity of the case, as well as by the beauty I see in the passage, by the blessedness of it, and the striking description it gives of the work of grace upon the soul, to view it in this experimental light, though not utterly rejecting all other.

1. “Thou sendest forth thy spirit.” The word translated “spirit” and “breath” is the same. It was the withdrawal of the “spirit” or of the “breath,” that caused the soul to sink into death and dust. The soul in itself had no strength or power to rekindle the flame; it could only die when God withdrew his “spirit;” it could only return to its dust when the creating hand ceased to maintain its life. Inability and helplessness are stamped upon the creature; but they are only learnt in experience, and they never are effectually learned until we know both sides of the question. It is having gathered what God has given; having received what he has bestowed; having had access unto God, that makes the soul feel the contrary. It is enjoying the pure breath of God that makes it feel the withdrawing of that breath; it is the actings of life that make it feel the sinkings of death; it is the heavenly-mindedness, the sweet spirituality, the holy affections, the tender breathings, that live in the soul when God is breathing into it his favour and mercy, that make it feel sensibly the change when he withdraws his breath, and it dies at his feet, when all its comeliness is turned into corruption, and it drops into its native dust.

But the Lord does not leave the soul there. He withdraws his breath that it may learn it lives in him, and lives to him. But he “sends forth his spirit,” and breathes once more into the heart. It comes into the soul, generally speaking, first as “the Spirit of grace and supplications.” This, I think, is sweetly pointed out in

the Pilgrim’s Progress. Christian and Hopeful are in the castle of Giant Despair; but before they got hold of the key of promise, they continued in prayer and supplication the greater part of the night. Here was the first inspiration, as it were, of the breath of God. Where the breath of praise was taken away, the breath of prayer was much taken away with it. The breath of faith, the breath of hope, the breath of love, the breath of desire, of enjoyment, and of feeling—all these were taken away when God withdrew his breath; and deadness, coldness, barrenness, and carnality took their place. Now the Lord has to revive this work; and as the withdrawing of his breath made the soul die in a spiritual sense, it is the sending forth into it of that spirit again which alone can make it revive.

“Thou sendest forth thy spirit.” How free, and yet how sovereign! Until the “Spirit” comes, it is powerless; it lies in its dust, unable to live, to act, to feel. But, as a free sovereign act of grace, God “sends forth his spirit.” And what follows? “They are renewed.” There is a renewal of everything in the soul; there is a blessed revival of the life, power, grace, and favour of God in the heart; and this by his “Spirit.” Not by their own works, not by creature doings, duties, or merits, fastings, tears, or prayers, nor anything that the creature can do or has done, but as a free sovereign act of God—as free and as sovereign an act as when he called the world into being, or as when the Spirit brooded upon the face of the waters in original creation—as free and sovereign as the first work of grace upon the soul—as all the acts of God are in nature or grace.

“Thou sendest forth thy spirit.” Where does the creature here put in his finger? Nature is silent here. The Spirit of God has put nature into its true place. “Thou sendest forth thy spirit” as a free sovereign act; and when the spirit comes into the soul, then they are “created,” or “recreated.” Indeed it seems to be altogether a creation; for the work of God upon the soul is a creation; “If any man be in Christ he is a new creature,” or ‘creation.’ And after a long death in the soul, when the Lord “sends forth his spirit,” is it

not a creation? a work so wholly of God, a work so wrought by his own hand, a work so thoroughly distinct from that of the creature, that it is felt and known to be a creation? But how at times the soul is almost hopeless that this will ever take place! Say that you, in times past, have enjoyed somewhat or much of the presence of God; but you have lost that presence; your soul does not now enjoy what it once enjoyed; you are often dark, very dark—dead, very dead—barren, very barren; and your religion as to life, feeling, power, seems much to have sunk away. Yet, at times, there is a sighing and a murmuring in your soul that things should be so. You want God again to appear; you cannot rest in this spot; you cannot be satisfied to be as you are; and though shut up in much darkness, unbelief, and deadness, yet every now and then there is a breaking forth, a sigh, or a cry, ‘Lord, appear for me; revive my soul, and bring me out of this state; do not let me be what I am, and where I am; bring me into some clearer, sweeter, nearer access, into some closer communion with thyself; and let me not be such a cumberer of the ground, such a mass of sin and death before thee!’ Have you not some such breathing of soul? Now the Lord “sends forth his spirit,” and effects this creation; a “returning,” as Job speaks of it, “to the days of their youth,” a revival of the old flame, a renewing (as we read, “thou renewest the face of the earth”) of the soul. It has been winter; frost has chilled it; snow has covered it; all vegetation has been frozen up; dark gloomy days above, and icy scenes below. But the Lord “sends forth his spirit, and they are created.” Every grace rises up under his creating hand; and “he renews the face of the earth.” There is a renewal of the soul, a revival of former feelings, a bringing back of things long forgotten, a restoration, a resurrection, a recreation of every blessed feeling of the heart.

And this, perhaps, is delayed till the close of life. The experience of many of God’s people seem to be this. Called in early days, they waited under conviction till the Lord appeared; the Lord, then appearing, blessed their soul, and gave them striking testimonies, in which they walked, sang his praises, and spake to the glory of his

name. But as they grew up into middle life, worldly cares, family anxieties, business, and many other things seem to bring a damp upon their souls; God took away their “breath;” he suspended the operations of the Spirit; they were not favoured as in times past with the sweet manifestations of his mercy, goodness, and love. And they died. Their heavenly life which they formerly enjoyed—the praises and thanksgivings—with all their lively, vigorous, active feelings seemed to die down to a stump and wither away in the soul, nipped by the frost, cut off like an herbaceous plant, with scarcely anything but the root left, and that covered perhaps by snow and ice. Thus they were little comfort to themselves, little honour to the church to which they belonged, and though generally believed to be good people, and in time past to have had an experience, yet, as far as any outward usefulness or inward comfort was concerned, there was little of one or the other. Are there not many like this—members of churches, advanced in life perhaps, or in middle age? But at the close of life, perhaps, they may have an affliction which brings them to a death-bed; in mercy God sends forth his spirit; then they are “created;” all their past coldness and deadness, all their carnality and barrenness are removed; they become to themselves and they become to others new creatures; there seems to be a pouring in of new life; and, like the plants I have been speaking of, they spring up from the old root with increased strength and beauty. Thus, the Lord “sends forth spirit;” they are created; he renews the face of the earth; he blesses their soul; they leave a sweet witness behind, and their happy spirits leave their poor crumbling tabernacles of clay for mansions of eternal joy.

Thus, our text, if I have given it a right interpretation, may embrace in its folds many, if not most of God’s living family, taking them from the very beginning of the work of grace upon their hearts, and closing them up in the last manifestations of God’s mercy, whereby he lands them safe in a happy eternity. Thus it corresponds in some measure with the “early and the

latter rain”—the “early rain,” which is in the autumn in Eastern countries, corresponding to “that which thou givest then they gather; thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good;” “the latter rain,” in spring, corresponding with “thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth.”

Thus, we find in these four verses four links of a Christian experience. Which link is in our hand? which link in our heart? If you are a child of God you will be found in one of these four verses; and that is the reason why this evening I took so long a text. I would not break the chain; I would not take one link; but I wished to take the whole comprehensive chain that I might wind it around living souls here present, and find some link to hang on each individual neck. Which link hangs upon you?

Let me, just by way of recapitulation, point out the four links. In the first dealings of God upon the soul, there is a “waiting” upon God: “These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.” Do you think that God has made you a waiting soul? Is the work of grace thus far begun as to make you know that Christ alone is the food of the soul? Has it taught and brought you to wait upon God to give you Christ, to manifest him, to bring a sweet sense of his love and blood into your soul? If you have this first link, you will in time have the whole chain; for he that has one link in this divine chain has all.

But there may be those who can go beyond this, who are now “gathering” what God gives. And this is one of the sweetest spots the soul can be in, to be gathering what God gives. O, those early days, that spring-time of the soul, when we are gathering all that God gives, when there is scarcely a sermon in which and out of which we do not gather something! O, blessed days, when we can scarcely open God’s book without gathering manna from it, scarcely go upon our knees without getting some access to God, scarcely speak to a Christian friend without feeling love burning in our bosom. Happy days! “the day of espousals,” the spring of the soul, the time when the Lord is first gracious, gives freely, opens

his hand, and satisfies the soul with his mercy! Perhaps some few here may thus now be favoured. May the Lord keep you, if it be his will, as long as possible in this state! You cannot have a happier; you may have a state more profitable, but not more blessed. May the Lord keep you long there, gathering what he gives; he opening his hand, filling you with goodness, and blessing your soul; and you thanking him for his mercy. This is one of the sweetest spots the soul can be in till it lands in heaven.

But, prepare yourselves for a change. The whole analogy of God is change. We should always like to have it beautiful summer, but winter will come. We should like the day to be always long, and the sun bright; but the short dark days will come, and the sun remain behind the cloud. We should always like prosperity, but we shall have it not. We should prefer an unmingled cup, but it will not be so. God will see good to withdraw his presence, hide his face, and not shine upon your soul as before. Then you will die in your feelings, sink at his feet, and as one dead return to your dust, be a miserable wretch, having nothing but gloomy feelings working in your mind, and little else than the dust of corruption in your heart. There perhaps you may be muddling for years. God in mercy keep you from that.

But, in due time, if the three links are of God, you will have the fourth. God will not leave you there. He will bless your soul again; for his love is from everlasting to everlasting; and he that began the work will carry it on. He will “send forth his spirit,” as an act of his free, sovereign grace, and recreate as it were every sweet feeling, every blessed affection, and every sense of enjoyment. He will banish the dark clouds of winter, thaw the ice and snow that has covered your bosom, make a second spring, and renew the face of your soul, as in nature he renews the face of the earth.

Now, among our Aged Pilgrims, whose cause I am to plead this evening, we may have some of those who have passed through the three successive stages, and are waiting for the fourth, or are now enjoying it. This is often delayed perhaps to the closing scene

of life; but yet it will come at last. What a mercy that God will not leave the work of his hands, will never give up Ephraim, and will never abandon Judah! Whom he loves, he loves unto the end, and saves with an everlasting salvation.

To be enclosed, then, within these links is to be enclosed in the chain of eternal love. To know anything of them is a mercy. If we are God's children, we shall be able to say, 'I have experienced this one; in this spot at least I am.' And if we can say this with a feeling heart, we may believe God will go on to work in us "to will and to do of his good pleasure."

143 The Battle is the Lord's

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, Hampstead Road,
on Tuesday Evening,
July 29, 1851

*"O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might
against this great company that cometh against us; neither
know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee."*

2 Chronicles 20:12

It is one thing to read the Bible as a history, and another to read it as a mystery. The mere narration of facts in the Old Testament is interesting and instructive. How pathetic is the history of Joseph! How stirring is the combat of David with Goliath! How touching the lamentations of David over Absalom! How full of interest the whole life of Elijah! Read in the mere letter, there is in these ancient records everything to inform the mind and touch the heart; and many have wept over the pathetic narratives of the Bible who have never wept over their sins.

But when we penetrate through the shell into the kernel; when we read the Bible with a spiritual eye, and God is pleased to communicate a measure of faith which, as the Apostle says, is mixed with the word, and so profits the soul (Heb. 4:2); how different then are the Scriptures of truth! When we can appropriate

the promises laid up in them, read our character depicted in them, feel their sweetness, and have the soul bedewed with the savour and unction that is diffused all through them, then the Scriptures are something far better than merely instructive or interesting. The sacred truth of God, as revealed in the Scriptures, reaches the heart, melts the soul, softens the spirit, touches the conscience, and brings, as a divine power accompanies it, blessed feelings and heavenly sensations into the bosom.

And in this way alone are the Scriptures profitably read. Thus read, the Bible becomes a new book, perused as it were with new eyes, and felt as with a new heart. Look, for instance, at the narrative of incidents contained in this chapter (2 Chron. 20). Read in the mere letter there is something very instructive in it; but when we penetrate beneath the surface of the letter, and read it spiritually, with a special eye to the church of God, it is invested with a new character, and upon it is shed a holy and blessed light.

Before, however, we enter upon the spiritual meaning of the text, let us look at a few of the incidents connected with it.

Jehoshaphat, the godly king of Judah, was, we read, attacked by a numerous company of enemies, and these of a race and from a quarter quite unexpected. They were not such as formerly had attacked them, Canaanites or Philistines, Egyptians or Ethiopians, nor the severed tribes of Israel. But they were those who had a kind of blood alliance with them. They were the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, who, you will recollect were the illegitimate children of Lot by his incestuous connection with his two daughters. They had thus an illegitimate relationship, a spurious, half-blood alliance with the people of Judah. We shall, with God's blessing, see by and by how this bears upon the spiritual meaning. Judah at this time was very weak. She had been brought low for her iniquities. And when this "great company" came against her, she had no strength, no army, no forces left to oppose them. Under these circumstances, what did the godly king of Judah as her head and leader? He "set himself to seek the Lord,

and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.” All human hopes, all creature help were utterly in vain; and therefore, as their only resource, they came to the Lord, who had rescued and delivered them again and again. The Lord heard their cry, and smote their enemies with confusion and destruction. I need not enter into further particulars, but will proceed at once to our text: “O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee.”

With God's blessing, in looking at these words, I shall consider:

I. First, What this “great company” spiritually represents.

II. Secondly, How the children of God have “no might against this great company, neither know they what to do.”

III. Thirdly, How under these circumstances they cry to the Lord, “Wilt Thou not judge them?” And,

IV. Lastly, The fixed posture of their souls: “Our eyes are upon Thee.”

I. This “great company” of hostile invaders was, as we before remarked, indirectly and illegitimately connected with them. They were not heathen idolaters, alien in race and language, but the same blood partly ran in their veins. An illegitimate flesh and blood alliance subsisted between the invaders and the invaded. View that circumstance spiritually. What foes chiefly invade our peace? Those that have a flesh and blood alliance with us. The enemies, then, that we have most reason to fear are those which claim relationship with our fallen nature. For instance,

1. There is a “great company” of temptations; for they come for the most part, not singly, but in troops. One temptation usually makes way for another. A single temptation resembles a burglar attempting to break into a house. The most bold, or the most dexterous comes first, cuts through the shutter, lifts up the window, enters the house, and then admits the rest; so one temptation opens a way for the entrance of more. Let a man only dally with temptation; let him only entertain one lust, and give it lodging in

his breast; let him only be allured by, and consent to, one powerful besetment, that one temptation will open a way for a whole troop of temptations to come and take possession of his heart.

But these temptations are, like the Moabites and Ammonites, our blood relatives. Illegitimate, indeed, and incestuous is their birth, for Satan is their father and sin their mother; but they have in us a nature akin to them. The same blood runs in their and our veins. It is this unhallowed, ungodly affinity which gives temptation such wondrous power. When temptation knocks at the door, there is a half-sister, a traitress to the very bone, waiting in the hall to open it and let him in. Temptation is fearful only as it is suitable. If there were nothing in our heart in alliance with evil; if we could reject it instantaneously, and say, “Get thee hence;” if we could deal with temptation as the blessed Lord dealt with it, when Peter said, “Be it far from Thee!” if we could say to every temptation as the Lord then said to Peter, “Get thee behind Me, Satan!” temptation would lose its power, it would drop from us as the viper from the hand of Paul, when he shook it into the fire, and felt no harm. But, alas! there is that in our heart which has a blood alliance with it, which listens to it, parleys with it, and would, but for the grace of God, fall on its neck and embrace it.

2. But there is also a “great company” of afflictions. For as with temptation, so affliction rarely comes alone. Look at Job's case. How affliction came after affliction, as messenger after messenger came with evil tidings! You will find that afflictions of body often bring affliction of mind, and that affliction in circumstances often produces rebellion, peevishness, and discontent. Thus we have to bear the load, not merely of natural, but also of spiritual trouble; one, as it were, helping on and giving force, weight and power to the other. A concurrence of trials is so frequent, that it is a common saying, “afflictions seldom come single.” And if this be the case with men generally, much more so is it with the people of God. “Woe is me now,” cried Baruch, “for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow” (Jer. 45:3). “Thou hast afflicted me with all

Thy waves," complained Heman (Psa. 88:7). This combination of troubles much increases their weight. If they came alone, it seems as though there would be strength to bear them; but to have affliction after affliction, and when one has struck, as it were, the soul down, then for another to strike the dying dead—this, this it is that gives such poignancy, weight and acuteness to the trials of the Lord's family.

3. But, again, what a company there is of lusts! If we look at the evils of our nature, we shall find that they too are not single. To examine our heart is something like examining by the microscope a drop of ditch water; the more it is looked into, the more hideous forms appear. All these strange monsters, too, are in constant motion, devouring or devoured; and, as glasses of stronger power are put on, more and more loathsome creatures emerge into view till eye and heart sicken at the sight. Such is our heart. Superficially viewed, passably fair; but examined by the spiritual microscope, hideous forms of every shape and size appear; lusts and desires in unceasing movement, devouring each other, and yet undiminished; and each successive examination bringing new monsters to light. O what a company of lusts! how one seems to introduce and make way for the other! and how one, as among the insect tribe, is the sire of a million!

4. And what a company at times there is of doubts, fears, and distressing apprehensions! What an alliance, too, not only with our carnal mind, but with one another! "The children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites." And all against Judah. Temptation comes first; with temptation comes the stirring up of lusts; and with the stirring up of lusts comes a whole troop of doubts and fears arising from guilt laid upon the conscience. Hart justly says, "Sin engenders doubt." It is the evil of the heart continually manifesting itself that gives such strength to unbelief, and adds such force to those doubts and fears which often come as a great armed company against the soul. A guilty conscience has a strong alliance with doubts and fears,

and this indeed makes them so formidable.

5. What a company of professors also are arrayed against a child of God! How they are all watching for his halting! How ready to magnify his infirmities! how eager to catch up any slip that he may make, or anything he may say or do inconsistent. One hounds on another. "Report it," say they, "and we will report it." Thus they hunt in packs; and many who have never tasted the bread of life, nor fed on the flesh of Christ, have had a sweet repast upon the mangled limbs of a child of God.

It was not the heathen that attacked Judah, but the Moabites and Ammonites; a spurious blood, but indirectly allied. So it is not the profane, but the professing world, a spurious race, who attack the living family. And surely they are "a great company," unmindful, like the children of Ammon, of all former benefits (ver. 10), and bent only on Judah's destruction.

Now all these "great companies" come against the children of God at some time or other of their spiritual life. It is true that all may not come at once; but at one time or other most of the children of God have to fight against them all; a "great company" of afflictions, of temptations, of lusts, of doubts and fears, or professors, who hate the truth of God which they see in them.

II. And what can they do? They are in the same plight and spot spiritually in which Jehoshaphat and the children of Judah were literally and naturally.

1. Jehoshaphat speaks for himself and his people: "We have no might against this great company." We have no weapons, no power of resistance; we cannot meet them hand to hand, or foot to foot; they are too many and too mighty for us; we have no power whatever to withstand or resist them. This every true Christian is taught and brought more or less to feel. None but Christians really feel it, because others have their weapons. But what makes a living man powerless is this: he knows there is no use to fight flesh with flesh; that is, by weapons of our own contrivance, or our own forging. A pharisee can fight in his own strength and righteousness;

he can make his vows and promises, form his resolutions, and combat hand to hand against this "great company." But a Christian is stripped of his carnal weapons. To afflictions a natural man can oppose stoical endurance; to temptation a hardened conscience; to doubts, impenitence, or self-righteousness; to attacks from men, blow for blow. But all these weapons have dropped from a Christian's hand; God must fight his battles, for he cannot. He has therefore no power, nor wisdom, nor strength, nor might against this "great company," for his weapons are not carnal, but spiritual; so that if he fight, it must be in the strength of the Lord, and the power of His might.

Now when the Lord denies His gracious presence; when He does not come into the soul in any measure of divine power and grace; when He leaves us, as He often leaves us, to prove our own strength by feeling utter weakness—then we come into this experience, "We have no might against this great company."

In what a wonderful way was the Lord pleased to teach Paul this great lesson! He was caught up to the third heaven; there he saw and heard things unspeakable; his soul was indulged with the greatest revelations perhaps ever given to any mortal. He comes down from heaven to earth. And then what takes place? He has a messenger of Satan, a thorn in the flesh to buffet him. Thus he falls, as it were, from the heights of heaven down to the very gates of hell. He leaves the company of God and angels, and the presence of the glorified spirits above, and comes down to be buffeted and plagued, harassed and beaten about by Satan. O how mysterious was this dealing of God! How the Apostle himself was unable to enter into this mystery, that one recently so highly favoured should now be so deserted; that one upon whom the Lord had bestowed such blessings should now be left in the hands of Satan! But he learnt afterwards why he had such an experience. The Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." But how could the Apostle have learnt this weakness but by soul experience? Was it not necessary for him

to be buffeted by Satan, to be beaten and roughly handled by the Prince of darkness, and to have this thorn in the flesh continually puncturing and lacerating his soul in order to learn it in and for himself? And can you tell me any other way whereby we can learn the same lesson? Can we learn it from the Bible? from books? from ministers? or the experience of others? We may learn the theory. The experience must be learnt in another school; and that is the school of painful and personal experience. The Lord, to convince us then of our weakness and to make His strength perfect in that weakness, suffers in His providence this "great company" to come against us; and thus teaches us that we have no might, that we cannot lift up a finger, that we have no weapons to fight with.

Now look at your experience, you that have any, and see when this "great company" came against you, whether you had any strength of your own. What could you do with temptation when it came in a powerful way? Could you master it? Could you throw up a bank against it, and say, "Thus far shalt thou come, and no further; and here thy proud waves shall be stayed"? Could you say to any one temptation, "Get thee behind my back; thou shalt not tempt me"? O when temptation creeps in like a serpent into the carnal mind, it winds its secret way, and coils round the heart. As the boa constrictor is said to embrace its victim, twining his coil around it, and crushing every bone without any previous warning, so does temptation often seize us suddenly in its powerful embrace. Have we in ourselves any more power to extricate our flesh from its slimy folds than the poor animal has from the coils of the boa constrictor?

So with the corruptions and lusts of our fallen nature. Can you always master them? Can you seize these serpents by the neck and wring off their heads?

The doubts and fears and distressing apprehensions that come into your soul when guilt lies hard and heavy upon your conscience, can you say, "Begone, doubts and fears; I will have none of you; you shall not touch me"? You might as well, when the

storm came down this morning, have said, "Storm, cease to fall;" as say, when doubt and fear and apprehensions of God's anger come down upon your soul, "Hailstones, beat upon me no more."

And what can you do against afflictions—afflictions in body, in family, or in circumstances? Can you bear them with a patient resignation, and say, "I can endure anything or everything"? Who can bear one affliction in his own strength? Can you bear your little finger to ache? Can you bear a sharp toothache, half-an-hour of tic douloureux, or a night's ear-ache? Can you bear to see a dear child suffer? Can you endure the frowning face of God in providence? Are you never chafed? Is not your mind cast down, and does not the rebellious wave sometimes flow over your breast?

When professors speak against you, and cast out your name as evil, can you always bear it? Can you put your mouth in the dust? When one cheek is smitten, can you always turn the other? O you must be made of different material from Adam's fallen race; you cannot have the same heart that beats in the bosom of him that speaks to you, if you can always be patient and resigned; always believe, and hope, and love; always be calm and unruffled; are never tempted, never slip, and never backslide. Surely, surely, you are not yet perfect in the flesh, nor out of the reach of gunshot.

2. "Neither know we what to do." That seems worse still. Know not what to do! To be in such perplexity as not to know how to act! If a man were to say, "I am very weak, but I have a plan in my head which I am sure will succeed; or, although I cannot do the thing myself, yet I have a friend that can;" such a person we should not consider without resource of some kind. He could not with truth say, "I know not what to do." To have no strength is to be very low; but to have no wisdom is to be lower still.

Now when a "great company" comes against you, do you always or often know "what to do"? Is there a treasure of wisdom in your heart? Can you take inward counsel, and say, "I see how I can manage this; I can easily overcome that; I have a plan for this difficulty, and a contrivance for that annoying circumstance. It

does not therefore much matter what trial comes, I know exactly how to meet it"? If you are there, you are not in the experience of Jehoshaphat, and the people for whom he was interceding with the Lord. He was compelled to confess for himself and them what many a poor child of God has said in substance, if not in word, "We know not what to do!" We are fairly brought to our wits' end, and are altogether baffled and confounded.

Apply this experimentally to your own case. When afflictions come, do you know what to do? You may have heavy losses in providence. Can you always meet the trial with calmness and resignation, and say, "Well, to be sure, it is rather a loss, but then it does not much signify"? A man who can talk so, does not know much about the matter. Apathy is not submission, though one of that spurious brood that often walk abroad under Christian surnames. This is the trying point, not to "know what to do"; not to see what way to take, nor be able by any contrivances of our own skill or wisdom to meet the difficulty.

Again, when your lusts and passions are stirred up—and I suppose sometimes they move, they do not always lie calm and dead in your soul—you find now and then a little working of the old Adam nature; sin is not always taking its nap, nor torpid like a snake in winter. I suppose that now and then there is something not altogether spiritual or gracious, some sensual desire, some pride, some base imagination at work in your carnal mind. O be assured there is a veil of unbelief on your heart if you do not see, and your conscience is not very tender if you do not feel it. But when your old Adam nature is stirred up, do you know what to do? "O, yes," say you, "I do; I am at no loss or standstill whatever. Directly I find sin stir, I make a firm resolution that I will not be overcome by it. I never give way to pride, covetousness, worldly-mindedness, evil tempers, or any of the works of the flesh." I really cannot believe you. You may make resolutions; but how long or how often do you keep them? Is it not as long as a little child keeps its resolutions to be good? When the parent is about

to punish it, O what resolutions it makes! The tears run down its little cheeks; it will promise almost anything to avoid punishment: "I will never do it again, I will never do it again; I will be so good, so good." How long? how long? Perhaps not half-an-hour. And thus our resolutions, if we make them, are not much better than the promises of a child. I have long given over making any. But if we are so foolish as to make resolutions, how long will they last? Just as long as a feather lies quiet upon the roof of a house; it only waits for the first puff of wind, and then it is gone. And so our resolutions are like feathers; the first puff blows them to the winds.

And how can you manage your doubts and fears? Do you take them by the neck and strangle them? Can you put your hand down into your heart and cast them out like a nest of vipers? You will be stung in the attempt.

The real cry of the soul is, "We know not what to do!" In times past we thought we knew what to do; we were tolerably strong, we would pray, would read God's Word, would keep our eyes and ears and tongues, would set a guard over the movements of the heart, and perhaps to a certain extent we succeeded. But it was because we knew little of this "great company." It was a little company, perhaps; and when it was only a little company, we might know what to do; but when this "great company" came, it put the soul to its wits' end, and brought forth the exclamation, We know not what to do!"

Now, till the soul is more or less brought here, it knows very little of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must be brought into trying places to know anything of God. I have often thought of poor McKenzie's words, and striking words they were, in his last illness. When the blood was gushing from his mouth, he said, "It is here we want a God!" Aye, it is here we want a God; but very often, too often, we do not want a God. Am I going too far when I say that nine-tenths of our time, perhaps, we can do without a God? Take this day. You have been engaged in your business, in your lawful occupations. Have you not been doing the greater part of this day perhaps without God? Have you in many hours,

many quarter-hours, many minutes this day, really felt your need of a God, really wanted God; feeling in that state and case that you wanted a present God, a God to help, a God to bless, a God to appear, a God to come down into your soul? I do not mean that there has been no aching void, no looking upward, no secret prayer or supplication; but not such extreme desires and earnest cries as if you needed Him in a special manner. Base creatures are we with all our profession, that we can do so much and so often without a present God; that we keep Him, so to speak at a distance; pay him compliments, and yet can do for the most part so much without Him.

But when brought into trying circumstances, then it is we begin to want a God, and such a God as is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, such a God as alone can bless and comfort the soul.

III. Now under these circumstances does Jehoshaphat plead with God. And how tenderly and affectionately does he plead! If you will read what precedes our text, you will see how he pleads with God, and chiefly on three grounds. He pleads with Him first on the ground of His power and might: "Is there not all power with Thee?" He pleads with Him secondly on the ground of His covenant: "Art not Thou our God?" He pleads with Him thirdly on the ground of His dwelling with them in the sanctuary: "And they dwell therein, and have built Thee a sanctuary therein for Thy name, saying, If when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in Thy presence (for Thy name is in this house), and cry unto Thee in our affliction, then Thou wilt hear and help." By the "sanctuary" we may understand the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, that sanctuary and true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. He comes therefore to God with these three powerful pleas: as a God of great strength, and therefore able; a God in covenant, and therefore willing; and a God in Christ, and therefore loving and merciful. These three powerful pleas he brings, and lays them

at His sacred feet, interceding with Him to do that for them which they could not do for themselves: "Wilt Thou not judge them?"

There is something, to my mind, very striking and suitable in this expression: "Wilt Thou not judge them?" It is as though he put himself, so to speak, into close communication with God, and identified Judah's cause with the cause of God; so that God in delivering her was actually fighting His own battles; and as a judge upon His judgment seat, was passing a judgment upon His own enemies.

Now this is the most prevailing plea we can make with God; when we can look up to Him as our God in covenant, and take our enemies, our temptations, our afflictions, our doubts, our exercises, so to speak, into our hand, as so many enemies to God, and ask the Lord to pass a sentence upon them, not because they are our enemies, but because they are His. We may perhaps thus illustrate it. In war time there is in the garrison a traitor who is conspiring to betray the fortress. A soldier detects the wretch; he seizes him upon the spot, brings him to the general, and denounces his crime. Now when the soldier arrests the traitor, he does not arrest him as his enemy, but as the enemy of his sovereign. So, if we can arrest our lusts and base passions, seize them as traitors, bring them before God, and say, "These are Thy enemies; do Thou judge them and punish them, and for Thy name's sake deliver us from their treachery;" this seems, as it were, to put God upon our side, and to call in His justice to execute judgment upon them as His enemies.

There is no use fighting the battle in our own strength. We have none. There is no use when sin has made a breach in the conscience to thrust into the gap a stout faggot of self-righteousness. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. The strength of Christ, the blood of Christ, the grace of the gospel, the sword of the Spirit—these must be our weapons. "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." But how few fight with these weapons! How many take their self-righteousness as a weapon against their sins; and thus they only fight flesh

with flesh; they only combat self in one form by self in another form. This is popery. Poor weak creatures go into convents and monasteries. For what? To fight against sin. By what? By self-righteousness. They macerate their bodies, wear sackcloth, repeat their prayers, and attend to their ceremonies. For what purpose? To subdue their sins, arming flesh against flesh. And what is the consequence? If they have any conscience at all, they are crushed down in this ineffectual struggle, as Luther was in his cell at Erfurt. This is popery in full blossom—a gaudy flower, of which Protestant self-righteousness is a swelling bud. The essence of popery is creature righteousness, and to fight against sin by self-righteousness is next door to going into a monastery, wearing a hair shirt, or flagellating the shoulders with a scourge. The gospel has brought to light a better, a more effectual way. "Wilt Thou not judge them?" "Here are my lusts, I cannot manage them; here are my temptations, I cannot overcome them; here are my doubts and fears, I cannot subdue them; here are my enemies, I cannot conquer them. Lord, I know not what to do. But wilt Thou not judge them? Wilt not Thou manage for me? Wilt Thou not subdue mine enemies and Thine?" This is, so to speak, taking these lusts and passions by the neck, and laying them down at the feet of God as God's enemies, and thus bringing the power of God against them, setting in array the omnipotence of Jehovah against what would otherwise destroy us. This is prevailing. To fight thus under the banner of the Lord is to make head against sin; but to fight against it in our own resolution and strength is only to fall its victim. This is taking the weapons of God to fight against our spiritual foes; and these weapons are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. This is fighting against sin, not in the flesh, but in the Spirit; not by the law, but by the gospel; not by self, but by the grace of God. And if your soul has had many a tussle, and many a wrestle, and many a hand-to-hand conflict with sin, you will have found this out before now, that nothing but the grace, power, and Spirit of

Christ ever gave you the victory, or the least hope of victory.

IV. "But our eyes are upon Thee." Jehoshaphat did not know what to do; he was altogether at his wits' end; and yet he took the wisest course a man could take. This is the beauty of it, that when we are fools, then we are wise; when we are weak, then we are strong; when we know not what to do, then we do the only right thing. O had Jehoshaphat taken any other course; had he collected an army, sent through Judah, raised troops and forged swords and spears, he would certainly have been defeated. But not knowing what to do, he did the very thing he should do: "Our eyes are upon Thee." "Thou must fight our battles; Thou must take the matter into Thy own hands. Our eyes are upon Thee, waiting upon Thee, looking up, and hoping in Thee, believing in Thy holy Name, expecting help from Thee, from whom alone help can come." But this is painful work to be brought to this point, "our eyes are upon Thee," implying there is no use looking to any other quarter. It assumes that the soul has looked, and looked, and looked elsewhere in vain, and then fixed its eyes upon God as knowing that from Him alone all help must come. This I believe to be the distinctive mark of a Christian, that his eyes are upon God. On his bed by night, in his room by day, in business or at market, when his soul is in trouble, cast down, and perplexed, his eyes are upon God. From Him alone all help must come; none else can reach his case. All other but the help of God is ineffectual; it leaves him where it found him, it does him no good. We are never safe except our eyes are upon God. Let our eyes be upon Him, we can walk safely; let our eyes be upon the creature, we are pretty sure to slip and stumble.

"Our eyes are upon Thee." And O, how simple, suitable, complete, and blessed a remedy is this, when the Lord is pleased to open our eyes, and fix them on Himself. He must do it all. If the eyes are to be upon Him, He must first give us eyes; if lifted upon Him, He must raise them upwards; if kept upon Him, He must hold them waking. It is good to be in this spot. There are times and seasons, perhaps, when we seem to have no religion whatever;

when we look, and look, and look, and cannot find a grain. Where is our spirituality? Where our heavenly affections? Where our prayerfulness of spirit? Where our tenderness of conscience? Where our godly fear? Where our meditations upon God's Word? We look, and look, and look; they seem gone. Now perhaps, in the midst of this uncertainty we are brought into some painful exercise, some affliction, some temptation, some apprehension, something that lies with weight and power upon the soul. Now is the time we want our religion. But it is gone, it is gone, leaving us empty, needy, naked, and bare; religion, as regards its blessedness and comfort, we seem to have none. This is emptying work; this is stripping the soul, as it were, to the very bone. But what a preparation to receive the religion which is from above! How the vessel must be emptied of the dirty water of creature religion, well rinsed, and washed out, to have the pure water of heavenly religion communicated from the divine fountain. God never mingles the pure stream of heavenly religion with the dirty, filthy water of our own creature religion. We must be emptied of every drop, so to speak, of our natural religion, to have the holy and spiritual religion, which is from above, poured into the soul. But to look, and look, and look, and find nothing but emptiness, nakedness, barrenness, and destitution; to have a "great company" of enemies all coming against us, and we as weak as water; what an emptying for divine filling, what a stripping for divine clothing, and what a bringing down of self for the raising up of Christ! True religion consists mainly in two points: to be emptied, stripped, made naked and bare; and then to be clothed and filled out of Christ's fulness.

Thus, of all people the children of God are the weakest, and yet they are the only persons really strong; of all they are the most ignorant, yet they are the only wise; of all the most helpless, and yet they alone are effectually helped; of all the most hobbling, yet they alone have a good hope through God; of all perhaps in their feelings the most unbelieving, and yet are partakers, and they

alone, of the grace of faith. "Great is the mystery of godliness;" a paradox is the life of a Christian; a mysterious path he is called upon to tread; and he can rightly learn it in the school of experience alone. By a series of lessons in the school of Christ the people of God have their religion burnt into their souls; and what they thus learn becomes a part of themselves. It is not lost on the road from chapel, nor left behind in the pew, nor shut up in the hymnbook till the following Sunday, nor dropped at the street-door. It is not a passing notion, nor an empty name, nor towering smoke, nor earth-born vapour; but a divine reality lodged by the hand of God Himself in the heart, which will shine more and more to the perfect day. Be not then discouraged, if the Lord is leading any of you in this path; say not, "a strange thing has happened unto you;" things you little thought of in times gone by. Does not the Lord lead the blind by a way they knew not? And in paths they have not seen? Does He not make crooked things straight before them, and rough places plain? Is not God in Christ alone to be our King, our Leader, our Help, our Hope, our All? It is a mercy to have something of the teaching of God in the soul, if it be only to empty it, at present no further than to strip and lay low; to take away every false covering, to bring down into the dust of self-abasement, with the eyes upon the Lord, looking for and expecting a revelation of His mercy and love.

There are few who have got so far as this. There are few, comparatively speaking, who know they are nothing; few who are low enough for Christ to stoop down to; few who feel they are fallen among thieves, and want the good Samaritan to pass by and pour oil and wine into their wounds. There are very few who have got so far as to know their own sickness and their own sore. Yet would we hope there are those here whom the Lord is leading down into the valley; and though they are perhaps writing bitter things against themselves, their names are written in the Lamb's book of life. It is the poor and needy whom the Lord has respect unto, and those that humble themselves in God's own time and

way shall be blessedly exalted.

144 The Whole Armour Of God

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on Lord's Day Morning,

August 3, 1851

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

Ephesians 6:13

Every child of God is a soldier, and a real one. In the Christian army, there are no feather-bed, no fire-side soldiers. All to a man are actual combatants. Are not their enemies real? Flesh and blood real? The world real? And Satan real?—a real devil? And if their enemies are real, the conflict with their enemies must be real too. "Every battle of the warrior," we read, "is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood." And such is "the good fight of faith." It is no sham fight, no Hyde Park review: but a hand to hand battle, in which wounds are inflicted, blood shed, and life, according to our feelings, often at stake.

But how shall we be able to fight this sore battle, and so to withstand the enemies of our soul's salvation as to come off more than conquerors? Weak as we are and & fenceless, without one weapon of sufficient temper and strength: through sin, like the children of Israel, "made naked unto their shame among their enemies" Ex 32:25, fall we shall, defeated we must be, unless we have some better weapons than our own armoury can furnish. God, who knows the strength of our enemies: God, who knows the weakness of our flesh, has therefore provided in the heavenly armoury weapons whereby, and whereby alone, we can make an effectual stand.

Of this heavenly armour the apostle speaks in the text, where, addressing his Christian brethren, he says, "Wherefore take unto

you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." He here makes it imperative upon them to take not a part of, but "the whole armour of God." assuring them that it is indispensable to their safety: that only by being clad in it from top to toe, can they "withstand in the evil day." when all the powers of earth and hell are arrayed against them: and that even then, when they have in the strength of that heavenly armour "done," or "over-come all," they must not put it off: but will still need it "to stand."

In opening up the words of our text, I shall endeavour, with God's blessing, this morning,

I.—First, to describe the heavenly armour; its various pieces and accoutrements, as indispensable to the Christian soldier:

II.—Secondly, to shew how this heavenly armour is taken, worn, and used.

I.—In order to do justice to our text, it will be necessary that I should take up, one by one, these several pieces of the heavenly armour; for it says, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God." If, then, I, as a combatant, am without one piece, I run the risk of defeat; and if I, as a minister, in laying open this text, omit one, I am so far unfaithful in neglecting a part that may be for our spiritual defence. As a Christian, then, and as a minister, I must take the whole, each and all being alike indispensable.

1. The first piece of heavenly armour that the apostle speaks of is, the Girdle: "Stand, therefore," he says, "having your loins girt about with truth." The loins, or lower part of the back, is the seat of strength, as well as of activity and motion. No heavy weights can a man lift, no hard work can he perform unless he be strong there. The prophet therefore says, "Make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily" Na 2:1. Of Behemoth, we read, "His strength is in his loins" Job 40:16. These loins, then, the seat of activity and strength, need to be guarded by a piece of heavenly armour, lest Satan make a deadly thrust there. If he can get a blow at our unprotected loins, it will paralyse every movement. A stroke

here, so as to reach the spinal marrow, prostrates indeed. "Smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again" De 33:11 . We need, therefore, to have our loins girded about with a piece of heavenly armour which shall effectually protect them from these paralysing blows.

This heavenly girdle is "Truth," What truth? By "truth" here we may understand. I think, two things.

First, generally Christian sincerity; "Truth," as the Psalmist speaks, "in the inward parts" Ps 51:6. Uprightness of heart lies at the base of all true Christian profession. If a man have no sincerity Godward, he has nothing. Our loins, therefore, or the seat of strength and activity, need in this sense to be girt about with what the apostle calls "simplicity and godly sincerity" 2Co 1:12. If there be insincerity in our profession, O what advantage is given to Satan! A blow from his hand against our profession, when there is no consciousness of sincerity Godward, must be fatal. Here he smote Judas, Saul, and Ahithophel; and they fell to rise no more. Against, then, these fatal blows, we need a girdle of truth—to be sincere Godward; to have truth in our inward parts; and, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to be made upright in our Christian profession. "I was upright before Him, and kept myself from my iniquity."

But we may observe further, that the ancients wore loose dresses; and as these were often in their way impeding their movements, they kept them tight round their body by a girdle. So we are continually impeded by the loose dress of unbelief, "the sin that doth so easily beset us," as the apostle calls it, alluding to it as an encumbering garment, which clings round the limbs, and impedes all free movements. But when the loins are girt about with sincerity and truth, it braces them with flesh activity and strength.

But secondly, the word "truth" is also used in a more particular and restricted sense to signify Christian truth, "the truth as it is in Jesus." A man may be sincerely wrong. Do you think that

there is no sincerity but what God implants? Are not many Papists sincere? many Mahometans sincere? many utterly devoid of grace, and bitterly opposed to the work of the Spirit, sincere? Yes, surely. Not spiritually, but naturally sincere. View the crowds of persons this day going to church and chapel where we know the truth is not preached, must we make a broad sweep with them all, and say, They are all of them wretched hypocrites, dishonest and designing, doing it to be seen of men? I dare not say so. Christian sincerity is one thing; natural sincerity another. Was not Saul of Tarsus sincere? And the mariners that threw Jonah overboard?

But spiritual sincerity itself, in deadly conflicts with sin and Satan, is not sufficient without a knowledge of “the truth as it is in Jesus.” Young converts are spiritually sincere, but how unable to fight in this great battle!

The truth, then, as revealed in the gospel of the grace of God must be the foundation of our spiritual strength. We cannot fight against Satan with lies. If we fight against him, it must be with truth. The truth of the gospel made known to the soul, revealed and applied to the heart and conscience by the Holy Spirit, must be the girdle to strengthen and guard the loins in the day of battle.

2. We pass on to consider the second piece of Christian armour, “the Breastplate of righteousness.” Now as the loins are the seat of activity and strength, so the breast is the seat of the heart, the fountain of the blood, which it propels through every artery, and of the lungs, which alternately inspire and expire the air, the vital breath of heaven. These are two vital parts. We need, therefore, to have this double seat of life specially secured.

Spiritually viewed, the heart may represent two things:—Firstly the conscience; and secondly the affections. And the lungs may represent two things also:

1. the inspiration of life and feeling, of prayer and supplication from God; and
2. the expiration of desires and breathings after his favour and presence. Now all these vital parts—the peculiar seat of life and

feeling, the special domain of heart religion—need to be covered with a heavenly breastplate; for if Satan could pierce any of these, that thrust would be fatal.

But how often does he aim his thrust against the heart, as the seat of conscience! and would, if he could, by deadly thrusts at that tender point, plunge the soul into despair! He would, were it wholly unguarded, hurl dart after dart, and shoot arrow after arrow into the conscience, till he made it bleed to death. We need conscience, then, to be guarded by a piece of heavenly armour. This is provided from the heavenly armoury—“the Breastplate of righteousness”—not our own, no, not our own, but Christ’s imputed righteousness.

Let Satan strike that, if he will. He could not pierce it when worn by the captain of our salvation, though, in the wilderness and in the garden, he thrust sore at it; as the Lord speaks, “Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall, but the Lord helped me” Ps 118:13. Let him strike at it now as worn by the soldier. It is to strike against a wall of flint, against a breastplate of steel. If that breastplate be on, let him accuse: let him tempt to despair: let him say, Your sins are too great to be forgiven: you have backslidden beyond all hope of recovery: you have no real religion; your beginning was wrong, the middle is wrong, and the end will be wrong; you are only a hypocrite, who will die in despair; there is no fear of God in your heart. These are some of the “fiery darts” of Satan aimed against conscience. If, then, we put on our own righteousness to shield us from these thrusts, it is but a wicker breastplate which the first fiery dart will set in flame, or the slightest thrust pierce through. We need a breastplate of steel, not of wicker-work such as our own fingers may intertwine, but Christ’s righteousness imputed; as Hart justly says,

Righteousness within thee rooted,
May appear to take thy part;
But let righteousness imputed,

Be the breastplate of thy heart.

And our affections also; for the heart is not only the seat of conscience, but the seat of the affections. What fiery darts can Satan throw into our affections! What lusts he can kindle through the eye! What love of the world; what greedy desire of gain; what sensual imaginations can he kindle into a flame! Even the tender affections which sweeten the bitter cup of life, the social relationships of husband and wife, parent and child, how he can distort even them, and pervert into idolatry the most hallowed ties! David's overweening love to Absalom nearly cost him his throne and his life. Eli loved his sons till he ruined them, and brought a curse upon his house. Nay more, the heavenly affections themselves; the pure desires, the celestial love of God's own implanting, need to be guarded. These affections the breastplate of Christ's righteousness only can guard, and preserve pure, holy, and tender, that the sacred flame may be ever kept burning upon the altar of a broken heart.

But the heart is also the seat of the lungs, that important organ of life, by which we alternately inspire and expire the breath of heaven. This may represent, in a spiritual sense,

1. the inspiration, or breathing in of God's Spirit, whereby we draw in the breath of heaven, "Come from the four winds, O breath" Eze 37:9; and

2. the expiration, or breathing out of these heavenly desires whereby the soul pours itself out before God. This inspiration and expiration, these inflowings and outflowings of life divine, need to be covered by the breastplate of righteousness; for soon, soon, Satan would strike a dart through the lungs to stop all inspiration of God's favour, and all expiration of desire, thankfulness, or praise. But our own righteousness—what a poor defence! Can it guard or protect the vital seat of these heavenly operations? But when the impregnable breastplate of Christ's imputed righteousness is received at the hands of God, fitted on to the bosom, and firmly clasped all around, the conscience, the affections, and the life of

God are all shielded as with adamant.

3. But we pass on to the Greaves. "Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." There is armour for the legs and feet; for these too may be assailed by the Prince of darkness. The feet have often to tread in miry ways; to walk amidst thorns, and snares, and pricking bushes; and, in ancient warfare, the uncovered feet were liable to be wounded by a weapon called "caltrops," or balls with three spikes of iron issuing from them, strewed on the ground.

By "the feet," we may spiritually understand our walk and conversation. Against this Satan may aim a fearful thrust. He aims at every unguarded spot; sometimes at the loins,—the seat of strength and of activity; sometimes at the heart and lungs,—the conscience, the affections, and the life of God; sometimes at the feet,—the walk, the conduct, and conversation.

Here is one of our greatest temptations—lest Satan should entangle us in anything disgraceful, inconsistent, or unbecoming! O how we seem to walk amidst snares and temptations! and how Satan is aiming deadly blows at our legs and feet, to cut them off, and lay us low. We need, then, "greaves," as they are called, or shoes reaching half way up the legs, in order to protect them from these deadly thrusts of Satan. And what has God provided? "The preparation of the gospel of peace." There is something very sweet and expressive, though perhaps at first sight obscure, in the word "preparation." It seems to my mind to convey the idea that the "gospel of peace" is prepared for and fitted to the feet and legs. It is not a loose leather shoe that may be kicked off and on: not an old, easy slipper: but a tight, firm, strong, clasped, and buckled boot, or greave, of polished steel: "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass." This fits closely and tightly round the leg; and is "the preparation of the gospel"—the leg and foot prepared for the gospel, and the gospel prepared for the leg and foot.

Thus, the apostle does not send us to Sinai to get a greave from that fiery mount, nor to the smithy of Moses and Aaron, that they

may forge a piece of armour to protect and guard our life, walk, and conversation. But he sends us to the gospel, “the preparation of the gospel of peace;” not the law of war, but the gospel of peace. Here is firm standing. To be at peace with God through this gospel gives firm foothold. To be shod aright, the foot must be neither in the tight pinching boot of the law, nor in the loose slipper of our own obedience; but in the firm yet pliant, strong yet soft, easy yet impenetrable greave of the gospel. And observe, it is “the gospel of peace,” not wrangling and quarrelling. Get only a sweet sense of peace into your heart; let the gospel of peace reach your soul, and you will find a piece of armour that will guard life and conduct and conversation, and be your best preservation in this wilderness from the thrusts of Satan at your daily walk.

4. To make the body armour complete, before I pass on to the shield, I shall next take in order “the Helmet of salvation,” which is to cover the head. The head, we may consider, as the seat of two special things:

1, of energy, activity, authority, movement;

2, of apprehension and understanding. Now Satan aims his deadly blows at our head, sometimes to destroy and paralyse all energy and movement, all life and feeling in the things of God, and sometimes to confuse our understanding, to thrust us into some error, or draw us aside into some heresy. How stunning is a blow on the head when unprotected by any defence! All energy and movement cease. So in grace. Were our head not guarded, how should we be stunned and paralysed by Satan’s blows! And we may observe, that there is an intimate relationship between consciousness and energy. The same organ, the brain, which apprehends, communicates influence to every muscle. If Satan, then, can confuse our mind, how he paralyses all the springs of motion!

Has not your mind sometimes been sadly tempted with erroneous doctrines? When you have heard of some deadly error that has been going abroad, has there not been something in it

that seemed to lay hold of your mind and carnal understanding so that it seemed almost true? Now here is Satan confusing the mind, stunning and bewildering it with his plausible errors. What need, then a piece of armour to guard the head. And we have it provided: “the Helmet of salvation.”

But why is “the Helmet of salvation” so suitable to the head? Because all truth contains in it salvation, and all error involves in it damnation. There are no trifling errors. All errors, examined to the root, are fatal. Satan never troubles himself to introduce an unimportant error. His blows are at the head. If you examine every error that comes abroad, you will find that it always is aimed at Christ, to deny his Godhead, his actual Sonship, the efficacy of his blood, the imputation of his righteousness, the truth of his grace, the power of his resurrection; or in some way or other to destroy and put away salvation, complete salvation, through the Person, work, and blood of Jesus. As Satan, then, aims these deadly blows at our head to confuse our judgment, we need a piece of armour to guard and shield it all around, which is called here “the Helmet of salvation.”

A child of God is made very tender about the truth. To part with truth is to part with life; to embrace error is to embrace death; and the more that he lives in communion with Christ, the more he will value “the truth as it is in Jesus.” Never give up truth. If you give up truth, what is there then to save your soul? But “the Helmet of salvation” must be put on and worn; and it is put on and worn when salvation is laid hold of as it stands in the Person of the Son of God. Salvation by grace, what but this can shield the head in the day of battle? Keep it firmly braced round your temples. Legality and self-righteousness, heresy and error will strike, but will glance harmlessly off the helmet of salvation.

5. The next piece of armour that I shall take, is, “the Shield of faith.” We have seen the body guarded on every side, except, as Bunyan, I believe, says, there is no armour for the back.’ At any rate, we have seen the body guarded in front: for it is a front to

front battle; a face to face, hand to hand, foot to foot, shoulder to shoulder engagement. We have seen the loins, the legs, the feet, the breast, and the head all protected; but there may be haply some unguarded part. We have to fight with a very skilful enemy, who watches every movement and every unguarded place to make a deadly thrust. We need then one piece of defensive armour more, which in ancient times was a very useful one—the Shield; so that by looking on every side where the darts fly, we may oppose it in an instant.

This shield is “the shield of faith.” How needful is this! What are we, where are we, how can we fight for a single moment, when unbelief seems to gain power and prevalence? We faint, we sink, we have no strength to lift up a finger, when unbelief and infidelity work so powerfully in our carnal mind. O how we need the shield of faith, faith in lively exercise, that it may be opposed against Satan, come from whatever quarter he may, thrust on whatever side he will! This shield of faith is “above all,” or “over all,” so as to protect whatever part may be unprotected, and to guard every portion unguarded. But one reason is especially mentioned, “Whereby we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the Wicked.”

The ancients were accustomed to employ “fiery darts,” that is, arrows tipped at the end with tow, which they kindled, and then threw against their enemies. How beautifully this represents the fiery darts of Satan! his blasphemous and obscene injections; for how they set on fire the carnal mind! Like the burning arrows used by the ancients, wherever they stick they set on fire. But these fiery darts of the devil, these infidel, blasphemous suggestions, these dreadful injections which this Prince of darkness shoots into the carnal mind, we cannot, with all our own strength, resist. We need heavenly armour, and the shield of faith, so as not to give credit to Satan’s lies; but when the fiery darts come, to hold up the shield, that they may spend all their strength on that. That they cannot set on fire. Our carnal mind is very inflammable; the least fiery dart can set it all on flame. But not so with the shield of faith: that is

made of materials which can quench every fiery dart.

When we believe our interest in the Son of God: that our name is in the book of life: that God is our Father. Christ our Brother, the Holy Ghost our Friend and Teacher: when we can believe that all Satan says is lies, and lies only: that all these imaginations are but his contrivances, all these base workings of his raising, all these vile thoughts of his suggesting, and not take them as our own: when we can thus object “the shield of faith;” they drop off, they do not reach the soul; they meet with no materials which they inflame. They fall down quenched by “the shield of faith.” But begin to doubt and fear and sink; to believe all that Satan suggests: to fall in with his carnal reasonings; to listen to his infidel suggestions, and give way to his vile thoughts, and the whole carnal mind is immediately set on flame. O how we need, deeply need the shield of faith to “quench the fiery darts of the Wicked!”

6. Now the pieces that I have thus far considered are pieces of defensive armour. But I pass on to one piece, and only one, of offensive armour, the Sword; for in this battle we have not merely to receive blow upon blow, and thrust after thrust; but we have to maintain the offensive as well as the defensive; we have to thrust at Satan as well as to be thrust at by him; to fight with him as well as he to fight with us. And what is our weapon? One only. But O, what an effectual one, called here “The Sword of the Spirit!”

This is the only piece of offensive armour provided, and yet about the last that we are enabled to take hold of. How apt we are to meet Satan upon Satan’s own ground! He reasons for, and we reason against; he brings his arguments, we bring perhaps our counter arguments; he tempts, and we are seduced by his temptations; he speaks, and we listen; he finds words, and we find ears; he lays the snare, and we lay a foot to be caught in it. If we attempt to fight, it is often by some sword of our own forging, not the right Jerusalem blade, not the sword from the heavenly armoury. Resolutions, promises, tears, acknowledgments, confessions—all these are but weapons of earthly make and temper. How slow, how unable are

we to take the only true weapon, “the sword of the Spirit; which is the word of God!” What an example the blessed Lord left us when he was tempted. Thrice did Satan bring his temptations to cast Jesus down: and thrice did Jesus meet him with the sword of the Spirit, “It is written, it is written, it is written.” He used no other weapon: and that weapon made Satan quail.

Now “the sword of the Spirit” is “the word of God.” But we can only use this sword so far as it is opened up to our understanding, applied to our heart, sealed upon our conscience, and faith is given to lay hold of it. A promise, a precept, an invitation, a warning, an admonition, a truth—it matters not what part it be of God’s word suitable to our state and case, it becomes “the sword of the Spirit” when laid hold of by faith, and is the only effectual weapon whereby to beat back Satan. Through the temptations of Satan, the soul sometimes seems ready to sink into despair. It is almost as though he had got the victory, so fast and thick does he hurl his fiery darts, arrow upon arrow, suggestion after suggestion.

Well, how can you stand? You have no strength in yourself; you never had any; and the little you had in Christ, or thought you had, seems gone. Just at this critical moment, some promise seems to drop into your soul just suitable to your case; it is caught up as “the sword of the Spirit;” and by that the enemy is beaten back. Or Satan is tempting you to some sin, and painting before your carnal mind some pleasure or profit to be gained by committing it. Here you are, wavering and wavering, and standing upon the very brink of a fall. In this critical moment the Lord drops some precept, admonition, or warning; the word comes with power to your soul. Here is “the sword of the Spirit, the word of God;” and by that the temptation is defeated, and Satan driven back. O! without “the sword of the Spirit” we are, as it were, only a target for Satan’s arrows. But when, in addition to the defensive armour which repels, there is the offensive weapon, “the sword of the Spirit,” which thrusts, he not only gains no ground, but is for a time beaten back.

II.—And then comes the heavenly recipe, how to take, wear, and use this armour aright.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” It is by faith, as we shall presently see, that the heavenly armour is received, worn, and used: but it is chiefly by the “prayer of faith:” for by believing prayer is the armour taken: by continual prayer “praying always” kept on: and by spiritual prayer “supplication in the Spirit” used and wielded. If we do not continually “pray in the Spirit,” the limbs will, so to speak, shrink: and the armour drop off.

The knights of old exercised themselves every day in their full armour, or they could not have borne it, nor used their weapons with dexterity and strength. So must the Christian warrior, by prayer and supplication, “exercise himself unto godliness.” Without “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance”—standing sentry in the armour, keeping ward and watch—its very weight will crush us. But it is “praying in the Spirit.” Not loud, long, formal prayers, nor vain repetitions; but, as Jude speaks, “praying in the Holy Ghost,” by the help and intercession of the Spirit; and that “always;” at all seasons, all times, all places, everywhere, and whenever the Spirit of grace and supplication may fall.

Again; it must be “all prayer;” that is, all kinds of prayer—public prayer, private prayer, mental prayer, crying prayer, groaning prayer, weeping prayer, meditating prayer; prayer feeble, prayer strong; prayer of necessity, prayer of importunity; prayer of distance, and prayer of nearness; the prayer of the publican, the leper, and the outcast, as well as the prayer of the believing, the hoping, and the loving. With prayer, must be joined “supplication,” that is, beseeching the Lord, weeping at his feet, begging of him to appear, clasping his knees, and pouring out the soul into his bosom. To this must be added, “watching thereunto.” To watch for the answer; to wait for the appearing of the Lord “more than

they that watch for the morning.” And this, “with all perseverance,” never giving it up, taking no denial, begging of the Lord again and again, and wrestling with him till he appear to bless, visit, and shine upon the soul.

O how this heavenly recipe keeps every part of the armour bright, and the soldier active and expert in its use! The armour indeed of itself, as being from heaven, gets neither dull nor rusty. It is we who get sluggish in its use. But, to our apprehension, faith and prayer make it glitter more brightly. How, for instance, “the prayer of faith” brightens up the girdle of truth, and makes it glitter and shine! How it burnishes the breastplate, and makes it fit tightly round the bosom! How it makes the helmet glitter in the sun, and its noble plumes to wave in all their native lustre! How it beats out every dent the shield may have received from the fiery darts, and fits it for fresh encounters! And how it sharpens “the sword of the Spirit,” gives it a brighter polish, and nerves the arm to wield it with renewed activity and vigour! O this is the secret of all true victory! All is, all must be well, when we are in a prayerful, meditative, watching state: and all is ill, when this heavenly recipe is neglected: when the hands droop, and the knees faint, and prayer seems dead and motionless in the breast. Let there be in the soul an abiding spirit of prayer, and victory is sure. Satan has little power against the soul that has an abiding spirit of prayer, and is “watching thereunto with all perseverance.” But, without this spirit of prayer, we are a prey to all his temptations, and can neither take, wear, nor use the only armour against them.

Such, then, is the armour that God has provided: and such is the way in which it is to be taken, worn, and used—taken by faith, worn by prayer, and wielded with perseverance—for it is never to be laid by till death unclasps it. And, you may depend upon it, that God would not have provided such an armour as this, so complete a panoply, unless there were a real battle to fight. Christian warriors are not Chinese soldiers, who wear armour of pasteboard, painted to resemble iron; but their armour is of real steel. As, therefore,

God has provided such an armour as this, it is plain they have no puny enemy to fight.

Now Satan’s grand stratagem is to conceal and hide his strength. He is like a skilful general, who does not shew all his army, but conceals them behind hedges, walls, and trees, and keeps them close in the trenches, so that the enemy may not see all his force. Satan is never so powerful as when we know least of his power, and he is never so successful as when he shoots at us from behind the trench. The apostle, therefore, says, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” It is his devilish craft and subtlety that we have so much to dread. Lay aside one piece of the armour, and you are at once shot down.

The text speaks of “an evil day;” that is, a day of danger, of alarm: a day on which the Prince of Evil is plotting: and an evil, dark and gloomy day for us, unless we have on the heavenly armour, and know how to wear and use it. “Put on,” says the apostle: “take unto you the whole armour of God.” There is a putting of it on. It is not like the Armoury in the Tower, where guns, and pistols, and other military weapons are hung up in ornamental circles to be looked at as a spectacle: but it is to be taken, to be put on, to be received from the hands of God, and clasped round by his own fingers.

I have already shewn how needful prayer and watchfulness are to the putting on of heavenly armour. But I may further add, that it is by faith we put on every piece. If we have no faith, we have no Christian sincerity, nor spiritual knowledge of the truth; therefore, “the loins are not girt about with truth.” If we have no faith, we have on no breastplate of Christ’s righteousness; for that is only put on by faith. If we have no faith, we have no defence for our feet; for by faith we stand and walk; and therefore the feet are not “shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” If we have no faith, we have no helmet, because “salvation” is laid hold of by faith. If we have no faith, we cannot have “the shield of faith;” that is evident. If we have no faith, we cannot use “the sword of

the Spirit,” which is only wielded by faith. If we have no faith, we have no true prayer; for it is “the prayer of faith” that is effectual with God.

By faith, therefore, is every piece of the heavenly armour put on; and by faith, living faith, is every piece of it used. What strange characters we are! Able to fight one day, fleeing the next; resisting Satan this moment, and giving way that. How is this to be accounted for? Because at this moment we have faith; at the next, we have, or seem to have none. Faith is to the soul what a main-spring is to the watch. The main-spring is broken, or wanting. What is the watch worth? So faith is the main-spring of the soul. Let there be no faith, there is no inward movement. There may be hands, but like the hands of a child’s watch, they are made for shew, not for use: a bauble and a toy, not a working instrument. There must be faith in the soul in order that the hands may move in accordance with the will of God, and keep right time with the dial of the Sun of Righteousness.

Faith too, we need not only to wear, but to wield this heavenly armour, so as to “withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” It is, in the margin, “having overcome all, to stand.” And what a flood of light does this cast upon a Christian’s path—that the greatest danger lies in, and after victory! Bunyan has beautifully touched upon this, where he represents Christian as stumbling and falling immediately after he had got the start of his brother. When you have, in the strength of Christ, overcome one temptation, you are standing upon the brink of another: and the very pride that may lift up your heart for having gained one battle, only opens a way to fall by the next encounter.

What a strange warfare! Paul’s maxim would not do for the Duke of Wellington, “When I am weak, then am I strong.” That would not do to go to Waterloo with. We are never so weak as when in ourselves we are strong; we are never so strong as when in ourselves we are weak. Let me think myself secure, I fall; let me fear to fall, I am safe. O the mysteries of the Christian life! O the

paradox of the heavenly warfare! And therefore, with the deepest wisdom, the apostle has said, “Take unto you the whole armour of God.” Do not leave a single piece out; your life is at stake; forget not one buckle; leave loose not a single clasp; “that ye may withstand in the evil day.” There is an evil day coming; a day of temptation, an hour of trial; an evil day when the clouds gather blackness, the welkin is overspread with gloom, and the enemy comes forth in all his strength. In that “evil day,” the hour of temptation, who can stand? None but he who has on “the whole armour of God.”

Well; the evil day passes over; the sky clears, the clouds break, the sun comes forth, and its bright beams glance upon the warrior’s armour. It is unharmed; it has effectually shielded him; the fiery darts have dropped quenched at his feet. Is he safe now? When one Waterloo is gained, is peace to be proclaimed, and maintained for five-and-thirty years? Not so in the heavenly warfare. “Having done all,” or, as it is in the margin, “overcome all,” and gained the victory, then comes the difficulty—“to stand.” Why, it is as though there were greater danger after the victory than before it: that when the battle has been fought, and the enemy fled, then the devil was stronger than ever; because then we are for laying aside the heavenly armour. We perhaps say, We have fought and conquered: let us enjoy victory; get our furlough: hang up the armour: take a quiet nap to refresh ourselves.’ But Satan sleeps not; he never rests, nor tires; and therefore, when the Christian warrior has laid the armour aside, and said, Now let me sleep, I have gained the victory!’ that is the moment for his unsuspected adversary to take him at unawares, and aim at him a deadly thrust. Therefore, the apostle says, “Having done all, or overcome all, to stand.”

O, we must never lay aside the heavenly armour! And this is a mercy, that if we have one piece, we have all. God does not send us to the battle half armed. He who has provided one, has provided all. Let this too be remembered, and laid to heart, by way of encouragement—that the Lord, in choosing recruits,

does not, like our army sergeants, choose the strong, active, stout, lusty, vigorous, and healthy. He admits strange characters into his regiment; those whom no army doctor would pass; the halt, and the lame, the blind, the crippled, and asthmatic, the wheezing, and the paralysed; the consumptive in lung, the diseased in heart, and the withered in limb; he enlists them in his heavenly regiment, makes them all whole by a touch of his finger, clothes them with his heavenly armour, sends them forth to battle, and fights for them as “the God of armies.” Thus, weak in themselves, they are strong in Christ, and in the power of his might. And every such soldier will eventually win the day, gain the prize, and come off more than conqueror through him who loved and gave himself for him.

145 The Prayer Of Solomon

Preached at Eden Street Chapel. Hampstead Road. London, on Lord’s Day Evening,
August 3, 1851

“That thine eyes may be open upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said that thou wouldest put thy name there.”

2 Chron. 6:20

The Tabernacle in the wilderness was a type and figure of the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thence it derived all its efficacy and all its blessedness. It was a symbolic representation of “the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man”—of that perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus, in which dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

When the Lord gave David rest round about from all his enemies, it was in his heart to convert this tabernacle into a permanent structure. He said therefore unto Nathan, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.” This intention God did not permit David to fulfil; but promised that he “would set up his seed after him who should

build a house for his name.” This promise was accomplished in Solomon, who built the temple upon Mount Moriah. The temple thence-forward became what the tabernacle had been. And to signalise this change with his special approbation, God was pleased on the day of its dedication to fill it with his glory, and to consume with fire from heaven the burnt-offering upon the altar as he had done at the consecration of the tabernacle. Upon this solemn day, Solomon, as king of the people, offered a prayer on their behalf to God; a prayer of a very peculiar nature, but full of meaning, significancy, and blessedness.

I shall, with God’s blessing, this evening, attempt to take up some of the leading points of this prayer of Solomon.

As the temple was typical and figurative of the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, it became the centre of Israel’s worship, as well as the place on which the eyes of God rested from the beginning to the end of the year. A striking representation of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Mediator between God and man! For he is the true temple in whom the fulness of God dwells: to whom the eyes of all Israel look: in whom all true worship centres: for whose name’s sake all true prayer is breathed into and out of the heart, and all gracious answers come down.

As, then, we must lose sight of the temple as a material structure, and view in it the Lord Jesus, so similarly we must not carnalise the prayer of Solomon, nor view it as merely supplicating God for temporal blessings. Under that dispensation indeed, temporal blessings and afflictions were a part of the old covenant. But we have now a new and better covenant, which not only promises, but secures spiritual blessings to the chosen remnant. Viewing, then, the prayer of Solomon in a spiritual light, we must consider the petitions, not as temporal, but as spiritual supplications, applicable to the experience, the varied experience, of the family of God.

With these hints, I proceed to the subject before us. Seven cases, if I mistake not, does Solomon mention as needing help

from the sanctuary.

I.—On the first case I shall not at any length dwell; in fact, I cannot dwell long upon any of them, the subject being too spacious. But the first seems chiefly to be addressed to the Lord as a righteous and holy Sovereign: as the God of righteousness and truth. For, be it ever borne in mind, that though he is the God of all grace, of all mercy, and of all pardon, he is also a just and righteous Jehovah—the Judge of all the earth, who must do right. Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne, though mercy and truth go before his face.

“If a man sin against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to make him swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house, then hear thou from heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, by requiting the wicked, by recompensing his way upon his own head, and by justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness.” God is called upon here to pass a righteous decision in matters of difficulty, when appealed to on oath, that a fear of his great name may be inlaid into the hearts of men: that he may not be mocked nor trifled with on the footing of his grace: and that men may not indulge themselves in the persuasion that because he is merciful he has ceased to be just. We must never in viewing one part of God’s character lose sight of the other. Justice is not absorbed in mercy, nor mercy lost in justice. God’s character is a complete whole: perfect in justice, and perfect in mercy: a God that “pardons iniquity, transgression, and sin, and yet will by no means clear the guilty.”

II.—Having laid this broad basis: having set up as it were the throne of God upon his eternal justice and righteousness. Solomon proceeds to those cases, which need the special interpositions of mercy and grace. For the Lord’s people are a fallen people: and often by their sins bring themselves into those straits and difficulties from which mercy alone can deliver them.

The first case, then, of mercy that Solomon lays before the Lord with all humility, is, “If thy people Israel be put to the worse before

the enemy, because they have sinned against thee.” How often are we put to the worse before the enemy! Enemies we have; and enemies we ever must have, if we are walking in the path that leads to glory; for, “if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must and shall suffer persecution.” But the greatest enemy that we have to cope with, is that enemy self. You may have many enemies; few are without; but there is no enemy so subtle, so dangerous, so unwearied, and so ever close at hand as that which you carry in your own bosom. A man may do himself more injury in five minutes than all his enemies put together could do in fifty years. Self, therefore, is and ever must be a man’s greatest and worst enemy. And how often are we put to the worse before this enemy! Self gets the better of us. Pride, covetousness, or fleshly lusts, carnality and worldly-mindedness, unbelief, some indulged evil, or some besetting sin for a time overcomes the soul. We are put to the worse before the enemy.

Solomon has put his hand upon the right spot where he gives the reason of our being “put to the worse before the enemy.” Were we in our watch-tower, strong in grace and faith, we should prevail. But too often God’s people are put to the worse before the enemy “because they have sinned against thee.” We need fear no enemy except we first weaken ourselves by sinning against God; and this puts us to the worse before three powerful enemies, law, conscience, and Satan. But for sin the law would not be our enemy: if the law found nothing to condemn in us, we could never be put to the worse before it. Is not a guilty conscience, though in one sense our friend, yet in another an enemy? But what power could a guilty conscience have over us, or how could we ever be put to the worse before this enemy, unless we sinned against God?

And is not Satan our enemy? But what advantage we give to Satan by sin! By not taking heed to our ways, by want of watchfulness and prayer, we first get entangled. This displeases the Lord; we become weak by his absence; and when the enemy pushes hard, we are put to the worse before him. Under these

circumstances, but for the grace that is in Christ Jesus, the law would condemn to hell, conscience would swallow up in despair, and Satan would yell over the soul with shouts of infernal triumph. Solomon, as a typical mediator, puts up a prayer on behalf of such. He does not speak to encourage any in sin; but he says, "If they return, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication before thee in this house, then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers." The Lord will work repentance, contrition, and godly sorrow in the souls of his people; he will make them feel the bitterness of sin and their own folly in transgressing against him. He will put forth his gracious finger to soften their heart, and touch and melt their conscience, and move them "to return" with weeping and supplications. And when he sees this, he will manifest his pardoning mercy, and shed abroad his love in their heart by the Holy Ghost. But all, be it ever borne in mind, through the Mediator. There is no merit in repentance, no virtue in tears. You might shed an ocean of them, they could not wash one sin away. Your eyes might be a fountain of tears, they would not blot out the sins, the carmine sins, that have defiled your conscience. It must be by "a better sacrifice," the blood of the atonement, the blood of the Lamb of God shed upon the cross, and applied to the soul, that sin is purged away.

III.—But Solomon assumes another case, for we are always sinning—always thinking, desiring, imagining, saying, or doing something evil. "When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee." Sin still the cause. Every affliction must be traced up to sin. This is the reason why the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain literal or spiritual. Viewing the state of the church generally, may we not fear, greatly fear, that we have much of this in the present day? It is a time of drought: the heavens are much shut up: little dew, little rain falls; the ministry of the word is little, little blest: in this dark and gloomy day, this day of Zion's low condition, few showers fall upon the souls of God's

people. But the heaven is often shut up as regards individuals. They often complain that they cry, and are not heard; that they come unto God, and find no access: that he covers himself with a cloud that their prayer should not pass through. When the heavens are thus shut up, when there is no passage for prayer, no access to God, no entering in within the veil, no sweet sense of union and communion, it is too often the fruit of their own disobedience and folly. If we walk contrary to the Lord, he will walk contrary to us. We shut up the heaven against ourselves.

But the same heaven that shuts out access from beneath, also shuts out rain and dew from above. What fruitfulness then can there be in the soul? What is the material earth without rain? Let there be a long season of drought, how vegetation suffers! how tree, plant, and flower, especially in hot climates, droop and wither! Much more so with the soul. If there be no spiritual rain, no dropping down of God's presence and favour, no bedewing showers of his presence and grace, how hard the heart grows! how every grace of the soul seems to droop and wither! The tender bud of hope, the expanding flower of love, the ripening fruit of practice, and the green leaf of profession, all droop and hang as it were only by the stalk, when there is neither rain nor dew. Sin, sin still the reason. If the Lord shut up heaven; if he refuse the rain, and withhold the dew; we are the guilty cause. We must clear the Lord, and not make him a partaker of our sin. This drought of soul, be it in churches, or in individuals, we for the most part procure to ourselves by our own carnality and folly.

But the first step out of this drooping state is to feel, deeply feel the miserable condition we are thus brought into. The worst state to be in is, to be barren, and not feel it; to be dry, drooping, withered, and be careless about it: to have no groans, nor sighs, though the heaven be shut up: to have no longing desires, though dew and rain be withholden. Such a state of soul as this is "nigh unto death." The first step, then, toward recovery is to feel the drought. It is so in creation. How everything which has life feels

the suspension of rain and dew! how plant and flower, how all animated nature seems to look up heavenward for the showers of rain to fall! Nay, the very brute earth, the very dull clods seem to thirst for the bottles of heaven. Much more where there is life in the soul, where the grace of God dwells.

The first breaking up, then, of this withered state is, to confess, pray, supplicate, seek, beg, and desire. As Solomon says, "Yet if they pray toward this place," that is, the temple, the type and figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, "and confess thy name;" confess thy justice and righteousness in withholding rain; "and turn from their sin," renounce their idols, pluck out right eyes, cut off right arms, and turn from their iniquities, loathing and abhorring them because they are hateful in God's sight; "when thou dost afflict them; then," when thou hast brought them to this point, and wrought this by thy grace in their soul, "then hear thou from heaven." This is a breaking through these iron gates; "and forgive the sin of thy servants," which has brought upon them this shutting up of heaven, which has been the cause of this withholding of rain and dew. "When thou hast taught them the good way," the only way of obedience, "wherein they should walk;" when thou hast wrought in their souls these gracious fruits, then, in thy tender mercy, "send rain upon the land which thou hast given this people for an inheritance;" then, do thou bedew and water their soul, and pour upon them the abundant showers of thy grace.

IV.—But he assumes another case. It is a most comprehensive prayer. How it enters into the varied experience of the family of God! What a divine portraiture of the various cases of their souls, and the state and condition into which they fall! "If there be dearth in the land,' if there be pestilence,' if there be blasting or mildew, locusts, or caterpillars,' if their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land; whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there may be." How comprehensive!

1. "Dearth in the land"—a general famine! And is not this true now? What a general famine is there in the land! How little life and

feeling is there to be found! How the souls of the Lord's people seem, for the most part, in a deep decline! How they are pining away for the want of spiritual food! There is a "dearth in the land," a grievous famine. "not of bread, but of hearing the words of the Lord."

2. "If there be pestilence:" aye, a pestilence worse than cholera—the pestilence of sin, that smites at noonday. And O, how this pestilence is at work in the professing church. assuming every form of disease—leprosy in the head, blotches in the face, wheezing in the lungs, stagnation in the heart, palsy in the arms, tottering in the knees, and debility all over! "The whole head sick, and the whole heart faint!" O sin, horrid sin, what a plague art thou to God's family! What a poison is there in thee! and how this poison runs through every artery and vein, and infects every thread, muscle, and fibre of our being!

3. "If there be blasting," or blight. How the souls of God's people are often as blighted! The cold east wind chills and nips them; and upon this follows blight. It is in grace sometimes as in nature. In early spring we walk in the fields. How beautiful the wheat looks! But alas, before harvest comes, an east wind arises; and upon the wings of the east wind rides the blight: and then where is all the verdure, the beauty that before gladdened the eyes as the precursor of an abundant harvest? Alas, alas, it is blighted. So sometimes the fruit in the garden. How well the blossom looks! what a promise of an abundant crop! But in one night it is blighted: and the fruit that looked early so promising, drops before ripened upon the ground. Is it not so in the professing church? How many young Christians promised well. They came into the church blooming with godly fear, tenderness of conscience, humility, and spiritual-mindedness. But pride and worldliness puffed them up; a nipping east wind in the shape of some powerful temptation fell upon them, and blighted their youthful promise. And what are they now? Like the fruit that hangs upon the tree, withered and blighted, proclaiming its own sad tale.

4. But there is “mildew” also: and that comes on more slowly. The blasting or blight may be a sudden stroke, done in a night: some gross sin, some slip or fall may blight a Christian for life: but the mildew comes on more gradually. Many are kept from sin outwardly who have the mildew in every leaf: business, business, business occupying the mind, engrossing the heart, filling every thought. O what a mildew is here! A person may say. It is right for me to work for my family: business must be attended to. A man would sink in this day of competition, if he swim not with the foremost, and strike out hands and feet with all his strength.’ Well, it may be so: yet the mildew may be in it all. But suppose you are prospering in business, and doubling your capital, or die with a good round sum in the funds, what is that, if there be mildew in your soul? If you have not the blessing of God upon you, nor Christ’s grace and presence, you are but a poor mildewed professor, without the life and power of godliness. And how worldly-mindedness and covetousness grow upon a man! As a man gets into middle life, how family cares grow upon him, and often with them worldly-mindedness! And how this mildew spreads over the soul, and brings as it were a sickly hue upon all his profession! O there is much mildew everywhere! Churches and individuals are mildewed. Who in this day escapes? It is in grace as in nature: a mildew is often general; few escape some touches of it, if they escape the whole.

5. But there are “locusts” too. These are greedy creatures; they eat up all, and leave not one green thing behind. And what are vile sins and indulged lusts but locusts that eat up every green thing in the soul? O, how they champ, and champ, and champ away till every leaf falls beneath their greedy jaws! Beware of the “locusts.” “The land is as the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness.”

6. But there are “caterpillars” also. And these you know are on the underside of the leaf. Would we look for them, we must lift the leaf up, and then we shall see the caterpillars feeding out of sight.

And O, how many caterpillars may be seen when we lift up the leaf of profession! Here is a fig-tree full of leaves. But lift up the leaves, and look beneath; see the caterpillars crawling amidst the fibres, sucking all their juice. Inward secret sins make sad work with the Christian: the indulgence of any besetment will surely starve his soul.

One has this, the other that temptation: evil temper, pride, unbelief, worldly-mindedness: but of all caterpillars the most frequent and the worst are those sensual desires and carnal appetites which are so deeply interwoven with our animal nature. These are the insatiable caterpillars which feed on the young leaf of profession, and secretly undermine and suck out all its sap: so that the leaf droops and withers, and but for a revival would altogether fall off; the very profession of religion would be abandoned, the very place of worship forsaken, the back turned upon the truth, and the people of God utterly left.

7. “If their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land.” They may have their cities and strong fortifications: they may fortify themselves with notions, opinions, or doctrines: and yet when their “enemies besiege them,” they have no strength to resist.

8. “Whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there be.” Blessed comprehensiveness! “Whatsoever sore!” Great, or small; beginning, or going on; deep, or shallow; “whatever sore, or whatever sickness there be;” whatever the complaint; whatever the disease—Solomon, the typical mediator, opens wide his arms, and comprehends them all. But he goes on to say, and blessed are his words, “Then what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house. Solomon comes to experience; he puts his hand upon the right spot. It is knowing his “own sore,” and his “own grief.” You may know another man’s; that will not profit you. You may read of experience in books, love to hear experimental ministers, and will hear no others; and yet not know your “own

sore;” your “own grief.” Like a physician who may know the symptoms of every malady, and yet not have one malady of his own: so you may hear described every symptom of every disease, and yet be untouched by one.

But the man for whom Solomon prays is he that knows and feels, painfully feels, his “own sore” and his “own grief;” whose heart is indeed a grief to him, whose sins do indeed trouble him. How painful this sore often is! how it runs night and day! how full of ulcerous matter! and how it shrinks from the probe! Most of the Lord’s family have a “sore,” each some tender spot. something perhaps known to himself and to God alone, the cause of his greatest grief. It may be some secret slip he has made, some sin he has committed, some word he has spoken, or some evil thing he has done. He has been entangled, and entrapped, and cast down: and this is his grief and his sore, which he feels, and that at times deeply before God. For such Solomon prays: he casts his net upon the right side of the ship: and says. “Then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest: for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men.” Yes; God alone knows the heart: he knows it completely, and sees to its very bottom.

V.—But Solomon, as a typical mediator, is not content with praying only for Israel: he casts his eye even beyond the domains of Canaan, and looks to the “stranger.” “Moreover, concerning the stranger, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country for thy great Name’s sake, and thy mighty hand, and thy stretched-out arm; if they come and pray in this house, then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for.” There are those among the family of God whom this description will suit. They are not members of churches; they have not cast their lot among the people of God. And as regards their experience and feelings, they cannot lay claim to the blessings of the gospel; indeed they hardly know whether or not the life of God is begun in their soul. When

they hear the family of God speak of the blessings they have felt, the mercies they have received, their tongue is dumb; they have little to speak of; they can only secretly sigh and pray that God would bless them too. And yet they come “from a far country,” the country of sin and carnality in which they have dwelt all their life long, and they come for God’s “great Name’s sake.” His “great Name” has attracted their souls, drawn them near to the place where his honour dwelleth: and they have felt “his mighty hand” in convincing them of their sins, and laying them low, and “his stretched-out arm” in taking them out of the world, bringing them to confess their iniquities, and seek and supplicate for mercy.

There may be some here who cannot speak much of the dealings of God with their soul: and yet they cannot say they have no desire Godward, no feeling, no conscience, no prayer, no supplication, no hunger, no thirst after the blessings of God experimentally felt. This they dare not say: but they can say little more. Now these are “the strangers who come from a far country for God’s great Name’s sake, and for his mighty hand, and his stretched-out arm.” that they may receive the mercy revealed in the gospel, that they may in God’s time be experimentally blessed with a manifestation of his love. These “come and pray in this house,” that is, in the name of, and looking only to the Lord Jesus. There is prayer in their hearts: the Lord has taught them to fear his great Name, and has put into their hearts a cry and a sigh for mercy. Now will the Lord refuse to hear their cry? “Then,” prays the king of Israel, “hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for.”

The “stranger” calleth upon God for mercy, for a sense of pardon and manifested interest in the Lord Jesus Christ; to have his conscience sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb: and to be enabled to say without a doubt or fear, “The Lord is my God.” He comes not in daring presumption; but in humility and brokenness of heart as a “stranger.” He lays no claim; he makes no boast: he

puts no confidence in the flesh; but comes in his real character as a “stranger,” and asks the Lord to bestow upon him this and that mercy, and to give him this and that blessing simply on the ground of his free and sovereign grace. Solomon, as a typical mediator, prays to the Lord that he would do “according to all that the stranger calleth upon him for.” And surely he will, he must do so for his own Name’s sake; for every prayer offered up in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, under the teachings of the Spirit, will surely bring down an answer.

VI.—But Solomon returns to the manifested people of God. He puts up a passing prayer for the stranger; but his heart and eyes are upon the gathered family; and therefore he assumes another case: “If thy people go out to war against their enemies by the way that thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name, then hear thou from the heavens their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.” In the first case, he assumes they were “put to the worse” before the enemy; but he speaks here of a legitimate warfare, as the apostle says, “if a man strive lawfully.” There is a lawful warfare, a contending against our spiritual enemies, a conflict, a daily conflict with everything contrary to God and godliness. Now in this warfare we need the Lord’s strength to be made perfect in our weakness. Strength in ourselves we have none. Not a single lust can we subdue: not one member of the old man can we put off or mortify: not a single temptation can we deliver ourselves from: not an enemy overcome by our own wisdom or strength. God must, by his Spirit, fight all our battles to bring us off more than conquerors. In this battle look we ever must to our great High Priest. Our eyes must be fixed upon the spiritual temple, and out of the fulness of the Lord Jesus all strength must come, all success flow, all victory proceed.

VII.—But as time is running on, I will come to the last case that Solomon speaks of, which I believe will meet the case of many of the Lord’s family. For the beauty of this prayer is, that it takes up

well-nigh every case: “If they sin against thee for there is no man which sinneth not and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near.” Here is the case of a poor soul carried away captive by sin. How do you and sin manage matters? Are you free from sin? If you are, Solomon has made a great mistake here; for he says, “There is no man which sinneth not.”

If, then, there be no man free from sin, who, who can claim exemption? The fact is this. Men, for the most part, do not know what sin is; they do not see light in God’s light; they know not the evil of their hearts: they do not feel what the apostle calls “the sin that dwelleth in them:” they are not alive to its movements and workings in their breast. But every one, without exception, taught of God, knows, and feels too, what sin is: and some feel too, that through sin they are brought into captivity, that their enemies get the better of them, and drag them away into bondage and imprisonment. Let me put to you this case. Do you never sin? I must confess, you reply, sin I do. Aye, there is not a day, nor an hour in my life in which I am free from sin. Well, let me put a question upon the back of this. How do you feel now, when sin has entangled and got the better of you? No guilt? no fear? no bondage? no darkness? no captivity? no groan? no sigh? If so, where, where is the life of God in your soul? Where, where is the fear of God in your heart? Where, where any tenderness of conscience? Then, if you sin, and none can claim exemption, you must, more or less, be brought into bondage. The thing is as plain to my mind as that two and two make four. Well, they are carried away captive into a land far off or near.

There are degrees of bondage. Sin sets all who feel it at a distance from God: but some sins set the soul farther from him than others. When thus carried captive, the poor prisoners lose their sweet confidence; they have not the same access to God as before, and they are in their feelings at a great, often a very great distance from God. But are they left there? Has the Lord no longer any regard

to them? Does he forget their captivity and imprisonment? “Yet there,” Solomon says, “if they bethink themselves.” God puts the thought into their heart; it is with them as with the prodigal, “they come to themselves:.... they bethink themselves.” Sin has rushed in upon them like a flood, it has carried them away, swept them into captivity. Yet, “they bethink themselves:” gracious thoughts spring up in their souls; the Lord touches their hearts with his finger, and “they bethink themselves” of where they are, and where they have been, what they have done, and the condition they have fallen into; and “they return and pray in the land of their captivity,” saying, “We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly.” Confession, honest, deep confession of their backsliding and sin! And then, flowing out of that, “if they return to thee with all their heart and with all their soul.” It must be with all the heart, with all the soul: no half measures will do when they are in the land of their captivity, whither they have been carried captives: and “pray toward this land which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name; then hear thou from the heavens, even from thy dwelling-place, their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee”—forgive them all their sins when they return unto the Lord.

Now these are the cases that Solomon, as a typical mediator, has assumed: and they are suitable, most suitable.

But to whom? Not to all, but to those who feel, who are exercised in their souls: who know, as Solomon sweetly speaks, “each his own grief and his own sore.” Do you feel it? Is this the experience of your soul? Are these some of the exercises and sorrows and grievings of our heart Godward? Then, what a mercy that there is a mediator like Jesus: that there is a temple in which the fulness of Godhead dwells: that the eyes of God are upon this temple from one end of the year to the other, and that he hears all prayer which is offered up in the name of Jesus, when eye and heart

are fixed upon him! However deep, however sorrowful be your case, there is still room for encouragement: there is still ground for hope whilst Jesus lives, and the life of God is in the breast.

The Lord appeared, we read, to Solomon by night, and said unto him, “I have heard thy prayer....Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.” It is for Jesus’ sake that all prayer is heard, and this is the ground of every gracious answer. The petitions offered by Solomon are for living souls, for those who have some divine feelings in their breast. How deep that feeling is, I will not determine; but there must be some life, some feeling in the soul, in order to have an interest in this comprehensive prayer. God in mercy grant that we may enter into the blessedness, beauty, and suitability of it; that having such a Mediator at God’s right hand, such a great High Priest over the house of God, we may be encouraged under every case, in every state, and in every condition, to make our wants and supplications known unto God. And, be assured, the soul that does this will be heard and answered sooner or later for Christ’s sake.

146 The River Of Life And The Trees On Its Banks

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road. London, on Tuesday Evening,

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“And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.”

Ezekiel 47:12

The last nine chapters of the prophet Ezekiel contain in them much that is very mysterious. You will recollect that “in the visions of God,” the prophet is “brought into the land of Israel, and set on a very high mountain by which was as the frame of a city on the south.” But besides this city, he is shewn by his heavenly Guide a temple, of which there is a most minute and particular description, his Conductor measuring its breadth, length, and proportions. Into these details it is not necessary now to enter. But a question at once arises, whether this portion of God’s word is to be understood strictly literally, or strictly figuratively. Some, and perhaps the large majority, consider that the objects presented to Ezekiel in vision were merely symbols of spiritual and experimental things. Others attach to the various things, so minutely detailed, a literal signification, and believe that they will all be fulfilled in times still future.

Which of these two interpretations is the true one, I do not feel competent to decide; but I do not see that one necessarily excludes the other. Even if we admit the literal interpretation, that no more excludes the spiritual than the literal existence of the ancient temple and its divinely appointed furniture, as the ark and the candlestick, shut out their spiritual meaning. One thing at least is abundantly clear, that there is a striking connection between a portion of the vision that Ezekiel saw, and that which was revealed to holy John in the Revelation. For, in Eze 47, the chapter from which the text is taken, a “river” is seen issuing out of the door of the house, and upon the banks of this river, trees growing whose fruit was for meat and their leaf for medicine. Now this is nearly identical with what holy John saw in Re 22, where in vision he was shewn “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” There is, however, a difference between the two descriptions, which in itself is sufficient to shew that they are to be figuratively understood, for were they to be literally fulfilled there could be no such discrepancy nor inconsistency. John saw but one tree, “the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and

yielded her fruit every month;” but Ezekiel saw trees, numerous trees, “all trees,” which bring forth not twelve manner of fruits, but new fruit according to their months.

In looking at the words before us, I will, with God’s blessing, attempt to examine, in a spiritual and experimental light,

I.—The River which Ezekiel saw issuing from out of the threshold of the house eastward. And,

II.—The Trees which he saw growing on its banks, whose leaf never faded, and whose fruit was never consumed, the one supplying medicine for every disease, and the other food for every appetite. The Lord enable us to pluck this evening one or two of these medicinal leaves, and to eat some of this satisfying fruit.

I.—The prophet, then, was brought by his heavenly Guide unto the door of the house, and “beheld waters issuing out from under the threshold of the house eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar.”

These “waters” are clearly identical with the “river” that John saw. But what did these “waters” and this “river” spiritually signify? The eternal love of God to the church, as flowing forth in the manifestations of grace, mercy and truth. For John saw this “river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” And what flows out of the throne of God and of the Lamb but the river of everlasting love? for, “God is love;” and he says to the church, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” But as the church in her fallen condition is dead, therefore she must be quickened and made alive; it is then chiefly and specially a river of life; and this John expressly calls it, “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal.” Thus it betokens the communications of spiritual life to the souls of the elect. This river had, therefore, different degrees of depth and breadth.

This heavenly Guide went forth eastward with a line in his hand, and measuring a thousand cubits, brought the prophet

through the waters: they were then up to the ancles. The course of this heavenly river and its degrees of depth and breadth seem to point to two different things: First, the gradual spread of the outward manifestation of grace in the gospel: and second, the degrees of the inward manifestation of grace in the soul. Thus, in the first promise that was given in Paradise to our fallen parents, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, was the first manifestation of pardoning grace. The river of eternal love first, then, rose to view: but in their development the waters were as yet shallow. They were but up to the ancles—a little rivulet. Thus also, in the first incomings of life into the soul, as well as in the experience of the love of God among many Christians, the waters are shallow; they do but bathe the ancles. But the divine Guide measured a thousand steps forward, and brought the prophet through the waters. They were then higher; "they were to the knees." The river of grace that had bathed the feet of Abel, Enoch, Noah, and the antediluvian saints, deepened and widened in the call of Abraham. The covenant promise "that in Him, and in his seed, all the nations of the earth should be blessed," flowed up to the knees of the patriarchs, no longer a rill, but a brook.

And thus there are those in the divine life round whose feeble knees the river of grace flows and strengthens and "confirms" them by its healing tide. But onward still the man with the line in his hand advances, and the waters are now to the loins. If "the ancles" denote the antediluvian, and "the knees" the patriarchal times, "the loins" may represent the prophetic period, when the outward manifestations of grace in a coming Messiah assumed a deeper, broader character. And, viewed experimentally also, the inward flow of life and love is in some up to the loins, bathing them with divine strength. If the ancles represent "babes," and the knees "the children" in whom the spirit of prayer is warm, the loins may typify "the young men" who "are strong and... have overcome the Wicked One." But the Guide still moves on, and now "the waters were risen, waters to swim in. a river that could not be passed

The River Of Life And The Trees On Its Banks 81
over." And may not this aptly represent the days of Christ and his apostles—especially the mighty pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, when the river of mercy, grace, and truth, the river of life and love became a river to swim in, and three thousand souls bathed in its stream in one day?

II.—But we will look, with God's blessing, a little more closely still at this "river." One important feature is its source and origin. This is "the sanctuary" as seen in the visions of Ezekiel: "Their waters, they issued out of the sanctuary." In John it is said to be "the throne of God and of the Lamb;" thus identifying the sanctuary with the throne of God and his dear Son.

There is something very significant in the word "sanctuary," as denoting the source whence these waters flow. I need not mention that it means the holy place, and was especially used of the tabernacle where God dwelt between the cherubims. God is holy; his name, his nature, is perfect holiness. Thus, these waters flow out of the bosom of that unspeakably holy Jehovah before whom the seraphs veil their faces, and cry, "Holy, holy is the Lord of Sabaoth." Though it is a pardoning love, flowing down to vile, unworthy, unholy sinners, yet it issues out of the holy bosom of a Triune Jehovah. But John saw it flow "out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," signifying the certainty and perpetuity of its source, as well as its union with the mystery of the incarnation. In Ezekiel it is therefore seen to flow down at the south side of the altar, pointing out its connection with the sacrifice and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. What so firm, so stable, so immovable as the throne of God? and what so gracious, so compassionate as the throne of the Lamb? The Lamb for sinners slain, the crucified Man of Sorrows, is set down with the Father in his throne, as he himself declares, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" Re 3:21. Out of this throne does this river take its source.

II.—But having looked at this "river" in its source, and seen a

little of the increasing breadth and depth of the streams, we may now consider its course. "Then said he unto me, These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed." To understand this, we must reflect a little upon the local situation of Jerusalem: for it was to Jerusalem that the prophet had been brought in the visions of God from Chebar in the land of Assyria. The Dead Sea lies to the east of Jerusalem, and the intervening country is a wild track of wilderness. Ezekiel, then, in vision saw the river flow eastward, and passing through the wilderness bury itself in the bottom of the Dead Sea, that well-known sulphurous lake; the ancient site of Sodom and Gomorrah. The river flows eastward. This seems to point to the future triumph of the gospel. Hitherto it has flowed westward, leaving the east to heathenism and Mahometanism; but the day will come when not only "the kings of Tarshish and the isles" Europe and the West, "but the kings of Sheba and Seba" the monarchies of the East "shall offer gifts."

But the waters flow through the desert into the Dead Sea. Can we find in all the word of God two more striking symbols of the human heart? Is not man's nature a desert, a ruined waste? Does anything good naturally grow there? Is it not wholly overrun with thistles, thorns, and briars? Is it susceptible of any cultivation? Can any human art, can any natural skill, make the wilderness blossom like the rose? Here false religion differs from true. False religion admits to a certain extent that the heart is naturally a desert, but insists on the ability of man to cultivate it. It puts into his hand an unlimited assortment of agricultural implements, and bids him cultivate this absolutely barren soil—with about as much success as if he ploughed the Alps, or sowed the wilderness of Sinai. True religion teaches that the heart is a desert, and that no skill or industry of man can alter its nature; but that grace, and grace alone, brings forth in it and out of it the fruits of righteousness.

But the Holy Spirit employs another figure to set forth the

nature of man, and to my mind a more expressive one could not well be chosen—I mean, the Dead Sea. You know what the Dead Sea is, and has been for centuries—a solemn and awful memorial of the judgments of God. Once there stood upon its site five flourishing cities—Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Bela. At the intercession of Lot, Bela afterwards called Zoar was spared: but on the four devoted cities the wrath of God fell. Fire and brimstone descended from heaven, burnt them up, with all their inhabitants, and turned that flourishing valley into a standing lake. What a figure of man's utter ruin! Man in his primitive state was like that well-watered vale, which for beauty and fertility was "as the garden of the Lord," in which Lot pitched his tent; but when Adam fell, that beautiful vale was turned into a salt and fetid lake. It is emphatically called the Dead Sea, as destitute in its waters of animal, and on its banks of vegetable life—apt image of the dead soul of man! And as the Dead Sea is said to exhale a fetid and poisonous vapour, so does the human heart ever exhale the noisome steam of sin.

IV.—But the river in taking its course through the wilderness, and into the Dead Sea, has to create a change in them. It has to make the wilderness blossom; to communicate life to that sea which is emphatically dead; for we read, "These waters issue out towards the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed. And it shall come to pass that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live; and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh" Eze 47:8,9. So when the river of God's grace, that "river of God which is full of water," flows into the human heart, it communicates fertility and fruitfulness to the barren desert, life and motion and health to the Dead Sea. What a wondrous change do the grace, mercy, and truth of God create in a sinner's heart! For want of this river, how much religion is there

without root or fruit! As Berridge justly says,

No real goodness long can stand Which planted is by human hand,
It dies as soon as born.

A man may plant, sow, weed and water; but the first breath of divine displeasure withers all the produce: and the first burning ray of the sun of temptation makes it like the grass on the house-top. But let the grace, mercy and love of God be felt in a sinner's heart: let, according to the promise, "waters break out in the wilderness and streams in the desert," then the Lord plants therein "the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree:" and all this, "that they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it" Isa 41:20. Under this divine watering and planting alone are produced the fruits of the Spirit.

v.—But the river does not tarry in the desert, nor lavish all its waters there. It speeds on in its vivifying course to the Dead Sea. There too it makes a wondrous change. "Which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed." I need hardly stop to prove that the Dead Sea is here spoken of, for no other sea lies to the east of Jerusalem, and two towns are specially named which stood on its banks, Engedi and Eneglaim, the former retaining almost its name to this day. The waters of this river are unspeakably salt and brackish, impregnated with sulphur, and covered with bitumen. But they are "healed" by the river of the sanctuary. They then become fresh and sweet. And what can heal the salt and bitter waters of the human heart? Their tossing and heaving cannot make them fresh and sweet. Nay, as the waters of Jordan have for centuries run into the Dead Sea, and it is brackish still, so all counsels and resolutions, vows and promises may be poured into the heart of man' but they cannot sweeten its bitter waters. Pride, envy, lust, unbelief still reign. But the river of life "heals" the waters. The misery of sin, the curse of the law, remorse of conscience, enmity against God, dislike of his will and way—the bitter waters that make life a burden and death a terror—are healed

by the streams that issue out of the sanctuary.

II.—But we turn back from viewing the Dead Sea into which this river pours its healing streams to look at the trees which the prophet in vision saw growing on its banks. "Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other" Eze 47:7. The object and use of these trees are described in the words of our text by the heavenly Guide. "And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine."

I.—Viewing the river as emblematic of the flowing forth of mercy, grace and truth, life, light, liberty and love, as revealed in the gospel, we must understand "the trees" on either bank as typical of blessings connected with the gospel. We may therefore consider the trees to represent the ordinances of God's house, what are commonly called 'means of grace.' I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour therefore to shew how these "trees" represent these ordinances and means.

You will observe that these "trees" grow on either side of the "river." They are therefore connected with the manifestation of grace in the gospel; they run as it were parallel with the gospel; and derive from it all their beauty, power and efficacy. Trees in hot countries were planted by the side of waters, for there only could they flourish. "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water" Ps 1:3. "He shall be as a tree planted by the waters" Jer 17:8. Thus, in the trees which the prophet saw; they stood on either bank, deriving from the river all their virtue and sap. Their roots spread themselves down to the flowing stream; their branches drooped over and inhaled the vapour and dew which rose up from it in the cool evening. The waters issuing out of the sanctuary flowed into their roots, imparting medicine to the leaves and nourishment to

the fruit. It says expressly, "It shall bring forth new fruit, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary." So the ordinances of God's house, and what are called 'means of grace,' derive all their balm and all their food from their being watered by the pure river of water of life.

1. Look at the word of God itself. Is not the word of God a blessed ordinance whereby the soul is healed when sick and fed when languishing? "He sent his word and healed them." But what gives the word of God its balm and its food? This tree stands on the river brink; the waters of life flow through it into the leaves—the texts and passages that clothe its branches—and into the fruit that hangs upon the boughs. Salutory medicines are generally bitter. Such often are the leaves upon this tree. The soul needs reproofs, warnings, admonitions, as well as cordials and tonics. The roasted paschal lamb was to be eaten "with bitter herbs," and "to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." But the soul needs also at times healing balm, when cut and wounded by sin and shame. The leaves in this tree—the promises and consolations—have then a healing efficacy. The fruit too—the truth as it is in Jesus, the declarations of mercy and peace, the revelation of grace and truth in the scriptures—derives all its food "because the waters issued out of the sanctuary." What is the word of God without life and feeling, without balm to the conscience or food to the soul?

2. Take again prayer. Separate prayer from the grace, mercy, love and truth of God—what is it? Unless the mercy and grace of God had been revealed in Jesus, there would have been no warrant for prayer. Devils pray not, for there is no promise of mercy, no Redeemer provided for them. Prayer is a gift from above: "I will pour upon the house of David... the spirit of grace and of supplications." Grace and supplications go together. The river of life waters the roots of prayer; into its streams the branches dip; and by what is beautifully called in Job, "the scent of water," that is, the vaporous breath that bathes its leaves, does it spring forth and grow.

3. So the preaching of the gospel is a tree of life. Many can bless God for a preached gospel. It has been a tree of life to thousands and tens of thousands. But whence does the gospel derive its efficacy? Not from the eloquence of the pulpit, the learning of universities, or the wisdom of academies; but because it dips its roots into the river of life, and draws out thence sap and juice that make the fruit thereof to be for meat, and the leaf for medicine.

4. And what is reading of the scriptures? "The book of the law," said the Lord to Joshua, "shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night" Jos 1:8. "Search the scriptures," said the blessed Lord in the days of his flesh. The life of God in the soul is fed by the scripture. The word of God is indeed a tree of life, on which new fruit is ever growing, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. "I am the Lord that healeth thee." But it is only a tree of life as it stands on the bank of the river. We may read the Bible with the greatest regularity: we may have our morning portion, and our evening chapter allotted out with the greatest nicety. Nay, we may devote our life to the study and perusal of the Bible, and yet never pluck from it so much as a leaf or gather one ripe fruit. It is good to read the Bible: but that is not sufficient to make a Christian. The river of life must bathe the roots of our Bible reading, and then when wounded there will be a leaf to pluck, and when hungry food to eat.

5. So with Christian conversation. The communion of saints, the intercourse that God's people have with each other, the talking often one to another as Malachi speaks of the Lord's goodness and mercy is a tree of life; but only so as it stands on the river bank, and dips its roots down into the stream. What is religious conversation, so called, but idle gossip, except it be impregnated with the grace and love of God? What is much that is called Christian conversation but mere slander, or gossiping newsmongering about churches and ministers? Religious tea parties, anniversaries, and too often ministerial visits, what are they, for the most part? "Trees... twice dead, plucked up by the

roots.” With leaves all withered, and fruit all wizened, there they lie prostrate on the bank like a mouldering pollard willow. And the reason why religious conversation so often degenerates into slander, detraction and gossip is, because this so-called conversation is not a tree of life that stands upon the brink of this immortal river. But let Christian conversation and the intercourse of saints be a tree of life; let it dip its roots down into the love of God, and draw sap and vigour out of this living river, then it brings forth fruit for meat, and leaves for medicine.

6. So with the ordinances of God’s house. How is baptism a tree of life, except as growing on the river bank, and dipping its roots down into the water of life? The baptismal pool does not make baptism a spiritual ordinance. In thousands of cases it is but a formal ceremony. But when it is impregnated with the life of God; when its roots are dipped into the streams of eternal love, then, as many have found, it bears fruit for meat, and leaf for medicine.

7. So with the Lord’s Supper. Take away the grace, love, and mercy of God out of the Lord’s Supper, and what is it? It is but an empty form. But let the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper dip its roots into the love of God, then it bears fruit for meat, and leaf for medicine.

II.—But the prophet says of these trees: “Their leaf shall never fade, and their fruit shall never be consumed.” In Eastern countries trees soon fade, and the fruit is soon consumed, if they do not stand by the side of a river. They need to be constantly irrigated at their roots in order to maintain verdure of leaf and perpetuity of fruit. Thus, it is said of these trees that “their leaf shall never fade, and their fruit never be consumed.” In other words, their leaves shall ever be green, and their fruit shall ever grow. Now this is the beauty and blessedness of real religion, vital godliness, the genuine work of God upon the soul, that it never dies. All other religion fades, withers and decays. It has no stamina in it; there is no healthy verdure in the leaf; no beautiful fragrance in its flower; no sweetness or nourishment in the fruit.

III.—But the beauty of these trees of life is this, that their leaf never withers. In real religion, in the sweet teaching of the Holy Spirit, there is always something fresh, always something new, always something blessed. It is like our daily bread which the Lord bade his disciples ask for—”give us this day our daily bread.” It never cloy, satiates, or disgusts. So with this blessed tree of life: the leaf never fades, but is always green, fresh and healing. The fruit, too, is never consumed; there is enough, and to spare; enough, and more than enough to supply all the wants of God’s people, in all times, ages, and circumstances.

See how this runs through every means of grace! You come to hear the word of God. How cold your heart is! how dead and dry! how stupid and barren! But there is something said, which seems in a moment to touch, soften and melt it. What is this? A green leaf from the tree of life. Ah, here too is fruit that is never consumed. You may eat and eat again, and never be weary of eating.

So with prayer. What a burden prayer often is to a living soul! He goes to it without any feeling: but let him upon his knees have his heart softly touched by the Spirit of God; let his spirit be sweetly melted by a sight of Jesus: let him find anything like real access—what a blessedness there is then conveyed to the soul! what a reviving communicated! what strength imparted!

So with Christian conversation. Sometimes we seem afraid to meet a child of God—ashamed even to see him, feeling ourselves utterly unworthy even to speak to God’s family. From this disinclination of our carnal mind, if we see them at a distance we could almost turn down a street to avoid them: and if we do get into their company sometimes, we leave them with our hearts rather discouraged and cast down than refreshed. But let Christian conversation be touched with the grace and love of God; let heart be knit to heart in the sweet bonds of fellowship and love; let something be said that meets an echo in our bosom, something which finds its way into our breast, how sweet and blessed Christian conversation then becomes; and how it seems

to strengthen, refresh, and comfort the soul.

So with the ordinances of God's house. What is Baptism; what is the Lord's Supper, except the Lord be there? Let the Lord be there, how fresh it is: every leaf that grows upon the tree of life is filled with verdure, and every particle of fruit that grows upon the boughs is meat—juicy, savoury, blessed meat to the soul.

IV.—But it is said to bring forth “new fruit according to his months.” There is always something new in the things of God. Here is a passage perhaps in the Word of God that we have read and read again and again without seeing or feeling anything in it; but all of a sudden there may come a blessed flash of light upon it; we now see something in it that we have never seen before, something exceedingly sweet and precious. It is now all new; it is received as new, felt as new, fed upon as new, relished as new. It seems as though we never saw anything in the passage before. So with prayer; so with hearing. You may perhaps have had your soul shut up in distress and bondage and misery for months; you could scarcely trace anything of the life of God in you. But under the preached word, it may have pleased God to drop something, which has come into your heart with warmth, and life, and feeling. O how new it is! It is as new as though it was never heard before: it seems as though the eyes were now first opened, to see new things, and the ears were opened to hear new things, and the heart opened to receive new things. The Lord thus fulfils that blessed promise, “He that sat upon the throne said. Behold, I make all things new! If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.”

Now this distinguishes real religion, the work of the Spirit, from dead, dry, formal profession. There is nothing new, green, flesh in the religion of the flesh. That is all stale, like the mouldy bread, clouted shoes, and worn-out garments of the Gibeonites. They have trodden and trodden the shoe till they have worn it into holes; and then they clout it and cobble it with a piece of old leather. The bread has been so long in their vessel, that it has become dry and

mouldy; and their clothes are ready to drop from their backs. Not so with the religion of the Spirit. The “preparation of the gospel of peace,” is a shoe that never wears out, which wants no cobbling or clouting; the bread of life that comes down from heaven is like manna gathered day by day, always fresh and always reviving; and the robe of Christ's righteousness is never sullied or old.

v.—But, we may observe, that not only is the fruit for meat, but the leaf is for medicine. Now medicine is of various kinds. There is not only sweet medicine, though that is rare; but bitter. There is medicine, which heals, and there is medicine which racks and pains. There is the keen knife of the surgeon, and the blister of the apothecary; the sharp caustic and the swathing bandage. So with the leaves that grow upon the tree of life. Do not think that no leaf grows upon this tree but what heals wounds. There are bitter leaves as well as sweet; “myrrh and aloes” grew in the bride's garden as well as “calamus i.e. the sweet cane and cinnamon” So 4:14. You may come, for instance, to hear the word of God, and what may you get? Comfort? No: you are not in a fit state to receive comfort: you want reproof, and you get it, and go home with a wounded conscience and a pained, groaning heart. Something is said which cuts you to the quick. Well, is not that a leaf? Is that bad medicine that sends you groaning home with a cry in your soul, keeping you awake half the night rolling upon your bed, begging the Lord to search and try if you are a hypocrite? Has not that been for some good? Has it not been a medicine more suitable than a cordial? A cordial might intoxicate and stupify the brain: but the latter leaf has wrought groans and sighs in the heart.

So in reading the Word of God. Perhaps you read for comfort: but you do not need comfort: you want a sharp reproof: you have got into a carnal state of mind: and what you want is, like a naughty child, not bread and jam for your supper, but to be shaken and well whipped. Remember, that there is a rod hung up in the spiritual nursery, and you will find the inventory of it in Ps

89. This you get. A sharp keen reproof enters your soul from God's word, that makes you tremble. Does not this do good? Does not this stir up prayer, and make you sigh and cry, and groan to the Lord to visit your soul with his presence and mercy?

So in Christian conversation. You often get reproof, you say, 'I fear after all I am nothing! O how spiritually-minded my friend is! What a deep, blessed experience he has! How he can speak of the goodness and mercy of God! And what a stupid, barren thing am I!' Has this conversation all been thrown away? Has it not been a leaf? aye, and a good leaf too, though a bitter one. And has not this leaf been medicine to purge away carnality, to stir you up, and make you seek a clearer manifestation of the mercy, goodness and love of God?

So with the ordinances of God, how they sometimes reprove us! A woman some time since joined our church. She was present at a baptism in this chapel last year; and what was said from the pulpit about the due qualifications of a candidate cut her to the very heart, and sent her groaning home. As she was crossing Fitzroy Square the Lord was pleased to speak a promise to her soul. Was not reproof and promise alike a leaf? Some who witnessed the same ordinance might have had consolation; she got reproof, and yet that reproof worked for her spiritual good; for it led afterwards on to the promise and a clearer manifestation. It is a great mistake to think the preaching of the gospel, or reading God's word, or Christian conversation is always to convey comfort. We are often so carnal that comfort to us would be little short of poison; it would drug us well-nigh to death, and we should fall asleep under the bewitching influences of the' intoxicating draught. We want something to rouse, stir, condemn, pierce, wound, at times almost to slaughter, and send the soul with cries and groans to the throne. And such should be the gospel ministry. If it be a tree of life, it should bear fruit for meat, and leaf for medicine: there should be in it fruit as meat for God's people, that they might have sometimes a sweet and savoury meal under the truth, and sometimes get a leaf

These waters, we read, issued out of the sanctuary: the trees therefore that grow upon the river's banks are always laden with leaves and fruit. Their leaf never fails; their fruit is never consumed. Thus, whilst there is a church on earth, and a God in heaven; whilst there is a people to be saved, and a Saviour to save them, so long will these trees grow upon the river's bank, and so long will they bring forth fruit for meat, and leaf for medicine—and all for the people of God. Every means of grace, and every ordinance, is intended either to be for meat or for medicine. As, therefore, the love of God is an overflowing river, so long as this river flows, so long will the means of grace and the ordinances of God's house stand, flourish and bear fruit.

This is the grand source of all the encouragement, which a minister has to preach the gospel. "Because I live, ye shall live also." "My word shall not return unto me void." And how this, too, should encourage hearers to make use of every means of grace. We sometimes are backward in this matter. 'O,' it will be said sometimes, 'why need I go to chapel? I have so much to do this Tuesday evening. Have I not plenty of business to attend to? I have gone before, and I have got no good; I think I will stay at home to-night.' A man may go on indulging this slothful frame till he never goes to hear at all. Another may say, 'I have read the Word of God day after day, but I cannot get any comfort out of it: I do not seem to find anything in it that suits or blesses my soul. Why should I read it any more?' A third may say, 'I try to pray, but I get no answer; why need I pray any longer?' But so said the ungodly king when there was a famine in Samaria 2Ki 6:33 . A fourth may say, 'I go amongst the people of God: I never get any good: I will have a little worldly society, and not go amongst those who profess religion.' And a fifth may say, 'I will not join a church: what are the ordinances? There is nothing saving in them: I may just as well be out of the church as in it.' What a slothful, Antinomian spirit a man may soon get into!

Bear in mind, then, that these means are of God's appointing: trees planted by his own hand on each side of the river: and their fruit and efficacy depend not upon man's appointment, but upon the appointment of God. Often when we break through the snare that I have been speaking of, leading us to slight or neglect them, we find there is a blessing couched in them. Sometimes when members of my church have called to see me, I have felt perhaps in my mind a kind of disinclination to their conversation, I am busy writing or reading, and do not want to be disturbed. But when they have come in, and sat down, and begun to talk, and my heart has felt a union with what they said, all the ice is thawed away, and I enjoy their company. Have you not felt the same? So sometimes in going to chapel, it has been dragging my body to the place, so cold and dead and lifeless, nay, feeling an aversion to the employment. I felt this lately once at home, so that I actually disliked the chapel, the people, and the preaching. But that evening I was favoured in my soul, and how differently did I leave the pulpit from going into it! I felt a love to the people and to the work, and was as comfortable as I was before just the contrary.

So in secret prayer. We would make every excuse to defer and put it off; yet when we are enabled at last to go to the throne, are we not sometimes graciously helped, feel a spirit of prayer, and enjoy access to pour out our hearts at the footstool of mercy? So with the other ordinances of God's house. There is in our wicked hearts a dreadful, I was going to say a damnable repugnance against them, a working up of the scum of that "carnal mind which is enmity against God." I do not say that all feel this. I was not born religious, as some are, who, from natural piety, seem to know little or nothing of the dreadful struggles of the carnal mind against everything spiritual and heavenly. But when we are able by the grace of God to resist these devilish workings, and are enabled to wait upon the Lord in the ordinances of his house, a sweetness is sometimes diffused through them. Some set up the ordinances too much, others value them too little. Some make them the river, and

others will hardly allow them to be the trees on its banks. They are not the river, but they stand on its brink, and are fed by its waters. Apart from the river, they are nothing: laved by its streams, their fruit is food, and their leaf is medicine.

Now this is a very different thing from setting up the ordinances of God's house, or the means of grace, as possessing an innate virtue. That is popery—attaching a sacramental grace necessarily to an ordinance, as if laying on of hands could convey the Holy Spirit, or sprinkling a child's face could regenerate the soul. Neither scripture nor common sense justify such religious jugglery. The trees in themselves would only wither and die were their roots not by the river. Thus we must always view the ordinances of God's house, and the means of grace in their connection with the appointment of God, and the love, mercy, and grace displayed in the Saviour. Then may we hope the preaching of the word will be blest; then may we hope that Christian conversation will be blest; that prayer at the throne of grace will be blest; that reading and searching the scriptures will be blest; and thus take sweet encouragement to believe that God, who has appointed his means, will bless them to our soul's edification and comfort

147 Idolatry

Preached at Bedworth on a Tuesday Evening in
April 1852

"For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God: and to whit for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead. even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

1 Thess. 1:9, 10

The churches in the New Testament differed much in gifts and grace. This may be gathered from the way in which the Holy

Ghost was pleased to inspire the apostle Paul to write to them. The Romans, for instance, appear to be much blessed with faith: for the apostle says, “their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world:” eminent believers, many of them, highly favoured with the faith of God’s elect. The Corinthians, the apostle says, came behind in no gift. The Lord bestowed on them much utterance and much knowledge, with which they were too much puffed up. It appears the Ephesians were led deeply into the mysteries of the gospel; for the apostle writes to them as those deeply instructed in the mysteries of Christ. The Colossians were not only led into the mysteries of the gospel, like the Ephesians, but the apostle speaks of their discipline: “Joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.” The Philippians passed through much persecution: “Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” The Hebrews were wavering and much tempted to depart from and give up the faith.

If we look at the churches in the New Testament, we shall see none were so highly favoured in the enjoyment of the things of God as the church of Thessalonica. The apostle writes to them as being much favoured with the sweet enjoyment of the gospel: “Remembering, without ceasing, your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father: knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance: as ye know what manner of men we were among you for our sake.”

Thus we find the churches in the New Testament were not all enjoying the same things. The Galatians were sadly tainted with a legal spirit, drawn after false teachers, turned their back on Mount Zion, had gone back to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto they desired again to be in bondage. The Hebrews were wavering continually, scarcely knowing whether they should hold out to the end. Similar things are to be found in the church in our day; similar differences, not only in the church, but also in individuals:

some weak, others strong; some highly favoured, others all their lifetime subject to bondage. With some it is spring time, with others summer, autumn, or winter. The Lord deals with different individuals as seemeth good in his sight; yet causing all things to work together for their spiritual good.

The words of the apostle before us point to two things, which are spoken of as being special marks of grace. He says, “For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God.” One mark of a person being a partaker of grace is being turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God.

The second mark which he gives as being a partaker of the grace of the gospel is, “And to wait for his Son from heaven.”

I believe we shall find these two marks in every child of God. If we set up a very high standard, many of the Lord’s children cannot raise up their heads so high; but here we shall see is a standard of God’s own raising. The apostle brings forward and points to two marks of grace in the souls of these Thessalonian converts; and if the Lord has touched our hearts with the same gracious finger, we shall find, if he be pleased to shine in our souls, these two marks. Bear in mind, these Thessalonians were a Gentile church, and therefore had worshipped idols, in the literal sense of the word. They had bowed down before idols of wood and stone. What is the reason we have in the world so much outward idolatry? Wherever we look or turn to in the heathen nations, we shall see something more or less of idolatry, worshipping gods of wood or stone. There must, therefore, be some principle in the human heart which brings it to worship wooden and stone gods: yet, as all men’s hearts are the same there must be that in our nature which is idolatry. There are the nature and spirit of it, though not, as in the case of these heathens, outwardly seen.

Now, what is idolatry? What is an idol? The bringing or meeting together in the human heart of two opposite principles. These are in every human heart, and are seen in various shapes and lusts,

and mixed with natural religion. Idolatry embodies two things that are quite distinct and opposite. Idolatry embodies a false notion of God; at the same time it deifies some lust or corruption. These heathen idolaters had their god of war, of love, of murder, of wine, and the god of death. Their idols were deified vices, lusts, passions, corruptions, and the wickedness of the human heart. Such was the working of Satan on the human mind, that he brought forth an idol representing two things apparently distinct, yet united: religion and lust, worship and devilism; the prostration of the body before a god that truly was nothing less than some deified lust and corruption. This is devilism, a false religion, worshipping some lust or corruption under the mask of religion; our natural corruptions under a profession; worshipping our pride, our respectability, our covetousness, or love of the world. All these are worshipped under the garb of religion, which is idolatry; and this is what every man does, except so far as he is delivered from it by the power and grace of God. Men must worship something. All have a natural religion. When the mind is dark through sin, the heart ignorant, the old veil remaining on the heart, no teaching of the Spirit of God in the soul, we must worship something, as the Athenians of old had an altar to the Unknown God. We must worship something; and if what we worship is not the true God, then we worship idols.

Some persons bow down before the great golden idol that Nebuchadnezzar set up. Many, very many hearts are set on this golden idol; they give a little money towards religion, and if they appear to be liberal in the cause, they then think that in other things they may be as covetous as they please; so that their religion is just as the heathen's; they worshipped golden gods, these worship their gold. They imagine by giving a little away that it is sanctified, therefore they may worship it. A man worships his own righteousness under the mask of religion: worships his self righteousness, falsely called holiness. He prides himself upon his gloomy and solemn countenance: so he indulges his pride, and makes his religion a mask to cover his sin.

This is what the people of God do, more or less, until they are delivered from it by the Spirit of God. Some are constant in attendance on the means, and go to the "sacrament," as a means to wash away their sins. Just as a man once said, he could not commit sin so greedily till he had said his prayers. Some, to pacify their consciences, will not go to rest or rise in the morning without saying their prayers: then they can rush into sin with greater pleasure. This is idolatry, deifying their sins, worshipping their lusts under the garb of religion. We have no occasion to go to the heathen in order to find out what is idolatry. It is not merely worshipping a wooden or stone god, but it is the lust and depravity of the human heart. If we dig down into the heart, deep down, we shall see the principle embedded there, like the coal in the pits at Bedworth; as the deeper you dig to discover the seams of coal, so it is with the heart of man; the deeper you go the more you find: "Son of man thou shalt see greater abominations."

Our Saxon ancestors were idolaters. They worshipped the Sun, the Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Mercury. Thus Dies Soils, or the Sun's day (Sunday); Dies Mond(?) Moon's day (Monday); Mars's day, Tiwe's daeg (Tuesday); Mercury's day, Wodnes daeg (Wednesday); Jupiter's day, Thunres daeg or Thor's day (Thursday); Venus's day, Friga's daeg (Friday); Saturn's day, Dies Saturni (Saturday). (The above does not appear to be perfectly reported.)

I merely name this to show what idolatry there is in the human heart. Now, here is a mark of grace, a mark of the Spirit—that you have been turned to God from idols. There is no real religion until God is pleased to touch the heart with his gracious finger; there is no spiritual light until the Lord is pleased to shine into the soul; no spiritual life until life is breathed into the conscience.

When the Lord is pleased to work in the soul, one thing he shows to us—that we have been wrapped up in a false religion, in self-righteousness; that we have been deceiving ourselves and have tried to deceive him; that we have mocked him with prayers and pretences; in which there was nothing but hypocrisy; hypocrites,

such as make a profession of religion, and yet are destitute of a real work of God on the soul. Nothing cuts more deeply, when the Lord is pleased to lay his finger on the conscience, than the pretences we made, having no reality. Having been turned to God is a clear proof that we have had a manifestation of God to our souls, whereby his fear is put into our hearts, so that we know him to be the only true God, by his shining into our souls and manifesting himself to us.

Look at the contrast. The god they served before, was a dead god, like Baal or his priests, who, for the time, were more sincere in their way than many are now. They cut themselves with lancets: but we should not find many either so earnest or zealous as to dig into their flesh with knives until the blood streamed out. Though they cut and wounded themselves, yet Baal never heard. So with us; if our god is a dead god, there will be no answer; God has never spoken to that soul. There is no answer to prayer, no pardon of sin, no manifestation of mercy, no shining in of light, life, liberty, and love. No application of God's truth, no sweet breathing of God's promise, no worshipping of God in spirit and truth, no power, no feeling in the soul, no work of faith, no labour of love, no patience of hope. It is a dead religion, addressed to a dead god.

When the Lord is pleased to begin his gracious work, the soul is turned from idols to serve the living and true God; the living God who fills all time and all space, a God who knows all motives, a God who sees into the depth of our being. I do believe that no man living knows the everlasting God, until he is pleased, in some measure, to manifest himself and to shine in his soul. Then, then he knows the living God; as the psalmist says: "Thou compassed my path and my lying down and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether" (Ps 139:3, 4).

This is true religion, to know the living God, a holy God, a sin-hating God, a sin-punishing God, a God who will not be mocked, a God before whose awful bar we must stand at the great day, a God who reads all hearts and knows all motives, a God who knows

what sins are indulged in, a God who beholds all the evil workings in the heart, and who drives us out of all the holes and corners in which we may take refuge, a God who lifts up the veil of unbelief from the heart, and whose awful prescience sees all our impurity at a glance, a living God who must have a living worship. A dead god may have a dead worship: but a living God must have a living worship. There is no living worship of a living God until he himself is pleased, by his Spirit, to give it. He is a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. If you look back at the first dealings of God with your soul, you will see there was living worship, that you could not rest satisfied with a dead religion. Dead prayers would not do; you wanted living prayers, living sighs, living groans, and a living movement towards God; a living feeling, a living religion, because it is addressed to him that liveth and abideth for ever.

When the Lord would manifest himself to the children of Israel, he sends to them, by Moses, his great Name: "I AM hath sent me unto you." He was not known to them before as the great I AM, the self-existent JEHOVAH, whose awful majesty, terrible justice, universal presence, a solemn, tremendous Being, couched in the words, "I AM THAT I AM." He was not known to them by that Name before, nor is he known to the soul now, until he is pleased to reveal himself as the great I AM—the self-existent JEHOVAH, a God of all power, who lives for ever and ever; and he is not known as such, until he is pleased to make it known to the soul; in the first teachings, in the manifestations of his awakening, gracious presence; he is then known to be the living God; a God who is worshipped as the living God, a God before whom we tremble, a God who hears and answers prayer, a God whose law becomes to us a living law, whose threatenings are living threatenings, whose wrath is living wrath, whose displeasure is living displeasure, whose declarations are living declarations; who saith: "Because I live ye shall live also."

Thus a soul worshipping a living God is alive, whereby he knows

God; and just in proportion as we know him to be a living God shall we have a living religion. In our approaches to him we shall know that a living God produces living feelings; we shall realize, from time to time, a living God, living desires, living prayers, living cries, living groans, going out of the heart with a living faith, living repentance, living sorrow for sin, living contrition, a living turning to God from idols, a turning from a dead god to a living One, from a dead religion to a living one, from a dead faith to a living faith, as the Lord is pleased to raise up a spirit of hope. Thus we have instead of a dead hope, a living hope. A man's religion becomes a living religion, coming from a living God and leading to a living God. The more he knows and feels the presence, power, majesty, and glory of a living God, the more his soul will be living near to God, and the more a living religion will be felt in his heart.

The child of God is a wonderful paradox; a mystery not only to others but also to himself. As every branch and member of the old man still continue within him, so among the members and branches of the old man is that one, idolatry. Remember this, that though a child of God has a living God for his God, and that this living God will have living service and worship, that those that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth; yet idolatry is still in the heart. Lusts, pride, self-righteousness, unbelief, and every member of the old man. Among these members is that of idolatry.

Now, what is an idol? Something my carnal mind loves. How may I know whether my carnal mind loves it? When it thinks of it, is very much pleased with it, we pet it, love and fondle it, dallying and playing with it, like a mother with her babe; see how she takes the little thing and gazes at it. Her eyes are fixed on it; she dotes upon it because she loves it, and it too often becomes an idol. Thus we may know an idol if we examine our own hearts, by what our imagination, desires and secret thoughts are going out after. I do believe nothing is too small or too insignificant which, at times, may not be an idol; even a tulip or a gooseberry! What

a wonderful large gooseberry! What a beautiful tulip! Some will walk up and down their garden on the Lord's day admiring their gooseberry trees, and praising the fruit, how fine and large it is; others their tulips or anemonies. They look at them and admire them, fearful the frost may have done them some injury. This is idolatry, because it is something, which, for the time, the mind is looking at before God.

Another makes an idol of his shop. He comes to chapel to hear the minister and the preaching; but, instead of this, he is thinking what customers he has missed, what he has lost by coming to chapel. His heart is, therefore, in his shop: that is his idol. The farmer makes the farm his idol. He thinks of his wheat: he is fearful of his barley: how much rain it wants. He looks at his beasts, his stock: how they are getting on. He goes into his fold-yard, looks at the sheep and dotes on them: therefore is an idolater, in so far preferring these things to God. Instead of being spiritually-minded, having his heart and affections in heaven, he has something in his mind which it is going out after; something or other laying hold of the affections, that were we to drive deeper, to go down into this coal-pit, and bring up these lusts, obscenities, this filth, this devilism, that works in the carnal mind, would prudence allow us to mention this baseness, this vileness—O so black, so filthy, that we should be more begrimed than the dirtiest collier?

The child of God has, more or less, all these propensities working within. There was a time I should not have believed it, if this had been told me. But I now know it, and it is from knowing what I have in my own heart that I can read others. I know your hearts by mine. From painful experience I know there is idolatry in every man's heart. But what a mercy it is to be turned to God from all these, from all these idols, to serve the living and true God. When is this? No man can turn till the Lord makes him. Then his prayer is, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." This was the prayer of the prophet Jeremiah. When the Lord is pleased to

turn us then we shall be turned. Something like our blessed Lord, when he turned and looked upon Peter; what was the effect? It broke Peter's heart; he went out and wept bitterly. As the Lord is pleased to turn the king's heart as rivers of water, which way he will, so he turns the heart of his children.

What a blessed thing it is now and then to be turned to God from these idols, to feel the misery, wretchedness, and dissatisfaction which these idols cause! There is something in idolatry so debasing, so unsatisfying, which makes a man thoroughly miserable, when he has been indulging in it, worshipping his idols, and his heart departing from the living God.

When the Lord, in mercy, by his gracious Spirit and presence, turns to us, then we are turned from idols, and serve the living God. What is it to serve the living and true God? The apostle says. "Whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son" (Rom. 1:9).

First to serve God in spirit, not with our bodies, because we may be serving God with our bodies and serving the devil with our souls. There is a great deal of wickedness committed on a man's knees. A man may be on his knees, and his heart in all manner of wickedness: a man may sit in a chapel, hearing a sermon and his heart practising all manner of abomination. That is serving God with the lips, but not with the spirit. In other words, being made partakers of that blessed Spirit, serving him in spirit, from a feeling, believing, affectionate heart; serving in the newness of the spirit, not in the oldness of the letter; serving him with some manifestations of mercy and love to the soul. This is to "serve in the spirit in the gospel of his Son." See how much is contained in these words, what marks of grace the apostle here sets up. To turn to God from these idols, to serve the living and true God, because the living and true God is served with the spirit in the gospel of his Son. If God is not served with the spirit in the gospel, it is merely bodily exercise, not evangelical obedience, not gospel obedience, but obedience in the letter, an obedience according to the beggarly elements of the law. What a mercy, then, to be able to serve God

The River Of Life And The Trees On Its Banks 105
in spirit, to have the proud heart brought down, willing to serve God!

Another sweet and blessed mark of grace is, to "Wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." Now, this waiting for his Son from heaven is not to be considered here in its primary signification. No doubt it means waiting for the second appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ, "who shall come the second time without sin unto salvation." Thus the saints in the Word of God are represented as waiting until then. Their happiness will not be completed until they see him as he is, until he comes the second time, when body and soul will be reunited. Their happiness will then be complete, and never will they be perfectly happy until they get to glory.

Here, then, are the two marks, the state of a child of God, and the marks of grace in the soul. One is, as I have endeavoured to show, being turned from idols, to serve the living and true God: the other, waiting for his Son from heaven. Why should a soul wait for the Son from heaven, unless he knew God had a Son in heaven, unless he had some life, feeling, and desires towards the Son of God in heaven? How do you know that God has a Son in heaven? "Well," say you, "the Word says so." That is good: but have you no other evidence? If God's Word says so, how do you know the Word of God speaks the truth? "That is shocking," say you, "to doubt of that." So it is: but this, I believe, we cannot know in our own souls that God has a Son in heaven, until he is seen by the eye of faith. There is no seeing the Son until he is revealed by the Spirit. If we do not have a manifestation by the Spirit to our souls, we do not know the Son of God. We must see him, in some measure, as Stephen saw him.

If we do not know for ourselves in the court of conscience whether God has a Son in heaven or not, how can we be said to wait for him from heaven? When the blessed Spirit is pleased to set Jesus before our eyes as the Son of God in heaven, we see him

by the eye of faith, as the Lord is pleased to manifest him to our heart as the God-man, the glorious Immanuel, God with us. Then we know for ourselves that God has a Son in heaven. When we know, by the Spirit's teaching, God has a Son in heaven, then the thoughts, desires, and affections of the soul go out after the Son of God in heaven. The soul is filled with desires, longings, and breathings after a revelation, clearer views of a Saviour; deeper, clearer, and more powerful manifestations of the Son of God in heaven.

Let me illustrate this. A woman is married, has an affectionate husband; he leaves his home for a time upon business, saying he shall return home on a certain day. When the time arrives, she is waiting for his appearance. She knows his step, knows the very way he turns the handle of the door. So it is with a soul that is married to the Lord. There is a spiritual union between Christ and the soul. He is absent, does not come: but he will come; the soul is waiting for his appearing. The soul knows his touch upon the handle of the lock, how he puts in his hand by the hole of the door, and makes the very bowels melt. The soul knows his voice: "My sheep hear my voice, and they know it." Every shining in of his presence, every drawing near of his most gracious Person. every manifestation of his love, makes the soul long for his appearance: and when he hides his face the language of the heart is, "Why does he delay coming? Why delay the wheels of his chariot? O that the Lord would visit my soul, bless me with his presence, shine into my heart, and speak the promise home to my soul!" So we talk with him, so we have sweet communion with him, "Waiting for his Son from heaven."

See what sweet and blessed marks they are, marks of grace in the soul! Do not be contented or satisfied with yourself unless you find more or less these two sweet and blessed marks. You know what you have been, what a wretch you have been, how in time past you have acted vilely and basely; but the Lord worked on your conscience and turned you from these cursed idols to serve the living and true God, to bow down before him, worship him

in spirit and in truth, fear his great Name, tremble at his law, at his almighty displeasure. This is turning from idols to serve the living God, to feel a living God taking possession of you, by the shinings in of his Spirit and grace in your souls, worshipping him in spirit, desiring his favour, having all this living religion wrought in the soul by the living God. This is the way the Lord is pleased to work; so that you daily repent, grieve, and groan, because of these idols, because of this teraphim (Hos. 3:4) in the camel's furniture. (Gen. 31:34.) So waiting with the heart for his Son from heaven, waiting for the word of peace, pardon, and mercy, waiting for a smile, some testimony of an interest in his precious atonement.

"Waiting for his Son from heaven." Waiting with earnest prayer; waiting for his Son from heaven, in hearing the word, upon your bed at night, to have a secret persuasion that he will appear. "Waiting for his Son from heaven," that you may be able to cast all your care upon him. This is a proof of the reality of the work upon your soul. If you are brought to a knowledge of the living God, to know this living and true God, as the Son in heaven to wait for him here, is the mark of a believer, to wait for him, not like a presumptuous professor, as the poet tells us:

"Who rushes in where angels fear to tread."

But waiting, longing, hoping, expecting. Sometimes drawing back, sometimes moving on, waiting for his Son from heaven, looking upward and inward, in hope Jesus will hear, will reply, speak the word, will dispel the cloud, will remove the burden, deliver from the power and guilt of sin, and appear for the soul's good and the Lord's glory. This is to wait for the Son from heaven. The man that has these two marks in his soul will have a deal of work between God and conscience, because he finds continually sad idolatry in his heart drawing him aside. What a deal he suffers from this: how it plagues and tries him! Like the man in the fable that found the dead viper, at least dead to all appearance through the cold. What a pretty looking thing! He puts it into his bosom and warms it, when it revives and bites him. So it is with a man

who plays with his lusts, indulging them; his carnal heart goes out after them, until at last, like the torpid viper, it turns to a living adder and stings him. What a deal of work for conscience this brings a man into, a man whose thoughts, desires, and affections wander from God. In this way, my friends, things in themselves, to use a common expression, innocent things, in themselves quite allowable, when indulged in, often bring guilt on the conscience and great grief to the soul.

A man may have a hearty appetite, but if indulged in to excess may be a snare to him. So in many other things, as children, wife, family, and conversation. How soon may they degenerate into idolatry, occupy the thoughts and affections, and turn the soul away from God. Like David, who idolized Absalom, Eli with his sons, or Samuel, that great and good man, who made his corrupt sons judges in Israel. How deep this idolatry is rooted in a man's heart, how it steals upon his soul! Whatever is indulged in, how it creeps over him, until it gets such power that it becomes master. What work for conscience to get out of this snare; how the conscience is defiled when these idols become an object of worship! There is something so detestable and abominable in an idol that it should be our earnest prayer for God to deliver us.

If a man knows anything of the idolatry of his fallen nature he knows also the desire to serve the living and true God. He will also know that he never can blend these two things. He may try to do it—while serving idols to serve God, but he cannot; “for what communion hath light with darkness, or Christ with Belial?” There can be no communion between a dead soul and a living God. How these things make a man wince, to give up his idol, to be obliged to part with it. How he pleads so hard: just this time. What work it makes. especially if the conscience is tender, struggling with the idolatry of the heart, the lust, concupiscence, and devilism of our fallen nature. I have compared it to a spider watching a fly. The poor little fly has just been caught in the extremity of the web; the spider lies in a hole: as soon as he sees the web shake, down he

The River Of Life And The Trees On Its Banks 109
runs, and draws the threads around his victim, kills him, sucks his carcase, and leaves it.

Thus the devil may be compared to the spider working in his web, waiting, lurking, in reality to suck the very bones and blood of a child of God and cast him into hell; and so he would, were it not for preserving grace. What conscience work there is between the idols struggling for mastery and for the grace of the Spirit of God, groaning, crying, and sighing continually to cast these idols out. Then we turn to God with weeping and lamentation, rending our hearts and not our garments; turn to the Lord with weeping and supplications. A man does not know himself if he does not know what power this idolatry has over him. None but God can make the man know it; and when the Lord delivers him, he then turns to God and says, “What a vile wretch I have been! What a monster to go after these idols, loving this thing, and that. A wretch, a monster of iniquity, the vilest wretch that ever crawled on the face of God's earth, for my wicked heart to go out after these idols!”

When the soul is brought down to a sense of its vileness and baseness and God's longsuffering and forbearance, it turns to God from idols to serve the only living and true God, waiting for his Son from heaven, who pardons the idolater, heals the backslider, and communicates special mercy to his soul. The Lord raises the poor soul up, raises him from the dead. What a blessed doctrine is the Resurrection of Christ! What a glory there is in it! The resurrection of Jesus is my triumph over death, sin, hell, and the grave; lifting the poor, his poor people, up from the grave of their misery and wretchedness, raising them from the dead.

“Delivered them from the wrath to come.” Wrath which we find drawn down upon our guilty heads through these idols. Delivered us from the wrath to come by interposing his body and blood. Waiting for his Son from heaven, triumphing over death, hell, sin, and the grave. He delivered his people from wrath, the tremendous displeasure of God's hand that will be poured out

upon a guilty world: upon all idolaters who live and die in their idolatry, upon all false professors, false religionists, upon all that are not turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. Jesus died to deliver us from the wrath to come: God raised him from the dead, and he is at his right hand.

What a mercy to be able to find these two marks standing up in your soul, though they are sometimes buried, like some old Roman relics. Suppose some antiquarians had information that at Bedworth there was a Roman milestone, they would soon come to the town, and when they had discovered the stone, though only just discernible, what a digging down to get at the inscription. So often the marks of grace, like the old Roman milestone, are buried in the earth. If God has put this blessed stone, this Ebenezer, in your heart, and the inscription is covered up with mud, mire, filth, and earth; if you want to have the inscription read, may the Lord, under the operation of his Spirit, enable you to dig down, so that every obstacle may be removed out of the way. I hope the Lord has enabled me this evening to clear away a little of the rubbish round this stone; so that you may be enabled to read the inscription and tell how many miles you are on the road to heaven, and to tell me that you have some reason to hope that the blessed God has caused the corruption, sin, and devilism of your heart to flee away, that you have a mark that you are a child of God.

To a poor soul sunk into carnality and sin, with everything that is base and horrible, what a mercy it is to have some little evidence of a work of grace in the soul! Here is the milestone found, first being turned to God from idols; the man can read the inscription—besides, he can read another: that is, “to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who hath delivered us from the wrath to come.” Whoever can find these two marks written with the finger of God in the soul, let the devil and unbelief say what they may, if they have these two Scripture marks in the soul, they will bless and praise God for his mercy and thank him for his unmerited favour.

148 The Marks Of Grace

Preached at Zion Baptist Chapel, Bedworth on Tuesday evening,

April 20th, 1852

“For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come”

1 Thess. 1:9, 10

The churches in the New Testament differed much in gifts and grace: this may be gathered from the way in which the Holy Ghost was pleased to inspire the apostle Paul to write to them. The Romans, for instance, appear to have been much blessed with faith, for the apostle says, that “their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world.” Eminent believers many of them; highly favoured with the faith of God’s elect. The Corinthians, the apostle says, come behind in no gift; the Lord bestowed on them much utterance, and much knowledge, with which they were too much puffed up. It appears the Ephesians were led deeply into the mysteries of the gospel, for the apostle writes to them as those deeply instructed in the mysteries of Christ. The Colossians were not only led into the mysteries of the gospel like the Ephesians, but the apostle speaks of their discipline: “Joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.” The Philippians passed through much persecution, “having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” The Hebrews were wavering, and, much tempted to depart from and give up the faith.

If we look at the churches in the New Testament, we shall see none were so highly favoured in the enjoyment of the things of God, as the church at Thessalonica. The apostle writes to them, as being much favoured with the sweet enjoyments of the gospel:

“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God: for our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake” (1 Thess.1:3-5).

Thus we find the churches in the New Testament were not all enjoying the same things. The Galatians were sadly tainted with a legal spirit, drawn after false teachers, turned their back on Mount Zion, had gone back to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto they desired again to be in bondage. The Hebrews were wavering continually, scarcely knowing, whether they should hold out to the end. Similar things are to be found in the church in our day; similar differences, not only in the church, but also in individuals. Some weak, others strong; some highly favoured, others all their life-time subject to bondage; with some it is spring, others summer, autumn or winter. The Lord is dealing, with different individuals as seemeth good in his sight, yet causing all things to work together for their spiritual good.

The words of the apostle before us point to two things, which are spoken of as being special marks of grace. He says, “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” That is one mark of a person being a partaker of grace: “Turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

The second mark which he gives as being a partaker of the grace of the gospel, is, “and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

I believe we shall find these two marks in every child of God. If we set up a very high standard, many of the Lord’s children cannot raise up their heads so high, but here is a standard of God’s own raising. The apostle brings forward and points to two marks

of grace in the souls of these Thessalonian converts, and if the Lord hath touched our heart with the same gracious finger that he touched their’s, we shall find, if he is pleased to shine on our souls, these two marks. These Thessalonians, bear in mind, were a Gentile church, and therefore had worshipped idols in the literal sense of the word. They had bowed down before idols of wood and stone. What is the reason we have in the world so much outward idolatry? Wherever we look to, or turn to the heathen nations, we shall see something more or less of idolatry; worshipping gods of wood and stone. There must, therefore, be some principle in the human heart which brings it to worship wooden and stone gods. There must be something in man’s fallen nature that teaches him to worship these gods. Say you, “We do not worship and never have worshipped gods of wood and stone;” yet all men’s hearts are the same. There must be that in our nature which is idolatry. There is the nature of idolatry, though not outwardly seen, as in the case of these heathens.

Now what is idolatry? What is an idol? The bringing or meeting together in the human heart of two opposite principles. These are in every human heart, and are seen in various shapes and lusts, and mixed with natural religion. Idolatry embodies two things that are quite distinct and opposite. Idolatry embodies a false notion of God, at the same time it deifies some lust or corruption. These heathen idolaters had their god of war, of love, of murder, of wine, and the god of death. Their idols were deified vices, lusts, passions, corruptions, and the wickedness of the human heart. These they deified, and made gods of. Such was the working of Satan on the human mind, that he brought forth an idol, representing two things apparently distinct, yet united, religion and lust, worship and devilism. The prostration of the body before a god that truly was nothing less than some deified lust and corruption.

Now if we look at our own hearts, we shall see how exactly, in our fallen nature, we have these two opposite principles. Thus idolatry is the bringing together of two antagonistic principles, two

things that in themselves are quite opposite. This is devilism, a false religion, worshipping some lust or corruption under the mask of religion; our natural corruptions under a profession; worshipping our pride, our respectability, our covetousness, or love of the world; all these are worshipped under the garb of religion, which is idolatry. And this is what every man does, except so far as he is delivered from it by the power and the grace of God. Men must worship something. All have a natural religion. When the mind is dark through sin, the heart ignorant, the old veil remaining on the heart, no teaching of God in the soul, we must worship something. As the Athenians of old had an altar to the "Unknown God," we must worship something; and if what we worship is not the true God, then we worship idols.

Some persons bow down before the great golden idol that Nebuchadnezzar set up; many, very many hearts are set on this golden idol: they give a little money towards religion, and if they appear to be liberal in the cause, then they think in other things they may be as covetous as they please; so that they have a religion just as the heathens: they worshipped golden gods, these worship their gold. They imagine, by giving a little away, that it is sanctified, and therefore they can worship it. So a man worships his own righteousness under the mask of religion; worships this self-righteousness, falsely called holiness. He prides himself upon his gloomy and solemn countenance. Thus he indulges his pride, and makes his religion a mask to cover his sin. This is what the Lord's people do, more or less, until they are brought out by the Spirit of God. Some attend the means [of grace] constantly, go to the Sacrament as a means to wash away their sins; as a man once said, he could not commit sin so greedily, until he had said his prayers; so men, to pacify their conscience, will not go to rest, or rise in the morning without saying their prayers, then they can rush into sin with greater pleasure: this is idolatry, deifying their sins, worshipping their lusts under the garb of religion.

In order to know what idolatry is, we have no occasion to go to

the heathen; it is not merely worshipping a wooden or stone god, but it is the lust and depravity in the human heart. If we dig down into the heart, deep down, we shall see the principle embedded there, like the coal in the pits at Bedworth; as the deeper you dig to discover the seams of coal, so it is with your heart, the deeper you go, the more you find: "Son of man, thou shalt see greater abominations." Our Saxon ancestors were idolaters; they worshipped the sun's day, or Sunday; the moon's day, or Monday; their Tuiseo's day, or Tuesday; their Woden's day; their Thor's day; their Friga's day; and their Seater's day, or Saturday. I merely name this to shew what idolatry there is in the human heart.

Now here is a mark of grace, a mark of the Spirit, that you have turned to God from idols. There is no real religion until God is pleased to touch the heart with his gracious finger. There is no spiritual light until the Lord is pleased to shine into the soul. No spiritual life until life is breathed into the conscience. This light comes from God. Life is breathed into the soul simultaneously with light. Though before pleasing themselves with a religion which was nothing better than idolatry, when light and life come into the soul by the power and teaching of God, they turn to God from idols. Now when the Lord is pleased to work in the soul, one thing he shews to us is that we have been wrapped up in a false religion, in self-righteousness, that we have been deceiving ourselves, and trying to deceive him; that we have mocked him with prayers and pretences, in which there was nothing but hypocrisy; hypocrites, such a as make a profession of religion, and yet destitute of a real work of God on the soul. Nothing cuts more deeply, when the Lord is pleased to lay his finger on the conscience, than the pretences we made, not having a reality, and we turn to God from this false religion, which is idolatry. Having turned to God, is a clear proof that we have had a manifestation of God to our souls, whereby his fear is put into our heart, so that we know him to be the only true God, by his shining into our soul, manifesting himself. Therefore the apostle says, Ye are "turned to God from

idols to serve the living and true God.” See the contrast. The god they served before was a dead god, like Baal, or his priests, who, for the time, were more sincere in their way than many now; they cut themselves with lancets. We should not find many that would do this. There are not many so earnest in religion, not so zealous as to dig into their flesh with knives, until the blood streamed out: they wounded themselves, cutting themselves, yet Baal never heard, and the prophet, therefore, mocked them, saying that he was asleep, and must be awakened; but there was neither voice, nor answer, nor any regard paid to their cries: so, if our God is a dead god, there will be no answer. God has never spoken to the soul. There is no answer to prayer, no pardon of sin, no manifestation of mercy, no shining in of light, life, liberty and love; no application of God’s truth, no sweet breathing of God’s promise, no worshipping God in spirit and in truth, no power, no feeling in the soul, no work of faith, no labour of love, no patience of hope. It is a dead religion, addressed to a dead god. When the Lord is pleased to begin his gracious work, the soul turns from idols to serve the living and true God: the living God, who fills all time and all space; a God who reads all hearts, a God who knows all motives, a God who sees into the depths of our being. I do believe that no man knows the everlasting God, until he is pleased, in some measure, to manifest and shine into his soul; then he knows the living God. As the psalmist says, in the 139th Psalm, “Thou art about my path, and about my bed: and spiest out all my ways. For lo, there is not a word in my tongue: but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether.” 20 This is the beginning of true religion, to know the living God: a holy God, a sin-hating God, a sin-punishing God, a God who will not be mocked, a God before whose awful bar we must stand at the great day, a God who reads all hearts and knows all motives, a God who knows what sins are indulged in, a God who beholds all the evils working in the heart, and who drives us out of all the holes and corners in which we may take refuge, a God who lifts up the veil of unbelief from the heart, and whose awful prescience

sees all our impurity at a glance, a living God who must have a living worship. A dead god may have a dead worship; but a living God must have a living worship. There is no living worship of a living God, until he himself is pleased by his Spirit to give it. He is a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

If you look back at the first dealings of God in your soul, much you will see of living worship. A dead religion would not satisfy you. Dead prayers would not do, you wanted living prayers, living sighs, living groans, and a living movement towards God, a living feeling, a living religion, because it is addressed to him who liveth and abideth for ever. 20. Psalm 139:2,3. Philpot here quotes from Coverdale’s Translation of the Psalms which appears in The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments According to the use of The Church of England. Philpot having seceded from the Church of England on 28th March, 1835 would still, no doubt be very familiar with that translation used in the Prayer Book. Now when the Lord would manifest himself to the children of Israel, he sends to them, by Moses, his great name “I AM hath sent me unto you.” He was not known to them before as the great I AM, the self-existent Jehovah, whose awful majesty, terrible justice, universal presence, a solemn tremendous being, couched in the words, “I AM THAT I AM.” He was not known to them by that name before, nor is he known to the soul now, until he is pleased to reveal himself as the great I AM, the self-existent Jehovah, a God of all power, who lives for ever and ever. And he is not known as such, until he is pleased to make it known to the soul. In the first teachings, in the manifestations of his awakening gracious presence, then he is known to be the living God, a God who is worshipped as the living God, a God before whom we tremble, a God who hears and answers prayer, a God whose law becomes a living law, whose threatenings are living threatenings, whose wrath is living wrath, whose displeasure is living displeasure, whose declarations are living declarations, who

saith, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Thus a soul in worshipping a living God is alive, whereby he knows him, and just in proportion as we know him to be a living God, shall we have a living religion; in our approaches to him we shall know that a living God produces living feelings; we shall realize, from time to time, a living God, living desires, living prayers, living cries, living groans, feeling them go out of our heart with a living faith, living repentance, living sorrow for sin, living contrition, a living turning to God from idols, a turning from a dead god to a living One, from a dead religion to a living one, from a dead faith to a living faith, as the Lord is pleased to raise up a spirit of hope. Thus we have instead of a dead hope a living hope, a man's religion becomes a living religion, coming from a living God, and leading to a living God.

The more he knows and feels the presence, power, majesty, and glory of a living God, the more his soul will be living near to God, and the more a living religion will be felt in his heart. The child of God is a wonderful paradox, is a mystery to others, and he is a mystery to himself. Every branch and member of the old man still continue within him. Therefore among the members and branches of the old man, is that member, idolatry. Remember, that though a child of God has a living God for his God; and that this living God will have living service and worship; that those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth: yet idolatry is still in his heart, lusts, pride, self-righteousness, unbelief and every member of the old man is still in you. Among these members of the old man, is that member, idolatry. Now what is an idol? It is something my carnal mind loves. How may I know whether my carnal mind loves it? When it thinks of it. If my carnal mind loves it, then it is very much pleased with it; we pet, love, and fondle it, dallying and playing with it, like a mother with her babe: see how she takes the little thing and gazes at it; her eyes are fixed on it, she dotes upon it, because she loves it, and it too often becomes an idol. Thus we may know an idol, if we examine our own heart, by what our imaginations, desires, and secret thoughts are going out after. Most

men have some idol or other. I do believe nothing is too small or too insignificant, which at times may not be an idol. A man may make an idol of even a tulip or a gooseberry. What a wonderful large gooseberry, what a beautiful tulip? I know this is the case in Lancashire: one walking up and down his garden on the Sunday morning, looking at his gooseberry bushes, how fine and large the fruit is! Another may dote on a tulip, or an anemone; he looks at it, he admires it, fearful the frost has done it some injury: is not all this idolatry? Something which the mind prefers to God. Instead of reading the Bible, he goes into his garden, to see whether the frost has hurt his cauliflower, or done the broccoli harm: is not this idolatry? Thinking more of these things, than the things of God; his mind running after tulips, more than the blessed Jesus or the Scriptures of Truth. Another man has a shop: he comes to chapel, to hear the minister and the preaching, but instead of this, he is thinking what customers he has missed, what he has lost by coming to chapel: his heart is therefore in his shop. That is his idol! The farmer makes the farm his idol; he thinks of his wheat, he is afraid of his barley; how much it wants rain; the barley will come up twice. Then he looks at his beasts, his stock, how they are getting on. He goes to his fold-yard, looks at his sheep, his cattle; he dotes on them, and is an idolater: he prefers these things to God. Instead of being spiritually minded, having his heart and affections in heaven, he has something in the mind which it is going out after, something or other laying hold of the affections, that were we to dive deeper, to go down into this coal-pit, and bring up these lusts, obscenities, this filth, this devilism, that works in the carnal mind, would prudence allow us to mention, this baseness, this vileness, oh, so black, so filthy, that we should be more begrimed than the dirtiest collier.

Now, I say, the child of God has all these propensities working in him. At one time I should not have believed it, if this had been told me; but I know it, and it is from knowing what I have in my own heart, that I can read others. I know your heart by mine.

From painful experience I know there is idolatry in every man's heart. One has one thing for an idol, another something different. What is my idol, may not be yours; I know it by the thoughts and affections of the mind, which most run after. But what a mercy it is, that we turn to God from all these, turn from all these idols to serve the living and true God. When is this? No man will, until the Lord makes him. Then his prayer is, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." This was the prayer of the ancient prophet Jeremiah. When the Lord is pleased to turn us, then we shall be turned. Something like our blessed Lord, when he turned and looked upon Peter, what was the effect? It broke Peter's heart; he went out and wept bitterly. As the Lord is pleased to turn the king's heart as rivers of water, which way he will, so he turns the heart of his children. What a blessed thing it is, now and then, to be turned to God from these idols; to feel the misery, wretchedness, and dissatisfaction which these idols cause. There is something in idolatry which is so debasing, so unsatisfying; it makes a man so thoroughly miserable, when he has been indulging in idolatry, worshipping his idols, and his heart departing from the living God.

The Lord in mercy does sometimes by his gracious Spirit and presence turn to us; when he turns, then we turn from idols, and serve the living God. What is it to serve the living and true God? The apostle says, "Whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son." First, to serve God in spirit, not with our bodies; because we may be serving God with our bodies, and serving the devil with our souls. There is a great deal of wickedness committed on a man's knees: a man may be on his knees, and his heart in all manner of wickedness; a man may sit in a chapel hearing a sermon, and his heart practising all manner of abominations. That is serving God with the lips, but not with the spirit. In other words, being made partakers of that blessed Spirit; serving him in spirit, from a feeling, believing, affectionate heart; serving in the newness of the Spirit, not in the oldness of the letter, with some manifestations of mercy and love to the soul; this is to serve in the Spirit in the gospel

of his Son.

See how much is contained in these words; what marks of grace the apostle here sets up: to turn to God from these idols, to serve the living and true God, because the living and true God is served with the spirit in the gospel of his Son. If God is not served with the spirit in the gospel, it is merely bodily exercise; it is not evangelical obedience, not gospel obedience, but obedience in the letter, an obedience according to the beggarly elements of the law. What a mercy then to be able to serve God in spirit; to have the proud heart brought down, willing to serve God. The greatest privilege God can give a man, is to make him his servant, to bow down before him, to walk in his ways. The greatest privilege God bestows on a man, as the Church of England well says, is perfect freedom. What is freedom? If the truth makes us free, we are free indeed; free from slavish fear. Another sweet and blessed mark of grace is, to "wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." Now this waiting for his Son from heaven, is not to be considered here in its primary signification: no doubt it means, waiting for the second appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall come the second time without sin unto salvation; then shall he appear with all his saints in glory. Thus the saints in God's Word are represented as waiting until then. Their happiness will not be completed until they see him as he is, until he comes the second time; when the body and soul will be reunited: their happiness will then be complete, and never will they be truly happy until they get to glory. "To wait for his Son from heaven:" waiting for a manifestation of the Lord Jesus, who is now in heaven, at God's right-hand. Here then are the two marks: the state of a child of God, and the marks of grace in the soul. One is, as I have endeavoured to shew, turning to God from idols to serve the living and true God; the other, waiting for his Son from heaven.

Why should a soul wait for the Son from heaven, unless he knew God had a Son in heaven, unless he had some life, feeling

and desires towards the Son of God in heaven. How do you know that God has a Son in heaven? Well, say you, God's Word says so. That is good, but have you no other evidence? If God's Word says so, how do you know the Word of God speaks the truth? That is shocking, say you, to doubt of that. So it is: but this I believe, we cannot know in our own souls that God has a Son in heaven, until he is seen by the eye of faith. There is no seeing the Son until he is revealed by the Spirit. If we do not have a manifestation by the Spirit to our souls, we do not know God's Son. We must see him in some measure as Stephen saw him. If we do not know for ourselves, in the court of conscience, whether God has a Son in heaven or not; when the blessed Spirit is pleased to set Jesus before our eyes as the Son of God in heaven, we see him by the eye of faith, as the Lord is pleased to manifest him to our hearts, as the God-man, the glorious Immanuel, God with us. Then we know for ourselves that God has a Son in heaven. When we know, by the Spirit's teaching, God has a Son in heaven, then the thoughts, desires, and affections of the soul, go out after the Son of God in heaven. The soul is all filled with desires, longings and breathings, after a revelation, clearer views of the Saviour; deeper, clearer, and more powerful manifestations of the Son of God in heaven.

Let me illustrate this. A woman is married, and has an affectionate husband. When he leaves his home for a time upon business, saying he shall be back at a certain day, when the time arrives, she is waiting for his appearance; she knows his step, knows the very way he turns the handle of the door. So it is with a soul who is married to the Lord. There is a spiritual union between Christ and the soul. He is absent, does not come, but he will come; the soul is waiting for his appearing. "To wait for his Son from heaven." The soul knows his touch upon the handle of the lock, how he puts in his hand by the hole of the door, and makes the very bowels melt. The soul knows his voice: "His own sheep know his voice," and every shining in of his presence, every drawing near of his most gracious person. Why does he delay coming? Why delay

the wheels of his chariot? Oh, that the Lord would visit my soul, and bless me with his presence, shine into my heart, speak the promise home to my soul. So we talk with him, so we have sweet communion with him, "waiting for his Son from heaven."

See what sweet and blessed marks they are: marks of grace in the soul. Do not be contented or satisfied with yourself, unless you find, more or less, these two sweet and blessed marks. You know what you have been, what a wretch you have been, how in time past you have acted vile and base; but the Lord worked on your conscience, and turned you from these cursed idols to serve the living and true God to bow down before him, worship him in spirit and in truth, fear his great name, tremble at his law, at his almighty displeasure; to feel a living God taking possession of you, by his shinings in your soul by his Spirit and grace.

This is turning from idols to serve the living God, worshipping him in spirit, desiring his favour, having all this living religion wrought in the soul by the living God. This is the way the Lord is pleased to work in your soul, so that you daily repent, and grieve and groan because of these idols, because of this teraphim in the camel's furniture (Gen.31:34, cf. v.19 mg): so still with the heart waiting for his Son from heaven, waiting for the word of peace, pardon and mercy, waiting for a smile, some testimony of an interest in his precious atonement. "Waiting for his Son from heaven," with earnest prayer. "Waiting for his Son from heaven," in hearing the word upon your bed at night, to have a secret persuasion that he will appear. "Waiting for his Son from heaven:" to be able to cast all your care upon him. This is a proof of the reality of the work upon your soul, to bring us to the knowledge of the living God, to know this living and true God as the Son in heaven. To wait for him, here is the mark of a believer; to wait for him, not like a presumptuous professor, as the poet tells us: "Who rushes in where angels fear to tread."

But waiting, longing, hoping, expecting; sometimes drawing back, sometimes moving on. "Waiting for his Son from heaven:"

looking upward and inward, in hope Jesus will hear, will reply, speak the word, will dispel the cloud, will remove the burden, deliver from sin, and appear for the soul's good and the Lord's glory. This is to wait for the Son from heaven.

The man that has these two marks in his soul, will have a deal of work between God and conscience, because he finds continually this idolatry in his heart drawing him aside. What a deal he suffers from; how it plagues and tries him. Like the man in the fable, that found a dead viper, at least dead to appearance through the cold, what a pretty looking thing it is; he puts it in his bosom and warms it, when it revives and bites him. Thus is it with a man who plays with his lusts, indulging them; his carnal heart goes out after them, until at last, like the dead viper, it turns to a living adder, and stings him. What a deal of work for conscience this brings to man that lets his thoughts, desires and affections wander from God. In this way, my friends, things in themselves, to use a common expression, innocent, things in themselves quite allowable, when indulged in often bring guilt on the conscience, and great grief to the soul. A man may have a hearty appetite, but if indulged in to excess, it may be a snare to him. So in many other things, as children, wife, family, and conversation. How soon may they deteriorate into idolatry, occupy the thoughts and affections, and turn the soul away from God. Like David who idolized Absalom, Eli with his sons, or Samuel, that great and good man, who made his corrupt sons judges in Israel. How this idolatry is rooted in a man's heart, how it steals upon his soul. Whatever is indulged in, how it creeps over him, until it gets such power that it becomes master. What work for conscience to get out of this snare; how the conscience is defiled when these idols become an object of worship.

There is something so detestable and abominable in an idol, from which it should be our earnest prayer for God himself to deliver us. If a man knows any thing of the idolatry of his fallen nature, he knows also the desire to serve the living and true God. He will know that he never can blend these two things. He may

try to do it, while serving idols to serve God, but he cannot "for what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" There is no communion between a dead soul and a living God. The only way is when the grace of God is in operation. How these things make a man wince, to give up the idol and to part with it. How he pleads so hard, just this time. What work it makes, especially if the conscience is tender, struggling with the idolatry of the heart, the lust, concupiscence, and devilism of our fallen nature. I have compared it to a spider watching a fly. The poor little fly has just been caught in the extremity of the web; the spider lies in a hole, as soon as he sees the web shake, down he flies, and draws the threads around his victim, kills him, sucks his carcase, and leaves it. Thus the devil may be compared to the spider lurking in his web, waiting in reality to suck the very bones and blood of a child of God, and cast him to hell: and so he would, were it not for preserving grace.

What conscience work there is, between the idols struggling for mastery and for the grace of the Spirit of God; groaning, crying, and sighing continually to cast these idols out. Then we turn to God with weeping and lamentation; turn, as the prophet Joel says, rending our hearts and not our garments; turn to the Lord with weeping and supplication; yes, weep tears of blood for these idols. A man does not know himself, if he does not know what power this idolatry has over him. None but God can make the man know it; and when he is delivered, he turns to God from these idols. He says, What a vile wretch I have been, what a monster I have been; I have gone after idols, I have loved this thing and that thing, and let my imagination go after it, a wretch, a monster of iniquity, the vilest wretch that ever crawled on the face of God's earth, to let my wicked heart go out after these idols. When the soul is brought down to a sense of its vileness, and its baseness, and God's long-suffering and forbearance, it turns to God from idols to serve the only living and true God, waiting for his Son from heaven, who pardons the idolater, heals the backslider, and communicates

special mercy to his soul. He restores the poor idolater, he brings him back once more to “worship God in spirit and in truth;” he is raised from the dead to life. “And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection.” The Lord raises the poor soul up; he is raised from the dead.

What a blessed doctrine is the resurrection of Christ; what a glory there is in it. The resurrection of Jesus is my triumph over death, sin, hell, and the grave, lifting his poor people up from the grave of their misery and wretchedness, raised from the dead. When we experience the power of Christ’s resurrection, our souls are raised from the grave of our lusts and corruptions, and stand in the presence of God, raised from the dead, delivered fully and freely, eternally, perfectly, and everlastingly “delivered us from the wrath to come,” which we find drawn down upon our guilty heads through these idols; delivered us from the wrath to come, by interposing his body and blood; waiting for his Son from heaven; triumphing over death, hell, sin, and the grave; delivered his people from wrath, the tremendous displeasure of God’s hand that will be poured out upon a guilty world, upon all idolaters who live and die in their idolatry, upon all false professors, false religionists, upon all that are not turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. Jesus died to deliver us from the wrath to come; God raised him from the dead, and he is at his right hand. “To wait for his Son from heaven,” for his smiles, his mercy, his deliverance. What a mercy to be enabled to find these two marks standing up in your soul, though they are sometimes buried.

Suppose some antiquarians had information that at Bedworth there was an old Roman mile stone; they would soon come to the town, and as soon as they discovered the stone, though the head might just peep out of the ground, what a digging down to find the inscription; they would dig and dig till they cleared away the rubbish that they might be enabled to read the inscription. So very

Zion’s Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders 127

often the marks of grace, like the old Roman mile stone, are buried in the earth; if the top is just seen of this stone, antiquarians dig down to get at the inscription. Thus if God has put this blessed stone, this Ebenezer in your heart, and the inscription is covered up with mud, mire, filth, and earth, if you want to have the inscription read, you must dig down. May the Lord, under the operation of his blessed Spirit, enable you to dig down, so that every obstacle may be taken out of the way. I hope the Lord has enabled me this evening to clear away a little of this rubbish round this stone, so that you may be able to read the inscription, and tell how many miles you are on the road to heaven, and to tell me that you have some reason to hope that the blessed God has caused the corruption, sin, and the devilism of your heart to flee away, that you have a mark that you are a child of God. To a poor soul sunk into carnality and sin, with every thing that is base and horrible, what a mercy it is to have some little evidence of a work of grace on the soul. Here is the mile stone found; first turning to God from idols. The man or woman that has turned to God from idols, can read the inscription; “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;” besides that, he can read another, that is this, “to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which hath delivered us from the wrath to come.” Whoever can find these two marks, written with the finger of God in the soul, let the devil and unbelief say what they may; if they have these two scriptural marks in the soul, bless and praise God for his mercy, and thank him for his most unmerited favour.

149 Zion’s Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders

Preached on Lord’s Day Evening, at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road.

August 1, 1852

“O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy

128 Zion's Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders
*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

The promises in the word of truth are exceedingly great and precious. This is God's own testimony concerning them; "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." 2Pe 1:4 But to whom are these promises "exceeding great and precious?" To the church of God. But are they exceedingly great and precious to the church of God at all times and under all circumstance? No; only at peculiar times and under peculiar circumstances. In other words, only as the church of God is brought into those circumstances to which the promises apply, are they to her either great or precious. Now what is true of the church generally is true also of each believer individually. However great and precious the promises may be in themselves, they are nothing to us, absolutely nothing, except as we are brought into those circumstances to which they are applicable. But is not something further needed? Assuredly; for I may be in the very circumstances to which the promise is suitable, and yet be as utterly unable to derive any strength or draw any comfort out of it as if there were none. What then further do I need? The application of that promise to my soul. Looking therefore at the promises generally, we may say of them that though they are all exceedingly great and precious in themselves, yet they are really only made so as applied by the blessed Spirit with light, life, and power to the heart.

We have in the words before us a whole cluster of most precious promises; but connected with these promises we have the church of God in suffering circumstances. The Lord is here addressing his suffering Zion. "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 so on.

In looking at these words, we may with God's blessing attempt
I. To describe a little of the state, character, and condition of

Zion's Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders 129
the suffering church of God as here drawn by the pen of the Spirit; and,

II. To consider the promises that are addressed to her under those suffering circumstances.

Describing her suffering condition, the Lord addresses her in these tender epithets—"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted." Everyone of these expressions is pregnant with heavenly meaning, and demands a separate examination.

1. "O thou afflicted." Affliction is one of the marks that God stamps upon his people. We may call it his peculiar sheep-mark. "I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord." Zep 3:12 Unless then we have stamped upon us by the hand of God this sheep-mark, we have, at present, but little testimony that we belong to the flock of Jesus. "Afflicted!" How are the Lord's people afflicted? Certainly not all in the same way. Afflictions are of various kinds, and widely differ in nature, duration, and degree; but, viewed as proceeding from the hands of God, they are all sent by him to work a certain effect in the hearts of his people. Some afflictions, for instance, are bodily. Ill health is a very common gift of a Father's love, disguised under this painful rod. Many, many of the Lord's people are suffering under this affliction. An aching head, or a torpid liver, or shattered nerves, or weak chest, or rebellious stomach, or paralyzed limbs, or racked joints to many embitter life. I can speak experimentally upon this point, for I have been afflicted, more or less, with colds and coughs, and a tender chest, for more than twenty years, besides being laid aside from preaching on two different occasions for many months. But if I know the painful part of this affliction, I trust, I know something also of the blessedness connected with it; for the greatest and clearest manifestation I ever had of the Lord Jesus Christ to my soul was when I lay stretched on a bed of affliction, from which I did not rise for three weeks. I know, therefore, the misery of it by painful experience, and the blessedness of it by pleasurable experience; for often, though by

no means always, when the body is most afflicted the soul is most favoured.

Others of the Lord's people, who are exempted from bodily afflictions have afflictions of another kind, such for instance as family afflictions. From this quarter how many gusts blow and billows swell. Into some families how often does death enter, taking away idol after idol! The buds drop before expanded into blossoms, or ripened into fruit. Or if children grow up it is but to open new sources of anxiety and sorrow, and rend the heart with deeper grief.

Others of the Lord's people are afflicted in circumstances. This is a very prevailing affliction amongst the people of God, for "he hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith." But I will not dwell upon those temporal afflictions which the church of God shares in common with the world. When the Lord says, "O thou afflicted," he seems rather to allude to those SPIRITUAL afflictions which are the peculiar lot of Zion. And, indeed, are any afflictions to be compared with spiritual afflictions? Guilt of conscience, distress of soul, fear of death, a troubled mind, anguish of spirit, the hidings of God's countenance, doubts, fears, and gloomy apprehensions, Satan's fiery darts, blasphemous suggestions, infidel insinuations—what bodily suffering, what family affliction, what poverty or temporal losses are to be compared with these draughts in Zion's bitter cup! Of this cup, each in his measure, all the Lord's people have to drink; for when the two disciples craved to sit, one at Christ's right hand and the other at his left, in his glory, he asked them whether they could drink of his cup and be baptized with his baptism; and when they replied that they could, he told them that of his cup, the cup of bitter sorrow, they should drink, and with his baptism, the baptism of suffering, they should be baptized. What he said to them he says to all, for only as we suffer with him shall we be glorified together.

2. But not to dwell too long on this part, of the subject, we will pass on to the second mark that God has stamped on his church—

Zion's Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders 131
"tossed with tempest." The Lord here compares his suffering church to a ship at sea, under bare poles, labouring in the storm, driven out of her course by contrary winds, as was Paul's case in the Adriatic, and doubtful whether she will ever reach the harbour, as the hymn says

"Half a wreck by tempests driv'n."

What a picture of a tempest-tossed soul! Sun and stars beclouded, compass lost, chart useless, pilot overboard, and breakers ahead! Many, very many, of the Lord's dear family are thus tossed with tempest; some with a tempest of doubts and fears; others with a tempest of lusts and corruptions; others with a tempest of rebellion and fretfulness; others with a storm of guilt and despondency; others with gloomy forebodings and dismal apprehensions. Thus are they driven from their course, their sun and stars all obscured; no clear evidences, no bright manifestations: darkness above and a raging sea beneath; breakers ahead, and no harbour in sight.

3. But the Lord adds another word which seems to complete the whole, and to stamp the sheep-mark with a more vigorous hand and in broader characters upon the fleece, "not comforted"—that is, not comforted by, not capable of comfort from, man. This I look upon as a very decisive mark of a work of grace upon the soul. When a man is so cast down in his mind, so troubled in his conscience, and so burdened in his spirit that none but God can comfort him, we seem at once to be on the footsteps of the Spirit. We do not find hypocrites on this ground. False professors can easily take comfort: they can steal what God does not give, and appropriate what he does not apply. Zion's special mark is that she is "not comforted"—that her wounds are too deep for human balsams, her sickness too sore for creature medicines. All the gospel sermons in the world, all the gospel ministers, nay, all the invitations, promises, and declarations of the gospel itself, short of divine manifestation, cannot minister to her any solid comfort. God has reserved her comfort in his own hands; from his lips

132 Zion's Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders
alone can consolation be spoken into her soul.

Now I do not mean to say that all the Lord's people are equally "afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted." In some measure they must be, or they are not within the scope of this promise. Still less do I mean to say that when they are passing through this experience, they can reap any evidence from it, for if they could they would be comforted; they would see the sun and stars, the course they are steering, and the harbour fair in sight. But this is their peculiar mark, and one we always see upon them, that they cannot take comfort except as God himself is pleased to speak it into their hearts. Now, do not cut yourself off for a poor lost wretch because you cannot get comfort easily, because you are tossed with a sea of doubts and fears, temptations and corruptions, by the waves of lust and billows of sin. Do not say to yourself, 'I have come here tonight praying and groaning to get a word of comfort and cannot get any; I have now no hope!' That is the devil's conclusion, not God's. His mark is, "not comforted."—a mark he has stamped upon his sheep and lambs.

II. But we pass on to consider the blessed cluster of gospel promises that God makes to his suffering church; and indeed they are most precious. "Behold," he says, as though he would draw her special attention to the work that he was about to perform—"I will lay thy stones with fair colours." The Lord here seems to take the figure of a building; or rather of a temple, for his people are compared to a temple, "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" And his blessed work upon their soul he compares to the work of an architect, or a builder who lays stone upon stone until he puts on the top-stone with shoutings of grace, grace, unto it.

1. The first promise that he makes relative to this building of mercy is—"I will lay her stones with fair colours." This seems to be a general description of the work of God in rearing up the spiritual building before he proceeds to nicer particulars, the other part of the text being, in my view, but a fuller explanation of what is laid

Zion's Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders 133
down in the promise, "I will lay thy stones with fair colours." "I myself," he says, "will build thee up," as he promises elsewhere—"Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel." Jer 31:4 And all the materials whether for foundation or superstructure shall be equally lasting and beautiful.

But what may we specially understand by these "stones," that the Lord promises to lay "with fair colours?" I think we may understand by them the blessed truths of the gospel. These are laid into the soul by the hand of God. Just as the mason takes a stone and lays it into the building, the structure itself being utterly passive in the matter, and only receiving stone by stone as the builder puts one upon another, so in the work of grace is the soul passive—God the Spirit taking precious truths out of the word, and inlaying them with his own hand into the heart. This indeed is the only way whereby Zion, afflicted, tempest-tossed, not comforted Zion, can receive the word of God. Her afflictions and tempests have beaten her off from every other mode. Nor indeed can any one in any other way rightly come at truth. It is not my coming to the word of God as to an orderly heap of building materials, selecting this or that stone, and laying this and that truth into my own conscience, and thus raising up my soul a temple for God. He alone begins, carries on, and completes. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, his hands shall also finish it." Zec 4:9

Now as God the Spirit is pleased to lay any blessed truth into the soul, it is "a stone of fair colours." However fair or beautiful any word of God be in itself, it only experimentally becomes so as inlaid by his own Divine hand into the soul. This brings out the fair colouring. How often we read the word of God without seeing any the least beauty in it. Let that same portion come home with sweetness and power to the soul, beauty, inexpressible beauty is seen in it immediately. It becomes at once "a stone of fair colours." Salvation full and free; the pardoning love of God; the precious blood of the Lamb; justification by Christ's imputed righteousness;

134 Zion's Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders
wine and milk without money and without price; superabounding grace; eternal mercy, everlasting life—these, these are some of the precious stones that God the Spirit, with his own hand, lays into the conscience.

But in the words, "I will lay thy stones with fair colours," there seems to be a reference also to the cement in which the stones are laid, as well as to the stones themselves. What is this cement? Is it not blood and love? Are not the stones of fair colours, bright and beautiful, well laid in when thus cemented? Nor is the cement less beautiful than the stones; for it must last as long as they, and glitter and shine with equal lustre and brightness. Thus is the building compact as well as beautiful, firm in strength as it is resplendent in glory.

2. But the Lord goes on to particularize his work more distinctly and minutely. He speaks of her "foundations," her "windows," her "gates," and her "borders," and he tells us how they are all severally framed and made. Beginning at the beginning, he describes the material and laying of her foundations—"I will lay thy foundations with sapphires." Before we can stand firmly in the things of God, we must have a good foundation, something solid for our faith, our hope, our love, our all, to rest upon. We read of a foolish builder who built his house upon the sand, and of a wise builder who built upon a rock. Now, what we want is a solid foundation to rest upon as regards our eternal all. This God promises to do for his afflicted Zion—"I will lay thy foundations with sapphires." But what is a sapphire? Have you ever seen one? Perhaps you have. But if you have not, I may briefly describe it as a precious stone, the distinguishing feature of which is its peculiar clear and beautiful colour—a heavenly blue. I would not press the figure too closely, but may it not fitly represent from its nature and colour a special gift from heaven? "A gift is a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it." Pr 17:8 Every testimony then that God gives to the soul, every promise brought into the heart, every manifestation of mercy, visit of love. Or application of truth, we may call, in a spiritual sense, a

Zion's Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders 135
sapphire, for it is indeed a precious stone, radiant with heaven's own hue. When God thus lays a sapphire into the soul it affords a solid foundation for faith. When he said to Abraham—"I am thy shield and exceeding great reward;" to Joshua—"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;" to Jeremiah—"Fear not," La 3:57 he laid a sapphire in each of their hearts. What a mercy for you if your faith has such a sapphire for its foundation; when you do not rest upon the bare letter of God's word, upon the naked truth of the Scriptures, but upon the testimony of God laid into your soul. When there is any manifestation of Christ, any application of a promise, any visit of his mercy, any token of his love, any proof of interest in the precious blood of the Lamb, that is a foundation, a safe and solid foundation on which to rest. As they are laid by the hands of God himself they must be firm; as they are sapphires they must be indestructible. These sapphires, it is true, may every one of them be buried in the dust of carnality and worldly mindedness; the filth and sewage, the mud and slush of our fallen nature may roll over them flood after flood; but are they injured thereby? Is their nature changed, their value impaired, their hue tarnished, their lustre faded and gone? A person whom I know, indeed a relation of mine, once lost a diamond ring for a whole year, in a strawberry bed in a garden. Autumn covered it with leaves, and winter with snow; the rain fell upon it, and the mould spread over it, it was wet with dew and bound in by hoarfrost; but did these impair its lustre? No; had it even dropped into a London sewer its value and beauty would not have been lessened. When my relation found her lost diamond ring it was as bright as ever. Thus, if God the Spirit has lodged a sapphire in your soul, all the dust and dirt of the carnal mind, nay, all the filth of sin, worse than that of a London sewer, may roll over it yet not destroy it. True, they may hide it from view, obscure the getting, and for a while dim its face; but one touch of the polisher's hand restores all its beauty. Grace in the soul has no more communion with sin than a diamond with a dunghill. The manifestations of Christ to the soul,

136 Zion's Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders
and the application of God's truth to the heart, are "sapphires," in their nature indestructible, in their beauty imperishable. See to it, my friend, that you have a sapphire in your soul. That is the foundation; get that, and you can build upon it without fear; But beware of counterfeits. There are plenty of Jews about who pass off paste for diamonds and blue glass for sapphires. Examine well your testimony from heaven, and see that it be a real sapphire, just in weight, clear in colour, bright in hue, and imperishable in nature, without fracture or flaw, and specially see whether laid by the hand of God. "I will lay thy foundations with sapphires."

3. But the Lord also adds—"And I will make thy windows of agates." What is a window for? Chiefly to admit light, and air, and also to give us a prospect of the scenery without. I am a great admirer naturally of fine prospects, and I have a very pretty one from the windows of my own house, which I often look at with pleasure and admiration. Our houses would be poor, dull abodes if there were no windows to them, or if they were always closed with shutters. They would rather be prisons than dwellings. Thus the windows spoken of in our text seem to signify spiritual prospects. For has the temple of mercy no windows for light and air? And are the shutters never thrown back to give Zion her prospects? Aye, surely, blessed prospects, glimpses of heaven, sights of Jesus, views of a triune God, glances into eternal bliss and blessedness beyond the grave.

But the windows are of "agate." Glass in those days was not used for windows; it was known for various other purposes; for it has been lately found in Nineveh, as well as in the tombs of Egypt; but its use for windows is of comparatively modern date. But why are they made of agate? Though not so clear as glass, it is what is called semi-transparent, that is, sufficiently transparent to admit a considerable amount of light. The sun shining through a window of agate might lose a portion of its brightness, but not much of its light. Upon Zion in her time-state the Sun of Righteousness does not shine in all his brightness. The windows of agate whilst

Zion's Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders 137
she is in the flesh temper his rays. Her prospects too are not fully bright and clear. As the Apostle speaks—"We see through, or in a glass darkly!" We have not those clear views which the saints have in glory where they see Jesus face to face. We have prospects sometimes, I hope, by faith, of God, and Christ, and heavenly glory; but still these views are but semi-transparent, streaked and clouded like a window of agate, not bright and clear as a pane of plate glass. But as Daniel opened his windows toward Jerusalem, that he might see by faith what he could not see by sight, so should we aim to look towards the heavenly Jerusalem, that by faith we may see him there who is invisible. It is poor, dull, miserable work to live in a house without windows; to have no views of God, nor sights of Jesus, nor glimpses of his heavenly glory! To be shut up in a prison, or a penitentiary, where every window is darkened with shutters, and but a few air-holes left to breathe at, is indeed most miserable. But many of the Lord's family live this prison life; and this makes them "afflicted, tossed, with tempest, and not comforted." But to such the Lord says—"I will make thy windows of agates." They shall have prospects. It may be at first only as glimmering through a lattice, but the windows of agate are ready for the framing; for "light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart."

4. But the Lord speaks also of Zion's "gates." These gates are to give admission to the temple which he is rearing for his own habitation. But of what material are the gates? These too, like the foundations and windows, are of precious stones. "And thy gates of carbuncles." Now I would not press Scripture figures too closely, and we must not be too fanciful in our interpretation of God's word; yet, doubtless, the Spirit of God chose these jewels with some peculiar meaning. The carbuncle is of a blood red colour. And why should the Lord have chosen that Zion's gates should be of this peculiar colour? May we not, without wresting the figure too closely, believe that there is some mystic allusion here to the blood of the Lamb? But what are gates for? Two purposes, entrance and

138 Zion's Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders
exit. How did we come into the chapel this evening but through the gate or door; and the same door that gave us entrance will give us exit. Zion too has her gates of exit and entrance. She has her gates of access to God, entrance into the presence of the Most High; the door of hope opened in the valley of Achor. And who has opened the door, or rather who has not only opened it, and made it, but himself is it, is the door. "I am the door," saith Jesus; and was not the door opened through his rent flesh, as the Apostle speaks—"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." Heb 10:19,20. Through his bleeding wounds, through his pierced side, through his mangled feet and hands, there is now access to God—

A door of hope is opened wide.
In Jesus' pierced hands and side.

Is there any other access to God but through the slaughtered Lamb? "Through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." There is no other, for he is "the way, the truth, and the life, and no man cometh to the Father but by him." Is not this an open way? Does not the soul through this door walk in and out and find pasture, and enter into the immediate presence of God? Do you, my friends, ever find access to God, a heart to pray, a sense of acceptance in prayer, an open door and power to enter therein? What opens it? Merit? Set up merit and we are all damned to a man! It is not merit, great or little; it is the blood of the Lamb which alone has opened a way for poor lost sinners to draw near to God. These are Zion's gates; her gates of carbuncles, ruddy in hue, types and figures of the atoning blood of the Lamb.

But gates not only give exit but admission. Not only do prayers, supplications, petitions, cries, groans, sighs and tears, rise up with acceptance through the gates of carbuncle, and thus enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, but promises also, tokens,

Zion's Foundations, Windows, Gates, And Borders 139
testimonies, and visits come down. And as every prayer, to be a prayer, is breathed through the gate of carbuncle, through the blood of the Lamb, so every answer, that is an answer, comes down through the same consecrated channel. Has it not surprised you sometimes that God ever heard your prayers? And what has been the reason of this surprise? Has it not been this? "My prayers are so polluted; my thoughts so wandering; my mind so carnal; my lusts so strong; my corruptions so powerful; my backslidings so innumerable; O, when I view these things I wonder that God can hear my prayers." And well you may wonder if you look at the matter in that way. God does not hear your prayers because there is anything good in you! How could it be? What does God see in you? A mass of filth and folly. There is in you nothing else. Then why does God hear prayer and answer it too? Only through the gate of carbuncle. Prayer ascends through Jesus, and answers descend through Jesus. Groans through Jesus enter the ears of the God of Sabaoth, and through the same open gate of bleeding mercy do answers drop into the soul. Our poor self-righteous hearts can hardly comprehend this; and we think we must have a good frame, or bring a good deed, or a good heart to make our prayers acceptable to God. Perish the thought. This is nothing but the spawn of self-righteousness. The gates of carbuncle,—through these every prayer ascends, through these every answer comes down; if we set up anything else, or make a gate of human merit, though no bigger than a mouse-hole, we pour contempt upon the grace and blood of the Lamb.

5. But the Lord also speaks of Zion's borders. He tells us he will make "all her borders of pleasant stones." There shall be nothing common about her. No architect pays the same attention to the courts and outbuildings that he pays to the mansion itself. If the mansion be of stone these may be of brick. Not so with God, Zion's divine Architect. Her very Courts are to be entered in with praise. No back buildings, no barn or stables, kitchens or wash-houses, to be thrust out of sight and hidden by plantations, lest as eyesores

they should disfigure the noble mansion. Zion's very borders, courts, outbuildings, are all of the same material with the mansion itself. "And all thy borders of pleasant stones," that is pleasant to the eye, as a precious stone is for its lustre and beauty. The walls that surround her, the courts within those walls, the avenues of approach, her walks and borders, every circuit and boundary whereby she is fenced off and separated from an ungodly world are made of stones pleasant to the eye and precious in value. Thus God's providential dealings, which often form the outer setting of his inward mercies, are of pleasant stones. North, south, east, west, all Zion's borders are of precious materials. The daily events of life, the circumstances of family, station, employment, success or the contrary, the ties of domestic affection, with all those varied circumstances which seem rather the borders and outer courts than the inner sanctuary of gracious experience—yet all these are of divine material and workmanship. Viewed by faith, every event and circumstance of life, however apparently grievous, is a pleasant stone; for all Zion's borders are of pleasant stones.

But for whom are all these mercies? The meritorious? the diligent? the industrious? We read not so: "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted." What! are all these mercies for such as they? They are the only persons who will prize them or glorify God for them. Give them to the Pharisee, and he will tell you that he gained them by his own exertions, deserved them by his own meritorious obedience; and, therefore, as God will not give his glory to another, and a Pharisee's religion is that which he can himself build up with his own hands—the Lord bestows them on the "afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted"—in other words, when he has made Zion a heap of ruins, he takes to himself the distinguished honour of building her up with his own hands, and laying every stone in its place with his own Almighty fingers.

But this is not suitable to the palate of a Pharisee. He wants to be handling the trowel himself. His very fingers itch to get hold of the plummet and line. If he might but dabble a little in the mortar

of human merit, become a co-builder with God, and then write upon the building—"This was partly built by God and partly by myself;" he would be satisfied. How pleased he would be to see his own name bracketed with the name of God, as you see in the city churches just below the organ, the twin names of the distinguished churchwardens, in whose year of office the church was repaired and decorated. Oh, if the Pharisee could but see his name thus bracketed with God's as a co-builder, how it would please his vanity and pride. It might please him, but it would not please God, and it would not please my soul, nor if you are taught of God would it please yours. Let self be nothing. Dethrone self from the seat of empire, and banish it, as it deserves, into exile and obscurity; but let God be exalted and shine forth in his own divine glory. This is sweet to every soul taught of God. He would not take to himself a grain of merit. For what does he really merit? Hell! That is what he merits, nothing more, nothing less. And as long as he only merits hell, he dares not, will not, must not, shall not merit heaven.

Now this is the reason why the Lord has, so to speak, to take such pains in thrusting Zion down, and making her a heap of ruins, that he may have all the honour and all the glory of building her up into a temple for himself, to dwell in her by his grace here, and in his glory hereafter. And he well deserves it. It is sweet to the soul that it should be so; and if we are taught, as we must be if we are taught of God, to know our own helplessness and hopelessness toward everything spiritually good, we shall give him all the praise. It is the sweetest feeling upon earth. It is a blessed foretaste of heaven to praise God for his mercy, to thank him for his grace, and to bless him for a sense of his love. It is a drop of heaven; and he who never has it here will never have it hereafter. No Pharisee ever had it. No Pharisee whilst a Pharisee ever will have it. He must become a heap of ruins before God wilt put forth his hand to rear him up into a temple. He must be "afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted" before the Lord lays the "stones with

fair colours, and lays the foundation with sapphires;” before he makes the “windows of agates, and the gates of carbuncles, and all the borders of pleasant stones.” And if God does not do this for him, where is his hope, where his confidence, and what will be his end?

150 Israel Blest And Kept

Preached on Tuesday Evening, , at Eden Street Chapel,
Hampstead Road
August 17th, 1852

“The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”

Num. 6:24-26

I once heard this text adduced as an argument for a form of prayer. It was argued that there could be no intrinsic objection to forms of prayer, seeing that God Himself had prescribed a distinct formula in the words of the text. But if that argument were valid in one point, it would be in others; and upon the same ground we might set up the whole of the Jewish ritual, and bring back circumcision and sacrifice. The spirit of the New Testament is not one of forms. These might suit the old ceremonial law, but are alien to the new covenant dispensation. Prayer is not a lip-liturgy, but a heart-breathing; and flows, not from a prayer-book, but from the Spirit of grace and supplications. I no more believe that when Paul prayed with the elders at Ephesus his prayers were made for him beforehand, than that their tears and kisses were manufactured to order. Nor do I believe that when he prayed on the sands with the disciples at Tyre he prayed out of a book, any more than that when he preached at Troas until midnight he preached a written sermon. The Spirit of grace and supplications, which intercedes for us and in us with groanings which cannot be uttered, supersedes all forms; and if He cannot make intercession for us according to

the will of God, it cannot be done by a collect or a litany.

Two things are worthy of notice before we come to our text.

1. First, that the blessing was put into the mouth of Aaron, the high priest: “And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them” (Num. 6:22, 23). Aaron in this, as in other points, was a type and figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great High Priest over the house of God. But Aaron could only pronounce the blessing, Jesus gives it. Words only fall from the lips of a man; blessings fall from the heart of the God-Man.

2. But, secondly, we may observe how by implication that fundamental, cardinal doctrine of our most holy faith, the Trinity, is here set forth. Observe in the text the triple use of the word Jehovah: “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” Why this triple repetition, except upon the same ground that the seraphim in the temple three times proclaimed, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts?”

I. “The Lord bless thee.” The high priest could only use the words; he pronounced the prayer, but he could not give that which was contained in the prayer. It was therefore not such a blessing as the Pope claims to give, but such a blessing as a poor sinner might ask; not a magical incantation to charm away sin, but a humble petition of one himself compassed with infirmity. The key to the words, “The Lord bless thee,” is, I believe, to be found in Eph. 1:3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;” for the blessings prayed for in our text would seem to be chiefly spiritual blessings. Not that we are to think lightly of temporal favours. They are left-hand blessings, if not right-hand mercies; they are gifts to be thankful for on earth, if not graces that take to heaven; provision for the perishing body, if not food

for the immortal soul. Health, strength, such a measure of worldly goods as shall keep the wolf from the door, and enable us to owe no man anything but love; children growing up to be a comfort to their parents; a kind and affectionate partner; warm and faithful friends; an untarnished name; and a little provision for those dear and near to us, that their tears over our body may not be doubly embittered by poverty and dependence; who shall say that these are not blessings for which God is to be praised? Viewed by the eye of faith, blessings in providence come down from heaven steeped in mercy. And yet how short, O how infinitely short, do these temporal blessings, which perish in the using, fall of spiritual blessings, which endure for evermore! A striking proof of this is that when we are privileged to draw near to a throne of grace with some measure of faith and feeling, the heart's desire is wholly towards spiritual blessings; and the eye of the soul is so wholly and solely fixed upon them, that there is scarcely left place either in the heart or lips to ask for any other.

Let us, then, as the Lord may enable, look at a few of these. They are indeed innumerable, and scattered up and down God's Word in such rich profusion, that we can glean up but a few. Like the trees in Paradise, so laden with promised mercies are the Scriptures, that we can but gather a cluster here and there. To gather the whole crop, that hangs so richly and luxuriantly from the boughs of promise, is beyond our power, as beyond our grasp. Yet a few we may safely gather.

1. Godly fear in the heart, that fountain of life by which an awakened sinner departs from the snares of death, is not that a blessing? and of all blessings first and foremost, because the "beginning of wisdom?" When, then, the priest spoke the words, "The Lord bless thee," may we not well believe he was to hold in his hand this blessing of godly fear, to drop, not only from his mouth, but also from the heart of God into the souls of the people prayed for? It is indeed such a blessing that there is no other blessing without it; for though it is "the beginning of wisdom," it is also "the

principal part" of it (Prov. 1:7, margin). It is, therefore, not a bud which drops off the bough, but one which expands into flower and ripens into fruit; it is not a limb which is dwarfed and stunted by the other limbs that surround it, but one which grows with their growth and strengthens with their strength. It is the companion of faith, the friend of hope, and the partner of love; it makes the conscience tender, the walk circumspect, and the life consistent. It is "a fountain of life," and, like a river, is only increased and deepened by successive additions of grace. Let us never think we possess any spiritual blessing if our heart be destitute of godly fear. If we have not the beginning, we can have neither the middle nor end.

2. But is not faith a blessing too? O how rich a blessing! And who know faith to be a blessing? Those who are deeply exercised and tried by an unbelieving heart. None prize the blessedness of faith when given so much as those who have had, and still have, painful struggles with a heart that cannot, nay, that will not believe. When faith comes down from heaven as a good and perfect gift into such a heart, when it leaps into the soul over such dark and rugged mountains of unbelief and infidelity, it is felt to be a blessing by the sweet effects it produces. We read that "the blessing of the Lord maketh rich." This is especially true of faith, for it is an enriching grace, putting the soul into possession of all the riches of the kingdom of heaven. It is almost as if the Governor and Directors of the Bank of England took you into the Bank cellars, and said, "You may take as much bullion as your eyes can look upon, or your hands carry away;" for faith gives such a blessed introduction into the treasures of God's grace, that it may have all it can grasp, and the more it grasps the better. But this is not often the soul's privilege. When God says, "Take," faith may embrace as much of Christ's riches as its eye can see or its hands grasp. But these are rare seasons. Too often are we like the penniless pauper who walks by the Bank, but to whom its cellars are closed, and all entrance effectually barred.

3. And is not hope a blessing too? I scarcely know how it is, but in our day this hope, which is spoken of so much in Scripture, which is termed an anchor of the soul sure and steadfast, which is called “a good hope through grace,” and placed by the apostle side by side and as if on a level with faith and love—this blessed grace of hope seems little thought of, and almost despised and set aside. One of the strangest and most inconsistent features of the present day is the combination of the strongest confidence with the greatest carnality. Never was there so much assurance, and never so little real faith; never so much stout wood, and never so little ripe fruit; never so much high profession, and never so much low practice. If these high and lofty professors were tried by sin, Satan, and by a desponding heart; if they did more business in deep waters, they would more prize the anchor. But when the ship is always in harbour, moored on to the quay till masts and timbers rot, the anchor is not wanted, and is therefore little thought of. It is being buffeted by wind and wave, and being in continual peril of shipwreck, that makes the anchor prized.

4. But what shall we say of love? Shall we pass by that greatest of all blessings, which abides when faith is lost in sight, and hope absorbed in enjoyment? Shall we think little of that grace which is glory in the bud, the earnest of heaven, the choicest gift of God, as most assimilating the soul to His own nature, for God is love? It is the richest blessing in the whole cluster; the sweetest grace which God has to bestow; without which heaven would be no happiness, salvation no joy, and immortality no bliss.

5. But are there no other blessings? Have we now come to an end? Are we like a person who has a small income, a few shillings per week, and when Thursday evening comes finds all spent, nothing left to go to market with on Saturday? God is no such niggardly bestower of His bounties. He does not dole out His mercies like a parish officer, or treat His children like the poor needlewomen; “He giveth liberally and upbraideth not.” Shall we omit patience? “Let patience have her perfect work.” We read of

those “who through faith and patience inherit the promises;” and if we have many trials, sufferings, and exercises, we shall not easily do without this blessing of patience and submission to God’s will. It will serve us in good stead one day, even if we seem not to need it now.

6. And shall we pass by blessed testimonies of God’s mercy and grace to the soul; views of the King in His beauty, and of the land that is very far off; wells of consolation in the valley of Baca; Ebenezers set up in the wilderness? Shall we omit crumbs from the bread of life, and drops from the everlasting fountain? Can anything not be a blessing which God gives? He gives no little favours; the least of His favours is but a pledge and foretaste of the greatest. When you send your child to school in the morning, and give it a kiss, it is but a little; but it speaks the love of a parent’s heart. But all your love is not spent in that one kiss; you have plenty more left, for you have a heart full of affection. Thus if the Lord is pleased to drop a kiss into the soul, are there no more to come? Has that one kiss exhausted all His love? “Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.” The bride wanted more than one; for the kisses of His mouth were but the language of His loving heart.

7. But are there no other blessings than these? Is not the rod often a blessing? God’s frown often a blessing? His stripping hand often a blessing? His rebukes in the conscience often a blessing? The hidings of His face, the withdrawals of His sensible favour, the stripes of His heavy hand; shall we say these are no blessings? They are, though they are to our feelings blessings in disguise.

But before we pass on, just look at the personality of the blessing asked: “The Lord bless thee,” not “you.” And yet when the high priest pronounced the blessing he did not fix his eye upon, nor did he address his speech to, any one individual. It was spoken to the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel; and yet the words were so framed as though the blessing was for each individual. Such are God’s blessings—personal, individual. Gracious souls, sometimes, when they have heard the word with

any particular sweetness or power, say, “It was all for me.” Well, it was all for thee; but art thou the only “me” in the place? Might not someone sitting by thy side say, “It was all for me?” Don’t think that one alone is to be blessed, and all others excluded. There is enough for each and there is enough for all. But there is something so singularly appropriating in the mercy of God when brought into the heart that it seems as though it was for me and for me alone. But here is the blessedness of the mercies of God, of the riches of His grace and glory—that one having a part does not deprive the other. It is not like a natural family, where each successive child seems to withdraw a portion of the inheritance from the others; so that, if they had the covetous feelings of up-grown people, the elder might well say to the new-born babe, “We don’t want thee, thou little robber! Why art thou come to cry halves with us?” It does not narrow the heavenly inheritance that there are so many to enjoy it; if it did, it would narrow God Himself, for God is their inheritance, and in God is enough to satisfy myriads of elect angels, as well as myriads of ransomed men. There need be no envy in the things of God; it is excluded by the freeness, fulness, and richness of God’s love. But I must not spend all the evening upon my first four words.

II. “And keep thee.” Blessing first and keeping afterwards. The blessing given, and then, when given, the blessing kept. The letter written, and then sealed; the jewel put into the casket, and then the casket locked. “The Lord keep thee.” How we need this as well as the other! And he that knows most of his own heart will prize this blessing most. We cannot keep ourselves. If a man think he can keep himself he knows nothing of the treachery and deceitfulness of his own heart.

But not to spend too much time upon this point, I would observe that there are three things, if not more, from which God’s children need to be specially kept.

1. I need hardly observe that the first and foremost is to be kept from positive evil. The Lord asked of the Father for His disciples,

“I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world”—no; let them suffer there as I have suffered before—but keep them from the evil.” They must be in the world, they must be brought into contact with the world, but O keep them from the evil that is in the world! And this will be first and foremost in the petitions of every child of God who knows his own evil heart and has suffered from its weakness and treachery, that the Lord will keep him from open evil, that he may bring no distress and guilt upon his own conscience or reproach upon the cause of God.

2. But another thing from which the Lord alone can keep His people is, error. Satan does not attack all alike. He knows the bent of our natural minds. Some men’s animal passions are strong; in others the animal passions are comparatively weak, but there is much mental speculation. Satan does not tempt the latter as he tempts the former. The passions of the one he inflames; but it is upon the speculative mind of the other that he works. Nothing is so easy for some minds as to drink down error. Their reasoning faculties are caught by the bait of some logical argument, or their speculative imagination by some deep mystery; or their pride gratified by some wonderful piece of knowledge. Now, under all this, error is usually concealed. The sweetness of the draught hides the arsenic in the cup. But no man can take even a few grains of error with impunity; it will stupefy, if it do not kill; it will weaken the soul, if it do not at once destroy life. It will and must affect his head or his heart, his hands or his feet, his faith or his walk. No man can drink down error and the spirit of error without being injured, his spiritual strength weakened, and his spiritual limbs paralysed. We are to beware of error as we would of poison. There is something in error alluring as well as sweet to the carnal mind. Many a child has been allured by the berries of the deadly nightshade first to taste, and, when tasted, their sweetness has drawn it on largely to eat. Let error once hang down its alluring berries from the pulpit, there are plenty in the congregation to pluck and eat. Therefore beware of error, and of erroneous men.

I am jealous of error in proportion as I love and value the truth.

3. But there is a third thing, perhaps more fearful still, from which the Lord's people need to be kept, a thing perhaps little thought of and little noticed, and that is, a spirit of delusion. Many, many persons are under a spirit of delusion, whose lives are consistent and whose creed is sound. Their minds are mostly of a peculiar cast. They are not persons usually of strong animal passions, nor of speculative reasoning minds, but dreamy, visionary, imaginative, with a strong tinge of superstition and a tendency to natural enthusiasm. Now upon such minds Satan specially works, for he is a spirit, and, as such, has access to our animal spirits, breathing into them a spirit of delusion. It was thus he acted upon the four hundred prophets whom honest Micaiah withstood at the court of Ahab; and so with the damsel mentioned in the Acts as "possessed with a spirit of divination" (Acts 16:16.) The Romish Church is full of the dreams and visions, trances and revelations, of their pretended saints; the visions of their St. Catherines and St. Bridgets fill volumes. So even where a sounder creed is professed there are continually found persons all whose religion consists in dreams and sights, in whom there is neither faith nor repentance, neither a sense of sin nor a knowledge of salvation. With these "light and airy dreams," as Hart calls them, they are wonderfully elated and puffed up, and feed on them instead of the riches of Christ's blood.

How we need the Lord to keep us! We stand upon slippery places. Snares and traps are laid for us in every direction. Every employment, every profession in life, from the highest to the lowest, has its special temptations. Snares are spread for the feet of the most illiterate as well as the most highly cultivated minds; nor is there anyone, whatever his position in life may be, who has not a snare laid for him, and such a snare as will surely prove his downfall if God keep him not. When Elisha sat upon the mountain and his servant was distressed lest his master should be taken away by violence, the prophet prayed the Lord to open his servant's eyes.

What then saw he? Chariots and horses of fire all round about the mountain guarding the prophet. Perhaps if the Lord were to open our eyes as He opened the eyes of Elisha's servant, we might see devils where he saw angels, see ourselves surrounded by Beelzebub and his legions, as the eyes of the servant saw Michael with the flaming hosts of heaven. Well, then, may it be the desire of our soul, "The Lord keep me"—keep me in His providence, keep me by His grace, keep me by planting His fear deep in my soul, and maintaining that fear alive and effectual in my heart; keep me waking, keep me sleeping; keep me by night, keep me by day; keep me at home, keep me abroad; keep me with my family, and keep me with my friends; keep me in the world, and keep me in the church; the Lord keep me according to His promise every moment; keep me by His Spirit and grace with all the tenderness implied in His words, "O keep me as the apple of Thine eye!" My friends, you can know little of your own heart, little of Satan's devices, little of the snares spread for your feet, unless you feel how deeply you need an interest in this blessing: "The Lord keep thee." And He will, for we read of the righteous that they are kept "by the power of God through faith unto salvation;" and that "He will keep the feet of His saints."

III. But we pass on to the third portion of the blessing: "The Lord make His face shine upon thee." The allusion here seems, to my mind, to be to the sun. Sometimes the natural sun has not risen; and the world must needs be dark if the sun be still beneath the horizon. So with many gracious souls; it is darkness with them, midnight darkness, Egyptian darkness, darkness to be felt, because at present neither the Day-star has appeared nor the Sun of Righteousness risen upon them with healing in His wings. It will and must be dark with them till the Sun rise. But sometimes after the sun has risen we see not his face: clouds, deep, dark clouds, may obscure the face of that bright luminary throughout the whole day, and we may not get a single ray from him through the whole period that he is above the visible horizon.

So many of the Lord's family, after the Sun has risen upon them in the morning of their spiritual life, may pass, perhaps, much of their subsequent time in the dark shadow, till perhaps at eveningtide there is light, and a departing ray gilds the dying pillow. But again, there are sometimes days when mists drive rapidly across the face of the bright orb of day, and yet occasionally he peeps through the breaking clouds. It has been much this weather to-day. And is not this, in some measure, an emblem of the way in which the Sun of Righteousness is continually obscured by the mists and fogs which spring up out of our unbelieving heart, hidden from view by the doubts and fears that, like the vapours of the valley, spread themselves, to our view, over His beauteous face? Yet there are times when He gleams through the clouds and disperses the mists. When the Lord is pleased to bless the soul and shine upon it with any sweet manifestation, then He breaks through the dark clouds; but they gather again. It is not in Christian experience one bright summer day. We do not live in Australia or Peru, where clouds and mists rarely obscure the face of the sun. Our spiritual climate is humid, our inward latitude northern.

“The Lord make His face shine upon thee.” Is the Lord, then, sovereign in these matters? Can we not lift up our hand and remove the cloud? We have as much power to stretch forth our hand and sweep away the mists that obscure the Sun of Righteousness, as we have power with the same hand to sweep away a London fog. How this puts the creature into his right place! and the creature is only in his right place when he is nothing, and God is all in all. The very words seem now to be dropping with some sweetness upon my spirit: “The Lord make His face to shine upon thee.” How blessed to see the face of the Father, and to see it shine! not covered with lowering clouds of justly-merited displeasure, as sometimes we see in the natural sky an obscured sun looking angrily down, presaging wind and storm. It is indeed true that, when we have brought guilt into our consciences, the face of God is seen to lower with anger. We have brought His just displeasure upon our heads:

though not angry with the persons of His people, yet is He justly angry with their sins; and a sense of this in the soul covers His face with clouds: “Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through” (Lam. 3:44)

“The Lord make His face shine upon thee.” And if He make His face shine upon thee He will make thy face shine too. It was so with Moses, when he was in the mount and was holding sweet communion with God. When he came down amongst the people, the skin of his face shone: the glory of God was reflected upon it. And if the Lord make His face shine upon thee, it will make thy face not unlike the face of Moses when thou goest among the people of God.

IV. “And be gracious unto thee.” How sweet the gospel is! But what makes the gospel sweet? That one word which sheds a perfume through the whole—grace. Take grace out of the gospel and you destroy the gospel; you nullify and overthrow it; it is the gospel no more. Grace pervades every part and every branch of the blessed gospel; it is the life of the gospel; in a word, it is the gospel itself. “Be gracious unto thee.” In what, then, is God gracious? In a broken law? What does that know of grace? In resolutions of amendment, creature performances, and human righteousness? Can the Lord, will the Lord, show Himself gracious in these? I have read of a project for extracting sunbeams out of cucumbers. We might as well expect to make sunbeams out of cucumbers as to make grace out of the law; it is cold as cucumbers; there is no sun in it. Grace, to be grace, must come out of the gospel. It is in the gospel, and out of the gospel must it come; and it does come, excluding all creature righteousness, putting an extinguisher upon all human merit. As the apostle argues: “And if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:6). “The Lord be gracious unto thee.”

But how is the Lord gracious? Perhaps you have had occasion at some time of your life, to go into the presence of some one

in worldly rank far your superior, and you went timid, nervous, and trembling; but you experienced what is called a “gracious reception.” Did not that enable you to speak and open your petition? So it is in the things of God. A sense of our meanness and unworthiness may and does make us feel timid and trembling before the face of the Most High; but when He draws us into His presence, and receives us graciously, as king Ahasuerus received the trembling Esther, extending to her the sceptre of his grace, it emboldens the soul to lay its petition at His feet. Nothing will do it but this. But you feel and say often, “I am so unworthy.” Will you ever be anything else? When do you hope to be worthy? When do you mean to be worthy? If you could be worthy to-morrow, where is your worthiness to-day? Is the old score yet paid? If you venture upon the ground of worthiness you must have the old score rubbed off before you come to the new. Worthiness! where is it? In man? Never since the day that Adam fell. Righteousness fell in Paradise; when Adam’s hand touched the apple, worthiness fell to the ground, and never since has been able to raise its head. I must not, then, go to God upon the ground of worthiness. But may I go on the ground of unworthiness? I read of one who did, and met with a very gracious reception. “Lord,” said one, “I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.” What did the Lord say of this man? That He had not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. What, too, was the confession of the returning prodigal? “I am no more worthy to be called thy son.” But this brought out the best robe, the ring for the hand, and the shoes for the feet. Why? Faith dwells with a sense of unworthiness; they are bosom companions; it dwells in no other but unworthy breasts. Feel spiritually unworthy and you are spiritually believing, for it is faith that gives a sense of unworthiness. You believe you are unworthy; by the same faith that you believe your unworthiness you believe God’s grace. “Be gracious unto thee.” That melts the heart; law and terrors do but harden. It is grace that softens, grace that melts,

grace that constrains, grace that produces godly obedience.

“The Lord be gracious unto thee.” But when? In all times, states, and circumstances. “What!” the soul says, “after repeated backslidings; after daily inconsistencies; after so much ingratitude, neglect, self-seeking, pride, worldliness; so much lightness and frivolity, so little living, speaking, thinking, and acting to the glory of God?” If the Lord take notice of these things so as to rebuke us, it is well for us; but if the Lord take such notice of them as to make them entire hindrances to His grace, where shall we find a person to whom the Lord will ever be gracious? Grace must come over all the mountains of our sin and shame, and constrain us to a willing obedience, for Christ’s people are made “willing in the day of His power;” and the more He is gracious unto us, the more willing we shall be to serve Him, love Him, obey Him, and walk in His blessed ways! God wants no slaves, no hired servants in His house; He is served by sons and daughters. The obedience of a son or a daughter is a willing obedience. You have seen sometimes an afflicted parent, and you have admired, perhaps, the willing services and kindnesses shown him in sickness or old age by some affectionate daughter. Suppose that daughter were continually reminding her parent, “I do this because it is my duty. If I prop up your pillow, if I bring your medicine, if I give you food, if I attend to your wants, it is my duty; you are my parent, and I therefore show my duty to you.” How could a parent receive attention from a son or a daughter who was ever throwing duty in his face? But if he saw that every movement was prompted by love; if he felt the soft hand of love propping up the pillow, the tender hand of affection giving the medicine, an affectionate smile upon the countenance, and sometimes the passing cloud of sympathy, but all connected with the deep affection of a daughter’s heart, that would be received as affectionately as bestowed. Is it otherwise in the things of God? Go to God with your duty—it is only fit to be thrown back upon your face. Go to God in love, in the obedience of an affectionate heart, and you will be accepted.

V. "The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee." The meaning of this expression may, I think, be illustrated by a simple figure. A child has been disobedient to, or otherwise displeased its parent; or, to take a somewhat tenderer relation, a wife has not been altogether to her husband what he might expect, nor shown him that kindness and affection which are his due, and which indeed it is not only her duty but her highest privilege to give. The husband's head is then sometimes hung down, his eyes are averted, and face turned away; she is not met with that cheerfully-raised countenance and gladsome eye that she is at other times greeted with. Is there not something in this figure that may give a key to the words, "The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee?" When we offend a person, his face is not toward us as at other times. It was so with Laban towards Jacob; and if we have in any way incurred a friend's or superior's displeasure we watch instinctively his countenance. Is it down or up? Does it wear a frown or a smile? Is it looking upon us with the eye of affection, or are the eyes averted? We can tell in a moment if we know the countenance. Thus is the blessing asked—"The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee," as a kind and affectionate parent upon an obedient child, as a fond husband upon a loving, devoted wife; for such is God to His children—Father and Husband. And do we not, as children, often provoke Him to look upon us with frowning brow, or rather not to look upon us at all, to "hide His face," as we read, "that we cannot see Him?" The prayer then is—"The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee," with a smile upon it; free, open, forgiving, merciful, and mild, that thou mayest advance therein. When a disobedient child comes home and sees its father's face not towards it as before, it shrinks away; there is no pressing forward to get upon the knee, no throwing the little arms round the neck and snatching a kiss, but a shrinking away through guilt and shame. So is it in the things of God. When conscience tells us how in this and that instance we have disobeyed, been inconsistent, transgressed, and done amiss, when we go into God's presence there is a hanging back, a

shrinking away through fear of an ill reception. But O the change in the child when the frown disappears and the smile succeeds; when the little one is taken once more into the arms and the tears are kissed away! How much more so in the things of God when He kisses away the tears of the disobedient child, as in the case of the returning prodigal! There are no kisses like those kisses of forgiveness, of mercy, and of restoring grace.

VI. "And give thee peace." O what a blessing! As Hart says,
 "I lay me down and sweetly sleep,
 For I have peace with God."

It is this that makes the pillow easy in life, and will alone make that pillow easy in death—peace with God through Jesus Christ, peace through the reconciliation, peace through the blood of sprinkling, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." Many covet great things, high things. But what said the Lord to Baruch? "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." Ministers often seek great gifts, great eloquence, great knowledge of mysteries, great congregations, great popularity and influence. They are wrong in seeking these so-called great things. Let them rather seek real things, gracious things, things that make their souls blessed here and hereafter. The blessing that the gracious soul most earnestly covets is peace; for this is the sweetest honey-drop in God's cup. It is true that it does not make the heart overflow like joy, nor to dance with exultation, like the first beaming in of the rays of hope, nor melt it down like the visits of love; but it is in some respects sweeter than all, because it so settles down the soul into sweet assurance; it is the realisation of the Saviour Himself, for "He is our peace," and may thus be called the crowning blessing.

But see how the links of this divine chain meet, somewhat like that which we were treating of last Lord's day evening. Just look at these links for a moment. "The Lord bless thee"—link the first; "and keep thee"—link the second; "the Lord make His face shine

Confirmed

upon thee”—the third; “and be gracious unto thee”—the fourth; “the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee”—the fifth; “and give thee peace”—the sixth. Six blessed links, and all united into one continuous chain; for when the Lord begins to bless, He ends with peace. We need wish no greater nor pray for a higher blessing than peace, for God has none greater to give. When a father dies he leaves his children all his goods. Jesus, before He died, said, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you.” It was His last legacy; His dying gift; in His own eyes of the greatest value, and it should be such in ours.

It is not my habit to preach introductory or farewell sermons. I often think there is much flesh in both, and, to my mind, the less the flesh appears in the pulpit or the pew the better. Natural feelings are to be discouraged by ministers rather than encouraged, for they are very deceptive, and often pass off for spiritual feelings; and this makes me dread them. To work upon people’s natural feelings is to be an actor, not a preacher; I therefore rarely, in leaving my own congregations, take leave of them, and when I return I preach as I should have done had I been with them for weeks. But as I would not in ordinary life be deficient in courtesy, neither would I in the things of God; and as these words came to my mind this morning with some little measure of sweetness and savour, it seemed as though they were adapted to close up my ministry this time in London. We cannot have greater blessings than the Lord has here bidden His servants to pronounce; and may it be our blessed desire that the Lord would fulfil in our souls every one of these blessed petitions. I could not leave you six more blessed petitions than these; if I were to ransack God’s Word from beginning to end I could scarcely find blessings more weighty, blessings more precious, or blessings more suitable. Therefore I would say, in the name of the Lord, addressing myself to each who fears God in this place, though not for a moment putting myself in the place of Aaron, but simply using the words of the text—”The Lord bless

Confirmed

thee, and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”

151 The Weak Hands Strengthened And The Feeble Knees Confirmed

A Sermon Preached on Lord’s Day Morning, at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road

July 24, 1853

“Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you.”

Isaiah 35:3, 4

The prophecies of Isaiah begin where God begins with a sinner’s conscience—in threatenings, rebukes, and denunciations against sin; and they end where God ends in a sinner’s heart—in promises, mercies, and blessings. Thus the order of God’s word, and the order of God’s grace are in strict unison. The malady is disclosed before the remedy is revealed—the wound opened before the balm applied. Thus we read in the 1st chapter Isa 1—”Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores.” What a description of a sinner’s state by nature and practice, of his fallen condition in heart, lip, and life! But how differently does the Lord speak in the close of the same prophecies! With what love and tenderness he addresses his Zion; what promises of blotting out her sins as a cloud, and

of rejoicing over her with joy and singing; what declarations that though a woman may forget her sucking child, yet he will never forget her.

The chapter before us is full of promises, filled with them up to the brim, like the water-pots at the marriage feast of Cana. May the same gracious Lord who there turned the water into wine be with us this morning, and give us to sip of the new wine of the kingdom.

The chapter, I remarked, is full of promises, but in the midst of these promises, interjected as it were by way of parenthesis, we find a charge given. The Lord had been speaking of “the wilderness and solitary place being glad, and of the desert rejoicing and blossoming as the rose;” but he breaks off suddenly, as if to commission certain persons to perform a certain work which he entrusts into their hands. “Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold your Lord will come with vengeance; he will come and save you.” To whom is this charge given? Who are the persons thus specially commissioned? God’s servants, ambassadors, ministers, those whom he sends forth with his grace in their hearts and his word in their mouths.

From the words themselves, and their connexion with the context we gather two striking lessons—1. That a very important part of the Christian ministry is to strengthen weak hands, to confirm feeble knees, and to comfort fearful hearts; and, 2. That the very same persons to whom all the promises are made in this chapter, of whom the Lord says, “that they are the ransomed of the Lord,” and to whom he declares, “They shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads”—have, at least many of them, weak hands, feeble knees, and fearful hearts.

In looking therefore at these words, I shall, as the Lord may enable, endeavour to show

I. What is intended by weak hands, feeble knees, and fearful

hearts.

II. The general commission given to strengthen weak hands, confirm feeble knees, and comfort fearful hearts.

III. The special message which the Lord himself sends by the mouth of his servants to those whose hands are weak, whose knees are feeble, and whose hearts are fearful. “Fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.”

The Lord, of course, speaks figuratively. Weak hands and feeble knees are not so literally, but spiritually. There is no reference to a rheumatic hand or a gouty knee, but to something spiritual and experimental, of which these are fitting and expressive types and figures.

i. What do we gather then from the figure? What is intimated by the expression “weak hands?” First, what is the hand? What is the special bearing of this familiar comparison? Is not the hand the most important and useful member of our body? Does not it perform many indispensable offices? Should we not be utterly crippled and maimed without it? What is there then in grace which corresponds to this important member of our body—to this distinguishing feature of man by which he is especially removed from the level of the brutes, and by which he executes the commands of his reasoning mind? May we not say that faith—that master fruit of the Spirit, that queen of graces—that most important, member of the new man, is represented here and elsewhere by the hand?

But the hand has certain very important offices to perform—offices so innumerable that we can only mention a few which may throw light upon our subject.

1 The main office of the hand is to take hold of and grasp an object. The human hand is the master-piece of anatomy, the fingers and the strong opposing thumb being expressly constructed by

their Divine Artificer to seize and retain objects; and therefore every muscle, artery, vein, and nerve conspire together to fulfil this destined office. Is there not in the office of faith something analogous to and corresponding with this? What says the Lord? “Let him take hold of my strength that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me.” There is a taking hold then of God’s strength. Is not this by faith? Is there any other grace of the Spirit which takes hold of the Lord, as Jacob took hold of the wrestling angel or as sinking Peter laid hold of the hand of Jesus? “Lay hold on eternal life,” is Paul’s charge to Timothy. 1 Timothy 6:12 But how is eternal life, and especially Jesus, “the Life,” laid hold of except by faith? “He that believeth on me,” says Jesus, “hath everlasting life.” He has it by laying hold of it.

So we read also of “fleeing for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” Heb 6:18 As the man-slaver fled for refuge to the appointed city and when his hand grasped the gates was safe, so guilty sinners flee for refuge to the Lord Jesus, and by faith lay hold upon the hope set before them in the gospel of the grace of God.

2. But again, the hand is the main instrument whereby the soldier fights. And is not Christian experience compared in scripture to a battle? “Fight the good fight of faith.” The Christian is compared to a soldier. “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” 2Ti 2:3 But if the soldier have no hand, can he grasp the sabre or hold the musket? So can I grasp spiritual weapons, can I take the shield of faith, and wield the sword of the Spirit if I have no faith? We have to “put on the whole armour of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” We have a conflict to maintain, a battle to fight, foot to foot, shoulder to shoulder, against foes without and within—self, Satan, and the world. But to go into this terrible battle without faith, is like a soldier going to fight without a hand. The first uplifted sabre cuts him down.

3 But by the hand also we receive what is needful for our daily

support. The beggar receives by his hand the alms dropped into it. Is it not so in grace? In grace we are all paupers to a man, and we have thankfully to receive what God is pleased bountifully to give. Favours, mercies, blessings, tokens promises—these are the gracious alms which the Lord bestows on his spiritual paupers. When given they are received. But how? By faith. Thus there is a receiving Christ. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk ye in him.” So there is a receiving Christ’s testimony; Joh 3:33 a receiving out of his fulness; Joh 1:16 a receiving the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost; 1Th 1:6 and a receiving a love of the truth—But it is by faith and faith alone that these blessings are inwardly received.

4 Our hand again, or rather the fingers of our hand, is the chief instrument of touch—therefore of feeling. A faith without feeling is a dead faith—the dead hand of a corpse. A living faith can no more exist without feeling than a living hand. Those who separate faith and feeling give us a skeleton hand without muscles to move it, nerves to influence it, or blood to animate it.

5 By the hand too, not to enlarge here too widely, we feed ourselves, dress ourselves, and perform the various employments of life. From the queen who wields the scepter to the ploughman who holds the plough, all the varied duties of social life are performed by the hand. Without it man would be lower than the lowest brute; with it he has subdued the earth, and replenished it on every side.

ii. But in the text the hands of the Lord’s redeemed family, are said to be weak. “Strengthen ye the weak hands.” But if the hand be weak, it must perform its various offices very feebly and imperfectly. The hand being weak it cannot lay hold of Jesus firmly; it cannot fight valiantly; it cannot retain what it receives lastingly. All its offices are imperfectly performed, or hardly performed at all.

But what has weakened the hands? Is there not a cause? When

God made the hand, did he create it weak? Dare we ascribe its present weakness to some fault in its original construction? That would be to reflect on its Divine Maker. No. This disease, like every other, bodily and mental, must be traced up to the fall. It is that deep-seated malady, that incurable disease which we have inherited from our first parents sin, dreadful sin, which has weakened the hand. It is original sin which, has Paralyzed every nerve, muscle and fibre of the soul, and killed out, as it were, the image of God in which it was created. But besides this we are guilty of weakening our own hands. Nothing so damps, nothing so deadens the life of God in the soul as giving way to evil. Carnality, self-indulgence, pride, covetousness, compliance with worldly customs and maxims; neglecting God's word, secret prayer, hearing his truth, and living for the most part carelessly and recklessly—all these fearful fruits of indwelling sin, if allowed to gain head and prevail, sadly weaken the hands. Indulgence in evil is to the soul what indulgence in opium is to the body, gaining strength by habit, it enfeebles it, and but for the grace of God would destroy it. But the weakness of the hands is usually not felt till they are wanted to act. It is like a person whose hand is paralyzed. Whilst he is asleep in bed, or his hand is lying on the cushion, he feels not his helplessness; but when he wakes, and would fain raise his hand he cannot lift a huger. So in grace. Be engaged in worldly occupations, spiritual weakness is not manifest. But come to perform some spiritual act, say, to believe a promise, approach the Lord's table, seek his face in prayer, converse with living, spiritually-minded Christians, where is your hand of faith now? Weakened, enfeebled, and trembling like that of a palsied old woman, and you have to rue your folly for the injury you have done to your own soul.

iii. But the "knees" are also spoken of here, and said to be "feeble," as the "hands" are said to be "weak." Of course, this is to be explained spiritually as the preceding figure. The leg, of which the knee is the central joint, has to perform certain offices, to which

certain spiritual movements correspond.

1. One special office is to walk and run. "Enoch walked with God." "They shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." "Let us run with patience the hope that is set before us, looking unto Jesus." "I will run the way of thy commandments when thou hast enlarged my heart." But what if the knee be feeble? What strong walking, what active running is there then? The feeble knee seems as if it would let the whole body down. It is the first symptom generally of weakness. Lying on a sick bed we do not feel our weakness till we rise. Then how weak and trembling are the knees! So when we would walk with God, or run the way of his commandments, the feeble knee faints and tires, and refuses its needful office.

2. But the Christian conflict is sometimes in Scripture compared to wrestling. "We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers." As In fighting the hand, so in wrestling the leg, and especially the knee is the most important member. Our enemies are unwearied, our lusts and passions strong, the host of hell is bent on our injury, if not destruction. How can we resist them or wrestle with them if our knees totter under us?

3. The knee is also the type of prayer. "For this cause I bend my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." A feeble knee then implies feebleness in prayer—a want of importunity and earnestness, of power and prevalence.

The same cause, be it borne in mind, which has weakened the hand, has enfeebled the knee. The same sickness, naturally, that makes the hand tremble, makes the knee totter; and thus the fearful malady that we have inherited by lineal descent from our fallen parents, has not only weakened the hand of faith, but enfeebled the knee of prayer.

iv. But the "heart" also, is said to be "fearful;" and that is the worst symptom of our malady, for the heart is the seat of life—

the centre of all movement. If the heart palpitate through disease or nervousness, if fainting or terror arrest the ebb and flow of the genial current of the blood, it seems as if the sources of life were stopped at the very fountain. A stout heart might nerve a weak hand, or strengthen a feeble knee, as we know it has done again and again. But a fearful heart will make a strong hand weak and a firm knee feeble. All are fruits and symptoms of the same disease—sin. But the guilt of sin it is which more especially makes the heart fearful and fills it with dread. Guilt made David tremble before Nathan, and Jonah before the storm.

But besides this special cause of fearfulness, there is often a general timidity in the hearts of many of God's people. They are timid for the same reason that a female is timid—a sense of their weakness and helplessness. Thus sometimes they are fearful lest the work of grace be not begun in them—fearful sometimes lest the mighty power of sin should overwhelm them; sometimes lest their trials should outweigh their patience; sometimes lest they be left to themselves and not be chastened at all; and sometimes lest they should be chastened too severely.

But you will say, “are these persons the Lord's people?” Undoubtedly. Read the chapter for yourself and see if the Lord is not speaking throughout of his redeemed, his ransomed, the homeward and heavenward bound who are “to come to Zion with everlasting joy upon their heads.” And to whom does the Lord give the commission to? As I before hinted, to his servants, his ambassadors, his ministers.

II. This brings us to the second branch of our subject—the general commission given to strengthen weak hands, confirm feeble knees, and comfort fearful hearts. These are the general instructions which the King of kings gives to his sent ambassadors. But can they strengthen weak hands? Can they strengthen their own? And if they cannot their own, how can they strengthen the hands of others? It is the Lord that does it through them and by

them. They are but instruments, feeble instruments, in themselves all weakness and helplessness. What they are they are by the grace of God, and what they do they do by the grace of God. But viewed as instruments they strengthen the weak hands in several ways.

1. By preaching the everlasting gospel in its purity and power with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and showing that salvation is of grace, and of grace alone from first to last—and that this grace is sovereign, discriminating, free, and super-abounding. This message from heaven, this good tidings from a far country, suits weak hands, feeble knees, and fearful hearts. For what has weakened their hands, made them fearful? Sin, original and actual,—sin in the fountain and in the stream, sin in its cause and in its consequences, in the root and in the fruit. Now could they be assured, that their sin is for ever put away, blotted out as a thick cloud, and will never come in God's debt-book against them—could they believe this and receive this into their hearts as a message from God to their soul, their weak hands would be strengthened, their feeble knees confirmed, and their fearful hearts comforted. Take away the malady, you give the remedy; give the remedy, and with the remedy comes the strength that is in the remedy. When the Lord healed the paralytic, he took up his bed and walked. The strength to take up the bed proved the completeness of the cure. The law discovers the disease, but the gospel reveals the remedy. Preach to poor guilty sinners human merit, creature righteousness, fleshly holiness—you add burden to burden, and grief to grief; you strengthen the disease, instead of strengthening the patient. But proclaim salvation by grace—the infinite mercy of God, and his everlasting and unutterable love; preach the eternal covenant ordered in all things and sure, the finished work of Christ, the atoning blood of the Lamb, justification by his imputed righteousness, and his ability and willingness to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him—and let the Blessed Spirit apply this precious gospel to the heart with his own

special savour and power, the weak hands are strengthened, the feeble knees confirmed, and the fearful hearts comforted.

2. But again, many of the Lord's people are very fearful, as I before hinted, as to the reality of the work of grace on their souls. These doubts and fears weaken their hands and enfeeble their knees; for when they would fain raise the hand of faith to lay hold of the Lord Jesus Christ—when they would lift up the hands which hang down to grasp the blessings revealed in the gospel, this damping thought and chilling fear will sometimes come in to check them: “What right have you to these promises and mercies? Are you sure that you are a child of God? Can you clearly see the work of grace on your soul? Many have made as much noise as you about religion, and professed greater things than you, all whose profession has come to nothing.” These doubts and fears unnerve the uplifted Band; and then instead of its taking hold of the Lord Jesus, and receiving the comforts which are in God's Word, it drops, and the heart being surcharged with fear, before the blessing is grasped it is gone. But if the servant of God is enabled to describe the work of grace upon the soul, and to bring forth such marks and evidences as meet the case of God's exercised family, as these are received into the heart, and a sweet response echoes in the bosom, faith is raised up and hope inspired; the graces of the Spirit are brought into exercise, and the weak hands are strengthened, the feeble knees confirmed, and the fearful heart cheered.

3. But the Lord sometimes strengthens weak hands by speaking through his servants special words of mercy and comfort to his chosen. “A good word maketh the soul glad.” How ever short or simple that word be, let it come from God—if it be but his mouth that speak it—and let faith embrace it as a message from the Lord—what strength, what support, what comfort it gives! This then is a very important branch of the Christian ministry. “Feed my lambs,” said Christ to Peter. “Comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak,” says the apostle. These form a large portion of the Christian

family, and the Lord himself takes special notice of them.

III. But besides these general instructions to his ambassadors, the Lord has put a special message into their mouths for his tried and exercised children, and has supplied them with the very words that they are to make use of. A familiar example will perhaps put this in a clearer light. The Queen sends an ambassador to a foreign court. He is furnished with certain general instructions by the tenor of which he is to abide. But besides these general instructions he is charged with a special message, or is the bearer of an autograph letter from his sovereign. These two things, though in themselves distinct, perfectly harmonize, and the particular message is in strict keeping with the general instructions. So it is with the Lord's ambassadors. What are their general instructions? “Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.” That is to be their general line of experience which God has put into their hands—the line of their ministry from which they are not to swerve, so as to make the heart of the righteous sad, and strengthen the hands of the wicked. But in addition to, yet in strict unison with these general instructions, the Lord has given them a particular message which they are to deliver as from his mouth. “Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.”

1. How different is the Lord's speaking and man's! I might stand here and cry out till I was hoarse—“Be strong,” but I could not communicate one particle of strength to your souls. But the Lord by one inward whisper, “Be strong,” could communicate a strength that would carry you to the martyr's stake. This strength is an inward strength, as David found and felt—“In the day when I cried unto thee thou answeredst me and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.” So weak are the words of man; so powerful the words of God; the one mere bubbles of human breath, the other the power of him who called the world into being. But the

ambassador speaks in the name of the sovereign; and as an earthly monarch will not let his ambassador speak in vain, neither will the King of kings. When then they say to the Lord's tried people, "Be strong," he himself is with them to apply the word with power.

But what if the soul reply, "How can I be strong? My hands are weak; my knees feeble; my heart fearful; and yet thou commandest me to be strong." O, what a mystery is this! But how it is opened up by the apostle in 2Co 12:9 : where the Lord Jesus spoke to him from heaven, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." No sooner were these words spoken than strength was communicated by them, and this made him say, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of God may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak then am I strong." Why? Because being weak he leant only upon the Lord, and received out of his fulness that strength which is made perfect in weakness.

But how, "be strong?" What made you weak? Sin. Guilt lies heavy on your conscience and fears trouble your mind; your foes are many and your temptations strong. But if you have an assurance that all your adversaries are dead men, your sins pardoned, your backslidings healed, your transgressions cast behind God's back, what strength this communicates! Thus God does not say, "Be strong," and leaves the soul weak, but gives what he commands. Here is a man fallen down in a swoon. His hands droop, his knees totter, his heart faints. Give him a cordial. No sooner does he take it than it seems to distil strength through every limb of his body, and he starts up a strong man. So it is with God's cordials. Let but one drop of his heavenly cordial distil into the soul, and all its weakness disappears. "Let the weak say, I am strong."

2. This is one part of the message. A second is, "Fear not." "Ah! But Lord," the soul says, "I do fear. I fear myself more than anybody. I fear my base wicked heart, my strong lusts and passions,

and my numerous inward enemies—the snares of Satan and the temptations of the world. Thou sayest, 'Fear not.' But I do fear. I cannot help but fear." Still the Lord says, "Fear not." Let us see if we cannot find something to explain this a little more clearly. There is a crowd yonder, and a weak woman in company with her husband. He says to her all trembling and fearing to pass through the crush, "Fear not; take hold of my arm, cling close to me." She takes hold of his arm and fears not. So with the timid soul and its enemies. It says, "How can I press through this crowd of difficulties; how elbow my way through these opposing doubts and fears?" Its husband, the Lord, comes and says, "Fear not; take hold of my strength; cleave close to me!" The soul hears, obeys, and clings; its enemies give way; its doubts and fears part asunder, and it passes safely through. Or take another familiar comparison. Here is a child trembling before a large mastiff; but the father says, "Fear not, he will not hurt you, only keep close to me." "Deliver my soul," cried David, "from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog." Who is that dog but Satan, that huge mastiff, whose jaws are reeking with blood? If the Lord say, "Fear not," why need we fear him? He is a chained enemy. But how the timid soul needs these divine "Fear nots!" For without him, it is all weakness; with him, all strength; without him, all trembling; with him, all boldness. "Where the word of a king is there is power;" and this makes the Lord's "Fear nots" so efficacious. As Augustine used to say, "Give what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt." The burden still remains, but strength is given to bear it; the trials are not lessened, but power to endure them is increased; the evils of the heart are not removed, but grace is communicated to subdue them.

3. But the Lord gives a gracious reason why his poor trembling ones are not to fear. "Behold your God will come with vengeance even God with a recompence; he will come and save you." The Lord then is not yet come; but he says he will come, and the promise

of his coming takes away the fear. He says, "Behold." Even that little word contains something in it noteworthy. The Lord is in the distance; his chariot is making ready; "for he maketh the clouds his chariot and walketh upon the wings of the wind." As the Lord said to his disciples, "Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh," so by the word "Behold," the Lord would take the eyes of his people from ever being bent on the ground or ever looking at their own miserable hearts and the difficulties and dangers of the way. "Look up," he would say, "look up; your God is coming to save you." I like to dwell on every crumb as it were of our text. The jots and tittles of God's word, like diamond dust, are to be gathered up and treasured. In scripture there is much in a little; not like our sermons, where there is often little in much. The word of God is full to overflowing with the very essence of truth; more concentrated and fragrant than the otto of roses. Look at the next drop. Is it not the very quintessence of blessedness? "Your God." What, is he your God? That is the very dropping of everlasting love. In that one word is concentrated the essence of every blessing of the new covenant. But you say, "My hands are so weak, my knees so feeble, my heart so fearful; how can he be my God?" Do your weakness and trembling alter God's love and mercy? It is not so in the things of men; and shall it be so in the things of God? Sitting on a door-step, there is a poor paralytic old woman, who holds out a trembling hand for your bounty. Your heart is opened; you drop a coin into her palsied palm; but the hand is so weak that it lets the money fall almost as soon as the fingers have closed round it, and it rings on the pavement. What do you do? Take it up again, put it into your pocket, and say, with a chuckling smile, "If you can't hold it, you shan't have it?" This would be mocking her weakness as well as insulting her poverty. Now do you think the Lord will do what you would not do? He gives a promise, speaks a soft word, bestows a token for good. But your hand is weak. You get it, but you cannot hold it: like the poor withered paralytic, no sooner have you

grasped the coin than you drop it. Now will the Lord take it away, and say you shall not have it because you could not hold it? It is the very weakness and misery of the object which calls forth the bounty of the giver; and the same liberal heart that bade him give, forbids him to recall. It is not then the weakness of our faith, nor the strength of our faith that adds to the value of the gift. A strong hand would not turn a shilling into a sovereign, nor does a weak hand turn a sovereign into a shilling. It is what the donor gives, not how the donor receives that makes the gift what it is. Let your hand be feeble; the gift is what the Giver has made it, and this gift is no less than himself. "Your God." And if God is your God, your doubts, fears, and misgivings do not break that sacred covenant tie. You are a husband, and your partner is afflicted with some mental disease; and the nature of the complaint may be such that she hardly recognizes your face, altogether doubts your affection, and does not believe you are her husband at all. Such cases we know are frequent. But do her doubts or denial dissolve your love, still less do they cancel the marriage tie? The state of her mind, however painful, does not alter the marriage relationship. So if the Lord's espoused ones, through Satan's temptations, doubt their union with him, do their fears break the wedding ring or cancel the marriage writings? If covenant love matched them in eternity, and covenant grace joined their hands in time, they are still his Hephzibahs and Beulahs, for "the Lord hateth putting away."

4. But this God is to come; and he is to come with "a vengeance;" what a word is that! and yet with a "recompence"—with vengeance in one hand and a recompence in the other. But is this consistent with grace and mercy that he should come with "vengeance?" Yes, it is. Love and jealousy are always co-partners, and recompence and vengeance are strict allies: love for the object, jealousy for the rival; recompence for the friend, vengeance for the foe. A delicate woman is insulted. May not her husband defend her, and avenge

her of her insulter? If he struck him to the ground he would as a man, I do not say as a Christian, be justified. This vengeance then is twofold. 1. Against Zion's outward foes. 2. Against Zion's inward enemies. "Avenge me of mine adversary," cried the importunate widow to the unjust judge. "And shall not God avenge his own elect which cry day and night unto him? I tell you he will avenge them speedily." But there is another vengeance—that of which the Psalmist speaks, "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." And are they not willing that he should do so? Your lusts and passions, pride, unbelief, covetousness, worldly conformity, and a host of inbred corruptions are enemies to God and enemies to your soul's profit and peace. Shall they then be spared? "No," says the Lord; "those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me." These inbred foes are our worst enemies. People talk about their enemies; yes, we have all our enemies, and must have, if we are walking in the narrow way. "The carnal mind is enmity against God," and therefore against God's people. But who is your worst enemy? "Why, So and so, and So and so." No, he is not. It is not So and so. It is yourself. You are your worst enemy. A man may do himself more harm in five minutes than all his enemies put together could do him in fifty years. The worst enemy you ever had, or ever will have, dwells in your own bosom; and against that enemy the Lord comes with a vengeance. And who is the person you hate most in the world? Think of all the people whom you most dislike, and then I will name the person whom you have most reason to abhor. Yourself, You should do so, if you do not. The man who does not hate himself is not a follower of Christ. A man must hate his own life before he can walk in the footsteps of a self-denying Jesus. A

Roman emperor once wished that all his enemies had but one neck that he might by one stroke of his sword put an end to them all. O, that our inward foes, our inward lusts and corruptions had

Shaking Of Things Made, And Firmness Of Things Given 175
but one neck, and that the Lord would smite off their heads at a blow!

5. But if he come with "vengeance" in one hand, he comes with a "recompence" in the other. A recompence! this word sounds strange. A recompence! A recompence is a reward; and that implies merit, does it not? But is there no other sense of the word "recompence?" Does it always mean reward? Not necessarily; certainly not here. Let us see whether we cannot dig into this word, and turn up a little nugget of gold out of it, it may be. You have passed through, we will say, a very painful day, have suffered much bodily pain. The night comes; your pain abates; you enjoy sweet refreshing slumber. Well, you say, this is a recompence for yesterday's suffering. But what merit was there in your tooth-ache? Just so here. The Lord's people pass through trouble and sorrow. The Lord comes and brings consolation and salvation. This is a recompence, for it makes up for all the trials that they have been passing through. Merit! I know of only one merit that we have—hell. If salvation were of human merit, not a soul could be saved.

6. But what is this recompence? "He will come and save you!" Salvation then is the recompence for the doubts, fears, and sufferings which the soul has passed through. But though the word recompence does not imply merit, it implies previous suffering. The Lord does not give mercy without misery, nor recompence without suffering; and when he comes and saves, it is all the soul wants. To be saved! Who can fathom the depth of that word? Only in eternity will it be known what is implied in the word SAVED! For the glorified spirit must look down from the battlements of heaven into the awful pit of hell, before it can comprehend a millionth part of what is contained in the word saved. Saved from hell—saved from the pouring out of God's terrible wrath through countless ages; saved from eternal punishment with devils and lost spirits; and saved into that heaven which knows no end, but is ever opening up with richer manifestations of glory and bliss! What

176 Shaking Of Things Made, And Firmness Of Things Given
is there to be compared with salvation? But if not experimentally
damned, not experimentally saved; if never feeling the pangs of
hell, never knowing the joys of heaven.

These then are the persons who are saved from the bottomless
pit and the devouring flame and eternal misery. Those that have
weak hands, feeble knees, fearful hearts, in whom the Lord is
working by his Spirit, and to whom he sends this sweet and tender
message. Oh! for hearts to receive it, for faith to believe it, hope to
anchor in it, and love to enjoy it. Surely then we shall give the God
of all grace all the praise, and freely ascribe to him all the glory.

152 Shaking Of Things Made, And Firmness Of Things Given

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, London, on
Lord's Day Evening,
July 24, 1853

*“And this word. Yet once more, signifieth the removing of
those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that
those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore,
we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have
grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence
and godly fear.”*

Hebrews 12:27, 28

When God gave the law upon Mount Sinai it was with
fearful accompaniments. Inanimate nature herself gave tokens of
recognition of her Almighty Creator, and trembled at His fearful
presence. “And it came to pass on the third day in the morning,
that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon
the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all
the people that was in the camp trembled. And Mount Sinai was
altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire:
and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the
whole mount quaked greatly.”

To these visible tremblings of the earth before her awful Creator

Shaking Of Things Made, And Firmness Of Things Given 177
the Psalmist alludes, Ps. 68:8, “The earth shook, the heavens also
dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at
the presence of God, the God of Israel.” So also Ps. 77:18, “The
voice of Thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened
the world: the earth trembled and shook.” To this fearful display
of God's terrible majesty at Mount Sinai the Apostle Paul refers in
the chapter before us: “Ye are not come unto the mount that might
be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and
darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice
of words” (Heb. 12:18, 19).

Now these accompaniments, when Mount Sinai was wrapped
in smoke and flame, and the solid earth shook, were to denote
God's majesty, holiness, and justice, in the giving of the law. But
there was something more intimated in the shaking of the earth.
It was typical and figurative of the shaking of the foundations on
which men rested. When the stable earth itself was shaken, all
hopes built upon that earth were shaken with it. It also denoted the
shaking of that earthly idolatrous worship which was prevalent, in
order to make way for the Levitical dispensation which was to last
until the coming of the promised Messiah. We gather this from the
remarkable prophecy of Haggai, to which the apostle refers in our
text, and explains. As this forms the groundwork of our subject,
and is the key to our text, we will devote a few moments to it.

In Hag. 2:6, 7, we find the following prediction: “For thus saith
the Lord of hosts: Yet once, and it is a little while, and I will shake
the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I
will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and
I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.” In these
striking words Haggai refers to the giving of the law on Mount
Sinai, when the voice of God shook the earth. “But now,” says the
apostle, quoting and explaining Haggai's words, “He hath promised
saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.”
When was this prophecy fulfilled? Clearly at the coming of Christ,

for when God shook the heavens, “the desire of all nations should come,” and the temple then building was to be filled with glory, which it was when the glorious Son of God, in human form, entered into its courts. But how were the heavens and earth then shaken? Were they not literally so at Christ’s crucifixion, when the sun withdrew his light, when the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent? These visible commotions in heaven and earth were, to a certain extent, fulfillments of the prophecy. But the apostle takes a wider scope, and explains the prediction spiritually, as referring to the shaking and consequent removing of the Levitical dispensation. This interpretation of the apostle will form the groundwork of our subject, in which there are five distinguishing features.

I. The removing of those things which may be shaken.

II. The remaining of those things which cannot be shaken.

III. The receiving of a kingdom which cannot be moved.

IV. The holding it fast by the power of divine grace.

V. The fruits and effects that spring out of receiving and holding an immovable kingdom.

I must ask your attention this evening. The links in this chain are so very closely connected, that unless you give me your attention you will perhaps be hardly able to see the beauty and blessedness of the subject brought by the apostle before us.

I. The apostle lays it down as a fundamental axiom that that which is shaken, or may be shaken, is to be removed. You will perceive that I adopt both the rendering of the text and the reading in the margin. The text reads, “are shaken:” the margin, “may be shaken.” Both are good, but the latter is more extensive in meaning. Now, this principle is of great extent and wide application. It holds good in the things of time and sense. An earthquake takes place: buildings are shaken; a rent is made in the wall of some public edifice. That rent speaks to the eye, and says, “This wall must be taken down; it endangers the passers by.” A bridge shakes as you pass over it. It is unsafe: it must be removed and a new one built.

How simple, and yet how universal is the principle! Whatever is shaken or may be shaken is unstable; whatever is unstable may be, must be, removed. When God then shook the heavens they were to be removed. But what heavens? Where God dwells in glory? No. This heaven can neither be shaken nor removed. But the typical heaven, the temple with all its rites and sacrifices, the framework of the Levitical dispensation, could be both shaken and removed. The holy of holies was a type of heaven; and that sanctuary was shaken when the veil across it was rent asunder. Its holy privacy was then shaken, and its sacred contents laid bare. When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, His train filled the temple, evidently showing that the temple was the type and representation of heaven, God dwelling mystically there between the cherubim. This typical heaven, therefore, was first shaken at the crucifixion of Christ, and by the Romans forty years afterwards removed by fire.

i. But we may extend the axiom laid down by the apostle and apply it to a variety of things, for it admits of a very wide application. Take it thus, “Whatever may be shaken is to be removed.” Now apply this fundamental principle to every earthly good.

1. Let it be health. Cannot that be shaken? Broken health, shattered nerves, a shaken frame; these are words in everyday use. The shaking of the tent pole and the flapping of the canvas show that it is not a fixture. Thus Paul speaks of the present body as a tent or tabernacle; but of the future, the glorified body, as a “building” (2 Cor. 5:1). Every ache, twinge, or pain, every sickness or sore is a shaking of the tent pole, a flapping of the canvas, certain marks that it is to be removed.

2. Look again at property of every kind, little or much, from the wealthy capitalist to the toiling stitch-woman. It is all shaking, fluctuating, wavering with every breath. A bank failing ruins hundreds; a change of fashions, a factory burnt down, a sudden rise of prices, throws thousands out of employment.

3. Take again our dearest natural comforts, our social ties, wife and children, house and home. What a shaking of these idols, these household gods, when death comes in at the door and bears away our own flesh and blood to the cold, silent grave. But what is there which may not be shaken? Long friendships, family connections, mutual confidence, the highest natural integrity, and the finest moral character, aye, the noblest intellect and the most powerful mind may all become a wreck and a ruin, fit only to be removed and taken away like the rubbish of a fallen house.

ii. But we may carry the axiom a step further still. The apostle applies it to the shaking and consequent removal of the Jewish heaven, the temple at Jerusalem, and that form of ritual and ceremonial worship which Moses introduced. So now there is a legal religion, a ceremonial lip-service, a pharisaic self-righteousness, a form of godliness which, in the case of God's children, He first shakes, then removes and takes away this legal religion. He shakes as He shook Mount Sinai, by the law. The wall built upon a sandy foundation and daubed over with untempered mortar is rent by the stormy wind and overflowing shower, and brought down to the ground (Ezek. 13:10-14). What is the rubbish then fit for but, like the leprous house, to be carted away?

iii. But carry the principle farther still. Natural faith, high or low, Calvinistic or Arminian, sound in the letter of truth or unsound, if it be but natural can be shaken, and is to be shaken that it may be removed. It will do for fair weather, but not for foul; stands firm in a calm, but gives way in a storm. So with natural hope. It is with it as Bildad describes, Job 8:14, 15: "Whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web. He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand: he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure." The same is true of the whole of a fleshly religion, root and branch. When the Lord takes the soul in hand, He shakes the whole tree, shivers the stem, breaks off the branches, overthrows it from the roots, hacks up the stump, and carries it away.

But why all this? Because there must be a removing of the "things that are made." A made religion—man's own handiwork, manufactured to order by earthly fingers, has no place in the kingdom of God. Vital godliness, the religion which saves the soul, is not made but given; the donation of God, not the fabric of man. It is like the temple at Jerusalem, and the temple of Christ's body. The one was made by human hands, therefore to be shaken and taken away. The other was not made by hands and therefore eternal and immortal. So there is a religion made by hands, and a religion not made by hands; the one is shaken, the other immovable; the one falls, the other stands; the one is taken away, the other lives throughout eternity.

II. We pass on, therefore, to consider that branch of our subject which stands in diametrical opposition to the point we have been thus far handling, the remaining of those things which cannot be shaken.

The foundation of this vital truth rests on an axiom as broad and as wide as the foregoing. There are things which can be shaken, and there are things which cannot be shaken; the things which can be shaken are to be removed, the things which cannot be shaken are to remain. It is true in nature as in grace. To be shaken implies inherent weakness, therefore decay, therefore removal; not to be shaken implies inherent strength, therefore firmness, therefore fixedness. But what are the things in divine matters which cannot be shaken? We will, with God's blessing, look at a few of them.

i. "The everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure" is one of those things which cannot be shaken. The counsels of the eternal Three in One, with the fixed decrees before the world had a being or time an existence, cannot be moved to and fro by the restless waves of chance or change. As well might a mountain be moved by the mists round its head as the eternal purposes of God by the breath of man. "He is in one mind, and who can turn Him?" "I am the Lord; I change not."

ii. The finished work of Christ is another of those things which cannot be shaken. Did He not say with expiring lips, "It is finished"? Almost His last words were, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." Hence it was prophesied of Him that He should "bring in everlasting righteousness," which He did when He obeyed the law and died under its curse. Of this finished work of the Son of God we may indeed say, "Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it." It is a perfect work, a finished salvation, a complete redemption. Nothing can shake, alter, or disannul it, and therefore it remaineth.

iii. The work of God upon the soul, the kingdom of grace set up in the heart, is one of those things which cannot be shaken. But you say, "I am very often shaken as to the reality of the work of grace on my soul." That may be, but your being shaken as to the reality of it does not shake the thing itself, that is, assuming the work to be real. Your apprehensions do not alter divine realities. If there is a work of grace begun upon your soul, it is begun; if it is being carried on, it is being carried on; and if God the Holy Spirit has planted His fear in your soul, He has planted it. These may seem commonplace truisms, but they are not. I merely put them in this form to set the matter in a clearer light. What I want to show you is that the work of grace is for eternity, and therefore cannot be shaken by the storms of time. Doubts and fears, therefore, which spring out of an unbelieving heart, as mushrooms from a meadow or fogs from a fen, cannot destroy what God has wrought. "I will work," He says, "and none shall let or hinder it." "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible."

iv. But not only does the work of grace, viewed as a whole, remain unshaken and unremoved, but its component parts also cannot be overthrown and taken away. "The gifts and calling of

Shaking Of Things Made, And Firmness Of Things Given 183
God are without repentance," that is, on His part; in other words, He never repents of having bestowed a gift, and therefore never recalls it.

1. Take for instance faith. This is the gift of God, therefore never taken away. Nay, more, it is never really shaken—at least, never shaken as false faith is shaken, so as to be removed. Let me explain my meaning a little more clearly and fully by a figure. Here are two trees in a park; the one dead, root and branch; the other living, stem and bough. A storm comes—the one falls with a crash: the other is shaken, but not moved from its place. It bows for a moment before the wind, but leaps back uninjured when the storm has passed by. The dead tree is now chopped up and taken away; the living tree remains clothed with foliage and fruit. Or it may be that the fruit is shaken off, and only the tree remains firm. So the fruits of faith, as joy, peace, confidence, assurance, communion, may be shaken and seem to fall off their parent tree, and yet faith itself be unmoved. This is a nice point and requires delicate handling; but I believe my assertion is substantially true. Look at it a little more closely, and I think you will see it must be so.

Say a man has false faith. It is shaken. Who has shaken it? God. Why? That He may take it away. Say a man has true faith. It is shaken. Who shakes it? Not God, but unbelief. God tried Abraham's faith, but did not take it away. If true faith could be shaken in the same way that false faith is shaken, how would they differ, and how would a living faith be superior to a dead one? We read of some that "they believe for a time and then fall away;" of others, that they "receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls."

Saul and Judas had the faith of the former; David and Peter the faith of the latter. They all were shaken; but the two first, like the dead tree, fell to rise no more; the two latter, like the living tree, sprang back to their place.

2. So with a good hope through grace. It may be deeply tried, and the heart may be moved, like Israel's of old, "as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind." Nay, under fits of despondency and unbelief, a child of God may say with Jeremiah, "My hope is perished from the Lord;" or with Job, "My hope hath He removed like a tree." But it is not really so. It is a fruit and grace of the Spirit, and therefore abideth; as Paul says, "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three."

3. Love, therefore, for the same reason cannot be shaken. It may be most sharply tried; nay, at times seem almost extinct, be covered up with ashes; but it never can perish out of a believer's heart. The apostle therefore says, "Charity," or, as the word means, love, "never faileth."

4. So the testimonies which God bestows on the soul, the promises which He applies, the tokens that He gives for good, the smiles of His countenance, the visitations of His presence, are things which abide. They are not shaken by the earthquakes of the law. If they could be thus shaken, it would show they were "things which were made." But they are not made, but given. Fleshly hands never wrought them; earthly fingers never wove them; the hammer of creature strength never forged them on the anvil of human merit.

Can you not see the line which thus divides the things that are shaken from the things which are not shaken? The things shaken are those which are made; the things not shaken are those which are given. To sum up the whole in one word, the religion of man is made, therefore shaken, therefore taken away; the religion of God is given, therefore unshaken, therefore abiding for evermore.

III. But we pass on to our third point—The way in which this unshaken kingdom is received.

I am always very unwilling to drop a word against our translation, it is so excellent; but I think if our translators had preserved the same word here, as is the case in the original, it would have been better.

Suppose we read it thus—"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken;" what a sweet connexion there now is with the preceding verse! Now take the whole connexion—"And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken." There is the connection at once—it is "the kingdom" which cannot be shaken. And what kingdom? The kingdom of grace here, the kingdom of glory hereafter; the kingdom which is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" the kingdom of which the Lord Jesus Christ is Head and Sovereign. This is the kingdom which cannot be shaken.

Earthly crowns fall from the heads of monarchs; worldly comforts wither and die; temporal prospects are beclouded; all that the world calls happiness how rent it is to the very foundations, and how soon all we see will be removed like a shepherd's tent! But there is a kingdom which cannot be moved, a kingdom of present grace in the heart established there by the hand of God, and a kingdom of future glory in which the kingdom of grace opens up and terminates.

But this kingdom is to be received. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved." It is not worked for, nor worked into, but received as God's own gift. This throws a light upon what I have been endeavouring to establish—the difference between a made religion and a given religion, between works and grace. The people of God are, therefore, called by the Lord "the children of the kingdom," and by James, "heirs of the kingdom." This kingdom they receive by faith. How did our queen Queen Victoria. receive her kingdom? Her uncle died; she was the legal heir, and she succeeded to the kingdom by way of right. But when did she receive it? Tidings were brought her—"the king is dead;" she believed the message, and by believing it she received the kingdom which was now hers, into her heart. So in grace. God's

186 Shaking Of Things Made, And Firmness Of Things Given
children are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. But though heirs they are often kept out of the kingdom by their unbelieving fears. They cannot rise up into the dignity and privilege of being kings and priests unto God. But a message from the Lord breaks in upon their hearts. There is some discovery and manifestation of the Lord Jesus. He is received into the soul as the Christ of God. In receiving Him there is a receiving of the kingdom.

Look at the prodigal. He returned to his father's house barefooted and in rags. What did his father do? Did he turn his face away as justly incensed at his base conduct? No; but he fell on his neck and kissed him, and said to the servants, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." But how passive in all this was the prodigal! All he did was to receive what was given. His shoulders received the robe; his finger received the ring; his feet received the shoes; and when the fatted calf was dressed, his mouth received the meat. So a child of God receives the kingdom which cannot be shaken. But how? By faith. Faith embraces what God reveals, takes hold of what God applies, and receives what God gives.

But do you not see how needful it is for the things which are shaken to be removed that the kingdom which cannot be shaken may remain? There is no room in the heart for the kingdom of grace whilst Self sits on his lordly throne. Legality, self-righteousness, and fleshly holiness are as great barriers to receiving Christ into the heart as sin and profanity. But let proud pharisaic self be shaken to the very centre; let the sinner quake before God; let the condemning law come into the conscience burning up all his righteousness; let him tremble at the wrath to come; and under a sense of condemnation let his legal hopes flee away like smoke out of the chimney, or chaff from the summer threshing-floor; then let there be some discovery of the Lord Jesus, how he receives the Saviour!—receives Him, as Hart says, "in his best room." Christ is King and Head in Zion; therefore, in receiving Christ, His precepts are received as well as His promises. A kingdom without laws is as

Shaking Of Things Made, And Firmness Of Things Given 187
great an absurdity as a king without subjects. There is an "obeying the gospel" as well as a believing it; receiving a Lord to rule as well as a Saviour to save. The dew and rain which water the earth make it bring forth and bud; and the same grace which pardons sin subdues it.

This, then, is the kingdom which cannot be shaken. We may be shaken, and are; but that is not the shaking of the kingdom. You may have all your money in a bank, and may have some apprehension whether the bank be secure. Do your fears make the bank insolvent? No more than your confidence makes it safe. So it is in grace. You may have fears, misgivings, and apprehensions; but the kingdom remains the same. Misgivings and suspicions do not alter facts. If God has wrought a work in your soul He has wrought it; and if He has given you faith, and hope, and love, He has given you these graces of the Spirit. These are decisive realities. What I may feel, or what I may fear, does not alter them. The soul may be in darkness, love cold, and the things of God out of sight. But they are there. I may stand upon Hampstead Heath and look towards St. Paul's; but it is so covered with smoke and fog that I cannot see it. My not seeing the dome does not sweep it into the river. Let the sun break out, the dome stands forth in all its noble proportions. So if the Lord has ever done anything for your soul, be it much or little, if He has given you one grain of grace, raised up one ray of hope, or shed abroad one beam of love, the kingdom is there; your eye may be dim, mists and fogs may obscure your view; but when the Sun shines, as shine it will, it will stand forth in all its reality and beauty.

IV. We pass on to the fourth point—the way in which the kingdom is held fast. I adopt the marginal reading, which is often most correct, and certainly best here: "We receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us hold fast grace." There is a holding fast grace, as the Lord speaks to the church of Philadelphia: "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." "Hold fast," says the apostle, "that which is good." If we hold fast the confidence

188 Shaking Of Things Made, And Firmness Of Things Given and the rejoicing of the hope “firm unto the end.” So here—”let us hold fast grace.” Why? Because if we have grace, though we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, yet we shall find many, very many things, which will try that grace, and seem as though they would take it utterly away. The same grace, then, whereby the kingdom is received is needful to hold that kingdom fast. The same favour of God that bestowed the gift is needful to retain the gift; and the same blessed Spirit who brings the kingdom into the soul must maintain that kingdom which He has set up.

Here is the mystery; here comes the trial of faith. The soul says, “Have I not received Christ? Was there not a time, a blessed time in my experience, when He was manifested to me? Then I received Him as the Christ of God. I felt Him precious, and He was near and dear to my heart. But now He is gone; His presence is not enjoyed; the manifestations of His love are withheld.” Now, what need of faith to believe that the Lord did reveal Himself! Unbelief says, “It was all a delusion.” Infidelity whispers, “It was all mere excitement of the natural mind.” Doubts suggest themselves; fears begin to work; misgivings haunt the soul; Satan distresses the mind; and all well-nigh seems gone.

Now what do we need? Grace, and especially the grace of faith to hold fast what has been received. This is the fight, the conflict, the trial of faith. In receiving, faith is as it were passive; but in holding fast, it is active. There is no trial of faith in taking what God gives; the trial is to keep it when sin and Satan would snatch it out of the hand.

Some allow that grace is freely given, but that when given, it is, as it were, self-sustaining. When I see a stone suspend itself in the air, I shall credit the self-sustaining power of grace. Faith is said in Scripture to be “of the operation of God;” and those who are kept, are “kept by the power of God.” The same grace which gave faith must maintain faith. The same grace which inspired hope must maintain hope. The same grace which shed abroad love must keep that love warm in the heart. All is of grace from first to last. Did

Satan never tempt you to give up ail, to abandon your profession, desert your place of worship, resign your church membership, if you are a member of a church, and cast away your very hope? But why have you not done all this? You would have done so if God had not given you grace to withstand the temptation. Have you not been tempted to plunge into sin? Have you not been tempted a thousand times to believe that there was nothing done in your soul by the power of God? What has kept you so long to the word of the testimony, to the throne of mercy, to hearing the truth, to a profession of the holy name of Jesus? Grace. As Paul says: “By the grace of God I am what I am.” Now what is the main point? To believe in spite of unbelief; to hope in spite of despondency; to love in spite of coldness and even enmity; to pray though no answer come; to hear, though rarely blessed; to search the Scriptures, though you rarely find comfort in them. Here is the trial of faith, still to go on faint yet pursuing, and holding fast by grace that which grace has bestowed.

V. But see the fruits and effects which spring out of all this. The child of God cannot always, nor often, see his own grace; he can see it in others, and they may see it in him; but he seems more ready to believe in the reality of their religion than of his own. Why is this? Because there is so much in him opposed to grace; and looking at this, he says, “Can I have grace? Should I be what I am? Should I act as I do? Would my heart be so carnal and sensual? Would my lusts and passions be so strong? Would my temptations be so powerful, had I grace?” Here then to help poor doubters we need some marks and evidences of the inward possession of grace. Two are specially mentioned here—”Reverence and godly fear.” Can you not find these sister graces in your heart? Have you no reverence towards God? When you come before Him in secret prayer is there no reverence of His Great Majesty? Here is a mark of grace. Does it never wound your heart to hear God’s name blasphemed? Is presumption a sin which you very much dread? Would you be anything sooner than be a hypocrite? Do you see

and feel the infinite disparity between you, a vile and polluted sinner, and Him, a pure and holy Jehovah?

And have you no godly fear? Fear of offending the great God of heaven? Search and sound your heart to the bottom, and see if there be not godly fear working in your soul. If you have backslidden, is there no contrition, sorrow, repentance? These are the fruits of godly fear; and God is served acceptably when He is served reverently, and when godly fear is in exercise. If you have one grain of holy reverence, one spark of godly fear, you are a Christian, a child of God, an heir of glory, and have received a kingdom which cannot be moved.

But you say, and I say with you—"Would to God I were more spiritual, heavenly-minded, and that my heart was more set on things above where Jesus sits at the right hand of God." Well, these things are very desirable. I can speak for myself and some of you, that we have enjoyed these things and felt their sweet reality. But we are not always nor often here. We have an earthly heart, a corrupt flesh which lusts against the Spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would. Still with all this there may be in a child of God features and marks of grace. Now just trace out if you can the work of grace upon your soul, and see whether there be not a chain with these several links. First a shaking; then a removing; then a receiving; then a holding fast; then a serving God from whom all these come with reverence and godly fear—five precious links and all closely joined together.

Thus grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, and all redounds to the praise, honour and glory of a triune Jehovah.

153 The Way-Worn Pilgrim's Hiding Place

A Sermon Preached on Lord's Day Morning, at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road

July 31, 1853

"And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind and a

covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken."

Isaiah 32:2, 3

What striking figures has the blessed Spirit here employed to bring heavenly realities before our eyes with greater distinctness and vividness, and to impress them with deeper power upon our hearts! There are some men, good men too, who are opposed to the use of figures in preaching, as marring, in their opinion, the simplicity of divine truth. I grant that the injudicious use of comparisons does mar the dignity of God's word, and that low, ill-chosen, or inapplicable figures may vulgarize, or obscure, or even pervert the sacred truth of God, and pollute as it were the oracles of the Most High. But we must not argue against the use of a thing from its abuse, and condemn the thing instead of condemning the men. Figures are like cutting instruments. Wrongly handled, they may cut the fingers of the user or mangle truth; rightly handled, they may be the sword of the Spirit and give to truth greater force and keener edge. How figurative is the language of Scripture! In fact, strong feelings almost unavoidably burst forth in figures. Take, for instance, the language of love, as we see it more especially developed in the Song of Solomon. How the Bride seems to bring forward figure after figure and to heap comparison upon comparison to set forth the beauty of her Beloved. "His head is as the most fine gold; his locks are bushy and black as a raven; his eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk and fitly set; his cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers; his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh." Every word here is a figure, as if her heart, burning with love, went out of itself to seek for objects in creation wherewith to express its ardent feelings. So again the language of deep affliction is usually eminently figurative. Look at Job lying under the afflicting hand of God. How he pours forth the distress of his soul in figure after figure: "For the arrows

of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass? or loweth the ox over his fodder? Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" Job 6:4-6 "Is my strength the strength of stones? or is my flesh of brass? Is not my help in me and is wisdom driven quite from me? To him that is afflicted pity should be shewed from his friend; but he forsaketh the fear of the Almighty. My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as a stream of brooks they pass away;" Job 6:12-15 "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope." Job 7:6 And again, "I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark. His archers compass me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare; he poureth out my gall upon the ground." Job 16:12,13 Take again the language of strong prophetic denunciation as we find it in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. How these inspired prophets pour forth in emblem and figure their warnings and reproofs! "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores." Again, "The daughter of Zion is as a cottage in a vineyard, a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city" three figures in the compass of one short verse. When we come to the language of instruction we find the most striking lessons still conveyed by figures. The Proverbs are full of them; and He who spake as never man spake conveyed his blessed instruction—how? In parables, in other words, in figures. Figures leave a definite impression behind them, convey with them a peculiar light, explain difficult points, and are often remembered for years. Rightly used they singularly facilitate comprehension, and many who cannot understand an argument readily catch the same truth when conveyed by a figure. They are indeed greatly subject to abuse, and may be enlisted in the cause of error; but such a misapplication is soon detected.

How full of striking and beautiful figures is our text! "And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken." But these numerous figures are all employed to point out one grand Object—the Lord Jesus Christ. The rays which these mirrors reflect, all converge to once focus—the Man, the wondrous Man, the only Mediator between God and men. The same figures, too, by implication, distinctly point out the persons for whom the man who is God's fellow sustains these blessed offices; and these are represented as travelling in a wilderness, amid wind and storm, heat and weariness.

In opening up the words of the text, I shall therefore attempt to show

I. Who the travellers are on their heavenward march, and the dangers and difficulties which beset their path.

II. The hiding place and covert, the refreshment and shade which the Lord has provided for these travellers in the Son of his love.

III. The opening of their eyes to see, and of their ears to hearken to the blessings thus provided for them.

I. The way to heaven is often spoken of in scripture as a journey, and this by no flowery meadow or purling brook, through no over-arching bowers or verdant shade, but through a wilderness. This figure has not only in itself a beautiful appropriateness, but possessed to the children of Israel a historic truth. It was through the dreary wilderness, and a forty years sojourn therein, that their fathers came into the promised land. Besides which, as their males were all commanded to appear, three times a year, before the Lord, and had often to pass through wild desert tracts on their way to Jerusalem, it was a figure of which they had an actual, literal experience. Thus we find the Psalmist spiritualizing the pilgrimage to Jerusalem of the godly Israelite. "Blessed is the man

whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them, who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." Ps 84:5,6,7 But we, in this cold, humid, Northern clime, must transport ourselves in imagination to an Eastern wilderness before we can see the beauty and appropriateness of the figure. In this climate, we have no idea of an almost tropical sun. An expression which I met with many years ago in Henry Martyn's Journal so struck my mind at the time that I have never forgotten it. He calls it "the terrible sun." This terrible sun, then, above, and the glowing sand beneath, want of food and water, of shade and shelter, with the exhausting nature of the journey, made a journey across the wilderness always a formidable and often a perilous undertaking. These perils are alluded to in the text, and four are specifically mentioned; pestilential winds; thunder storms, drought, weariness and tiresomeness of the long and painful way. These perils have, of course, all of them a spiritual signification, which it will be my business, with God's blessing, this morning to open and to point out its bearing upon the difficulties, perils, trials, and temptations which beset the path of a child of God on his heavenward pilgrimage.

i. The first peril mentioned is the Wind. This is implied in the promise. "And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind." By "the wind" here, I understand the pestilential wind, sometimes called the simoom, or samiel, which at certain seasons passes over the desert, blasting and withering all it touches, and carrying death in its train. Were the traveller fully exposed to this noxious blast, he would sink beneath its deadly breath. He therefore needs a hiding place to shield him from its pernicious effects, and save his very life. But what is there in the spiritual desert corresponding to this pestilential wind? Sin. That is the deadly wind, the pestilential simoom, which bears death and destruction in its breath. "For the wages of sin is death." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And as wind diffuses itself in every direction, and subjects all it encounters

to its influence, so the deadly breath of sin has diffused itself all over the world, and blows its terrific blasts over the wilderness of our fallen nature, withering and destroying all good as it springs up, as the samiel blights all that seeks to grow in the desert. Assailed by this deadly wind, the traveller, if he escape with life, is often smitten with disease. So the pestilential breath of sin pollutes everything it touches.

Like the wind of the desert, it taints every living thing subject to its influence. Our prayers, our desires, our performances, our holiest seasons and most sacred employments, the closet, the pulpit, the Lord's table, the pew, are all exposed to the noxious blasts of this pestilential wind. Our thoughts in their lowest depths; our words, however cautiously uttered; our actions, however directed to the glory of God and the good of men, all lie open to its influence, and are tainted by it as they spring forth. This noxious wind is not indeed fatal to the Lord's family, for "their life is hid with Christ in God," and therefore beyond the reach of its mortal influence; but it weakens where it does not destroy. If the spiritual traveller smitten by the blast do not lay his bleached bones among the thousands which strew the desert, yet he feels its poisonous breath in every limb. His knees totter, his limbs tremble, his breath is short and feeble, his whole head is sick and his whole heart faint.

ii. The second peril in the wilderness is "the Tempest." This is implied in the promise, that a man shall be "a covert from the tempest." This we may characterise as the thunderstorm which differs from the pestilential wind in being from above, not from beneath; violent, not subtle; destroying by lightning, not by poison. There must in grace be some antitype to "the tempest" here spoken of. And what so aptly corresponds to this as the manifested anger of God against sin? When God gave the law on Mount Sinai, it was in a storm and tempest, as visible emblems of his wrath against sin; and the Psalmist speaking of the terrible indignation of the Almighty against sinners, compares it to a horrible tempest. "Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a

horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup." Ps 11:6 But what makes the tempest so terrible in the wilderness is the absence of shelter. The pilgrim there stands exposed to the full violence of the storm. Wherever he turns his eyes he sees but a trackless waste, without house or shelter. What an emblem of a poor guilty sinner without a manifested interest in Christ! And how sweet the promise, "And a man shall be a covert from the tempest."

But the storm teaches the value of the shelter; and the first mutterings of the approaching tempest warn the traveller to do as David speaks, "I flee unto thee to hide me." The heavenly traveller hears the distant roll of thunder in the sky, and marks the first arge drops that fall at his feet. He has light to see and life to eel that those tokens imply a coming storm; and therefore flees for refuge to the hope set before him in the gospel. But those who see no oming storm, whose eyes are not opened to discern the first symptoms the approaching tempest, take no heed, are overtaken, overcome, and destroyed. "A prudent man forseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." Pr 22:3 Noah, warned of God, prepared an ark to the saving of his house. Lot, admonished by the angels, fled out of Sodom. So there is a fleeing from the wrath to come. How careless, how secure, and unconcerned are we till quickened with spiritual life! Solomon speaks of those who sleep on the top of a mast, where one jerk of the wave, or one turn of the sleeper may precipitate him into the boiling ocean. God's anger is gathering against a wicked world. Who will escape this fearful storm of eternal unmitigated wrath? Those who flee to Jesus. Who flee to Jesus? Those only who feel their need of him. How are they made to feel their need of him? By the flashes of God's anger. Whence issue these flashes? Out of the thundercloud of God's holy law—the revelation which he has made of his anger against transgressors. How necessary then to feel the application of the law to the conscience, to experience what Job calls, "the terrors of God," that the "covert from the tempest" may be seen and fled unto! It is like the warning given in Egypt

of the grievous hail: "He that feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses, and he that regarded not the word of the Lord left his servants and his cattle in the field." Ex 9:20,21 Faith credits what unbelief derides. As is their nature and operation, so is their end. Faith ends in salvation; unbelief in perdition.

iii. But there is a third peril in the wilderness—one in a measure peculiar to it, and rarely absent from it, the want of water, for the wondrous man here spoken of is promised to be "as rivers of water in a dry place." The wilderness is especially dry. One of its most marked and distinguishing features is the absence of water. It is this which makes it a wilderness, for in those burning climes where no water is, all is desert. To be without this necessary of life is the greatest peril of the wilderness, and we may add, the greatest source of suffering. It is said by those who have experienced it in the desert, that of all painful sensations the most painful is continued thirst. The parched throat, the dried up mouth, the feverish tongue, the tottering frame, each vein, nerve, muscle, and artery of which is calling for water to relieve the burning fever, all tell of deadly suffering. Famine may be borne; but not thirst. Men have lived days without food, but not without water.

What an expressive emblem then is thirst of the desire of the soul after Christ. "Give me water or I die," cries the traveller in the wilderness. "Give me Christ or else I die," is the corresponding cry of the spiritual pilgrim in the wilderness of sin and sorrow. David felt this, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" Ps 42:1,2 And again, "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 thee in the sanctuary." Ps 63:1,2 What a mercy for the church of God that there is a relief for this spiritual thirst. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man

thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." Joh 7:37

iv. The fourth and last peril of the wilderness here mentioned is the Wearisomeness of the way. This is beautifully expressed in the words "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." What poetry and beauty there are in the expression, "a weary land!" as if the land itself were weary, weary of its own wearisomeness, weary of being such an uncultivated waste, and of wearing out the lives of so many travellers. We may stand in imagination on some lofty mountain on the edge of this wilderness and strain our eye across its weary wastes. What a sense of desolation creeps over the mind! Sand and sun—these are its items. Day after day, league after league, still the same Sand and sun. How wearisome to the eye; but how much more wearisome to the limb! How dreary in prospect; how much more dreary in experience! It is this unintermitting march, this sustaining of daily toil and daily thirst, which wears out the traveller. To begin is one thing; to hold on is another. Not Christian. to sink under trial and temptation, but to persevere to the end and be saved—this marks the Christian.

One main, perhaps the chief element of the wearisomeness of the desert is the unclouded sun, ever darting his beams down upon it. I have quoted the expression of a traveller, "The terrible sun." This expression seems strained to us in this damp Northern clime, where every ray of the sun is hailed with gladness. But many, yearly, in hot climates, die under those beams which are so cheering to us. "The shadow of a great rock" implies shelter from the sun, and is put in the same class of benefits with the hiding place from the burning wind, the covert from the furious storm, and the rivers of water in a dry place—all which are deliverances from destruction. We must put, therefore, the sun in the same class of destructive agencies, or there would be inequality in the different figures of the text. What does the sun here then represent? Temptation. In this sense the bride uses the word,— "Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me." So 1:6 It was the sun of temptation which had blackened the complexion of the bride.

The heat of the sun acted on the juices of her skin as temptation acts on the evils of our heart—tanned and deformed her, and this made her cry out that she was "black as the tents of Kedar" that is, the Arab tents which were made of black camel's hair. Look at these elements of weariness—sand and sun, and see their counterparts—self and temptation. What a barren, interminable, sandy waste is self! What wearisomeness to be so much exposed to the sun of temptation! Are not you often weary of everything below the skies? Weary of the world, weary of the church, weary of sinners and saints, weary of the conflict with an evil heart, weary of sin, and above all, weary of self, miserable, miserable self? II. But having viewed the travellers in the wilderness, and their perils and difficulties, we pass on to the wondrous provision which God, of his infinite mercy and grace, has made for their relief. "And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Who is this man? Need I ask the question? Is there not a response in every God-fearing breast? It is the man Christ Jesus—the man who is God's fellow. How sweetly and blessedly does the Holy Spirit, in the text, bring before our eyes, and impress upon our hearts, the humanity of Jesus, "A man shall be as a hiding place from the wind!" And how blessed it is to have a scriptural and spiritual view of the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ, to see him not merely as God, truly essential God, one in essence, glory, and power with the Father and the blessed Spirit, but also man, made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted. And what a suitability there is in the humanity of the Lord Jesus, when we view it in union with this glorious Deity! As man he suffered, as man he bled, as man he died, as man he stands a mediator for his fellow men between God and man. As man, he has for human distress an affectionate, compassionate, sympathizing heart; as man, he obeyed the Law in every particular; as man, he bore all the sufferings of humanity, and thus became the brother born for adversity, flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone; yet perfectly

200 Shaking Of Things Made, And Firmness Of Things Given
pure, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and now exalted
higher than the heavens.

This wondrous man, this Immanuel, God with us, is appointed
of God, “a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the
tempest,” and is made such to the spiritual travellers who are
journeying onward through the waste howling wilderness. Let us
then view this wondrous man under his various covenant offices
and characters, as here set before our eyes.

i. “A hiding place from the wind.” This wind we have already
explained as the pestilential breath of sin, that deadly simoom,
that blighting samiel which sweeps over the desert of self. A hiding
place is wanted lest it should destroy body and soul in hell. Where
shall we find it? In the Law? That is going out of the wind into the
storm. In self? That is the very thing we most want shelter from.
Jesus is the hiding place, the only hiding place from sin and self.
“Thou art my hiding place,” said David of old. This was shown to
Moses, in figure, when the Lord put him into the clift of a rock,
which Toplady has so beautifully versified, to paint the longing
desires of his soul:

“Rock of ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee.”

It is the man, Christ Jesus, who is the sinner’s hiding place. His
pure spotless humanity, his pierced hands and feet, his wounded
side—here is the hiding place from the blasts of sin.

But three things we must know and experience before we can
enter into the beauty and blessedness of Jesus as a hiding place
from the wind.

1. First and foremost, we must feel our need of such a shelter.
This is an indispensable preliminary. All religion without this is
but a notion and a name. This sense of need is produced by feeling
what fearful havoc sin has made in us. Its hot pestilential blasts
withering and destroying every green thing in the soul must be felt
before a shelter from them can be sought

2. Secondly, We must be brought to see the hiding place which
God has provided in the Son of his love. But what beauty, grace,

Shaking Of Things Made, And Firmness Of Things Given 201
glory, and suitability do we see in the man, Christ Jesus, till he is
revealed to the soul by the Blessed Spirit? None. It is He who takes
the humanity of Christ Jesus, and shows it to the eye of faith. And
this humanity he shows not as mere humanity, but as in union
with, though distinct from, his eternal Deity.

3. Then follows the third step—the entering into the hiding
place; and this, too, by a divine constraining power. Moses did not
put himself into the clift. “I,” said the Lord to him, “will put thee
in a clift of the rock.” This third point is of immense importance.
Here many of the living family seem to come short. They feel their
need of Jesus; they see his suitability; but they rest as it were at
the mouth of the hiding place, without entering in. Being thus
only partially sheltered, they are struck by the tail of the wind, and
though safe, are not secure.

ii. But the same wondrous man is also “a covert from the
storm,” This we explained as referring to the law. How a shelter
is needed from its condemnation and curse! Where is this refuge
to be found? In Jesus. He has redeemed us from its curse, as the
Apostle declares. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the
law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every
one that hangeth on a tree.” Ga 3:13 He fulfilled its demands and
endured its penalty, and thus took it out of the way. “Blotting out
the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was
contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.”
Col 2:14 What is the happy consequence to the believer in Jesus?
No condemnation. “There is therefore now no condemnation to
them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but
after the Spirit.” Ro 8:1 All this he did as man; and therefore a man
becomes to us a covert from the storm. O this blessed man!—this
man of sorrows; this suffering, agonizing, crucified man. View
him on the cross, bleeding for thy sins; and then lift up thine
eyes and see him as the same man at the right hand of God. This
was Stephen’s dying sight just before he passed into his presence.
“Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing

on the right hand of God." Ac 7:56

iii. From this springs the third character which Jesus sustains to the pilgrim in the wilderness, "As rivers of water in a dry place." How graciously does the blessed Spirit, by this figure, "rivers of water in a dry place," set forth the suitability of the Lord Jesus Christ to travellers in the wilderness. Turn our eyes where we may, there is no water to drink; nothing to satisfy the boundless desires of an immortal soul. What is there in nature which can supply your wants, or fill up the aching void of a spirit longing after God? Are not death and disappointment stamped on all earthly things? Your business, your families, your dearest and tenderest ties, may occupy the mind, but cannot satisfy the spirit; may entangle the affections, but cannot relieve the heart. The children of men feel nothing of this thirst after God. They do not long after the Lord Jesus Christ, and seek earnestly after a manifestation of his gracious presence; nor do they deem one smile from him dearer than a thousand worlds. To the children of the world this is not a wilderness; it is to them a rich, wide-spread demesne, a noble estate, a well watered garden from which they reap an ample revenue of pleasure and profit. But to the living soul it is a wilderness, dried up, desolate, and barren.

The Lord Jesus is spoken of as "rivers of water." The very thing in the desert which we need. In the wilderness we do not want strong drink; that would only inflame the thirst, make the blood boil in the veins, and smite the frame with fever. As it toils through the desolate wastes of sand it is water that the fainting spirit wants. So in the things of God. It is water—the well of water springing up into everlasting life which the soul needs. This the man himself is, out of whose side the beloved disciple saw gush blood and water. Out of his suffering Manhood flow mercy, pardon, peace, salvation, love, joy, holiness and happiness, as a copious river watering the desolate wilderness. Hence the promise is, "Her peace shall flow like a river;" and, "at God's right hand from the Man who sits there, there are pleasures for evermore," called elsewhere,

"the river of God's pleasures." The fulness of the Lord Jesus is not a rill, but a river; nay, more, not only a river, but "rivers." "All my fresh springs not a spring, but "springs," are in thee." Need any way-worn pilgrim die of thirst when there are rivers at hand—rivers of pardon, peace, holiness, and happiness? Why, then, are these rivers not at once found? This mystery is opened up by the Lord himself. "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." Isa 41:17,18 Here we have the poor and needy seeking water and finding none till their tongue fails for thirst. Now the Lord says, "I will open rivers in high places and fountains in the midst of the valleys." Till the Lord himself opens them in the desert, they do not flow into the soul, and therefore are as if they were not.

iv. But the Lord Jesus is spoken of also as "the shadow of a great, rock in a weary land." He is a rock, "the rock of ages," on which God has built his church. As a rock, he is deep as well as high—so deep as to have under-bottomed the depths of the fall, so high as to be God's fellow, seated at his right hand. As a rock, too, he is broad as well as long—broad enough to bear millions of living stones built on him, and long enough to reach from eternity to eternity. The Apostle, therefore, prays that the church at Ephesus may comprehend with all saints, "what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

In our text, the Lord Jesus is spoken of as "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The figure, as I have already hinted, is that of the "terrible" sun, when he darts his mid-day beams upon the head of the traveller, till his brain reels with the burning heat and his body is ready to sink under weariness and exhaustion. But when just about to fall and die, he espies in the distance a vast, overhanging rock, and hastens as fast as he can to reach its cooling

shade. Its over-arching recesses form, as is common in Palestine, a deep grotto, intercepting the piercing light and burning heat of the almost vertical sun. In these shady recesses he finds rest and shelter, and his throbbing brain and feverish pulse become cool and calm. What an emblem of the shade and shelter from the fiery sun of temptation which is found in the man Christ Jesus! He has been tempted in all points like as we are; but as the rock bears uninjured the beams of the hottest sun, and yet, by bearing them, shields in its recesses the way-worn pilgrim, so did Jesus, as man, bear the whole fury of Satanic temptations, and yet was as uninjured by them as the rock in the desert. And having borne them, he shields from their destructive power the tempted child of God who lies at his feet under the shadow of his embrace. How refreshing in the great and terrible wilderness is this sheltering rock where the wearied pilgrim may rest his limbs under the cool shade! In hot climates hundreds die every year under coups de soleil, sun-strokes. How many more, in a spiritual sense, die under the sun-stroke of temptation! Nor would any child of God come off with life were it not for the shadow of the great rock in the weary land. "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." There was the rock which saved Peter from the sun-stroke that destroyed Judas. The over-arching intercession of the man of sorrows shielded his faith from perishing to the root, and restored him to life after his temporary swoon.

Now look at the characters which the Lord Jesus sustains to the way-worn pilgrim. Four perils assail the traveller Zionward—the pestilential blast of sin, the tempest of a condemning law, the drought and desolation of the wilderness, and the burning sun of temptation. To preserve their life through these perils. God has provided a Man—the Man in whom his soul delighteth; and this once crucified but now glorified Man is "a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the storm, rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

But now comes the great, the all-important question—how are

these gracious realities seen, and how are these glorious tidings heard? The answer to which brings us to our third point,

III. The opening of the eyes to see and the unstopping of the ears to hearken to the blessings thus promised. "And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken."

Two gracious promises are here given. Let us examine them separately.

i. "The eyes of them that see shall not be dim." By nature all men are blind—blind to sin and blind to salvation; blind to malady and blind to remedy; blind to self and blind to Christ. This blindness is partly innate, and partly superadded. "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." Eph 4:18 This is innate blindness—blindness of heart, as a consequence of the fall. But there is another cause of blindness. "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God should shine unto them." 2Co 4:4 This is superadded blindness—blindness produced by the special power of Satan.

But our text speaks rather of dimness than blindness. There is a difference between the two. The dead in sin are blind; the newly quickened into life are dim. We see this distinction in the case of the blind man whose eyes the Lord opened. When he first touched his eyes, light broke in but dimly and feebly. When asked, if he saw aught, "he looked up and said, I see men as trees walking." Before he saw nothing; now he sees certain objects, but the film still hanging over his eyes, he could not tell a man from a tree. The word here rendered "dim," means, literally, "besmeared," as if the newly opened eyes were bleared with water or matter, and therefore saw every thing through a mist or veil. How true is this of the wilderness pilgrim!

The breath of the pestilential wind, the thick clouds of the

tempest, the hot and burning sand, and the glare of the mid-day sun, all blear and dim the eye. But the hiding place from the wind, the covert from the tempest, the rivers of water, and the shady rock heal the dimness, and then “the eyes of them that see shall not be dim. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.” Isa 33:17 Till the pilgrims reach the rock their eyes are dim; but then, according to the promise, their eyes see out of obscurity and out of darkness. They see the Person of Christ as God-man, his suitability, atoning blood, and justifying righteousness; and seeing Him of God made unto them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, they have in him all their hearts can wish. ii. “And the ears of them that hear shall hearken.” This promise, too, is closely connected with the preceding. The same fall in paradise which sealed the eyes in blindness, stopped the ears in deafness. Therefore the promise runs, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.” Isa 35:5

But the persons spoken of in the text are not totally deaf, for they “hear.” Yet there is a difference between hearing and hearkening—a difference almost analogous to that between the eyes being dim and seeing. The dim eye sees, but not distinctly; the hearing ear hears, but does not always hearken. To hearken implies faith and obedience. A disobedient son may hear his father speak, but does not hearken. Many under the word hear, but do not hearken, for they neither believe nor obey. But when the pilgrim in the wilderness reaches the hiding place from the wind, and the covert from the tempest; when he drinks of the rivers of water, and lies under the shadow of the great rock, he not only hears but hearkens—believes, loves, and obeys. It is thus that faith and obedience are wrought in the soul. This is hearkening to the word of God—to promise, and to precept. Necessity constrained him to hear the law; love constrains him to hear the gospel. His understanding, conscience, heart, and affections are all bound to the Man at the right hand of God; and thus he obeys not under the

lash as a slave, but under the constraints of dying love as a son. Such are Zion’s heavenward and homeward bound pilgrims. Happy are those who have any testimony that this is their character and experience; for of such we may safely say, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

154 Suffering And Its Benefits

Preached on Lord’s Day Evening, at Eden Street Chapel,
Hampstead Road
August 1, 1853

“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”

1 Peter 5:10

When Peter was in the garden of Gethsemane with his suffering Lord, he was not qualified to write an epistle to the Church of God. The hand that grasped the sword which cut off the right ear of Malchus was not the hand to hold the pen of an inspired apostle. Like other good men, in the days of early profession, he had more zeal than knowledge, more fleshly ardour than deep teachings of the Spirit and rich experience of the love of God. Had he then written, he would most probably have used his pen as he used his sword; and in cutting down the foes of Zion he might unwittingly have smitten some of her choice friends. But when he had passed through affliction’s fiery furnace, had the dross and tin taken from him, and had become melted and softened by the grace of God, then as the blessed Spirit breathed upon him, and touched his pen with his own sanctifying grace, he was qualified to write these epistles so full of power and blessedness, and so full of rich experience of divine truth. I know not whether you paid much attention this morning, when I read the first chapter of this First Epistle. Many seem to think the reading of God’s word a very unimportant portion of the service of God, and in some chapels it

is omitted altogether, much, I think, to the loss of the people. But, in reading the chapter this morning, I could not but be struck with the richness and depth of divine truth with which that portion of God's word seemed to me full even to overflowing.

We see, then, in the case of the Apostle Peter, how he was melted, moulded, and softened by the furnace of affliction and temptation; and when grace had wrought these blessed effects in his soul, then, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he could sit down and pen this epistle for the edification of the Church of God in all times.

The grand point of the words which I have read—and from which I hope with God's blessing to speak a little this evening—is suffering and the benefit of it. But, I shall, with a desire to bring the subject more plainly before your mind, and to enforce it more powerfully upon your conscience, divide my text into four leading branches.

I.—I shall endeavour to speak a little on the fulness and freeness of grace.

II.—The holy and heavenly calling wherewith the children of God are blessed.

III.—The necessity and nature of suffering.

IV.—The blessed benefits and divine fruits that spring out of it.

You will find this chain drawn out in our text; and it will be my business, as the Lord may enable, to take up these truths and to lay them before you, looking up to the Lord to bless his own word with power to your consciences.

I.—The God of all grace. How sweet is the word “grace” to every God taught soul! But there is something, to my mind, singularly beautiful in the expression which the apostle here makes use of—”The God of all grace.” It is as if he would lead our hearts at once to the fountain; as if he would bid us not look at the stream, but lift up our eyes and view, in the actings of faith, the ever-flowing source of all grace.

We may view this part of our subject negatively and positively.

God is the God of all grace; and, therefore, there is no grace but that which is of God. Many seem disposed unduly to magnify what are called “means of grace.” They are good when God through them is pleased to communicate grace; but without his blessing what are they? We see sometimes as we pass along the streets the pavements broken up and pipes and tubes lying about. What are all these pipes for? To convey water; but of what use are they if there be no water to flow through them? Will iron pipes of themselves bring water? So what is all our praying, preaching, and the ordinances of God's house? They are mere pipes; and need the water of grace to flow through them if they are to be of any benefit to us. If the water of grace flow through these into the soul, what do we feel grateful for? The water or the pipe? It is the stream of mercy and grace that flows into the soul for which we are thankful, and not the mere conduit through which that grace is communicated. But positively he is “the God of all grace.” But how, and in what sense? Why, of grace in all its various branches, ramifications, and developments.

1.—For instance, there is convincing grace; for by the grace of God we are convinced of sin. The arrow of conviction shot into our conscience, making us to feel that we were sinners, and to cry for pardoning mercy came from God. God was the Author of that feeling if it were a spiritual conviction. It was he that wounded; he that pierced; he that killed, he that brought down; and he that opened the wound which nothing but the blood of Christ could heal.

2.—But he is the God of pardoning grace. The same grace that led him to wound leads him to heal; the same grace that brought down raises up; the same grace that strips clothes; the same grace that preaches the thunder of the law, preaches the peace speaking gospel; and the same grace that reveals the malady and uncovers the sore, brings the balm of Gilead and reveals the heavenly Physician. Therefore he is the God of pardoning grace in the sweet manifestations of the Saviour's love.

3. But the soul often wanders from its heavenly fountain. It

backslides from God; and then grace is manifested in its restoration. David speaks of this restoring grace when he says—"He restoreth my soul." He brings us back to the spot whence we have wandered, and manifests the riches of his pardoning love, unsealing the fountain once opened for sin and for uncleanness. He it is who applies to the conscience the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel.

4. But we have walked, perhaps, in temptation's fiery path, and sometimes have been well nigh overwhelmed with a sea of trouble. As one said of old—"All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." "Then we want supporting grace. "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me." "Underneath are the everlasting arms." As we pass through the mazes of affliction, are in the furnace of trial, or are tossed on the deep waters of sorrow, still his arm is underneath to sustain.

5. But as we have by nature a heart "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;" as we live in an ungodly world, and carry in our bosom the seed of all sin, and are tempted continually to evil, we want keeping grace. "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Of that too he is the Author; for none can stand a single moment except as upheld by the mighty power of God.

6. And when you come to lay your head on a dying pillow, and the cold sweats of death gather upon your forehead; when the eye strings are breaking, and you must take leave of this world, and of all that is in it, you will want dying grace to support you in a dying hour.

Thus he is the "God of all grace." All the grace that ever the church had; of all the grace the church ever needed or will need he is the God. Look at the sun, that beautiful emblem of the Holy Spirit's own choosing to represent the Sun of Righteousness. How that glorious orb of day has shone for thousands of years! Look at the thousands of harvests which have been reaped under his benignant influence; think of the millions of human beings that

have been fed by the fruits that he has matured and ripened. But the sun still shines on in all his original warmth, light, and beauty. He is not exhausted; he manifests no signs of exhaustion, nor has lost anything by shining; nor have all the rays and beams that have flowed from him drained him of one jot of his light and warmth. He is still the glorious orb of day, shining and shining, and losing neither light, nor heat, nor influence. So it is with the God of all grace? Thousands of hearts he has gladdened by the beams of his grace; thousands of contrite sinners he has comforted by the pourings out of his favour; but he is still the God of all grace, which is ever, therefore, flowing in rich streams of mercy, goodness, and love to the church of Jesus. Oh! why should we be so contracted as we often are, and lose sight of the God of all grace? Why dwell so much upon the creature instead of dwelling upon him whom to know is life eternal? The God of all grace! This is a worthy theme, and I might enlarge upon it, but I have other work this evening before me to do.

II. I must, therefore, proceed with my text. "Who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus."

There may, perhaps, have been this thought in the heart of some present. All this no doubt is true; but what interest have I in it? I hear of the God of all grace; but have I grace? Has the God of all grace bestowed his grace upon me? You may well ask yourself that question, considering how few there are, speaking comparatively, upon whom God has bestowed his grace; but just see what gives a manifested interest in it. What makes that grace my own? "Who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus." Calling, our second point of consideration, manifests an interest in the grace of God, and in the God of all grace. We are told by the same inspired apostle to "make our calling and election sure." How can we make our calling sure? By wrestling with God till he make it sure in us, by sealing it with his own heavenly witness upon our breast, and making it as plain in our hearts as the sun in the sky. But it is not every child of God who can make his calling and election thus

undoubtedly sure. There are some who like Belshazzar cannot read the writing on the wall, and want a Daniel to decipher it for them; but they have not an interpreter who can read one letter. Aye; there are many of God's children who cannot read their own experience; they cannot trace out their own grace, nor make manifest to themselves their own calling. They need then an interpreter, as Job speaks—"One of a thousand, who can save them from going down to the pit," by showing them how to read the work of faith in their soul. This is the benefit of an experimental ministry, to discover to you what you could not otherwise learn for yourself—opening up the work of God which is locked up from your own eyes.

There is then a being "called." This calling is "of God." It is "through Jesus Christ," and it is "unto God's eternal glory."

Divine calling is a special work of God upon the soul, separating from the world, profane and professing, bringing down high looks, piercing the conscience with convictions, and raising up longing desires after Christ, with a going to him for mercy; leading the soul with weeping and supplication to the feet of the Mediator; and then in God's own time and way making Christ precious, revealing his person, blood, and righteousness, and shedding abroad the love of God in the heart by the Holy Ghost. To know anything of this divine teaching is to be made "a partaker of the heavenly calling," and to experience a saving work in the soul. And consider those striking and heavenly words, "to his eternal glory!" "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." To be called then unto God's eternal glory, to view it hereafter in its full blaze on the heights of Zion, to enjoy it with a soul rendered capable of bearing its full and eternal weight, and the body made a fit treasure-house and immortal companion for the glorified spirit; to be enraptured with the manifestations of God's presence and love throughout a boundless, glorious eternity—what prospects of heavenly bliss are opened up and revealed in these words! What the full enjoyment of this unutterable weight of glory will be is

beyond all present human conception, beyond the apprehension of the wisest saint, or the experience of the deepest taught saint of God. At the best, we can only have a faint glimpse of the glory which God has prepared for them that love him. But it is not so of our calling. No matter how desponding some of the Lord's family may be, they are called unto his eternal glory, to the preparation for it here, and to the rich enjoyment of hereafter.

III. But let us pass a little further onward. We have not yet got into the marrow of our subject; we are still but at the vestibule—we have not yet penetrated into the inner court. We must pass the entrance before we get into the apartments of the palace. There is no entering into glory except through suffering; nor is there any getting into the rich experience of grace without affliction and trial. Was it not so with Jesus? What did he say to his disciples? "Ought not the Son of man to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?" And has not the Lord Jesus led the way in which we are to tread; and must we not be conformed to his suffering image here that we may be conformed to his glorified image hereafter? "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." If we have no union with Christ in suffering, we shall have no union with Christ in glory; and therefore there is a necessity of suffering with the Lord Jesus. Now it is this suffering which so deeply tries the minds of God's exercised family. If they were not so heavily weighted, they could get on, or at least they think they could; if the road were easy and the path smooth, if there were no trials and temptations, they, at least in their own apprehensions, could travel cheerily on. But when they come into temptation's fiery furnace, and are baptized into a flood of suffering and sorrow, then their faith seems to give way, and their hope to stagger; they reel to and fro like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end to believe there is a grain of grace in their heart.

There is a necessity then for suffering; but though there be this necessity, yet one thing is very evident, that all God's people do not suffer in the same way, or to the same degree. God chooses our

afflictions for us. He knows what peculiar trials are needful for every one of those who fear his name. We differ in bodily constitution, education, habits of life, powers of mind, and natural disposition. We differ as widely within, as we differ without; the features of our mind are as various as the features of our face; and therefore my suffering would not be your suffering, nor your suffering mine. We have each our own peculiar path of trial and suffering which God has appointed us to walk in. Some suffer in mind, others in body; some in their family, others in their circumstances; the trials of some are chiefly in things temporal; others suffer a fiery baptism in matters purely spiritual. But in addition to all other sources of trial, there is one common to all the redeemed family, a daily, hourly conflict with the body of sin and death, and the workings of evil in the carnal mind.

But time will not admit of a minuter detail of the various sufferings which are appointed for the family of God. Some may be deeper, others shallower; some shorter, others longer; but each is designed, to work a like purpose—the conforming of the soul to the suffering image of Jesus.

You will observe that in this chain there is a beautiful proportion and harmony. Suffering does not come at the beginning of the chain. First, we have, “the God of all grace,” the overflowing, overflowing fountain of goodness and mercy, being the source of all. Then we have the “calling,” whereby this grace is made manifest to the soul, and of which Christ is the blessed Subject, Object, sum, and centre. And then comes “suffering,” the third link of the heavenly chain. Grace, first; calling next; and suffering third. If, then, you have not this link, the link of suffering, there is a breach in the chain. If the God of all grace be your God, he has called or will call you; if he has called you, he has appointed unto you a certain measure of suffering by which you will be, as the apostle speaks—“filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ,” that is not his vicarious sufferings, but his afflictions in his members.

IV. We are now then prepared to pass on, by the blessing of

God, to examine our fourth and last point—the benefits, blessings, and divine fruits that spring out of suffering, which adds the last link to the chain.

But observe the expression, “After that ye have suffered a while.” Suffering is only for a while. Say at the most, that suffering should run parallel with the whole course of your life; say that you live to be ninety, and have day after day suffering and sorrow; say that every hour brings you pain of body or grief of mind, trial of spirit, or temptation of soul. Say it shall be so, which however is not very probable, for you are not likely to live till you are ninety, nor are you likely to have every day a day of trial, temptation, and suffering; but say it were so appointed, then when your soul is set at liberty from your enfeebled body, to soar upward into the regions of light and love, and drink in rivers of peace and joy at the fountain head, it would, after all, be only “a little while.” Measured by eternity, what is time? It is but a point, a thing only of a moment’s duration. “Our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

But even in a world like this we are not always suffering. It comes and goes—it is brought today and is taken away tomorrow. When the furnace has done its work, then the gold is taken out. But it is after, not before. You perhaps say you want to enjoy a clear assurance of interest; to be established in the liberty of the gospel; to walk as an enfranchised child of God; to be favoured with fresh and fresh manifestations of his mercy and love; and have your soul sweetly enjoying the presence of a beloved Lord. But have you been ever tossed on a sea of suffering? or do you think always to be in London Dock without ebb or flow? Does the extent of your spiritual voyage reach no farther than Gravesend, where the scarcely salt river is still far from the sea? You fresh water mariners who sail on so jauntingly in your river built yachts are not fit to do business in deep waters, nor can you see the wonders of the Lord as those do in the great deep. But if you have been long

tossed on the stormy main, how welcome does the shore beam on your straining sight; and how then you will drop anchor with an inward peal of joy. It is not before then, but “after ye have suffered a while” that real soul profit, satisfaction, and joy are realized or experienced within.

But perhaps you are saying—”May not persons be Christians and yet not be much tried or afflicted?” Now, I believe it holds in grace as in nature—whatever is easily got is rarely worth having. As a general rule, a man gets nothing easily that is really valuable; neither knowledge, nor power, nor learning, nor even glittering gold dust; nothing even that this world values is obtained without labour and pain. And sure I am that no spiritual man gets a rich experience of Divine mercy and love without passing through more or less of soul exercise. He is not fitted for it; his soul has not yet the capacity to enjoy the fulness of the love of God. In order to this he must, like a vessel, have ample tonnage. There must be capacity made in the soul, as in the hold of the ship, to receive the fulness of God’s mercy. Self must be baled out before the Lord of grace and glory will come in; the cargo of rubbish must be heaved overboard before the rich treasure of heavenly mercy can find room in the bosom.

It is, then, after we have suffered awhile, and only after we have suffered a while; been exercised in our soul, tried in our mind, tempted of Satan, and gone through more or less of this inward strife and affliction—this sea of storms, that these other links of the heavenly chain are brought, into the heart, of which the apostle speaks—”But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”

Oh that these words might sound in your ears. Oh that they might be graven as by the pen of God in your hearts.

I. But let us look at these blessings in their order. “Make you perfect!” What word have we here? Does not this look like perfection in the flesh? Perfection in the flesh! The Scriptures know

nothing of this kind of perfection, nor does any experienced child of God. In what sense, therefore, may we understand the word used by the Holy Spirit here? “Make you perfect.” The terms have a meaning; we will not dislocate and distort God’s sacred word by putting on it a forced construction. Far be that from our wish or thought. I may observe, then, that there are two senses in which the word “perfect” is used in Scripture as regards the saints of God. The first meaning of the word is perfection in Christ—”Ye are complete in him.” The church of God is represented as being “without spot or blemish or any such thing,” a view of which draws forth from her divine lover those striking words—”Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee.” In that sense the church of God is perfect—perfect in Christ, comely with the comeliness which he himself has put upon her, and so stands perfect in his perfection, holy in his holiness, glorious in his glory.

But that is not the sense meant by the word “perfect” here. She is that already; but the making of her perfect “through suffering.” Perfection, then, as here spoken of is not that through Christ’s righteousness; that is an outward perfection; but an inward, an experimental perfection as wrought in the soul by the grace of God through suffering. What then is this inward experimental perfection? There is an expression in Heb. 5:14, which, to my mind, much clears up the whole subject—”But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” The apostle is speaking here of the difference between those who are weak and ignorant and those who are strong and established. He says that some were babes, and did not even understand the elements of divine truth; but that others were “of full age.” It is in the margin, which is the more literal rendering, “perfect.” Those, then, are, in an experimental sense, “perfect” who have arrived at the meridian of full age, whose senses are exercised by long and deep experience to discern both good and evil. This, then, is the scriptural definition of experimental perfection. It does not

consist in the absence of sin nor in progressive sanctification; nor in being made any better as regards our carnal mind; but it consists in this—in being ripened and matured in the Divine life; in being no longer a child, and ever in want of a tutor of first principles; but “a man in Christ,” grown up in him and having a ripeness of Christian experience. This is Christian maturity; and this divine ripeness of soul is only to be obtained through suffering. It is “after you have suffered a while” that God thus “makes you perfect”—in other words, matures you, so that you bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, and become an adult man in the knowledge, enjoyment, and experience of spiritual things. The tried soul comes forth from the furnace with the dross and tin of self taken away, and thus becomes a vessel of honour fitted for the master’s use.

2. But the apostle goes on to pray that the God of all grace would, after they had suffered awhile, “stablish” them. This extends somewhat widely. It implies an establishing of our understanding, conscience, judgment, and experience not only in our views of divine truth, but also of our own interest in “the truth as it is in Jesus;” that we may not be carried about with every wind of doctrine, but be so established, rooted, and grounded in the truth of God, as never, by any consideration be moved from it. How is this desirable thing to be attained? Suffering, suffering, is still the channel: and the furnace is still the means. It is only “after we have suffered a while”—suffered from Satan, from sin, from persecution of enemies, and the unbelief and abounding corruption of our own hearts—it is only after such an experience of personal, inward suffering that we get to be thoroughly established in the truth. Growth in grace is like growth in nature. It is the mushroom that springs up in a night; but the oak is the growth of centuries. We are to grow like the oak, not like the poplar; be a cedar of Lebanon, not a willow by the brook. We have also to take root downward as well as to grow stout and strong upwards—to spread deep and wide roots in the soil as well as to spread forth sturdy branches in the air. And it is that we may thus take root and become established

that we are subjected to affliction and sorrow. No instance was ever known of an established Christian who had not become so through the medium of deep and sanctified affliction; and God will not alter his ways to please our vain fancies, “for he is in one mind, and who can turn him?”

3. The next fruit of suffering for which the apostle prayed was that God might thereby “strengthen” them. But what a strange way of being strengthened! You feel your weakness; do you not? “Yes;” I may speak for some here—“I do indeed; oh if you did but know how weak I am!” I know it very well, for I know how weak I am myself. If I can read any thing it is my own heart; and in reading mine I can read yours. But you say, “How weak I am.” Well, will you ever be anything else? Would you wish to be anything else? “I would be strong,” you reply. So you are. “When I am weak,” said Paul, “then am I strong.” There is the true secret of all strength! What makes us strong?

Weakness. Weakness make us strong? “That is a flat contradiction.” No; it is not. Because when you are weak then the Lord Jesus works strength in you, and thus you resemble the worthies spoken of in Heb. 11, who “out of weakness were made strong.” No other strength is worth a straw. Suppose I came here this evening, and into this pulpit all strength in myself. Should I be worth hearing or listening to? But I come all weakness; if I have strength God gives it me. So if you come strong to hear, you will not want for Christ to bless the word and communicate strength to your soul; but if you come weak as one seeking strength from him; if you come as an empty vessel for God to pour his love and grace into, then the Lord will answer you. Was it not so with David? “In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.” But you will say, “I have had a great deal of trial lately; I have had affliction in my body, or trials in my family, or my circumstances have been very distressing, and to make it worse, I have had such darkness of mind and many powerful temptations to grapple with. Under all this my wicked heart has

rebelled against God; and I have had hard work, I can assure you, to stand my ground at all.” What has that taught you, and to what point has it brought you? It has made you a hearer of the gospel, it has made you to long for the God of all grace to manifest unto you the riches of his mercy; it has weaned you from the world broken the arm of self; destroyed your creature confidence; and rendered you a fit subject for the Lord Jesus Christ to work upon, and in you to will and to do of his own good pleasure. All this good suffering has done, if it has been sanctified to your soul. Look at Moses! How weak he was. He replied, when sent on his mission to Pharaoh, “I am slow of speech;” but God qualified him to speak and act too. Look at Abraham, and the course of God’s dealings with him. How the strength of God was made manifest in his and Sarah’s natural weakness! Look at David, the beardless boy, going out against the giant. So your weakness is but the needful preparation for God out of it to make you strong. I hope that some of you here, this evening, if not many, are poor and needy, weak and helpless. So many as are such, are so many cases for God to strengthen.

4. The last blessing for which the apostle prayed as following suffering was, that God would thereby “settle” them. I was speaking this morning about a building. Now you know a building must settle before it will stand. It is so with every structure. A bridge has to settle sometimes some inches and time for the most part must be given for every edifice to settle before you can be sure that it will stand firm. It settles by sinking, and becomes firm by losing somewhat of its original height; it drops that it may stand; it sinks that it may not fall. So must you be settled, if you are to stand; not settled on yourself, but upon the work of Jesus, the living stone which God has laid in Zion. To be settled is not to be settled down in vain, presumptuous confidence, but to have a firm standing in Christ by the Spirit’s teaching and testimony, and so to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. There must be a settling down into and upon the Lord Jesus; a resting the entire weight of the soul’s salvation wholly and solely upon him who is mighty to

save. And the more the soul is thus settled upon the foundation, the firmer, closer union it has with it.

Now, look at these things, for they will bear examination. I am not afraid of my doctrine being examined. Not that the things I have uttered are worth anything, so far as I am the speaker of them; but the points I have advanced and dwelt upon are solid truths; and I know them to be such. They are in strict accordance with the word of God; and I believe in accordance with the experience of God’s saints. Weigh them up then, and weigh yourselves too at the same time. Put yourselves into the scale, and see whether God has stamped good weight upon you. Who is it that has reason to tremble when the surveyors come round to examine their weights and measures? It is the deceitful, dishonest tradesman who fears to see their face. The honest tradesman boldly brings forth his weights and measures, and does not slink into the back shop with fear and trembling. So the teaching of God in the soul will bear examination. You may be very weak—the tradesman’s weights and measures are not all of the same size and dimensions. There is the gill and the quart, as well as the pint and gallon; and there is the quarter and half ounce as well as the stone; but they must be all lawful weight and bear the queen’s stamp. So that if you say, your grace is small, I reply, “It may be none the worse for that.” If we have gardens, and are fond of flowers, we admire the little shrub as well as the larger one; and there is as perfect a life in the tender flower as in the stronger plant. So, if you are planted into the heavenly garden, the Divine Husbandman will water and make you grow. I would much sooner have a little living shrub put into my garden bed than a dead lofty tree. All the trees of righteousness planted by the hand of the Lord are living, growing, trees, watered and nourished by the dews and rains of the Spirit. See, therefore, whether you cannot find something like the grace of God in your heart. O what a mercy to have one grain of grace! What a mercy to be a living soul! You may be tried, tempted, and exercised; but if you are one of the Lord’s people, all this will eventually be for your

profit. But always remember that there is a furnace to go through to bum up self-confidence, and bring you forth a vessel fit for the master's use. The trials you are called to experience, and the sighs and groans you utter are spiritual sacrifices, acceptable in God's sight. These things are designed to mature you in the things of God, to establish you in the truth, to strengthen you in faith, hope, and love, and to settle you down into sweet confidence in the Lord Jesus. O, you will say, if this be the case, thank God for every trial; bless his holy name for every temptation; thanks for every furnace, every exercise, and every affliction; they have brought my soul to a firm standing; they have made Christ precious; they have endeared his love; they have led me more fully into the "truth as it is in Jesus," and given me richer and more blessed views of Immanuel, God with us. Now this is the main thing the heart desires; not that we desire the furnace, but we desire the great benefits produced by it. O, may "the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus," in the words of our text—"after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."

155 Zion's Wayfarers And Their Earnest Resolve

Preached on Thursday Evening, at Oakham
March 21st, 1854

"They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."

Jeremiah 50:5

God has in this vale of tears a family whom He has loved with an everlasting love, and of whom He is the everlasting Father and Friend; as the hymn says,

"There is a family on earth
Whose Father fills a throne."

As, then, of this family God is the Father, so the Lord Jesus Christ is the Elder Brother, and the Holy Spirit the Teacher,

Comforter, and Sanctifier. But in this heavenly family there always have been, and ever will be, members differing from each other in age, knowledge, and stature, as, in a corresponding sense, there are these different members in an earthly family. Thus, first, there are "babes," as the Apostle Peter tells us: "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). Next, there are "little children," of whom we read in the Epistle of John: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" (1 John 2:12). There are also in this spiritual family "young men," who are grown up to some degree of Christian maturity, and according to John's declaration, "have overcome the wicked one." And, lastly, there are "fathers"; aged fathers, who have maintained a long course of conflict and temptation, and have become firm and established and rooted in the gospel of the grace of God. The mark that John gives of them is that "they have known Him that is from the beginning" (1 John 2:13). It is beautiful when we can see these members of the family of God united to each other in the bonds of sympathy, affection, and love. Literally and naturally there are few sights more revolting to the mind than the spectacle of a divided, quarrelling family. And there are few sights upon earth more lovely than a family united in the bonds of mutual affection, and where each member seeks the interest and happiness of the whole. But if this be true naturally, how much more so spiritually! There is not, there cannot be, a more discordant sight—there is not, there cannot be, a thing more inconsistent with the precepts and practice of the Lord Jesus than a church of God rent and torn with divisions. It is an object for the saints of God to weep over, and to endeavour by all means in their power either to prevent or to remedy. And on the other hand, to see a family of God walking together in tender affection, striving not only to maintain the power and purity of the gospel, but to seek each other's spiritual welfare and interest, weeping with those that weep and rejoicing with those that rejoice, is a sight for angels to look at and admire.

In our text we read of certain members of this family, for it does not seem to comprehend all the children of God, who are described as journeying Zionward. Of them it is also said that they ask their way with their faces thitherward, the meaning evidently being that they have turned their backs upon the world, and have set their faces towards Zion with the hope and expectation of entering into it, and becoming citizens of it. They seem also represented as cheering one another along in their dangerous and difficult course by speaking to each other in words of tender affection: "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." This appears to be a consistent and Scriptural interpretation of our text.

In looking, then, at these words, I shall with God's blessing endeavour to show—

I. What is meant by Zion.

II. The way to Zion.

III. What it is to ask the way with our faces thitherward.

IV. The sweet language of a believing heart when Zion's battlements appear in sight: "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."

I. The word "Zion" occurs very frequently in the Old Testament, and therefore it will be desirable to obtain, if we can, a Scriptural view of what the blessed Spirit means by the word so frequently employed. To get at this, we must see what and where Zion was literally. For the literal meaning is always the foundation of the spiritual. Zion literally was a strong hill forming a part of the ancient Jerusalem. In fact it was the strongest and highest part of the whole of the city, being an almost inaccessible rock, and therefore it remained in the hands of the Jebusites many years after the children of Israel got possession of the lower city. In fact Zion never belonged to the children of Israel till the time of David. We read an account of its capture in 2 Sam. 5:6: "And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away

the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither." This was a taunting speech, its meaning being that the precipice of which the hill Zion formed a part was at once so high and so strongly fortified by nature and art that the blind and the lame whom they had set upon the battlements were strong enough to keep possession. This taunting speech incensed David, and made him issue the proclamation, "Whosoever getteth up to the gutter (or parapet) and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain" (5:8). Not to dwell longer upon this point, David succeeded in the attempt, and took the stronghold of Zion. Having thus got possession of that strong fortress, what did David do with it? He made it his own abode; as we read, "So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David." Zion, then, was not, as many have asserted, the spot on which the temple stood. That was situated in another part of the city, and was built on Mount Moriah.

In our views, then, of Zion, we must always bear in mind that it was the spot where David built his palace; where he reigned in power and splendour; whence he issued his laws; and where he was enthroned as king of Judah and Israel. From those circumstances, Zion became in the Old Testament prophecies a standing emblem and representation of the Church of God in which Christ reigns and rules as Head and King. We therefore find the Apostle Paul thus speaking to the Hebrews: "But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," where he clearly considers Mount Zion to represent spiritually the Church of Christ as being the city of the living God. And is not this in strict accordance with the general tenor of divine truth? Spiritually viewed, where does Jesus reign? Where does He manifest Himself? Where does He keep His court? Where does He sway His sceptre? Where does He shine forth in His grace and glory? Is it not in His Church and people? For He dwells in their hearts as David in the literal Zion, and sways His sceptre in their consciences as David did literally in his palace. But as it is by the gospel that the

Lord Jesus sways the hearts of His living people, Zion became also often employed as the prophetic and foreshadowed name for the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the literal David sat enthroned in Zion, and thence issued his laws, so the spiritual David sits as it were enthroned in the gospel; for it is in and by the gospel that His glory is made manifest. Now you will see why the Apostle Paul in the chapter quoted from the Epistle to the Hebrews draws a distinction between the law and the gospel: "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words;" by all which expressions he points out the giving of the law upon Mount Sinai; but contrasting with it the gospel, he says, "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God." If you look at the passage, you will see how he enumerates certain blessings which only flow out of the gospel, such as the blood of sprinkling, and mentions specifically the general assembly and church of the firstborn. Jesus, then, as the Mediator of the new covenant, dwells enthroned in Zion. We may view, then, Zion in our text under two lights. 1. As representing the Church of the living God; and, 2. the everlasting gospel of the grace of God.

II. But we pass on to consider our second point, which was to examine the way to Zion. For the heavenly travellers in our text are represented as desirous to know this way. "They shall ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward." The way to Zion is hidden from the eyes of all till God is pleased to make it known to them by spiritual revelation. It is as Job speaks, "There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen" (28:7). Thus the way to Zion is hidden from the fowls of the air, those unclean birds of the sky which may typify the ungodly, and is not seen by the piercing eye of the vulture, which may represent those who have clear views of doctrine, but are devoid of grace. Yet this way to Zion is laid down plainly and clearly enough in the Word of God. There is no difficulty or obscurity there. The darkness is not

in the revelation of the way, but in our mind, the veil of unbelief over our hearts preventing us from seeing it. The Lord, however, in His own good time and way is pleased to open the eyes of His people to see this way, for it is His goodwill and pleasure that they should walk in it. Now one thing is very plain, that we must be out of the way before we can get into it; and it is equally evident that whilst we are in the world we are not in the way. Zion and the world are as much opposed to each other as heaven to hell. There is, there can be no communion between light and darkness, no partnership between Christ and Belial. And as Satan is the god of this world, whilst we are in it and not brought out of it, we are so far his servants and subjects. A man then in the world is not in the way to Zion.

2. But again; whilst we are wrapped up in a mere profession of religion, without having experienced any power in our souls of the truth of God, we are not in the way to Zion.

3. Nor whilst we are under the power of self-righteousness, immersed up to the neck in Pharisaism and legality, are we in the way to Zion. For Zion, as we have explained, represents the gospel, and that is as distinct from it as the two literal mounts, Sinai and Zion, were separate.

4. Nor again, until there is some conviction of sin produced by the operation of the Spirit of God in a man's conscience, can he be said to be on the way to Zion, for we care nothing about the gospel till the blessed Spirit convinces us of sin, and shows us our need of it. Thus when Peter's hearers were pricked in their heart, he immediately preached the gospel to them, and they gladly received his word. A man may think himself in the way to Zion, and yet upon this point much deceive himself. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

But having shown thus far what is not the way to Zion, let me endeavour to point out what is the way. We may lay it down, then, as a certain truth, that the way to Zion lies through tribulation, for

it is "through much tribulation that we are to enter the kingdom." Tribulation therefore is pretty sure to begin with us when we begin to walk in the way to Zion. We cannot take many steps before we meet with a strait gate; and we may be well assured that this gate will be too strait for any person to get through as long as he is wrapped up in the cumbrous robe of his own righteousness. But besides the strait gate, there is also a narrow way which runs from the strait gate, and keeps narrow all its length; and this way is so hemmed in on every side by its close and confined boundaries that no person can pass through it who is not stripped to the skin of all his own strength, wisdom and goodness.

Again, hard abutting on the way to Zion lies that fiery mount, Mount Sinai, from which the law was proclaimed in thunder and lightning. The terrors of this mount urge the wayfaring pilgrim onward, for unless he knows something of the breadth, spirituality, curse, wrath, bondage and condemnation of the holy law of God, he will never turn his face from Mount Sinai unto Mount Zion. Hundreds and thousands are tarrying at the foot of Mount Sinai because that flaming mount is in their apprehension but an extinct volcano. But if that volcano were to cast forth its flaming fires, and again to burst out in thunder and lightning, they would be glad to escape from it, and flee to a city of refuge. Had they seen the flames, heard the thunders, and viewed the molten lava streaming down its sides, how glad they would be to get away from under its frowning top.

But again, the way to Mount Zion is through atoning blood; for as Hart speaks, "Blood lines all the way." It is only through the blood of Jesus that we have access to God. As the High Priest, on the great day of atonement, could not enter into the most holy place except he carried atoning blood in his hand, so without the precious blood of Christ we cannot approach God acceptably in His courts below, nor shall have access into the glorious courts above.

Again, the way to Zion lies through Christ's obedience to the

law in acting and suffering, in doing and dying, which constitutes our justifying righteousness. Nor can we be said to walk in Zion's way except as sprinkled with atoning blood and clothed in Christ's righteousness.

But the way to Mount Zion lies also through temptation. Nor are these temptations of a slight or passing nature. They are called in Scripture " manifold temptations," implying number and variety. They are therefore, for the most part, very powerful, and often very distressing. They cannot indeed be said to form a part of the way, but still they lie in the way, much in the same manner as mud and mire do not necessarily form the road, but so lie in the road that if we walk in it we must walk through them. So if we are walking Zionward we shall have our feet clogged by those temptations which lie in the road.

It is also a way of affliction and trial, for many are the afflictions of the righteous. These afflictions will be sometimes in providence and sometimes in grace. Many painful trials may be expected from various quarters, sometimes persecutions from without, and opposition of various kinds from within. I cannot now dwell upon the numerous afflictions of the Lord's people, as there is, for the most part, in them a great variety of circumstances, and they proceed from such various quarters; but from whatever source they arise, or of whatever nature they be, they all produce suffering and distress, and constitute the afflictions of Zion. One thing, however, we must never lose sight of in pointing out the way to Zion, that the Lord is Himself emphatically the way, as He declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." He therefore must ever be looked to as the only way to God.

III. But we now come to our third point, which was to describe in what way the heaven-bound pilgrims "ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward." They are represented by this expression as having turned their back upon the world and the City of Destruction, which Bunyan speaks of in his "Pilgrim's Progress." This is indispensable, for, until the back is fairly turned upon the

world, the face is not directed Zionward. When God takes a man in hand, He turns him, so to speak, right round, puts his back to the world, and his face to Mount Zion.

But, though their face is turned Zionward, they at present neither know it nor the road which leads into it. They are therefore said "to ask their way to Zion," the expression clearly implying not only their ignorance of the road, but their desire to find it and walk in it. But whence could this desire have arisen? It must have arisen from some discovery to their souls of what Mount Zion is. In other words, they must have seen and felt something of the beauty and blessedness of the gospel; it must have been in some way commended to their consciences; they must have had some such views of the Church of God and its high and glorious privileges as to make them long earnestly to partake of them. We read of the Lord making His people "willing in the day of His power," and the promise runs, "As soon as they hear of Me they shall obey Me." It is, therefore, the gracious movement of the blessed Spirit on their souls which has produced in them this willing mind to travel toward it, at every risk, and through every obstruction.

Here we seem to see the spirit of a true-born citizen, and to trace some of the genuine family features, some infallible tokens of divine relationship, manifesting and proclaiming their participation of a heavenly birth. A sincere, heartfelt love to the gospel is certainly a mark of grace, for it shows that those who possess it have received the love of the truth. Professors of religion who have not felt the power of truth have none of this love toward it. Nay, they hate the gospel even more than the world does. Those, too, who are filled with a legal spirit, who have never known either law or gospel by a divine application, but are still wrapped up in their own righteousness, are so far from loving the gospel of the pure grace of God that they rather hate it with perfect hatred.

How differently does God deal with His children! To draw His family Zionward, He graciously at times lets down into their soul a taste of its sweetness, and gives them to see a beauty and

blessedness in it, which touches their heart, and draws it forth in earnest desires to enjoy its blessings.

I wish to dwell markedly upon this point, because I consider it a very distinctive mark of a child of God. See how the gospel, when faithfully preached, works upon different individuals. Two persons may come to the same place of worship to hear the gospel. They may both be in a profession of religion, but the one shall be a nominal professor and the other under his profession may have divine life at work in his soul. Now he who has nothing but a profession will have his carnal mind stirred up to storm and rage against the freeness and fulness of gospel grace. The very blessedness of the gospel, and its suitability to the wants of a lost sinner, only serve to stir up the nest of vipers which previously lay hidden and coiled up in his carnal mind. But the other, who may not appear to know much for himself, at once feels a going out after and a clinging to what he hears, it being so commended to his conscience, and dropping with such a sweetness into his heart. Whence arises this difference in these two individuals? God has raised up in the latter a new heart and a new nature, which He has not given to the former; and it is this new man of grace, which though very weak and tender, and perhaps much buried and covered up from view, yet feeds upon what it hears of the word of life, and cleaves to it with purpose of heart. Thus there is a separation between these two individuals. The one tarries still at Mount Sinai; and the other, having had a taste of the sweetness and blessedness of Zion's provisions, goes out after them with earnestness. The power and preciousness of the gospel being thus felt, it sets the face Zionward. Nor do these pilgrims ever turn their back on Zion afterwards. All they want is to get into it, that they may see the beauty of the King, sit under His shadow with great delight, and find His fruit sweet to their taste. Having once tasted the power and preciousness of the gospel, their desire is to have more and more of it, for everything else, compared with the gospel in its power and preciousness, is to them vapid and tasteless.

I often think that our early days—what the Scripture calls, “the day of our espousals”—are our best days. It is much with spiritual love as with natural. People who have been married a number of years, though they may love each other as much as ever they did, and perhaps with a stronger degree of affection, yet their love has not in it the same ardour, warmth, and tenderness, as when they first came together. So in divine things, when a soul is first espoused to Jesus, in the days of its espousals there is a warmth of affection which it seems much to lose afterwards. It may have a more deep and solid love to Jesus; but it does not seem to possess that holy fervour and heavenly tenderness of affection which it enjoyed when the Lord was pleased first to manifest Himself. Now I do not mean to say that the soul enjoys this manifestation of Christ until it comes to Zion, but it often has sips and tastes beforehand; and it is these sips and tastes, with the blessed discoveries of the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel, which set the face Zionward. At this period of the soul's experience, there is usually a great fixedness of determination whereby the face is set as a flint against all obstacles without or within. It now says, “What care I whether I am liked or hated, honoured or despised, rich or poor? O let me be anything, rather than miss the prize! What need I care if I am right at last, and win Christ as my eternal all?” Under such feelings we can make sacrifices, care neither for friend or foe, be deterred by no opposition, and count nothing worth living or dying for but the precious gospel, and to enjoy a sweet manifestation of the power and preciousness of that gospel to our souls.

Now this earnest bent of the soul is setting the face Zionward. It is sweet to see how persons under these impressions ask the way thitherward. They feel their ignorance, and this makes them ask the way, for they are afraid of taking a wrong path. But this they do in a variety of ways. One way is to inquire of those who have travelled the road. Suppose, for instance, you were going to a strange country, say Australia, and there was in the town where you live a person who had been there many years, and had lately returned

home. Would you not want to see that person that you might get from him some correct information about the land whither you were going? So in divine things. If you are one of those who are asking their way to Zion with their faces thitherward, you will want to get into the company of those who have been to Zion, that they may tell you something of the beauties and glories of Zion, and the difficulties and troubles they experienced in getting there. You are thus brought to value the experience and exercise of the children of God. You can no longer despise and ridicule them as professors do, but feel a cleaving of soul to them, because you see in them the grace of God. If you have been taught highly to prize the grace of God, instead of despising the children of God, let their station in life be ever so mean, you will be glad to talk with them, and will often feel to get more instruction and real soul profit from their conversation than from books or learned divines. This, then, is one way of asking your way to Zion with your face thitherward.

2. But suppose if you were taking a journey to a strange place you had heard there was a map or a chart of the road published, would you not be very glad to get hold of one that you might look over it, and by it trace your path? When our fleets sail into the Black or Baltic seas, they always take their charts with them. These are what the pilot has continually to pore over, that he may not run upon the rocks, but may steer the ship in the right channel. God has given us a chart of the way to heaven. This chart is the Bible, the Scriptures of truth. When God's inquiring family, then, are asking their way to Zion with their faces thitherward, what students of the Bible they generally are! what earnest, what indefatigable Scripture readers they are! How they search God's Word as for hidden treasure, and what good it does them when it comes home with any sweet, encouraging power to their souls to assure them that they are in the way! We never read the Scriptures so much as when the Lord is first pleased to bless our souls. I have gone sometimes and lain on the warm sea-beach, within sound

of the waves, and almost learnt whole chapters by heart, and read them with a savour that I wish I could feel now. O how hard I find it to read the Bible now as I used to read it then! I tasted such a blessedness and sweetness in the Word of God at that time that I wanted no other company. And this, I believe, is generally true in those who ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward. How diligently and earnestly they read the Scriptures! What light, life, power, and blessedness they see in the Word of God, and as they thus sip a little of the honey out of the rock, how it makes them come to the Word of God again and again. When the Lord is thus pleased to cast a light on the Scriptures, and open up its precious truths to the heart, it seems to bring them into a new world, to give them a new bible to read, a new Jesus to look unto, and a new Spirit to teach and lead them into all truth.

3. But suppose there was a guide appointed to show the travellers the way, would they not wish to put themselves under his guidance, and listen to his directions? The Lord has provided such guides for His people. These are His servants, whom He instructs into His mysteries, and sends out as leaders and guides for inquiring pilgrims. These are the teachers promised, who are not to be hidden in a corner, but whom their eyes are to see. When, then, the Lord brings them into the way, He opens their eyes to see who are servants of His, whom He has instructed in the gospel, and whose word He blesses to the souls of His people. They therefore ask the way to Zion by sitting under the ministry of those who are commended to their consciences as taught and sent of God. I cannot speak upon this point of personal experience, for I never was privileged to sit under the gospel, nor did I know there was such a thing as experience, or that there were such persons as experimental ministers, until I had some experience in my own heart, and preached experience myself. But the Lord in mercy usually takes care to place His people under a gospel ministry, and gives them His servants to be their guides and instructors. This is a great privilege, but these guides are to be followed only so far as

they follow Christ and His Word, and not a single step farther.

4. But, best of all, there is an infallible Guide. Your earthly guide might through ignorance mislead you, for earthly guides are at best but fallible men. But there is a heavenly Guide who never can mislead, a Pilot who never makes a mistake, or steers the ship into a wrong channel. Those therefore who ask their way to Zion will be looking up toward that infallible Pilot, that holy and heavenly Guide, who is to lead them into all truth. But how do they ask their way to Zion? Must it not ever be by prayer, supplication, and entreaty, with cries, sighs, groans, and tears? This is the Lord's description of them: "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them."

IV. But we must pass on to consider the language which they make use of as they journey Zionward. We at first sight might ignorantly think that this was the language of free-will, but, if we thought so, it would be from a misapprehension of their meaning. There often occurs in Scripture a language which to ignorant people sounds like free-will, and which Arminian ministers bring forward as such. But to a discerning heart and a God-taught soul, it is on the contrary the sweetest language of free grace. Look, then, at these words, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord." To my mind, these words, instead of breathing the language of free-will, are full of sweetness and blessedness—the very cream and marrow of free grace. I will show you how.

We read, then, that the Lord works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. When, then, He works in us to will, we have a will, what I may call a free-grace will; and when the Lord works in us to do, we have not only a will, but also a power to do—what I may call a free-grace power. Thus it is free grace in its blessed influences and unctuous power in the heart which makes these Zion-bound pilgrims say, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant." Their desire is after union with the Lord. This implies the coming together of two parties. If, then, the Lord stretch forth His hand, and I take hold of that

outstretched hand, is it my free-will in the usual sense of the word which does it? Look at this idea naturally. Here is a young couple going to be married. When they take each other's hand for life, is not that on both sides a spontaneous act of love? Is there compulsion or constraint on either side? So in grace. If the Lord put forth His hand in a way of love, drawing thereby the heart unto Himself, and the soul in tender affection takes hold of that hand, is there in that act any particle of creature strength, or any act of the natural mind? So when these Zion-bound pilgrims say, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord," it implies that the Lord is drawing them to Himself. They are not only longing after, but enjoying a measure of spiritual union with Him, and it is as if they said, "O how blessed the Lord is! How we do love the Lord Jesus! How we cleave to Him, to His precious blood and justifying righteousness! O come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord, that we may enjoy blessed union and communion with Him!" Now, can you find free-will in these desires and expressions of a believing heart? So far from that, I only find in it the sweetest breathings of free-grace. But observe how the text is worded. "Come, let us join ourselves." How shall we explain this language of the pilgrims to one another? May we not explain it thus. Suppose you were journeying onward with a gospel traveller, and the Lord was blessing your soul with some sweet manifestation of His love and mercy, and your friend was rather hanging behind through doubts and fears, might you not safely encourage that limping traveller by saying, "Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant"? You believe that he loves the truth, and desires to experience a sense of the Lord's goodness and mercy. May you not, then, encourage him to believe from what you are feeling in your own soul? Here is a soul longing to be one with Jesus, to be married to and enjoy sweet union and communion with Him, and that in a perpetual covenant, so as to be His for ever and ever. Why should not that soul be encouraged to give itself unto the Lord? And if there be those here who are desiring, but have not yet attained to this, may I not say to them,

Has your soul never earnestly longed with intense desires after union with Christ, as though nothing else could satisfy you? Now when, perhaps, upon your bed, your heart was going forth after union with the Lord Jesus, you were saying inwardly, using the language of these pilgrims, "O let me join myself to the Lord in a perpetual covenant! Let Him be mine and me be His for ever, and let there never be any separation between Him and me. May I enjoy His blessed presence whilst here on earth, and afterwards see Him as He is in heaven." Where do we find free-will speaking of a perpetual covenant? Where does free-will even name a covenant at all? Why, a perpetual, an indissoluble, an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, is its very death-stroke.

Now the grand point is whether you can find in your heart any of these marks and testimonies of being a Zion-bound pilgrim. Has your heart ever longed after Zion, and its beauty and blessedness ever been commended to your conscience, and let down with any measure of sweetness into your soul? Has this brought you out of the world, and turned your face Zionwards, though it has cost you many sacrifices of a worldly nature, and you have been even obliged to turn your back on your dearest friends? Here, then, is a mark that the Lord has been dealing with your conscience. And can you see how you have been perhaps for years asking the way Zionwards by prayer and supplication, by reading the Scriptures, hearing the truth preached, and pressing forward as one desirous to know, believe in, and love the Lord Jesus Christ, being united unto Him in the bonds of this everlasting covenant not to be forgotten? Where we find these marks, we have a Scriptural evidence of a divine work on the soul. And those that thus set their faces Zionward will surely reach Zion. Not only shall they enjoy the power and preciousness of a free gospel here, but most certainly they shall hereafter appear before God in Zion.

156 Israel's Sun And Shield

Preached at Oakham, Rutland, on Lord's Day Morning,

July 9th, 1854

“For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee.”

Psalm 84:11, 12

Judging from internal evidence, there can be but little doubt that David, when he composed this psalm, was deprived of the privilege of worshipping in the courts of the Lord's house. Now, there were only two seasons, as far as we can gather from his history, in which David, for any length of time, was banished from the sanctuary which he loved so well. One was during the period of his persecution by Saul, when he was hunted like a partridge on the mountains; the other, when he fled from Jerusalem, driven thence by the rebellion of his son Absalom. On which of these two occasions, we may ask the question, was this psalm written? According to the date in the margin, it was written during the latter period, namely, when Absalom's unnatural rebellion had made him a wandering fugitive, and, but for the special providence of God, would have stripped him both of crown and life. And to this point of time we seem tied down by the word Zion in the seventh verse: “They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.” Zion did not belong to the children of Israel in the days of Saul, but was still possessed by the Jebusites, the ancient inhabitants of the land, from whom it was only conquered by David, who made it his own city, and afterwards brought up into it the ark of the Lord.

Being, then, deprived of the privilege of worshipping in the courts of the Lord's house, he breathes forth in the psalm before us his desires after it. “How amiable,” he cries—that is, how lovely, how desirable—are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts. My soul longeth,” and, as if that expression were not strong enough to convey his feelings, he adds, “yea, even fainteth”—as though his desires

after them were so intense that he swooned under the weight of absence from them—”yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” His desire was to enjoy the presence of the living God as he had felt it in the tabernacle, and to see His power and glory as he had seen them in the sanctuary, as he speaks in another psalm: “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 Thee in the sanctuary.”

I have thought sometimes, and I believe it is true, that the Lord in those days was wont to manifest Himself in the tabernacle to His believing people in an especial manner—a manner to which we have no full similarity in His earthly courts now; for though it is a blessed privilege to meet in the house of prayer, to worship Him in spirit and in truth, to hear His Word, and sing His praise, yet we have nothing in the assembling of ourselves together exactly parallel to what the worship of the tabernacle was to the believing Israelite. It was there, and there only, that God recorded His name; it was there, and there only, that His presence was specially pledged; there alone were the sacrifices offered; there only the altar of incense sent forth its odoriferous breath; there, and there only, the ark of the covenant, and the mercy-seat sprinkled with the atoning blood, and the Shechinah, or divine cloud, manifesting the presence of God as resting between the cherubim, were seen. As the tabernacle was the place where the Lord especially dwelt, so He appears to have made Himself especially known in the manifestations of His presence to the believing Israelite when he came to worship in the Lord's house. This made Daniel open his window toward Jerusalem when he knelt and prayed three times a day; this, also, led Jonah, when in the whale's belly, and in his own feelings in the very belly of hell, to say, “Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple.”

The promise which God specially made to Solomon was, “I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put My name

there for ever; and Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually." This blessedness we cannot be said indeed to have altogether lost, because we possess in substance what they had but in figure—Jesus Christ, the true tabernacle, which God pitched and not man. But we cannot expect to realise in our assemblies that peculiar blessedness which the believing Israelite enjoyed in the earthly sanctuary. Our sanctuary is not on earth, but in heaven; and as every desire of the believing Israelite, in ancient days, went out towards the tabernacle, as the standing type and visible representation of the promised incarnation of the Son of God, so every desire of the believing Christian now goes out after and centres in the Lord Jesus, He being the true antitypical tabernacle in which the fulness of Godhead dwells.

Time, however, will not permit of my running, even in a cursory manner, through the whole psalm, though it is full of beauty and blessedness. I pass on, therefore, to the words of our text, merely observing, by way of showing their connection with the general bearing of the psalm, that when David uttered them it was as though he said—"Here I am, a stranger in the wilderness; driven from my throne and home by my ungodly, unnatural son; deprived of the privilege of worshipping in the Lord's courts, and banished from that sanctuary where I have been so blessed and favoured. But is all lost, because I am deprived of these highly-prized mercies and privileges? Is all my hope for ever gone? Is not God still the same in every place? Is He not still full of mercy and goodness?—my God, my sun, my shield, here as well as in Jerusalem? and though I cannot see Him in His earthly tabernacle, as in days past, days looked at and longed for, yet can I not, and do I not, feel Him here in the wilderness still precious to my soul?" Look now at the words of the text in the light of this short commentary. "For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee."

In opening up these words I shall, with God's blessing, follow

the order of the text, taking up the four clauses as they lie before me; but they seem so full of blessed truth, that I feel I shall not do justice to the text, to you, or to myself, if I crowd all my thoughts and feelings upon it into one sermon. I shall not attempt, therefore, to venture beyond the first clause this morning. The Lord give His blessing to what I may speak in His Name.

"The Lord God is a sun and shield."

How simple, beautiful, and expressive are the figures of Scripture! They are so pregnant with divine meaning; there is lodged in them such a fulness of heavenly truth, and at the same time such a suitability to the wants and exercises of the family of God, that they cannot be too closely examined, or too highly prized. Let us then endeavour to gather up the spiritual meaning of these two striking figures, each in its order.

i. "The Lord God is a sun." Bear in mind that whenever the Scripture speaks of "the Lord God," it usually means Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three Persons in one glorious Essence. There is no division or discord in the Holy Trinity. All the thoughts and acts of the three divine Persons are one, though their operations differ according to their several undertakings in the covenant of grace. What the Father wills, the Son wills, and what the Son wills, the Holy Ghost wills. When, therefore, the Scripture speaks of the LORD God, it does not speak of the Father to the exclusion of the Son, nor of the Son to the exclusion of the Spirit, for in Deity there is neither division nor disunion—"Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one Lord!" but as the Lord Jesus Christ is especially spoken of in the prophet Malachi as "the Sun of Righteousness," we may view that figure as especially applicable to the second Person in the glorious Godhead, Immanuel, God with us.

Now, look at the sun—I mean the natural sun, that blazes in the midday sky; and see what a beautiful representation it is of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The sun is the centre of our system. It is only by its attraction that the earth is kept in its orbit. Without the sun the earth would

not only be a miserable chaos, but could not even exist; nor was there ever a period when there was earth without sun, for "in the beginning," we read, "God created the heavens and the earth." So the Church has no existence separate from Christ. He holds her in her orbit, and draws her to Himself by His attractive influences, as the sun attracts the earth. "Draw me, we will run after Thee." From this primary connection between the sun and the earth come all its subsequent operations and influences.

2. From it, for instance, comes light. How darksome is the earth in the absence of the cheering orb of day! What would the earth be without the light of the sun? A chaos of miserable confusion, without life or inhabitant, a wild, desolate waste, worse than the crater of a volcano. Jesus is to the Church of God that divine light of which the sun to the natural world is but a dim representation. The sun is but a creature—a dead and lifeless creature. He is the Creator. The sun shines only by divine command, and exists only by divine sufferance. Jesus shines in the rays of eternal Deity, and will continue to shine when the light of the natural sun is quenched. But as without the light of the sun the world would fall into desolation, so without the light and sustaining influences of the Son of God the Church would fall into nothingness. As, too, the sun gives light to the whole earth, "his going forth being from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it," so Jesus gives light to all His believing people; for there is not a ray nor a sparkle of divine light in the soul which does not come out of His glorious fulness.

But was not the sun made to shine? Is not this its appointed office? When the creating voice of God set that glorious orb in the sky, was it not placed there by Omnipotence itself, that it might shine forth in countless rays of blazing splendour? Thus we may say that in shining the sun only fulfils the office which God gave it to perform; and the more brightly and gloriously it shines, the more does it accomplish its appointed work. So we may say of the blessed Jesus. He is the Sun of the church; and when God set Him

as the great High Priest over the house of God, at His own right hand, in the heavenly places, He put Him, so to speak, as a Sun in the spiritual firmament; that, as the natural sun gives light to the world, so Jesus might give light to the church. "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory." We read, therefore, of John the Baptist, "He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:8, 9); or, as the words might be rendered, "that was the true light which, coming into the world, lighteth every man;" that is, every believing man, every partaker of grace. Now can the earth produce light of itself? Can she call up from her dark caves and inward abysses any beams for her own illumination? Neither can a child of God produce light in his own heart, or raise up from its dark caverns any cheering rays to gladden and illuminate his own soul. But does the sun wait until he sees some light previously kindled on earth before he begins to shine? He rises at the appointed hour; and when he bursts forth from his chambers in the east, he gives forth his bright beams without waiting for any previous light kindled in his absence, through ignorance or rivalry, to supply his place. Is it not so in grace? You may try to elicit some light from the depths of your own heart; you may search its inward recesses, hoping to find in them some cheering beams of hope, some rays of divine comfort. But what heavenly light can you find in that fallen nature of which the apostle said, "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing?" To look then for light in ourselves, distinct from that which shines into the soul out of the fulness of Christ, is to look into earth's dark caverns for sunshine. Not to speak of its hidden caves, the very face of the earth is dark without the sun. Such is the face of the soul without Christ. But when He, the Sun of righteousness, rises upon the soul with healing in His wings, He brings light with Him; and in this light we not only see Him, but every other object on which He

shines. Our evidences, waymarks, and testimonies all shine forth as He shines upon them. We can no more see Jesus by the eye of faith without seeing light in His light, than we can see the natural sun without seeing his light shining all around. But sometimes the natural sun is obscured. It is so to-day. When I was here last, it was shining brightly into our midst. Now the day is cloudy, and his bright beams are veiled from sight. But have we not light enough to see one another and surrounding objects? By the light of the sun, though himself you saw not, you walked hither, and by the same light you will walk home. On the last Lord's day that I was here, the sun brightly streamed through every window. Now his light is comparatively dull, and his rays are hidden by clouds. Yet is he not the same sun now as then? So it is in grace. We have not always the same bright light shining into the soul, nor do we always feel the Lord's presence gladdening the heart. The Sun of righteousness, according to our feelings, is then beclouded, and His light dim and dull; yet it is the same light that enlightens us when we walk in darkness as when we walk in the light of the living. Nay more, not only may clouds veil his face, but he may for a while set, as he will certainly do this evening; but will he not rise again at the appointed hour, and shine brightly as before? So Jesus, the Sun of the church, seems at times to set—as if He were gone and gone for ever; but He rises again at the appointed season; as He said to the disciples, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice."

3. But whence come all warmth and heat? Is it not out of the sun? He is not only the fountain of all light, but the source of all heat, that is, as regards the face of the earth. So Jesus is the source of all divine warmth in the soul. How cold, how frozen, our hearts often are—the flowings and gushings of love and affection locked up as if in chains of ice. Can you at such wintry seasons raise up one living affection towards the Lord of life and glory? Can you produce one genial glow, one soft, melting sensation, when frost and ice thus congeal your very heart? No; nor can you melt yourself into contrition, brokenness, godly sorrow for sin, weeping and

mourning with and over a suffering Man of sorrows, any more than the earth can thaw itself into softness, or than a brook, when locked up in frozen chains, can of itself flow down into a running stream. The chilled earth and ice-bound brook want the sun to shine upon and into them; and when his beams burst forth in their genial heat, more is done by them in five minutes than without his warmth they could do for themselves in five centuries. So it is in grace. We may try to pray, read, and meditate, and thus seek to warm our cold, icy heart into love, submission, and obedience. Alas! it is but chafing a frozen limb with snow. If a momentary glow be obtained, it soon becomes cold as before. But one ray of love shining out of the fulness of the Lord Jesus Christ is able in a moment to give us that heavenly glow, that divine warmth, that melting of soul, and dissolving of heart which we could not produce by all our own exertions, separate from grace, if we were engaged in them every moment of our lives.

4. And whence come joy and gladness to the earth? Does not the sun gladden the whole face of creation? What a contrast between a day of gloom and of sunshine! How when the sun bursts forth, the very birds hail with gladness his returning beams, and sing to him their grateful songs of joy. How every glowing and beauteous tint is reflected in the clouds above, and lights up mountain and vale beneath. How it even cheers our animal spirits to walk abroad in the early spring with the bright sun shining in full lustre over our heads. How it seems to refresh the wearied body and restring the slackened nerves. Is not this also true of the spiritual Sun? Whence comes every gladdening sensation of the soul; whence all spiritual joy, all real heartfelt happiness? Only, only from the shining in of the beams of the Sun of righteousness. It is only He that puts gladness into the heart more than in the time that the corn and wine of worldly men increase. What joy and gladness His presence creates in the soul of a downcast sinner, when he can say, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with

gladness" (Psa. 30:11).

5. And is not the sun also, in a certain sense, the source of all life? In winter how all creation seems buried in torpor and death. But when, with returning spring, the sun once more climbs his airy height, and darts forth his former beams, how nature at once revives out of its state of wintry death; and what new life is put into all animated creation! Is it not so with the Sun of righteousness? What life is there in the soul except what He is pleased to bestow? What life is there in praying, preaching, hearing, or meditating, except He is pleased to revive His own work in the heart? This made David say, "Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?"

6. And is not the natural sun the cause of all fruitfulness? Where would the harvest be without the sun? Where bread for man, or food for animals, except as produced by his ripening influences? What fruit, too, could arrive at maturity and flavour were it not for his genial rays? So, where is any Christian fruit except as produced by the Sun of righteousness? How unable is the soul to bring forth any fruit to the honour and praise of God except as that gracious Sun is pleased to make it fruitful in every good word and work! O it is not our own exertion, or any strength of the creature, that can produce in our hearts, lips, and lives any fruit acceptable to God. "From Me is thy fruit found;" "Without Me ye can do nothing," is the testimony of the Scripture, and the express declaration of Jesus. That all Christian fruit is only produced by the beams and rays of this blessed Sun of righteousness is a truth which every child of God will most heartily subscribe to; nor is there one truly taught of God who will not say that as the Lord Jesus is the only source of his light, life, heat, and gladness, so is He the only source of all his fruitfulness.

If, then, these be the real feelings of your heart, have you not the same experience that David here speaks of? "The Lord God is a sun." This he knew, for he had felt His beams; he knew also what those beams produced; he had seen His light, and felt His

life; it had gladdened his eyes, and warmed his heart, dispelled his gloom, and revived his soul.

Thus he knew there was a spiritual Sun by soul experience, as he knew there was a material sun by bodily experience, and he could therefore say, in the language of faith and love, "The Lord God is a sun. Let men say what they will, He has been, and is, even now in this wilderness, a sun to my soul." It will be a blessed thing for us if we can see eye to eye with David in this important matter, and say the same thing from a similar experience.

But is not the sun sometimes eclipsed? Do not clouds and darkness often veil his face? And does not the soul in a similar manner often go, as one speaks of old, "mourning without the sun?" It does. But is the sun then utterly extinct? Do the clouds that hide his face sweep him from the sky? Is there no sun because we cannot see him? "No," you say, "the sun is still there, even though he be eclipsed, and he still shines behind the clouds, though I cannot see him on account of them." But you will see the sun by-and-by shining the more brightly for his temporary absence. After the cloudiest morn is there not often a bright afternoon; and even if the whole day has been one of clouds, does not the sun sometimes go down without a single wreath to intercept his beams? So in grace. How many of God's dear children have walked in darkness the greater part of their days, and yet have made a good end! The rays of the Sun of righteousness have gilded their dying pillow, and gladdened their hearts, before they shut their eyes on earth to open them for ever in heaven.

ii. But He is also a shield. "The Lord God is a sun and shield." How diversified are the figures of Scripture! First the Lord is spoken of as "a sun" to shine, and then as "a shield" to protect. David, we may observe, does not say, "The Lord is like a sun," but he says, "He is a sun." And so he does not say, "He is like a shield," but, "He is a shield." How is the Lord a shield? What is a shield? It was a warlike implement used in ancient times to protect the person of the warrior, but now discarded as useless, through

the improvement, if I may use such an expression, of the arts of warfare. When men fought with spears and arrows, then the shield was a very useful weapon of defence, it being made of light yet tough materials, such as hard leather or steel, so as to receive and ward off the thrusts of the enemy. The leading idea, then, couched under the figure of a shield, is a weapon of defence.

Now, look at this idea in connection with the Lord Jesus. A shield implies that we are exposed to the spears, arrows, and other deadly weapons wielded by numerous, yea, innumerable enemies; and that the Lord Himself is our only protection from them.

1. Look, for instance, at the law. O, what a curse belongs to it! How fearful is the language which it breathes! "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Have you ever felt what it is to be cursed of God in your getting up and in your lying down, in your coming in and in your going out? O to be cursed of God! No language can describe the horror of a man's soul who feels or fears he is under His curse. We need not wonder that a man should be tempted to commit suicide if he feel the curse of God in his soul. It seems as if he could not do anything less, were he not prevented by the special providence and sovereign grace of God. But O! how the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, interposed as a shield between the curse of God's righteous law and the souls and bodies of His people. The shield receives into its bosom the thrusts of the sword and spear and points of the deadly arrow, and thus preserves the warrior unharmed. How this thought seems to bring before our mind's eye the sufferings and sorrows of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the shield of the warrior is pierced with the arrows and spears of the enemy, so the curses of God's righteous law pierced the holy soul and body of Jesus. "Thine arrows," He says, "stick fast in Me." Those curses which would else, through all eternity, have lighted upon the Church, all fell upon the Church's Head; and thus by piercing the incarnate Son of God, they could not reach her; for she stood as if behind the shield which He interposed between the Law and

her, when He presented His sacred body and soul to drink up all the bitter wrath of God. O what a glorious and blessed truth, that all the penal wrath of God due to the Church fell upon Him, and by falling on Him was intercepted, so that not a single arrow or dart can ever take effect upon the bride and spouse of the Lamb, her covenant Head and Husband having bled and died for her.

Now, if your soul has ever been favoured with a taste of mercy, with a sip of the brook by the way; if ever your conscience has felt the application of atoning blood, or the love of God has ever been shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost, when the law comes to curse you, endeavour always to bear in mind that the Lord Jesus Christ stands as the shield between you and its curse. The law has therefore nothing to do with you that believe; it has cursed Jesus Christ for you; as the apostle declares, "He was made a curse for us;" and again, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree," &c. Therefore the law has nothing to do with you who believe in Christ Jesus. He has intercepted the curse for you, and, by receiving it into His own body and soul, bore it harmless away from you. It is a blessed act of faith when you can thus take Christ in your arms and hold Him up as a shield between the law and your conscience. And this the apostle seems to hint at in a measure when he says, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked;" for many of these fiery darts are taken from the law. It is indeed a great and especial act of faith thus to take Jesus Christ in the arms, and, holding Him up in the face of the law, to be able to say, "Law, thou hast nothing to do with me; Jesus has fulfilled all thy righteous demands, and endured all thy tremendous curses. He is my shield, to protect me from thy condemning sentence; and all thy curses are harmless; they all fall short of me, because they all fell wholly upon Him." I say this is a special act of faith, because we cannot do it except as divinely enabled. Otherwise, it would be but an act of presumption. I may add, also, that it is a very rare thing to be enabled so to take Christ and hold Him up as a shield

against the curses of the law; but when done under the influences and operations of the blessed Spirit, it is an act of faith which God approves of and honours. Nor is there any other shield to intercept its tremendous curse.

2. But what accusations there are also from a guilty conscience! What inward condemnation on account of the slips, backslidings, and inconsistencies that we are continually guilty of; and what self-reproach and self-abhorrence there is or should be for all these things! How are we to get relief from these stings of internal guilt and self-reproach? By the same all-gracious and all-glorious shield; by interposing the Lord Jesus between the conscience and the accusations of guilt that alarm and terrify it. When we can see the Lord Jesus dying to redeem us from all our sins, and washing us from them in His own most precious blood, then and only then do we get any true or spiritual relief from the accusations of our own condemning conscience. A guilty conscience is a very trying thing. It brings great darkness into the mind; stops the mouth of prayer; beclouds all evidences; seems at times almost to drown faith, bedim hope, and damp the flame of love, until it is relieved by the application of atoning blood, pardoning grace, and manifested mercy. Till then, we have no sweet liberty of access to God, nor is there any real peace and joy in believing.

3. But there are also the fiery darts of Satan. The great object of Satan is, first, to tempt a child of God to sin, and when he has entangled his feet in his net, then to turn accuser, and tell him he has now sinned beyond all reach of mercy. These accusations are some of his "fiery darts." We must not think that Satan's fiery darts are only blasphemous suggestions. He can and does make great use of our own guilty conscience, as well as of the law, and often forges his arrows, as well as sharpens and tips them, in the inward furnace of our own creating. This, indeed, is the sharpest arrow in his quiver; for there is none that sinks so deep, or makes such galling wounds, as that barbed shaft which is first dipped into the fire of a guilty conscience. Nor can it ever be fully or rightly extracted until

we see it lodged in the heart of Jesus, and can believe that He bore these and all our other aggravated sins and backslidings. Here it is chiefly that we see what "a shield" He is against the fiery darts of the enemy.

4. But, in addition to these inward darts, we have also outward reproaches to meet with, if we walk consistently with our Christian profession. These taunts and reproaches are very cutting and lacerating to our feelings, especially if they come from those who are near and dear to us in the flesh. But how are these best met? Here we shall have occasion to use the same shield. When we can see how the Lord Jesus was reproached, slandered, wrongfully accused, and despised when here below in this ungodly world, this is interposing Him as a shield between us and all our reproaches for His name's sake.

"If on my face for Thy dear name,
Shame and reproach there be,
All hail reproach, and welcome shame!
If thou remember me."

But let us seek to bring the points we have been considering this morning more to a head. O what a mercy for the Church of Christ that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus has not left her, as He might justly have left her, to perish in her sins, but has provided for her a Saviour, and a great one, and does from time to time encourage every poor, self-condemned sinner to hope in His mercy! The very things, poor exercised soul, that most try your mind are the very things that make such a Saviour suitable to you. You are dark; this makes the Sun of righteousness exactly suitable to enlighten you. You are cold; this makes you want the Sun to warm you. You are cheerless and cast down; this makes you want the Sun to gladden you. You are barren and unfruitful, and lament that you cannot bring forth fruit to God's glory; you want the Sun to fertilise you. You are, at times, very dead in your feelings, and can scarcely find any inclination to pray, meditate, or read the Scriptures; you want the Sun to enliven and revive you. Are not,

then, these very trials and temptations necessary to make you feel that the Lord Jesus is the Sun, the very Sun that David felt Him to be? What value do those put upon the Lord Jesus who make a fire for themselves, and walk in the sparks of their own kindling? What is Jesus to those who know no trouble of soul? What real and earnest prayer or fervent desire have they after Him? what ardent longing for His appearing? what breathings to see and feel His blood and righteousness? O! it is sharp exercises, manifold trials, and powerful temptations that make the soul really value the Lord Jesus.

Now, is not the sun made to shine? It is his office to do so. So it is with the Sun of righteousness; He is made to shine. And does the natural sun lose any of his light by shining? Why, the more he shines, the more light he seems to have. For ages he has shone as brightly as now. His beams were as glorious before we had birth or being, and will be as glorious when the eyes which now see him are mouldering in the dust. Thousands of harvests has he ripened, millions and thousands of millions has he fed; but he shows no sign of exhaustion or decay. And does Jesus lose anything by communicating His light, life, love, and grace? He is all the more glorified thereby; and the more you look to Him as the Sun, that as such He might shine into and upon your soul, the more you glorify Him as the Sun of righteousness. When in the morning we throw the shutters back, or draw up the blinds, it is to receive the sun into the dark room. So the more we are enabled by divine grace to throw back the shutters of doubt and fear, and draw up the blinds of unbelief which hang down over the mind, the more we glorify the Lord Jesus by receiving out of His fulness, and grace for grace. O! it is good to be sometimes enabled to look beyond and above doubts, fears, misgivings, and the many things that try the mind. You may pore over your sins and miseries till you fall well nigh into despair; you may look back upon your wanderings, inconsistencies, and want of fruitfulness, till you are almost ready to sink down without hope and die. To do this is to resemble a

person wandering in a dark room, tumbling over the furniture, and at last sitting down and saying, "There is no light." If he can but throw back the shutters, the sun will shine into the room. So we sometimes may sit pondering over our many inconsistencies till we say, "There is no light in my soul; there never was, and there never will be." O to be enabled (when I speak thus, I know well, from soul experience, that it is only God who can do it in us and for us) to throw back the shutters, and look away from those things that so weigh down the mind! Look up, O sinking soul, and see the blessed Sun still shining in the firmament of heaven. Why, the very power to do this, the very act of doing so, brings with it a felt blessedness.

How good, also, to be enabled to make use of Christ as a shield! O how often we go to battle without this shield upon our arm! But depend upon it, the Lord would not have provided such a shield for you unless He knew that your enemies were too many for you. Doubt, fear, darkness, despair, the law, the accusations of a guilty conscience, the fiery darts of the devil—how can you fight against these enemies without a shield? Why, you would be like a soldier going out against the Russians without either sword or musket, and laying his bosom bare to all their weapons, without Minie or bayonet in his hand to defend himself. So, to go into combat against the law, the accusations of a guilty conscience, and a desponding heart, and have no blessed Jesus to hold up as a shield against these deadly foes, would be enough to sink a man into despair. But if he be enabled to make use of the shield that God has provided, and to hold Christ up against a condemning law, a guilty conscience, an accusing devil, and a desponding mind, and say to them all, "Christ hath died, and died for me," then he receives into the shield those darts which would otherwise sink into his soul, and then they all fall harmless, because they all fell on the Lord Jesus.

Now, whether you can see it or not, feel it or not, believe it or not, it is still the same grand truth in God's holy Word. You may

lack the comfort of it, but there it is; and if God be pleased to seal it on your heart with a divine sweetness and power, you will say, “Blessed be God that there is a spiritual Sun to warm my soul, and gladden my heart; and blessed be His holy name, there is a shield, for without that my soul would sink into interminable despair.”

157 The Power of the Gospel

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord’s Day Afternoon,

October 29, 1854

“For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance.”

1 Thessalonians 1:5

Election! what a word is that! How distastefully for the most part it falls upon the ears of men! Why is this, but because it so exalts the sovereignty of God, and so loudly declares the fallen, helpless condition of man? But the Apostle speaks the word out plainly enough. He did not keep this doctrine according to godliness back. In the verse preceding our text we meet with these words: “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” It is evident from these words that the Apostle knew that those to whom he was writing were amongst the elect of God. But how came he by this knowledge? When he was caught up into the third heaven, did the angel bring to him the golden book, and, turning over the leaves, did he show him in the Lamb’s Book of Life the names of those Thessalonians to whom he wrote this epistle? No; nor did he wish to see it; his soul was too much taken up with viewing the beauties of the Lamb to want to glance into the Book of Life to see whose names were inscribed therein. He did not know it from that source. He tells us from what source he did know it. He knew it, first, from seeing their work of faith, their labour of love, and patience of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and his Father; and, secondly, because his “gospel came not unto

them in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” It is in the same way, my friends, that we must come to know our election. It is not by hearing the doctrines in the mere letter, nor by chattering about them with fluent tongue; but by having those blessed communications of the Spirit of God whereby “the gospel comes not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” unto us. In opening up this subject, I shall, from the words before us, attempt, with God’s blessing, to show three things.

I.—First, what is the meaning of the words “our gospel.”

II.—Secondly, what it is for the gospel “to come in word only.”

III.—Thirdly, what it is for the gospel “to come not only in word, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” And if the gospel has so come into your heart, you may thus know your election of God.

I.—“Our gospel.” By the word “our” the Apostle seems to embrace not only his fellow apostles, all of whom preached the same gospel, but all his fellow believers. In those days there were not two gospels. The apostles who were sent forth all preached the same gospel. But the word “our” includes not only his fellow apostles, preachers and teachers of God’s word, but the converts to whom he preached, and, amongst them, these believing Thessalonians; for that gospel became his and theirs when it was received into their hearts by the application of the Holy Spirit. But what does the word “gospel” signify? “Gospel” is a good old Anglo-Saxon word of that pure Anglo-Saxon which forms the bulk of our noble language, and means, literally, “good news,” good tidings. But if it be good news, it must be good news of something and to somebody. There must be some good tidings brought, and there must be some person to whom it is communicated. This was the good news or glad tidings which the angel of the Lord brought to the shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night, when he said unto them, “Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto

you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10, 11.) And with this was joined the heavenly anthem, when the angelic choir sang “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luke 2:14.) In order, then, that the gospel should be glad tidings, there must be a message from God to man—God being the sender and man the hearer; God the giver and man the happy receiver. But this gospel can only be worthy of the name when it proclaims grace, mercy, pardon, deliverance, and salvation, as free gifts of God’s unmerited favour. Otherwise, it would not be a gospel adapted to our wants, to us poor sinners, to us law breakers, to us criminals, to us transgressors, to us arraigned at the bar of justice, to us condemned to die by the unswerving demands of God’s holiness. Our gospel will only then be a pure gospel, it will then breathe the very atmosphere of heaven, it will then flow in streams of living water as flowing out of the throne of God and the Lamb. Then it is not only pure of any taint of human merit and creature attainments, but flows clear as crystal, as John saw in vision in the book of Revelation.

It is therefore not only pure but clear, brightly and beautifully transparent. Not being muddied with any admixture of the creature, the image of God is to be seen in it as it flows onward in streams of crystal transparency. Every perfection of Deity is revealed and reflected by the crystal streams of the gospel.

Again; it must be free. To suit our case, it must flow without let or hindrance out of the bosom of God into the hearts of his children, so that it may not be obstructed in its course, but come as freely and fully into their heart as Ezekiel in vision saw the river flow from out of the temple into the desert, and thence into the Dead Sea, healing its salt waters.

This gospel, then, thus pure, clear, and free, is glad tidings as proclaiming pardon through the blood of Jesus Christ, and justification by his obedience to God’s holy law. It therefore magnifies the law and makes it honourable; brings glory to God and salvation to the soul. It is a pure revelation of sovereign mercy,

love, and grace, whereby each Person in the divine Trinity is exalted and magnified. Now nothing short of this, nothing less than this is our gospel, the gospel preached by the apostles and received by the New Testament believers.

If you love a pure, a clear, a free gospel, the gospel of the grace of God, you love it because it is so fully suitable to your wants, so thoroughly adapted to your fallen state, because it not only speaks of pardon, but brings pardon; not only proclaims mercy, but brings mercy; not only points out a way of salvation, but brings salvation with its soft silvery notes to your heart as a sinner. It thus becomes the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth.

i. But this gospel comes to some “in word only.” It never reaches their conscience, touches their heart, or has any saving effect upon their souls. It is in itself a good gospel, a pure, a clear, a free gospel; but as regards many of those to whose outward ears it comes, it produces no effect, it bears no fruit. The seed may be good in itself, excellent of its kind, but if cast upon the pavement there it may lie till trodden under foot of man, or picked up by the birds of the air. There is no fault in the gospel, as there is no fault in the seed which is cast abroad by the hands of the sower. The whole difference is in the ground upon which the seed falls. How many there are, indeed, we may say, by far the greater part who sit under the sound of the gospel, to whom it comes in word only.

But you may say, “What a singular thing it is that they should come Lord’s day after Lord’s day on purpose to hear the gospel, and yet not be saved by it, not be blessed by it, not be wrought upon by it, have no interest in it, but live, die, and be damned under the sound of it.” This is indeed a mystery; but it always was so. And we may perhaps explain it thus. There is something in the gospel which seems to commend itself to the natural understanding, a something pleasing in it to the natural minds of some men. For there are in it sparkles of divine glory which seem to shine brightly where prejudice is in some measure removed. But apart from this, various motives work in men’s minds. Some, from hearing

the gospel often preached, have got a notional acquaintance with it, which leads them boldly to contend for it and it only. Yet, as a revelation of God to their soul, as a manifestation of pardon and peace to their heart, as a life-giving word to save them from eternal misery, they know it not, believe it not, feel it not, and realise it not. Thus the greater number of the hearers of the gospel live and die in their sins, just as much as though they had never heard the way of salvation declared, or the work of God on the soul experimentally traced out. It is to be feared there are many more hearers than we think to whom the gospel thus comes in word only. It may touch their natural feelings; it may gratify their love of hearing; it may commend itself to their understanding; it may seem to produce some kind of fruit; but with all this it produces no real spiritual effect, no saving efficacy, and with the gospel sounding in their ears they still live and die in their sin. Now this is no fault of the preacher of the gospel nor of the gospel which he preaches. It is in the hearers who are dead in sin, or dead in a profession. If God do not bestow upon them his supernatural grace nor favour them with his blessed Spirit, they may hear the gospel all their days, and yet live and die as devoid of faith in the Lord Jesus, as though they had never heard even of his name.

II.—But we pass on to show what it is for the gospel to come “not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” My friends, power belongeth not to man. It is a very solemn assertion but it is a very true one that no man can quicken his own soul. It is a very solemn, we might almost say, a tremendous truth, that the gospel only comes in power to those whom God has chosen unto eternal life, and that a man cannot, by any exertion of his own will or power, quicken his own soul into spiritual life, or communicate to it faith, hope, love, repentance, or any saving grace of the Spirit. For so thoroughly dead is he in sin, and such a poor crawling wretch, and cleaving to his mother earth through the fall, that he cannot raise himself up out of this state to newness of life. But O! in spite of all this, the Lord has a people who

are dear to him, and to whom he makes himself dear. These are the elect of God; and where the Lord has a vessel of mercy whom he has thus chosen to eternal life, in due time, and in his own time and way, the gospel will be made to come with power to his heart and conscience.

i. But what is meant by the word “power?” It is a term much used in the New Testament. “The kingdom of God,” it is declared, “is not in word but in power.” What then is power? It is a divine operation; God himself puts forth in the soul. It cannot be described by words, nor can language explain it. It must be felt to be known and must be realised in a man’s own soul before he can have any conception of it. But “Thy people shall be willing,” we read, “in the day of thy power;” and when the gospel does come to the soul by the application of the blessed Spirit, and a divine power accompanies it, it is made known by the effects which follow. For instance: here is a poor wretch condemned by the Law; he may perhaps see there is salvation in Christ, and he knows there is salvation in no other. O how he begs, and prays, and petitions God to have mercy on him! Continually is he endeavouring to seek God and ask him to have mercy upon his soul; but he cannot get peace to his conscience; he is still in trouble and distress; bowed down with bondage, guilt, and fear. Now where the Lord is pleased to apply some portion of his blessed word to his soul, or to speak home some particular promise, the power that accompanies this, raises up a special faith whereby that portion of God’s holy word which speaks of Christ, or that promise is laid hold of. Here then is power communicated with the gospel whereby he believes in the gospel as revealed in the Scriptures; he could not believe it before. No; he might as well attempt to create a world; but no sooner does he believe what the Holy Ghost now applies by a living faith, than a divine power comes into his soul which takes away his doubts and fears, dispels guilt from his conscience, banishes the mists and fogs that for months have hung over his soul, reveals in him a precious Jesus, makes the promises of God

to glitter before his eyes like dew drops in autumn, and gives him an unspeakable nearness to God, such as he never knew till the gospel came with power, and faith was raised up in his soul. This is power. Power then does not consist in noise and bluster, fantastic flights of enthusiastic excitement or any such wild delusions. How was it with the prophet Elijah when the word of the Lord came to him, "Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire." (1 Kings 19:11, 12.) In none of these was the Lord; but "after the fire a still small voice." In this still small voice God was, for when the prophet heard the still small voice "he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entering in of the cave," that he might listen to the voice of God. We should have thought there was a power in the earthquake, in the wind, and in the fire; but God was not in them. In all these loud and visible demonstrations the voice of God was not; in them was no power. But when the still small voice began to speak, it came with that divine savour and unction, and was so evidently the voice of God himself, that it touched the prophet's soul, melted his spirit, and faith was raised up to receive with simplicity what God with authority spake.

Now, tell me, has the gospel ever come to you in power? If it has, it has done something for you. Has it ever, then, dispelled your many doubts and fears; has it ever made Jesus precious to your soul; ever brought with it a promise to your heart; ever given you access to the bosom of God; ever communicated that spirit of liberty and love whereby you were enabled to prevail with God, and get a blessing out of his hands and heart? It is useless to talk of power when nothing is done. A man says to an engineer, "I want you to construct me an engine of a hundred horse power." Now, if the engineer make the engine, and upon trial it is found only of

ninety horse power, and the work requires a hundred horse power, the engine is so far useless. Now what would his employer say to him but, "What a mistake you have made. I ordered an engine of a hundred horse power; and this is only ninety. It will not do the work I want. Take it away, and get about your business." So in grace. We want a power that can move certain weights; the weight of sin, for instance, off a guilty conscience, fears of death and hell; the strength of unbelief, the workings of carnal enmity, and many trying assaults and temptations of Satan. We have a large amount of work to be done; many hundred-weights to be moved—weights, that if not moved, would sink the soul into endless despair. O! what numerous and heavy weights have we to be lifted off; what huge stones to be rolled away from the sepulchre. The world has to be overcome; lusts and passions to be crucified; the old man of sin to be mortified; Satan to be defeated and put to flight. But besides all these enemies to be overcome, there is the soul to be saved, heaven to be brought near, hell put out of sight, the law to be forever silenced, death to be robbed of its sting and the grave of its victory, and an eternal crown of glory to be won. O! what a mighty work has to be done in us and for us—a work which no man ever has done or can do for himself. Now if the gospel does not do all this for us, we may say of it what the contractor would say to the engineer, "It will not do for me; it will not perform my work, take it away; bring me something that will do my work, and I will thank you; but do not deceive me in this weighty and important matter; but bring me an engine that will do my work, or keep it to yourself." This is what we may say to a muddled gospel, a Galatian gospel, which is not the gospel, but a muddy medley of law and gospel. Such a half-and-half gospel will not do your work; will not save or bless your soul; therefore, send it about its business. Do not pause one moment, but say to it, "Get away from me; you will not do my work. I will not take you into my heart; you shall not have a footing in my conscience; I will have nothing to do with you, and you shall have nothing to do with me. My

sins are too black and grievous, my backslidings are so great, my lusts and passions so powerful, the world so ensnaring, business so captivating, the devil so tempting that I am sometimes almost at my wits' end. Now, as you cannot help me out of these difficulties nor do for me the work which I want to be done, get about your business; it is of no use my standing here and talking any more to you." This is what I advise you to say to all or any muddled mixture of law and gospel which may present itself for you acceptance. Say to it, "I have a conscience to be healed, the law to be satisfied, Moses to be silenced, the thunders of Sinai to be hushed; besides all which, there is a poor soul of mine that wants to be saved with an everlasting salvation; and, as nothing but the gospel can do this for me, it has a place in my heart and conscience, and in it I hope to live and die."

This may explain the reasons why the Lord makes so many of his people to sink so low in their souls, and why Moses peals such terrible thunder-storms in their ears. This may serve to explain why their sins press them down like so many tons of lead; why they are frequently assailed with such powerful temptations; why they are so often cast into hot furnaces of affliction, and well-nigh drowned in floods of sorrow. All these painful lessons are to teach them that God only of his infinite mercy and grace can save or deliver them; and that the only way whereby he does it is by his precious gospel being made the power of God unto their salvation. When, then, this gospel comes with power to their soul, "Ah!" they cry, "now I have got it." "This is the very thing for me." "Right at last; right at last." "This is the thing I wanted." A pure, a clear, a free, a precious, an everlasting gospel; unfolding the riches of God's mercy, magnifying his grace, satisfying his law, revealing his pardoning love, and bringing a precious Christ with it into the soul. O, may we not say, as Hart speaks on a similar subject?

"Be this religion mine."

To know, feel, and experience this, is for the gospel "to come not in word only, but also in power." You may depend upon it,

that those who have ever felt this power in the gospel, will never part with nor turn aside from such a glorious gospel. Nay, it will grow upon them increasingly in love and affection; and the more they feel its power, the more will they love and cleave to it. I cannot, therefore, understand the ease of those persons who, after professing the gospel of free grace for many years, in their declining days turn aside from it to embrace a muddy mixture of law and gospel. Nor, indeed, can I understand how anyone, whether, old or young, who has ever felt the power of the gospel even in a small measure, can forsake it for Arminianism and free will. We may ask with the prophet "Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken?" (Jer. 18:14.) I can understand how one may get entangled with a worldly spirit from too much occupation in business; and how another may be overcome by the temptations of Satan, so as to call everything in question. I can understand, also, how a third may be overcome by the power of sin; but I cannot understand how a man can turn his back upon the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ after he has ever felt its precious power. It seems to me easier for him to turn his back upon all religion, than leave a free grace gospel for a mixture which, in fact, is neither law nor gospel. I find the gospel more and more precious. The more I see of myself as a poor miserable sinner, the more I see, or want to see, of the beauty and to experience the power of a free grace gospel. It was, doubtless, some feeling of this kind which led the Apostle Paul to denounce such thundering sentences against the Galatian churches, for turning aside from the gospel which he had preached unto them, to embrace what he calls another gospel, but which was not the gospel of Christ.

III.—But the gospel came to them "not only in power, but in the Holy Ghost." This is the third point to which I was to call your attention. The Holy Ghost is the third Person in the Trinity, and it is his peculiar province and divine office to apply the Scriptures to

the soul. We see with what power he clothed the apostles when he came down upon them, and what mighty effects he wrought upon the souls of the people under the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Ghost will honour nothing but the gospel of Jesus Christ. He never preaches anything to the soul but Christ's gospel; nor is he ever made manifest but in and through this everlasting gospel. Men may talk about the Holy Spirit; they may contend for him and for his operations; but that holy and divine Teacher and Comforter never travels out of Christ's gospel; and all which he reveals, manifests, and applies is from and through the gospel. It either flows out of the gospel or is connected with the gospel. His covenant office is to take of the things of Christ and reveal them to the soul; not the things of Moses, nor the things of self, but the things of Jesus Christ. When, then, the Scripture comes in power, it comes also in the Holy Ghost; that is in the light, life, liberty, and love of the Holy Ghost. By these divine operations through the Scriptures, he makes a man a spiritual man; communicates his gifts and graces to his soul; and raises up that "new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." He comes as a Spirit of grace and supplication; a Spirit of wisdom and understanding; a Spirit of the fear of the Lord; a Spirit of faith in Christ Jesus; a Spirit of hope in his mercy; and a Spirit of love towards his name. He comes as a Spirit of repentance and godly sorrow for sin, making the conscience tender and the heart contrite; and meekens and humbles the soul, conforming it to the suffering image of Christ. He comes as a comforter in the Scriptures to bind up broken hearts and wipe tears from the eye; he comes as a Spirit of truth to lead him into all truth, and instruct him in the blessed realities connected with it.

But the Holy Ghost never comes into any poor sinner's soul except through the medium of the gospel of the grace of God. Have you ever considered that point? You are praying perhaps that the Holy Spirit would teach you and be in you a Spirit of revelation, a remembrancer, a comforter, instructor, and teacher. You pray

for his gifts and graces; but have you ever viewed these graces in connection with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Now, if you want the Holy Spirit to come into your soul, you must keep firm hold of the gospel, you must not run away from it to the law or to self, but keep firm, fast hold of it so far as you have felt its power and have faith in it. If you are tired [tried?], still hold the gospel; if tempted, still hold the gospel; if Satan gets you into his sieve, still hold the gospel; if in the furnace of affliction, still hold the gospel. If you are called upon to wade through floods of sorrow, still hold fast the gospel. If Satan tell you you have no part or lot in the matter, still hold fast to the gospel. Let not Satan, if ever you have felt the power and preciousness of the gospel, baffle you out of it, or drive you from it, but hold to the gospel for it is your life. If you are a poor, guilty, conscience-stricken backslider, hold the gospel, for in that alone is pardon and healing contained and revealed. If you are tempted with manifold and grievous temptations, still hold the gospel, for through the gospel alone can come any real or lasting deliverance; and it is through the gospel that you may hope the Holy Ghost will speak a delivering word to your soul. If you are burdened with many doubts and fears of your interest in Christ because you cannot believe, or be what you would, still do hold on firm and fast to it, because it is only by the gospel that these fears can be removed, and a word of peace be spoken to your conscience. If you are wading through deep afflictions, and need a word of consolation, still hold by the gospel; for it is through it that all real comfort is imparted. And may I not ask you whether this is not commended to your conscience as sound doctrine and good experience? If not, tell me what you can substitute for the gospel? What balm is there to be found any where else for bleeding wounds? What pardon for guilty sinners? What peace for rebels? What terms of composition for enemies, but in the gospel of the grace of God? Where else will you find any thing to suit your case if you are a poor, tempted, tried sinner? Will you go to the law which can only curse and condemn you? Will you go to

yourself? What is self? It is a heap of ruins. What then can that do for you? And not only a heap of ruins, but all mouldering ruins—ruins of which every brick has in it the rot and all its mortar fallen into dust. So utterly ruined is self that with all your contrivances to get something out of it, it is like making a rope out of sand, or like drawing up water with a bucket with the bottom knocked out. Where then will you go? After all you must come to the gospel if your soul is to be saved and blessed, and if you are to experience the consolations of the Holy Ghost, who alone can bless and comfort you; for that blessed Spirit only comes by and through the gospel into the heart. I want, with God's blessing, to impress this vital truth upon your mind, that you may not be looking away from the gospel; and as Berridge says, "squint and peep another way," but that you may keep your eyes firmly fixed upon the gospel; for if you believe it, it can and will save your soul. Does not the apostle say that it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth? So, then there is neither power or salvation in anything else. Never therefore, expect power, salvation, or comfort but by and through the Holy Ghost preaching the gospel into your heart.

iii. "And in much assurance." The word "assurance," here, does not imply that they were necessarily in the enjoyment of an assurance of their personal and individual interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, though I do believe myself that faith always has assurance in it in proportion to its strength. Faith contains assurance in it, as the flower contains the fruit; and yet, if faith be weak, it does not mount up to the full strength of assurance. But what is assurance? It is really only a large measure of faith, differing from faith not in quality but quantity; not in nature but in degree. Assurance, then, is only faith grown to man's estate, or faith raised up so as to act in a powerful way. It is not, therefore, a gift of the Holy Spirit distinct from faith, but faith drawn out, as it were, and shone upon by the blessed Spirit. It therefore rises and falls, ebbs and flows with faith and the actings of faith. But the "assurance" here spoken of is not so much an assurance of interest, as an assurance that the gospel was

the gospel of the grace of God. It was therefore, not so much their assurance of their personal interest in the electing love of God, as an assurance that the gospel which Paul preached, and which had come to their souls in power, was the gospel of the grace of God.

Now, have you not sometimes felt this firm and sweet assurance when you could not perhaps feel the certainty of your own salvation? There was something in the gospel as preached in your ears which came with that demonstration and power, that savour and sweetness to your soul, as fully convinced you it was the gospel; and as such, was worthy of all acceptance. Under these feelings you could scarcely forbear, crying out; "This is the gospel; I can live and die by this gospel; I am sure, and more than sure, that this is the gospel. I see a beauty in it; I feel a power in it. I have inward and solemn delight in it; it drops with that savour and sweetness into my soul; it is so commended to my conscience; it so shines into my understanding, that I am sure it is the very gospel of the grace of God; and what I can and do embrace as suitable to all my wants, and glorifying to God." Now, this assurance may not be an assurance of your interest in the gospel, but still it is such an assurance that the gospel preached in your ears is the gospel of the grace of God, that you embrace it with all the faith that is in your heart. The law has no assurance of this kind, except the assurance that all are cursed who live and die under it. Nor has a muddled mixture of law and gospel this assurance. It may terrify and alarm the conscience, as Wesleyans talk of being shaken over hell, and may produce powerful convictions, and hold the mind in bondage and terror but it does not shine with that beautiful grandeur; it does not warm the soul by its blessed beams nor come with that peculiar demonstration and power which attends the gospel. That sometimes carries with it such a blessedness, that it seems so to lift the soul out of itself as to take and carry it gently into the bosom of God. That comes with such balmy sweetness into the conscience, and drops with such life and light into the poor benighted spirit, that it dissolves into love every tender affection of the heart.

There is something in the gospel which never can be described; it carries with it its own evidence, and shines in the brightness of its own testimony. Wherever this is felt, the gospel has come, “not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”

It is this divine power and heavenly assurance that makes God’s people so love the gospel. Men wonder sometimes, and say to one another, “How is it that these people will walk so many miles to Stamford, or Oakham, or elsewhere, year after year, in all weathers, to hear preaching? We wonder why they cannot stay at home, and attend their parish church, or the chapel in the village: but instead of remaining quietly at home, they will trample through mud and mire as if they were mad.” Ah! these people do not know the sweetness that there is in the gospel when preached with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The people of God feel that there is nothing but this which can move the loads of sin under which they groan, take guilt off their conscience, lift up their affections to God, bring sweet and blessed feelings into their soul, and give them an assurance of their salvation. It is this secret power attending the gospel which makes it fall like dew drops of honey from heaven. And wherever this is felt, it gives such a love to the gospel, that a man cannot help going to hear it: nay, he will time after time walk many miles merely with the hope of feeling one soft touch of this heavenly power. He will come Lord’s day after Lord’s day, for month after month merely to get a honey drop from the mouth of God through the gospel; and if it be given him, it well repays him for all his toils, his sore limbs, weary feet, and aching head. “O!” says one of these despised ones, “to get a testimony of my interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, in his dying love and precious blood is well worth going many weary miles for.” And if he be sometimes overborne with fatigue through the week’s work, and feel almost disposed to stay at home, yet says he, “I must go again, for if the Lord should be pleased this day to give me a little taste of the gospel, and of my interest in it, I shall not mind how tired I

am at night.” This, then, is the secret why the Lord’s people travel so far to hear the gospel; and this will explain why they love the preachers of the gospel, the books that savour of the gospel, the people that know the gospel, and feel sweet union with those who have experienced the power of the gospel. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant,” which is the gospel; and because this gospel has come to them “not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance,” they love it, delight in it, and cleave unto it. Now, if you can find anything of this in your soul, you are one of the elect of God. “Knowing, brethren beloved,” says the Apostle, “your election of God.” This was to him a proof of their election of God, that the gospel had come to them “not in word only, but also in power; and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”

If, then, the gospel has come with these three things into your soul, you are the elect of God. God has chosen you in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, he gave you to his dear Son, that he might redeem you from death and hell. You are saved in him with an everlasting salvation. Walk then worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called. Bless and praise the God of all grace for his glorious gospel, and praise that divine power with which his gospel has come into your soul.

158 A Spiritual Death And A Hidden Life

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

July 20th, 1856

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.”

Col. 3:2-4

What a signal mercy! what a blessing, as beyond all price, so

beyond all conception, and all expression, is it to be a believer in the Son of God! Hundreds, thousands, millions, live and die without any knowledge of Him, any faith in Him, any love towards Him. And what must be their eternal destiny? What but the lake that burns with fire and brimstone? Our reasoning mind, when not subdued by divine teaching, our naturally compassionate feelings, when not softened into acquiescence with the divine will, pause and ponder; and when in imagination we seem to look down into the flames of eternal woe, and think of the thousands and millions that will for ever welter there, we instinctively shrink back. If such feelings be indulged, we may soon be drawn aside to pity lost souls; when once we begin to pity lost souls, Satan may draw us on to pity lost devils; and when we begin to pity lost devils we rebel against God, until the mind becomes filled with every base imagination too vile for me even to allude to. We must, therefore, at any cost, hold fast by the Word of God's testimony; for when once we depart from that, we wander into mazes of error and confusion. Now, if we adhere to God's testimony, we seem, to my mind, to come to these three points: 1. That the soul which lives and dies without knowing the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be a partaker of eternal life; for He Himself says, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." If, then, eternal life consists in the knowledge of Christ, eternal death must be the consequence of not knowing Him. 2. Again: the Lord says, "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." We come, therefore, to this solemn conclusion, that if a man live and die without a spiritual faith in the Son of God, he is and must be eternally lost. And, 3. We come to a third conclusion, from the same inspired Word of testimony, that if a man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, and live and die without His love being shed abroad in his heart, he falls under the curse of God; for the Apostle Paul, speaking in His name, says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema," i.e., let the solemn curse

of God rest upon him. So that if we adhere to the Word of God's testimony we come to this solemn conclusion, though in coming to it we seem to cut off and indeed do cut off millions, that without a saving knowledge of, without a spiritual faith in, and without a divine love to, the Son of God, there is no salvation; and therefore that those who die without that knowledge, without that faith, and without that love, must perish in their sins.

But the point that concerns you and me is, whether we have this saving knowledge of, this living faith in, and this heavenly love toward the Son of God; for we have to stand before His bar, we have souls to be saved or lost, and the grand question with every one whom God has quickened into spiritual life is, "Lord, is it I? How stands my soul before God? On what ground does it rest for eternity?"

The Epistles, and amongst them the Epistle to the Colossians, are addressed to the Church of God. When, therefore, the Apostle says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God," he addresses these words to believers—to those who, by virtue of a vital union with the Son of God, and by being made partakers of regenerating grace, have risen with Christ, and having risen with Christ, and sitting with Him in heavenly places, are seeking "those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." It is, therefore, to believers, and to believers only, in the Son of God, that he addresses the exhortation of our text, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Why? "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." But will it be always so? No; for "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."

In looking at these words, I hope I shall not confuse your minds, nor complicate my subject, if I arrange my thoughts under five heads.

- I. I shall endeavour to show how Christ is "our life."
- II. How the believer is "dead."

III. How his life is hid with Christ in God.

IV. How it springs from this—that he is to “set his affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”

V. Lastly, the sweet and blessed promise that puts the crowning blessing upon the whole: “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.”

I. Union with Christ is the grand truth revealed in the Scripture, and the fountain head out of which every blessing springs. But to understand this we must carry our thoughts upward and backward, to look at the foundation of the eternal union that subsists between Christ and the Church. The Fall did not break in upon the purposes of God as a river swollen with heavy rains bursts in upon and desolates the smiling plains. It was an event fore-viewed and fore-provided for; and therefore, in the counsels of eternity, a people, “a multitude which no man can number,” was given to the Son of God, and united to Him by a union so close, so ineffable, and so indissoluble, that though the Scripture does give us figures to help our conception, yet all earthly figures fall far short of the divine reality. There is no union in nature that approaches in closeness the union betwixt Christ and His people. “I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one.” What natural oneness can ever approach a union thus set forth by the words of Him who cannot lie?

But to help our conceptions, the Scripture has given us various figures to set forth the eternal union that subsists between Christ and His Church. The vine and the branches, the corner-stone and the stones that surround it, the husband and wife, the head and members—all these are Scriptural figures, whereby the eternal union between Christ and His people is set forth. Now, it is by virtue of this eternal union between Christ and His people that when He suffered they, so to speak, suffered with Him; when He died, they died with Him; when He lay in the tomb, they lay with Him; when He rose from the grave, they rose with Him; when He ascended up on high, they ascended with Him; and when He sat

Himself down in heavenly places, at the right hand of the Majesty on high, they virtually sat down together with Him. All this was independent of the work of grace upon their soul, whereby they are brought in due time to a living apprehension of it. There are members of Christ who are not at present in living union, and yet have an eternal union with Him. We may conceive this even in the instance of the human body. Take the case of a frost-bitten hand. That is to all vital movement and feeling perfectly dead; and would, unless vivified and restored, rot and perish. But by timely aid, and proper appliances, it is restored, and becomes a living, active member of the body. So there are members of the mystical body of Christ still dead in trespasses and sins. Nay, many are not even in existence, but are still unborn. As the Lord Himself speaks, “In Thy book were all My members written, when as yet there was none of them.” These, then, have not yet received regenerating grace to give them a vital union; but they have eternal grace stored up in Christ, as their covenant Head, whereby they possess an eternal union. In due time the Spirit of grace will come into them, and quicken them into spiritual life; and then they will be not only one with Him in that eternal union, which is the source of all other, but they will have a living union by faith, whereby being joined to the Lord, they become one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), and so receive out of His fulness grace for grace.

In this sense Christ is “our life.” When the blessed Spirit has breathed upon us, quickened us into spiritual existence, communicating the life of God, brought Him near to us and brought us near to Him, and given us a living faith to apprehend Him, then He becomes “our life,” our Head, and from Him we derive all supplies of faith, hope, love, and every grace.

II. I pass on to consider how a believer is “dead;” for the text says, “Ye are dead.” Religion, true religion, is full of paradoxes. There is no real contradiction in the work of grace upon the heart. But there are many paradoxes. The apostle, for instance, says, “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many

rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things.” These are not contradictions, but they are paradoxes; that is, they are apparent, not real inconsistencies. So in the text, the believer is not dead in one sense, yet he is dead in another; yea, by a singular paradox, when he is alive he is dead, and when he is dead he is alive. As the apostle says, “I was alive without the law once.” He was not really alive, for he was dead in sin; but when the law came and slew him, though there was life in his soul, yet by that law he was killed and slain; as he says, “When the commandment came, sin revived and I died.” Now, a believer, a child of God, is dead in two senses: he is dead as regards the law, and he is dead as regards the gospel; and I shall show you how. First, he is dead by the law; as the apostle says, “I through the law am dead to the law.” The law comes home with spirituality to his conscience, and by its condemning sentence it slays him utterly; it kills him as to all legal hope.

But we may say, perhaps, if we examine the subject a little more closely, that the law kills in three senses, and in three ways.

1. First, it kills by its spirituality and curse, when it is opened up in a sinner’s conscience, in some such words as, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” When that killing sentence comes into a man’s conscience, it slays him as to salvation by the works of the law; it condemns him, and kills him outright, as to any hope that may spring from his own righteousness.

2. The law kills, secondly, by stirring up the movements of sin in the carnal mind. As the apostle says, “The motions of sin, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.” Sin lies in our mind at times almost torpid; at least we are unconscious of any vigorous movement. The law comes. What is the consequence? Sin is revived by the condemnation that the law brings. There is something in our nature that resists prohibition, and rises up against it. If there were so many rooms in a house, and there was a strict charge given you that you should not go into one

certain room, that would be the first room you would want to enter. If there were so many different kinds of fruit put on the table, and you might touch every fruit but one, that one would be the one you would want to eat. There is something, then, in our perverse nature, which prohibition seems to stir up into movement. Thus the law, prohibiting sin, rouses up sin by the very prohibition it gives. “Thou shalt not do this.” “Aye, but I will.” “Thou shalt do this.” “Aye, but I won’t.” There is thus the vigorous movement of the carnal mind setting itself in opposition against the will of God. And thus the spirituality of God’s law kills, not only by cursing us in every thought, word, and deed that does not come up to the required perfection, but by rousing up the very sins that it does condemn; and thus brings us in doubly guilty.

3. And there is a third sense in which the law condemns; which is, by not only slaying once, outright and for ever for transgressions past and gone, but by continually passing a fresh sentence of condemnation against every sinful thought, word, or deed, as it springs up into manifestation. Thus it is not only the scythe in the hayfield that mows down the long and strong crop of grass, but the scythe on the lawn which cuts down the fresh grass as it springs up. And thus, first, by its spirituality, secondly, by its stirring up of sin, and thirdly, by its constant sentence of condemnation, the law kills and slays the soul which is under its curse and bondage. In that sense, then, a believer is “dead.” When, however, the law has executed its office it is virtually dead also. It has done its worst, and dies in doing it. Like a bee it dies in stinging. Let us look a little more closely at this point. A man is arrested for a certain crime, for the commission of which the law of the land adjudges six to twelve months imprisonment. The man is found guilty, and the law takes its effect. But with the last stroke of twelve on the last day of his imprisonment, he is as free as his jailer; the prison doors are thrown open, and the law is as dead to him as much as if he had never broken it. So in the case of the condemned murderer. When the law has hanged him, and his body is taken down from

the fatal beam, the law is as dead to him as if it had never executed him. This is the apostle's meaning when he says, "I, through the law, am become dead to the law." When the criminal dies by the law, he becomes dead to that law which has killed him. The law is then dead to him, and he dead to it.

But there is another sense in which a child of God becomes "dead;" and that is by virtue of a living union with Christ. When, after being killed and slain by the law, mercy reaches the soul with any revelation of Christ, any manifestation of the love of God, or any application of His truth, a divine power is put forth that raises up a living faith in the Lord Jesus, as sitting at God's right hand; and this living faith puts us into a vital possession of all those benefits and blessings which are in Christ Jesus. We know not who or what Christ is till He reveals Himself; we know not what He has suffered, or what we are in Him till He is pleased to manifest Himself. But when he discovers His blessedness and beauty, He raises up a spiritual faith in Himself; and by this spiritual faith we apprehend what He is and has, and receive out of His fulness grace for grace; and thus we enter by living faith into the benefits and blessings of His death and resurrection. It is in this sense that we become "dead" by the gospel, as we became "dead" by the law. Now, it is only as we drink at the fountain-head, and receive by living faith out of Christ's fulness, that we can be dead in the full sense of the apostle's meaning; for when he says, "Ye are dead," he implies the death of a child of God to everything around him—to all those things that lead the soul into captivity and bondage. We are to become "dead" to everything by which we are surrounded. How? By a vital union with the Son of God; by seeing who and what Jesus is, and entering by faith into His sufferings and sorrows, death and burial; and then rising with Him into heavenly places, and receiving supplies out of His fulness. It is by this experience that a death is put upon the things of time and sense, and we become, as the apostle speaks, "dead" in the true gospel sense of the word.

How many poor souls are struggling against the power of

sin, and yet never get any victory over it! How many are daily led captive by the lusts of the flesh, the love of the world, and the pride of life, and never get any victory over them! How many fight and grapple with tears, vows, and strong resolutions against the besetting sins of temper, levity, or covetousness, who are still entangled and overcome by them again and again! Now, why is this? Because they know not the secret of spiritual strength against, and spiritual victory over them. It is only by virtue of a living union with the Lord Jesus Christ, drinking into His sufferings and death, and receiving out of His fulness, that we can gain any victory over the world, sin, death, or hell. Let me bring this down a little to your own experience. Say your soul has been, on one particular occasion, very sweetly favoured; a melting sense of the Saviour's precious love and blood has come into your heart, and you could then believe, with a faith of God's own giving, that He is eternally yours; and through this faith, as an open channel of divine communication, His merits and mediation, blood, righteousness, and dying love, came sweetly streaming into your soul. What was the effect? To lead you to sin, to presumption, to licentiousness? Nay, just the contrary. To a holy obedience in heart, lip, and life. Sin is never really or effectually subdued in any other way. I have often thought of the conversion of Colonel Gardiner as an instance in point. It is an extreme case, I admit, and one, perhaps, unparalleled in the annals of grace, but it will, perhaps, throw light on the subject before us. He, being dead in sin, had made an assignation with a married female, and was waiting to keep his criminal appointment. To while away his time, he took up a book; and whilst reading, a light suddenly streamed on the page. Looking up to see the cause, he beheld in vision Christ hanging on the cross, surrounded with heavenly glory, and these words seemed spoken as with an audible voice, "Did I suffer all this for thee; and are these thy returns?" I offer no opinion on the vision itself, though I believe it was from the Lord. What I want to show is, the effect produced on his soul. It overwhelmed him in a flood of

sorrow, and swept away in a moment every thought of his criminal engagement. Saul struck down at the gates of Damascus, and turned from persecution to praying, is a scriptural instance of the death of sin by the power of Christ. It is not, then, by legal strivings and earnest resolutions, vows, and tears, which are but monkery at best (a milder form of the hair shirt, the bleeding scourge, and the damp cloister), the vain struggle of religious flesh to subdue sinful flesh, that can overcome sin; but it is by a believing acquaintance with, and a spiritual entrance into the sufferings and sorrows of the Son of God, having a living faith in Him, and receiving out of His fulness supplies of grace and strength—strength made perfect in our weakness. In this sense the apostle says to these Colossians, “For ye are dead;” not merely by the law having condemned and slain you, as to all legal hopes, but by virtue of a participation in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, by virtue of a living union with the suffering Son of God. “Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law,” where sin reigns with increased dominion, “but under grace,” which subdues sin by pardoning it. If you read Rom. 6 with an enlightened eye, you will see how the apostle traces out the death of the believer unto the power and prevalence of sin, by virtue of a spiritual baptism into the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

III. But I pass on to our third point, which is very closely connected with the two preceding. I have been endeavouring, hitherto, to trace out from the Word of God, and from the experience of His saints, these two vital positions; first, the union that a believer has with the Son of God, giving him communion with Him in sufferings and death, as well as in resurrection and life. I then went on to show how the believer, by having this living union with the Son of God, received into his soul Christ’s death and sufferings; and by virtue of these, felt in living experience, obtained a victory, according to the measure of his faith, over sin and the world. Now I pass on to a point closely connected with these two, which is, the life of a believer being hid with Christ in God.

I said religion was made up of paradoxes. Paradoxes are not contradictions; at least so only in appearance, for though they contradict each other in one sense, yet not in another. Here, then, is a paradox: dead, and yet alive. “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” But, my friends, what a blessed thing it is to have a life in the soul that never can die! What will all our profession avail us if we are not made partakers of this spiritual, this eternal life, by regenerating grace? But if we are, this life can no more die out of our heart than Christ can die out of heaven. His own words are—and let His own words stand, say unbelief and Satan what they will—“Because I live, ye shall live also.” Here, then, is our life, if God has quickened our souls into spiritual being. It is Christ Himself; and the life that He gives out of His fulness He will Himself maintain, according to His own declaration: “My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.”

But this life is a hidden life; and hidden in two senses. 1. First, from all human view. As Hart speaks of faith,

“Deep in the heart it lies;

so with the life of God. It lies deep in the heart, and lying there is necessarily hidden from all human eye, except so far as is manifested by fruits following.

There is nothing so deep, nothing so hidden, as the life of God in the soul. It seems to be enshrined in the lowest depths of a man’s heart. It does not float upon the surface, like a cork upon the water, but sinks deep, very deep, into the very bottom of the soul. Therefore hidden from the eyes of a profane world; hidden from the professing world; and what is more, sometimes hidden from the subject of it himself. A child of God often cannot see his own faith, nor can he discern the life that is bubbling and streaming up in his own bosom. It is not a lake, spread abroad in the meridian sunshine, to attract every eye; nor is it a brook that flows babbling on over the clear pebbles; but it is a well. “The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting

life.” Therefore hidden from view. The best part of our religion is that which is least seen. The secret cries, groans, tears, confessions, supplications, and breathings after God do not for the most part come abroad; the despondency, heart sickness, trials, perplexities, and powerful temptations, with which many a dear saint of God is exercised, do not come to view. No; nor his fears, sinkings, guilt, misery, and self-condemnation. Yes, the best part of his religion is hidden from view, for the weightiest ever sinks the deepest. And as it is with the dealings of his soul with God, so it is with the dealings of God with his soul—making and keeping his conscience tender, reviving the fear of God, drawing the heart upward into prayer and meditation, watering his spirit, and bedewing it with the secret dew and rain of His grace. Thus, the best part, because the spiritual part, of a man’s religion is hidden from the eyes of all, except as the fruits thereof are manifest. Take your stand upon yon hill, and see that thread of verdure spreading itself through the barren plain. Whence comes that green strip which you see? Coming down to examine it, you find a little brooklet threading its way through the barren plain. It is this brooklet that, watering the roots of the grass, gives it that verdure; yet the brooklet itself is hidden till the eye is brought close to it. So it is with the life of God in the soul. We see the effects, the verdure produced by the brooklet: but the brooklet itself, the life and grace of God in the innermost soul, is hidden, “hid with Christ in God.”

And if not merely hidden, but hidden with Christ in God, what a sacred, what a holy, what a truly divine life it must be! If this be spiritual religion, that it dwells with Christ Himself in the bosom of God, what a divine thing, what a heavenly possession! how full of eternal blessedness must the religion of a child of God be! It is locked up in two distinct places, yet united with each other by virtue of the humanity of Christ, and the faith that embraces it. If I may use the expression, one end is in the bosom of God, and the other in the believer’s breast! Compare man’s paltry, beggarly religion with this supernatural life of God in the soul—Christ

Himself formed in the heart the hope of glory. Words would fail to express the eternal distinction between them.

2. But the word “hidden” will carry another idea—out of reach, treasured up, therefore safe. What would have become long ago of the life of God in the soul, if it could have been robbed, trodden out, or lost? But this it never can be, for it is locked up in the person of the Son of God. It is, therefore, out of the reach of Satan, sin, death, and hell; safe in Christ’s keeping, locked up in His eternal bosom. Were it otherwise, where should you and I long ago have been? Where would our religion have gone to, unless we had reason to believe that it had been kindled by the power of God, and was maintained by the same power which first gave it birth? This is the grand consolation of a child of God—to believe that he has the life of God in his soul; and to feel, day by day, that He who gave that life maintains it in firm and living exercise.

IV. This brings us to our fourth point: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”

Has God by His Spirit and grace planted divine life in your soul? Has He made you a partaker of the benefits and blessings of Christ’s sufferings and death, blood and righteousness? and is your life “hidden with Christ in God?” Where are your affections, then, to be? Are they to be set on things on the earth—those perishing toys, those polluting vanities, those carking cares, which must ever damp, though they cannot destroy, the life of God in the soul? Oh! we may well say to those who have any vital evidence of being dead, yet alive, “Dear brethren, set your affection on things above; let your thoughts, your desires, your wants and wishes, be fixed on heavenly realities; let them not grovel on things below, which, fondly loved and eagerly pursued, can only bring bondage and death into your soul.”

The expression, “Things on the earth,” takes a wide scope. It embraces not only the vain toys, the ambitious hopes, the perishing pleasures in which a gay, unthinking world is sunk and lost; but even the legitimate calls of business, the claims of wife

and home, family and friends, with every social tie that binds to earth. Thus every object on which the eye can rest, every thought or desire apart from God that may spring up in the mind, every secret idol that lurks in the bosom, every care and anxiety that is not of grace, every fond anticipation of pleasure or profit that the world may hold out, or the worldly heart embrace—all, with a million pursuits in which man's fallen nature seeks employment or happiness, are "things on the earth" on which the affections are not to be set. Love we may our wives and children; pursue our lawful callings we should with diligence and industry; provide for our families we must according to the good providence of God; but set our affections on these things we may not when they pull us down from heaven to earth. He who is worthy of all our affections claims them all for Himself. He who is the Bridegroom of the soul demands, as He has fairly won, the undivided love of His bride.

But how are we to do this? Can we do this great work of ourselves? No; it is only the Lord Himself manifesting His beauty and blessedness to our soul, and letting down the golden cord of His love into our breast, that draws up our affections, and fixes them where He sits at God's right hand. In order to do this, He captivates the heart by some look of love, some word of His grace, some sweet promise, or some divine truth spiritually applied. When He thus captivates the soul, and draws it up, then the affections flow unto Him as the source and fountain of all blessings. We are not flogged into loving Him, but drawn by love into love. Love cannot be bought or sold; it is an inward affection that flows naturally and necessarily towards its object and all connected with it; and thus, as love flows out to Jesus, the affections instinctively and necessarily set themselves "on things above, and not on things on the earth."

But what are these "things above?" They are all things stored up in Christ, that breathe of Christ, and come out of Christ. Pardon, peace, righteousness, love, "joy unspeakable and full of glory," with strength against sin, victory over death and hell, power against besetting lusts and temptations—in a word, every

blessing wherewith God hath blessed His people "in heavenly places in Christ;" these are the "things above" that the soul has to set its affections upon. But we must have some view by faith of the Person of Christ, the eternal Son of the eternal Father; He must be revealed to our soul by the power of God before we can see His beauty and blessedness, and so fall in love with Him as "the chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely." Then everything that speaks of Christ, savours of Christ, and breathes of Christ, becomes inexpressibly sweet and precious.

This is "the golden oil" that flows into the heart; this is the "sweet-smelling myrrh which drops upon the handles of the lock;" this is "the aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces;" this is "the love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown;" and by an experience of this the affections become set on things above. And in no other way can they be lifted up from earth to heaven. We cannot control our affections; they will run out of their own accord. If then our affections be earthly, they will run towards the earth; if they be carnal and sensual, they will flow towards carnal and sensual objects. But when the Lord Jesus Christ, by some manifestation of His glory and blessedness, or the Holy Ghost, by taking of the things of Christ and revealing them to the soul, sets Him before our eyes as the only object worthy of and claiming every affection of our heart, then the affections flow out, I was going to say naturally, but most certainly spiritually, towards Him; and when this is the case, the affections are set on things above.

Again, there is no way except by being spiritually baptized into Christ's death and life, that we can ever get a victory over our besetting sins. If, on the one hand, we have a view of a suffering Christ, and thus become baptized into His sufferings and death, the feeling, while it lasts, will subdue the power of sin. Or, on the other hand, if we get a believing view of a risen Christ, and receive supplies of grace out of His fulness, that will lift us above its dominion. If sin be powerfully working in us, we want one of

these two things to subdue it: either we must have something come down to us to give us a victory over sin in our strugglings against it, or we must have something to lift us up out of sin into a purer and better element. When there is a view of the sufferings and sorrows, agonies and death of the Son of God, power comes down to the soul in its struggles against sin, and gives it a measure of holy resistance and subduing strength against it. So, when there is a coming in of the grace and love of Christ, it lifts up the soul from the love and power of sin into a purer and holier atmosphere. Sin cannot be subdued in any other way. You must either be baptized into Christ's sufferings and death, or you must be baptized (and these follow each other) into Christ's resurrection and life.

A sight of Him as a suffering God, or a view of Him as a risen Jesus, must be connected with every successful attempt to get the victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave. You may strive, vow, and repent; and what does it all amount to? You sink deeper and deeper into sin than before. Pride, lust, and covetousness come in like a flood, and you are swamped and carried away almost before you are aware. But if you get a view of a suffering Christ, or of a risen Christ; if you get a taste of His dying love, a drop of His atoning blood, or any manifestation of His beauty and blessedness, there comes from this spiritual baptism into His death or His life a subduing power; and this gives a victory over temptation and sin which nothing else can or will give. Yet I believe we are often many years learning this divine secret, striving to repent and reform, and cannot; trying to get better by dipping the Ethiopian into the washing tub, till at last by divine teaching we come to learn a little of what the apostle meant when he said, "The life I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." And when we can get into this life of faith, this hidden life, then our affections are set on things above. There is no use setting people to work by legal strivings; they only plunge themselves deeper in the ditch. You must get Christ into your soul by the power of God, and then He will subdue, by His smiles, blood, love, and presence, every internal foe.

V. The apostle (to come to our fifth and last point, upon which I must be brief) sets before the believing church a blessed prospect, to cheer and encourage them in their onward struggle towards this heavenly kingdom. "When Christ," he says, "who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." If Christ be your life upon earth; if you have a living faith in His divine majesty; if any drops of His love have ever bedewed your soul; if any sweet smile has ever comforted your heart, the apostle would say to all such, "When Christ, who is your life, shall appear with all His saints, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." No longer pestered by sin and Satan, no longer carrying about a weak, infirm tabernacle, the seat of innumerable evils and maladies, but endued with a soul pure as He is pure, and a spiritual body capable of enjoying the bliss and blessedness of eternity, "then shall ye appear," ye suffering saints, who have set your affections on Him whom ye have not seen, and yet in whom ye believe, "then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." And is not this worth struggling for? Is not this a blessed goal at the end of the race? Is not this a worthy prize to run for? Is not this an ample reward of all your temptations, troubles, griefs, and sorrows, to believe, and not in vain, that "when He shall appear," you "shall appear with Him in glory?" The Lord, if it be His will, lead our souls into these divine and blessed realities! They are the substance of vital godliness; and so far as we feel them, and live under the sweet influences and bedewing operations of the Spirit of grace, these things will prove all our salvation, as they must be, if we be rightly taught, all our desire.

158 The Riches Of God's Mercy

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

July 27th, 1856,

"And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:3-6

There are three subjects, branches we may call them, of divine truth, which seem to have been specially opened up in the experience of the Apostle Paul; and which he therefore, as an inspired writer in the New Testament, opened and enforced with corresponding fulness, clearness, and power. 1. The first branch of divine truth into which he was so deeply led is the Fall of man, with its attendant consequences of sin and death. 2. The second branch of divine truth into which he was so blessedly led is the Person, work, obedience, blood-shedding, death, resurrection and glorification of the Son of God, viewed in relationship to His Church and bride. 3. The third great branch of divine truth in which the eminent Apostle so blessedly shines, is sovereign grace in its justifying, sanctifying, and saving effects upon the Church of God. I do not mean to say that the Apostle lays down these three grand branches of divine truth with all the systematic accuracy of the philosopher; that they are divided and subdivided into so many consecutive clauses, like an Act of Parliament; or proved sentence by sentence, and line by line, like a scientific mathematical treatise. It never was the purpose of God to address the Scripture to man's intellect, but to his heart and conscience. As, then, these divine truths formed part and parcel of the Apostle's experience, and flowed into his soul out of the bosom of Christ, so they flowed out of his heart, and were written by his pen in the inspired record.

We shall find these three branches of divine truth—the Fall of man; the Person and work of the Son of God; and sovereign grace, with its blessed fruits and effects—if we have eyes to see and hearts to feel them, shining forth in the Words of the text. But I shall, with God's blessing, more especially call your attention to four points

that seem to me to spring immediately out of the words before us.

I. First, what we are by nature. "And were by nature children of wrath, even as others."

II. Secondly, the riches of the mercy and the greatness of the love of God. "But God, who is rich in Mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us even when we were dead in sins."

III. Thirdly, salvation by grace, which is the fruit and effect of this rich mercy and unspeakable love. "By grace ye are saved."

IV. Fourthly, the manifestation and operations of this grace in the persons of the saints of God, whereby, in consequence, they are "quickened together with Christ, raised up together with Him, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

I. What a description does the Apostle give, in the early part of this chapter, of the state of man generally through the Fall! Such by nature are the saints of God, who, by being buried in the ruins of the Fall, resemble in all points their fellow-sinners and fellow-mortals. We know that God had eternal purposes of love and mercy towards them. But that does not interfere with their state and condition as involved in Adam's transgression. Whatever they were viewed eternally in union with the Son of God; whatever they will be in the accomplishment of God's purposes, when they will outshine the stars in glory, they fell in Adam to the same depth as all Adam's posterity that then were in his loins. And therefore the description, however vivid it may be of the state of man generally, applies with equal force to the elect of God; because, viewed in their relationship to Adam, their first parent, they fell as fully and as foully as all the rest. Now, what does the inspired Apostle say of man generally, and of the saints of God, as viewed in their unregenerate condition?

i. His first declaration concerning them is, that they are dead in trespasses and sins. No language can go beyond the expression of "dead." A man may be in a swoon, but he is not dead; he may be asleep, but he is not dead; he may be paralysed hand and foot, but he is not dead; he may be dying, but he is not dead. As long as

there is the faintest pulsation in the body, as long as there remains the feeblest spark of life, there is some power of motion, some respiration, some evidence of life still in the frame.

But when the stroke of death has taken effect, when body and soul are separated, and the vital current is congealed at the fountain head, how breathless, pulseless, motionless, the body lies! Is there any word, then, that can be used which more aptly describes the total inability of man in his fallen condition to raise up any spiritual movement Godward? No, man before God, as to any spiritual movement, is as helpless as the corpse in the coffin.

But as if that were not sufficient to describe the state of man before God, the Apostle uses a very emphatic expression, "Dead in trespasses and sins." I hardly know how I can convey the thought as it springs up in my mind, but I will endeavour. Some months ago, in the grey dawn of a winter's morning, there was found on Hampstead Heath the body of a miserable suicide—it was lying upon the dry heath. That is one figure. Take another: walking by the sea-side, you come suddenly upon the body of a shipwrecked sailor, washed high and dry upon the sandy beach. In the one case the body was lying on the dry heath, in the other case upon the dry sand. Death is dreadful here, but not necessarily disgusting. But if you were to see a body, not lying upon the dry heath, nor upon the sand of the seashore, but sunk in a deep sewer, where every loathsome reptile and hideous creature swarming in a pool of corruption were crawling in and over it; or if this miserable corpse were buried in the deepest, foulest filth which imagination can conceive; that would be a different spectacle from seeing a corpse upon the heath, or the dead body of a sailor upon the sand. Now, when the Apostle speaks of a sinner being dead in trespasses and sins, it seems to me to convey the idea of a dead body immersed in the foulest corruption, with hideous reptiles and myriads of loathsome monsters swarming over it. Such is man by nature and practice; not only dead, but dead in trespasses and sins; as far as any vital movement to God is concerned dead, but every sin as

active, lively, and swarming upon the dead corpse as tadpoles in a pool.

ii. But the Apostle uses another expression; and of course he selects, under the teaching of the Holy Ghost, those figures which convey to our mind the clearest ideas. He speaks of their walking according to the course of this world. Now, as a dead body cannot walk, the figure is changed to convey a lively impression. But looking at the figure as it stands, and viewing the dead in sin as walking according to the course of this world, what a description it is of what the world really is! It seems to me represented under this idea—a river flowing onwards, and every wave of that stream flowing away from God into an abyss of eternal misery and woe. There is not a drop in that river which is flowing to the throne of God; the whole course of that stream is flowing onward to eternal destruction. If such be the course of this world, whether pleasure or amusement, or even occupation and business, according to the same course the saints of God walk while they are in their state of unregeneracy.

iii. But the Apostle has not yet done with describing the state of man by the Fall. He adds another feature to the dark portrait, which seems to go beyond all yet traced by his powerful pen, "according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." It seems to my mind as if Satan here were represented hovering in the air, there exercising some such dominion over men as the eagle, towering on her lofty eyrie, exercises over the feathered race, pursuing and hunting them to their destruction. He is "the prince and god of this world," and is represented here as an unclean spirit, brooding over the children of disobedience, and working in them his own malignity, rebellion, pride, and obduracy. Now, look for yourself at fallen man as drawn by an inspired pen. Do not think that I exaggerate, misstate, or misrepresent God's solemn truth. I am merely holding up to your view the language of the Holy Spirit, and endeavouring as far as I can to cast a light upon it. Examine

these expressions for yourselves; they are not my statements; I merely hold them up that you may look at them; weigh them carefully; weigh them separately; then put them together, and tell me whether I am exaggerating man's natural condition.

iv. I might, if time permitted, dwell on another feature of this vivid portraiture, the carrying out into positive practice the sins thus engendered or infused. "Among whom," says the Apostle, "we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." Some of these desires were the more polluting pleasures of the flesh; others, the higher and more intellectual employment of the mind; but each and all alike alien to the life of God, and issuing in destruction. But I shall not detain you upon this part of our subject beyond just dwelling for a few moments upon what the Apostle in our text more particularly enforces upon our consciences, where he says, "and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

God's children, the saints of the Most High, never were, as regards their persons, under the penal wrath of God in the same way as those who are finally lost, because He loved them from eternity, and justified and accepted them in the person of His dear Son; as the Apostle says, "made us accepted in the Beloved." The Apostle therefore does not say they were hated of God, or lying under His penal or vindictive wrath; but "by nature," that is, viewed in their natural state and condition, viewed as buried in the ruins of the Fall, and simply with regard to that corrupt, depraved nature which they inherited as sprung from Adam's loins; in this sense, and this sense only, were they "children of wrath, even as others." Their principles, their motives, their practice, their ignorance of God, their unbelief, enmity, and general ungodliness, were as great if not greater than in their fellow sinners, and these therefore exposed them to, and made them deserving of the wrath of God. In fact, the expression "children of wrath" is a Hebrew idiom. We find an almost similar expression (1 Sam. 26:16) where David, speaking to the men who guarded Saul so carelessly, said

to them, "As the Lord liveth, ye are worthy to die (margin, "the sons of death"), because ye have not kept your master, the Lord's anointed." The expression, therefore, "children of wrath," signifies not that they were liable to the penal wrath of God, to His eternal anger and fiery indignation: but that their former conduct and practices, their abominable sins and ungodly ways, were of such a nature as exposed them to, and made them worthy of that flaming displeasure that burns to the lowest hell; and it is this desert of theirs which so enhances the mercy of God that He did not give vent to His holy indignation, but in justly-deserved wrath remembered mercy, for His dear Son's sake. Which brings us to

II. Our second point, The riches of the mercy of God, and the great love wherewith He loved His saints even when they were dead in sins. I remove the comma which is found in our translation after "us." This we may do without scruple when the sense is improved thereby, for there are no points in the best and most ancient manuscripts. I therefore feel at liberty to remove the comma, and read the whole sentence as one continuous expression of the greatness of God's love. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us even when we were dead in sins." Does not this enhance the love of God that He loved us even when we were dead in sins? This eternal love prompted, so to speak, mercy. Love regarded the persons, mercy regarded the sins of the elect; and the two combined to save them from hell, where sin would have carried them, into heaven where love would have them. But let us examine these two attributes of God separately; and first, Mercy.

i. Mercy is that peculiar attribute of God which was drawn out by the sin of man; for mercy, as a pure attribute, has respect only to sinners. Before man fell, mercy was an attribute that lay, so to speak, hidden in the bosom of God. Angels fell; mercy poured not out itself from God's bosom to rescue them. Man fell; then mercy, which had been hidden in the bosom of God, first came forth into visible manifestation. We must ever bear in mind that all God's

attributes are what is called “co-ordinate”; in other words, that all the perfections of God—what are commonly called His attributes—are alike infinite. He is, therefore, “rich in mercy,” because infinite in mercy. With Him mercy is never exercised, as it may be in our case, at the expense of justice, nor is justice exercised at the expense of mercy. In our case, mercy often bespeaks weakness. The Queen, for instance, might show mercy to a criminal at the expense of justice. But in the instance of the infinite Jehovah, all His attributes being perfectly co-ordinate and perfectly equal, His mercy is as great as His justice, and His justice is as great as His mercy.

But again, in order experimentally to understand the riches of God's mercy, we must have a spiritual sight and sense of our need of that mercy. Men brand us sometimes with the title of “corruption preachers”; and if we speak a little of the depths of the Fall, and of what man is by nature as a sinner, this is termed “gloating over and preaching corruption.” But I am bold to say this, that we never can really, truly, and experimentally enter into the riches of God's mercy until we are made deeply acquainted with our need of that mercy. We must go down into the depths, if we are to rise up to the heights. If we are to feel the balm of a Saviour's precious blood healing the festering sores of a guilty conscience, there must be guilt and wounds made in that conscience before the balm is applied, or its benefits realised. Slightly wounded, slightly healed; know little of man's corruption, know little of God's mercy; sink little into the depths of nature's ruin, rise little into the heights of grace's recovery; because he loves most who has most forgiven. Would we, therefore, enter, by living faith, into the riches of God's mercy, we must know deeply, painfully, and experimentally the depths of the Fall; and be it called corruption or not, it is the only way whereby a door is opened for the reception of God's salvation into our heart. The more we know of our own misery, the more we shall prize God's mercy; and the more we feel ourselves, from the workings of sin and guilt, miserable creatures, and unworthy of the least notice from God, the more we shall prize His smile, the more

we shall value His blessing, the more we shall extol His name, and the higher He will rise in our affections, when He manifests the riches of His mercy to our heart. It is easy enough to use a nickname. This is the ready weapon of every ragged street boy. There may be those here who, themselves ignorant of soul trouble, throw scorn and contempt on the tried and tempted, the distressed and exercised saints of God; but their great Advocate will plead their cause; and you may have a reckoning at the last day to make for these things that you at present but little dream of. It is a grievous thing to rub salt into the wounds of a bleeding conscience; to strike the dying dead; to add grief and sorrow to those who are sinking already under apprehensions of eternal wrath.

ii. Not only, however, is God “rich in mercy,” but great in love; for, indeed, who can tell the heights, depths, lengths, and breadths of the love of God? But to enter, in some measure, into the love of God, we must see when, where, and how that love was manifested. Here I see the beauty of that passage, when we read it, as I have pointed out, as one sentence, “For His great love wherewith He loved us even when we were dead in trespasses and sins.” I was speaking of man's natural condition as imaged by the figure of a loathsome corpse lying in a sewer, all surrounded with corruption and filth. Now, is there anything in such an object to draw forth love? Must it not, viewed in itself, ever be a loathsome spectacle? Could you love such an object? Would not your eyes instinctively turn away with deep loathing, and fainting, staggering sickness, from such a sight? Now carry that thought, as the Apostle here describes it, into the love of God. That He should love a saint is nothing so marvellous; but that He should love a sinner!—there is the mystery. When we view the perfections of God, His infinite purity, spotless holiness, inflexible justice, tremendous majesty, eternal hatred against sin, and have some spiritual sight also of the natural loathsomeness of a sinner in His holy and pure eyes—then to see the love of God extending itself towards him as he lies dead in sin, we stand amazed how the love of God, a Being so pure,

a Being so infinitely and beyond all conception holy, should flow forth to objects so polluted. A knowledge, therefore, of sin, and of our death therein, a sight, sense, and feeling of our corruption, let men say what they may, is essential to our reception of the love of God. For if the love of God is shown to us when we are dead in sin, how can we understand that love? how rightly apprehend it? how enter into its lengths, breadths, depths, and heights, unless we have seen and felt ourselves to be objects naturally of God's detestation; and yet, to our joy and astonishment, found ourselves, on the contrary, the objects of this eternal love? It is only as we have our eyes opened, and our hearts touched to see and feel "the depths of sin that we wade and grope in," that we can enter into the riches of God's mercy, and admire with holy wonder that eternal love which could break forth through everything which is hateful to the pure nature of God, and fix itself in unalterable delight upon chosen sinners.

III. But I pass on to the next point which I proposed to bring before you; and that is so expressed as if the Apostle's heart were so full of it that he threw it in by way of overflowing parenthesis, "By grace are ye saved." O the volumes of blessed truth that are couched in these few words, thrown in out of the Apostle's full heart as if to give a moment's vent to his love of salvation by grace! Mercy, love, and grace are all in the bosom of God toward His saints; and yet they differ from each other. But how? Mercy regards the criminal; love regards the object; grace, perhaps, is a blending of the two—the union of mercy and love. God loves the holy unfallen angels; there is an object of love in which there is no mixture of mercy; for having never sinned, mercy they do not need. Again. God showed no mercy to the fallen angels; there we have justice and wrath, without mercy; but in the case of the saints of God, the election of grace, we have not only mercy and love, but we have the conjoint attribute that, uniting mercy and love in one stream, flows onward to the Church, as the river of the water of life—the pure crystal river of grace. Grace means, as

you well know, the pure favour of God, and, as such, is sovereign, distinguishing, free, and superabounding. Every attribute of Jehovah is distinct, and yet so blended that the whole shine forth in one glorious effulgence. The rays of the sun united form one complete body of pure bright light; but the prism, or the rainbow, separates these rays into distinct colours. So the attributes of God are not confused though blended, and all shine forth in one pure bright glory. But this is the peculiar character of grace, that any intermixture of worth or worthiness in the object would destroy it. We have heard much, far too much lately, of a poison called strychnine—that deadly drug of which so small a portion as a grain is fatal to the human system. To use a comparison, here is a glass of pure sparkling wine, which, to a person exhausted or fainting, would be a refreshing cordial; but suppose some deadly poisoner were to introduce into that wine one grain of this fearful drug—which it were well for the human race had it never been discovered—the infusion of that one grain, or half a grain, would convert a healing cordial into a deadly draught. So the grace of God, which you may compare to pure sparkling wine—"the wine that cheereth God and man," infuse into the grace of God one grain of human merit, and you convert the cordial of a fainting sinner's heart into a deadly poison. For if the gospel require merit, we are damned by it as inevitably as by the law. This Luther felt when, racked and torn by the words, "the righteousness of God without the law is manifested," he cried out in the agony of his soul, "What, am I damned not only by the law, but damned by the gospel also!"

This pure, free, unadulterated grace is the joy of every soul that is able to receive it; for it comes as a blessed cordial when sinking and swooning under a sight and sense of the deserved wrath of God. When, then, the pure gospel of the grace of God comes as a cordial from the Most High, it lifts up his drooping head, revives his sinking soul, and pours oil and wine into his bleeding wounds. By this grace we are justified, pardoned, accepted, sanctified, and

saved with an everlasting salvation. O glad tidings to perishing sinners! O blessed news to those who are sinking under a sense of guilt and misery, in whom the law of God is discharging its awful curse! When we get a view by faith, and a sweet taste of the pure grace of God, what a balm, what a cordial, what a sweet reviving draught it is. It is this which makes us prize so highly, and exalt so gladly, the free grace of God; because it is so pure, so free, and so superabounding over all the aboundings of sin, guilt, filth, and folly. It never can be laid down too clearly, it never can be too much insisted on, that "by grace," and grace alone, "ye are saved." If free grace has reached your soul, it has saved your soul; if free grace has come into your heart, it has blessed you with an everlasting salvation, and you will live to prove it when your happy soul joins the throng of the blessed. If anything can lift up a drooping sinner, restore a backslider, break a hard or soften a stony heart; draw forth songs of praise and tears of contrition; produce repentance and godly sorrow for sin; a humble mind, and a tender conscience; it is a sweet experience of the superabounding grace of God. Can we then exalt it too much? Can we prize it too highly? Can we cleave to it too closely? No; in proportion as we feel our ruin and misery, we shall cleave to it with every desire of our soul; for it is all our salvation, as it is all our desire.

IV. But I pass on to our fourth and last point, which is, the effects and fruits of this grace, as they are brought forth into living manifestation.

The Apostle speaks of three things that spring out of the sovereign grace of God. 1. That God hath "quickened us together with Christ." 2. "Raised us up together." 3. "And made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Observe the union with the Son of God. Is the soul quickened? It is "quickened together with Christ." Is the soul raised up? It is "raised up together with Christ." Does it sit in heavenly places? It sits there in and with Christ; He being the Head, from whom the body, the members, derive all their vital influence. Let us trace out these three blessings.

i. The first thing said here is, "hath quickened us together with Christ." To understand this we must take a view of the Lord Jesus Christ as He lay in the sepulchre. View Him, then, lying dead there; see His holy body preserved from the least taint of corruption, but still a dead body. Now carry your thoughts onward to the operations of the Holy Spirit (for He was "quickened by the Spirit") and His own divine operations, because He raised up His own body. What is the first? It is the quickening, the entrance of life into the body, previous to its resurrection. With this quickening came virtually the quickening of all the elect of God; for they, being members of Christ's body, were virtually quickened by that quickening act, and at the same moment. It is true they were not all vitally quickened; we ourselves, for instance, were unborn. Eighteen hundred years have rolled away since the body of Christ was quickened in the sepulchre; but the virtual effect of that quickening reached all the election of grace, and will stretch down to the remotest period of time. Now, by virtue of this quickening, when the Holy Spirit comes forward for the execution of His purpose life enters into the soul. "You hath He quickened who were dead." With quickening comes living sensations, such as conviction of sin, guilt of conscience, the fear of God, the heart broken, the spirit of prayer, repentance unto life, in a word, all the first work of grace in the soul. As in the body of Christ, when quickened by the Holy Ghost, there were vital movements before that body left the sepulchre, so there are vital movements in the soul of a child of God under the quickening operations of God the Holy Ghost, before raised up and brought forth. He is quickened into life, and under that quickening sees, feels, trembles, cries, groans, begs, and sues for mercy; every faculty of his renewed mind is alive and open to the things of God. Never do we pray, read, hear, feel so much the power of eternal things as when the Lord by His Spirit and grace is first pleased to quicken us into this spiritual life. But no resurrection yet; the quickening precedes.

ii. But as, when the breath of the Holy Ghost, so to speak,

quicken the body of Christ as it lay in the sepulchre, it was but a preparation for the raising of that dead body from the tomb, so the quickening operations of God the Holy Ghost in the heart of a child of God are but preparatory to his being raised up together with Christ. Christ's body did not lie in the tomb, though it was alive in the tomb; so those whom God has quickened and who are still lying in the tomb of sin, misery, and wretchedness, but are sighing, suing, and begging for mercy at His hands, will certainly be brought out. Christ's body was not left there when it was quickened, neither will any of you that are quickened be left in your sin and misery, in your condemnation and guilt. The same divine operation that quickened you into spiritual life will bring you out of this state of concern and anxiety into the resurrection life of Christ, as was done in the case of His body when He rose out of the tomb.

Now, when the power of God is put forth in the soul; when mercy reaches the heart; when Christ is revealed, His word applied, and it comes forth out of the dark tomb in which it has lain, like Lazarus, bound with napkins, and yet alive; when the door of hope thus is set open, and the soul is raised up to believe, hope and love, then it is "raised up together with Christ." The resurrection of Christ was not merely the grand testimony that God put upon Him as His dear Son, for He was declared to be "The Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead," but He was "raised also for our justification;" and we rose in Him if we believe on His name. All the elect of God rose with Him; for they are "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." When He died they died; when He rose again they rose again; and as they rose virtually in the person of the Son of God when He rose triumphant from the tomb, so, when the Holy Ghost applies to the heart and conscience the benefits and blessings of His death and resurrection, He raises them up and brings them out of the dark sepulchre into the open light of a glorious gospel day. And this is being "raised up together with Christ."

iii. And now we come to a third blessing of which the Apostle speaks, in connection with the resurrection of Christ. Jesus did not tarry upon the earth; He ascended up where He was before, and took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. But when He ascended up on high, all the election of grace ascended with Him. He did not leave His members behind upon earth, but He took them all virtually into heaven. And this is a pledge that they will one day be with Him in the realms of eternal bliss because they have already ascended with Him, as the members of His mystical body.

But this, in experimental manifestation, is the lifting up of the affections, the raising up of the soul to sit together with Christ in heavenly places. Sin, death, hell, and Satan, with all the misery and wretchedness we have brought upon ourselves—to have them all under our feet, as Christ now reigns, having put all enemies under His feet—to enjoy this is to sit with Christ in heavenly places. One of the last acts that God usually does for the soul is the lifting it up thus to sit with Christ in the anticipation of eternal glory. To see death dethroned, hell destroyed, sin abolished, and a glorious immortality reserved for the saints of God; to enjoy this in the sweet anticipation and blessed foretastes, so as to be in heaven before we get there—this is to sit down with Christ in heavenly places, by virtue of His sitting down there "at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Now, see what benefits and blessings spring out of a union with the Son of God. Why did God quicken your soul? Because you tried to make yourself better? Because you were sick of sin and the world, and wanted to be a good man or a good woman? Away with such paltry ideas of the grace of God! Oh! to introduce such petty peddling into the gospel of Jesus Christ is to cast contempt on the Majesty of heaven and on the grand truths revealed in the Scripture, as with a ray of light. Why did He quicken you? Because you were a member of Christ. Why were you raised up to "a good hope through grace"? Why did mercy, peace, and pardon flow into

your soul? Why were you brought out of misery and death into the light of God's countenance, and had a precious Christ revealed to your heart? Because in the day when the Son of God rose triumphant from the tomb, you, as a member of His mystical body, rose there and then with Him. Why are you sometimes privileged to have your affections on things above, attain any victory over sin, death, hell and the grave, find your enemies put under your feet, and look forward at times with a sweet anticipation of eternal joys? Because, as a member of Christ's mystical body, you have already ascended, and are already sitting at the right hand of God with Christ, who is sitting as the head of His body there.

Oh! what beauty and blessedness shine forth in the gospel when we view it connected with the Person and work of the Son of God! Take the doctrines of grace isolated from the Person of Christ: they are scattered limbs; there is no beauty in them; but view the truths of the gospel, in connection with the Person and work of the Son of God—what a heavenly light, what a divine glory, is cast upon every truth connected with His sacred Person, atoning blood, finished work, and dying love! This is the way to receive the gospel: not as a thing of shreds and patches, a mere collection or scheme of certain doctrines floating up and down God's Word, as waifs and strays from a stranded ship; but as one harmonious gospel, full of grace, mercy, and truth, impregnated with divine blessedness, and all connected with, all springing out of, the Person of the God-man. How it seems to lift us up for a time, while the feeling lasts, above sin, misery, and wretchedness, to view our completeness in Christ, to see our interest in His finished work, to behold ourselves members of His mystical body—to triumph in His holy triumphs—to rejoice in His victories, and to ascend with Him above the din and stir of this dim spot that men call earth. As one might rise out of a London fog into a pure atmosphere, and bask on some mountain-top in the bright beams of the sun, so the dear saint of God, when he is privileged to read his title clear, see his name in the book of life, feel the love of God in his heart, and rejoice in

Christ, is lifted up above the fog and smoke of this dim spot, and sitting with Christ in heavenly places, he feels a sweet victory over every foe, internal, external, and infernal. And there is no other way whereby we can get out of it. Like a man in the London fog, struggling on with fog in the east, west, north, south, fog and smoke all around; so it is whilst we are struggling onward with sin and self; north, south, east, and west, there is nothing but fog, fog, deep and dense. We must be raised out of it to the mountain-top, and this only can be by being lifted up by a sweet testimony of interest in the blood and love of the Son of God. This lifts up, this lifts out; this gives strength, and this alone will give victory; and so far as we fall short of realizing these precious things, we grope for the wall like the blind, and stumble in desolate places like dead men. It is true that for the most part the saints of God only have a little of these blessed things from time to time, just brought in and taken away, but sufficient to taste their sweetness, to know their beauty, to see their glory, and therefore sufficient, whilst they last, to help them onward in their course, and keep them struggling on, till they reach that eternal glory.

159 Precious Faith, With Its Benefits And Blessings

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

August 10th, 1856

"Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord."

2 Peter 1:1, 2

If to-morrow morning a letter were brought you by the

postman bearing your name and address, you would consider yourself quite warranted to open it, and if that letter contained valuable remittances, clearly intended for you, to appropriate them in the manner pointed out. But, on the other hand, if, accidentally, a letter should be left at your house bearing the name and address of another person, you could not, durst not, break the seal, much less appropriate its contents as rightfully your own.

Now, if this simple, common-sense principle had been adopted in the interpretation of a large part of the New Testament, how much confusion and misunderstanding of its meaning would have been spared. We have before us “Epistles,” that is letters, addressed by inspired apostles, some to believing churches, and others to believing individuals; and if addressed to believing churches, and believing individuals, what upon earth has an unbelieving world to do with them? Just as much as the first man I meet with in the street has to do with a letter addressed to me.

To set this in a clearer light, look at the persons to whom the apostle Peter addresses his second epistle. It is true that names are not to be found, except in the case of special individuals, such as Timothy and Titus, but we have characters. And, therefore, would we know whether we have any interest in this or any other epistle of the New Testament, any right to appropriate to ourselves their rich contents—for they overflow with gospel gold, every verse is a bank note—we must first have this grand fact established in our conscience, that we are such characters as were those to whom they were originally written. To whom, then, was this letter addressed? When “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ,” under the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, sat down to write this letter, to whom did he address it? “To them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” If, therefore, we have not “obtained like precious faith” with this holy servant and apostle of God, can we for a single moment entertain the thought that any promise or blessing in this epistle belongs to us? But, on the other hand, as in

the case of a private letter, if one line of the letter belongs to me then the whole contents are mine; so, if we can only prove that we have obtained like precious faith with the saints and servants of God, then, not only one promise of this blessed epistle, but the whole of its rich and valuable contents belongs to us.

With God’s blessing, then, this morning, in attempting to unfold the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost in these words, I shall call your attention to four particulars:

I. The characters to whom the epistle is addressed. They are those “who have obtained like precious faith” with the apostles and saints of God.

II. The channel, the glorious channel, through which they obtained this precious faith. It is “through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

III. The blessings which the apostle prays might be granted to those thus highly favoured. “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you.”

IV. The spiritual medium through which these divine blessings come. “The knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”

The Lord so help me to open up the mind and meaning of the Holy Ghost here, that that blessed Teacher and Comforter of the Church of God may seal it with divine unction and power upon believing hearts.

i. But first a few words as to the writer, “the servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.” What a miracle of grace was that man! View him as the rude fisherman of the Galilean lake, as ignorant of God and godliness as the very fishes he entangled in the meshes of his net; and see how one word of the sovereign Lord of all power and might converted that rude fisherman into a believing disciple of the Lord of life and glory. Pass on and see that believing disciple left in a moment of temptation to deny his Lord and Master, and see how the rough Galilean fisherman seems, for a moment, to resume his pristine nature, and burst out in oaths and cursing. But see that look of tender reproach, and yet affectionate love, from

his suffering Lord, which melted and broke that heart into tears, and restored that almost renegade to his place as a disciple; and view what he became afterwards as a blessed apostle to the Church of God. Anything from his pen would deserve our attention: but when we know that the Holy Ghost inspired that pen, though held by the hand of Peter, what he says demands all our faith, and all the attention of our awakened consciences.

ii. Now let us look to the characters to whom this servant and apostle of Jesus Christ writes. They are those who have obtained like precious faith with the apostles and saints of God.

What an eminent grace is the grace of faith! I call it sometimes the Queen of graces; for faith seems to lead the van, though hope and love follow almost side by side. But still, faith, as the Queen, seems to go in the foremost rank, and to claim the most eminent place. Now, what is faith? That is a question of questions, for on it hangs heaven or hell. God Himself has given us a clear definition of it, where He says, "faith is the substance of things hoped for." In other words, faith in the soul gives a realisation to the things in which we are brought to hope, takes what to most men are airy shadows, mere words and names, and gives them a substantial existence, a firm abiding place in the heart and conscience. He calls it also "the evidence of things not seen." That is, faith by believing the testimony of God, is to us an internal eye, whereby we see those things which, to the natural eye, are invisible. Thus adopting the apostle's definition, we may call faith the eye of the soul, as we read, "by faith he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." For it is only by faith that we see either God, or the precious things of God. It is only by faith that we feel their power. It is only by faith that we know they have a real subsistence, or that we ourselves have a substantial interest in them. But this faith is the special gift of God. It is not the exercise of any intellectual faculty. It is not the result of reasoning or argument. Nor does it spring from any historical proof. It is a special gift of God, a grace of the Spirit raised up by the power of God in the soul, and acting upon the truth of God as

the blessed Spirit draws it forth. Jesus is the author; Jesus is the finisher of it; and we have no more, and I believe no less faith, than He Himself, by His almighty power, is pleased to grant and to sustain.

But, looking at faith and some of its properties, we may branch out a little in describing how faith acts. There is an expression of the Apostle's that casts a sweet light upon the work of faith, where he says, "Unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." Here he brings forward a special operation of faith, in that it mixes with the word of truth. And it does it thus. God the Holy Ghost applies God's word to the conscience. He thus raises up the grace of faith; this grace of faith embraces God's testimony, and so intermingles itself with this testimony that it enters into it, appropriates it, and gives it a substantial realisation and personal indwelling. See how this was done in the instance of Abram. God comes to him in the night visions, and says to him, "Fear not, I am Thy shield and exceeding great reward." But Abram, in a fit of unbelief, says, "What wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?" The Lord then takes him abroad into the air, shows him the stars of the sky, and tells him, "Such shall thy seed be." Now here was the testimony of God in a certain promise to Abram's conscience; upon this, faith immediately sprang up in his soul; for we read, "Abram believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." When God spake to his soul, Abram believed it by the operation of God's Spirit on his heart. So it is with every child of God. He believes what God speaks to him, he inwardly, spiritually credits it, because he feels what God the Spirit applies to his soul with power; for the same Spirit that applies God's word to his heart raises up the faith in his soul that mixes with the word applied, and thus gives the word a substantial realisation, a firm abiding place in his conscience.

iii. But faith here is called "precious"; and well it may be called

so, for look at the precious exploits that faith performs, and the precious fruits that faith produces.

1. It is called “precious,” first, because it is so rare. There are very few persons, speaking comparatively, who are possessed of this grace of the Spirit. To be a believer in the Son of God is a rarity indeed. Many profess, but very few possess, the faith of God’s elect as a special grant from heaven. This divine grace—faith—is not like a stone in the street that every ragged boy may pick up, and keep or throw away as he likes; but like a jewel in the Queen’s crown. Precious stones are valuable, not only for their beauty and intrinsic worth, but on account of their exceeding rarity. Thus faith is called “precious,” not only because it is in itself so intrinsically valuable, but because of its comparative scarceness; “for strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it;” the reason being that it can only be found by faith.

2. But again, it is called “precious” on account of the blessings it puts us into possession of. Why, it saves the soul: “Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul.” Must not that faith be precious, the end of which is salvation? If you are delivered from the bottomless pit, and saved into an eternity of bliss; if you are rescued from all the miserable consequences of sin under which thousands will welter throughout a boundless eternity, and are taken into a heaven of eternal happiness, glory, and immortality—must not that be a precious grace of God, the end of which is this full, free, and glorious salvation?

3. Faith also is “precious” as giving us union with the Son of God. It unites us to Him as the branch is united to the vine; and therefore puts us into possession of all the benefits and blessings of the Person and the work of Jesus. Must not that be a precious gift, and eminent grace, that unites us to the Son of God, and puts us into possession of all the benefits and blessings which flow through the consecrated channel of His sufferings, death, and resurrection?

4. Faith also is “precious” as giving communion with the three Persons of the sacred Godhead. It brings us to the Father to have

communion with Him, to the Son to have a lively fellowship with Him, and to the blessed Spirit to have heavenly intercourse with and from Him. The grace that thus introduces us into the very courts of heaven, and gives us communion—holy and sacred communion—with the three Persons of the Triune God, what an eminent grace must that needs be! Well, then, may the Apostle call it “precious.”

5. By faith we overcome the world; and if the world, our grand enemy, is overcome, must not that be a precious grace which obtains such a victory?

6. By faith, too, we stand where thousands and tens of thousands fall; and if by faith we stand, must not that be a precious grace that enables us to stand amid wreck and ruin on every side? By faith we fight; and by faith we gain the victory; and if faith be the grace that sustains us in the hour of conflict and which eventually brings us off more than conquerors, may it not well be called “precious”?

I have only run through a few Scriptural reasons why faith, above all graces, is worthy of the name that the Apostle has here stamped it by, “precious.”

iv. But he says, “like precious.” And what a thought it is that if you and I possess one grain of living faith, the same precious grace is in our hearts that was in the hearts of all the saints of God, from Abel, the proto-martyr, in all the saints of the Old Testament, in all the prophets, and martyrs, and servants, and apostles of God, and will subsist in the bosom of every saint down to the remotest period of time. There is but “one faith,” as there is “one God, one Lord, and one baptism;” and it is by the possession of this “like precious faith” that all the family of God are knit together into one glorious body, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the risen Head. You, in yourself, may be very poor and needy, for faith gives us to feel our poverty and need; you may think and feel yourself unworthy of the least notice of God’s favouring eye; but if the blessed Spirit has raised up one grain of living faith

in your soul, you stand on the same holy platform with saints, apostles, prophets, and martyrs, and you are as much “accepted in the Beloved,” as much loved of God, and as much a member of the mystical body of Christ, as though you were the Apostle Peter, Paul, Enoch, Abel, Isaiah, or any of the prophets.

v. Now, those to whom the Apostle wrote had “obtained like precious faith.” Not through their own exertions, their own works, their own merit, their own obedience, their own pious dispositions, or religious inclinations; because they had availed themselves of some peculiar advantages that others were deprived of, and had gradually drawn themselves up, by working at the winch, into the possession of this eminent grace. They had “obtained” it, but how?

This brings me to my second point.

II. It was through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. You will observe that I adopt here the marginal reading, which is, in fact, the more literal translation. It stands in our Bible, “through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;” but in the original, as in the margin, it stands thus, “the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.” I think the marginal rendering is by far the more blessed and beautiful, and therefore I adopt it. What a beauty and blessedness there is in the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, when viewed by the spiritual eye. Our reasoning minds, it is true, may be deeply stumbled at the doctrine of an incarnate God. My own mind, I know, has sometimes been driven almost to its wits’ end by this great mystery of Deity and humanity combined in the Person of Christ; for it so surpasses all human comprehension, and is so removed beyond the grasp of all our reasoning faculties. It is not, indeed, contrary to reason, for there is nothing in it impossible or self-contradictory; but it is beyond and above the reach of human thought and tangible apprehension. But when we are led to consider what would be the most certain and most fearful consequences unless the Lord Jesus Christ were what He declares He is—God as well as man—we are compelled, from the very necessity of the case, to cast ourselves

with all the weight of our sins and sorrows upon an incarnate God, as the shipwrecked sailor gladly casts himself upon the rock in the ocean as the only refuge from the devouring sea. Thus as law-wrecked, conscience-condemned, most guilty and miserable sinners, who have feelingly damned ourselves to the lowest hell by our iniquities and crimes, we are compelled to throw ourselves upon the Deity of Christ, because without it we have not the shadow of a hope. When we feel what sinners we are, and have been, look down into the depths of the Fall, and see in some feeble and faint measure what sin is in the sight of a holy and pure God, what can save us from despair unless we see the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ investing His work upon the cross and His obedience with a merit that shall suffice to justify our guilty souls, wash away our aggravated iniquities, blot out our fearful crimes, and make us fit to appear in the presence of a righteous God?

Thus we are sometimes absolutely compelled to throw ourselves on the deity of Christ, as ready to perish, because in such a divine Saviour, in such precious blood, we see a refuge, and we see elsewhere no other. And when we thus flee to Him to hide ourselves in Him, and God the Spirit is pleased to testify to our consciences of His being God as well as man, and raises up and draws forth faith, hope, and love in Him and towards Him as such, then we see in every act of His holy doing and agonising suffering a divine merit investing the whole of His finished work. We then feel that if the deity of Christ be taken away, the Church of God is lost. Where can you find pardon? where justification? where reconciliation to God? where atoning blood, if there is no Saviour who merited as God and suffered as man? We might as well leap into hell at once with all our sins upon our head, as a sailor might spring over the prow of a burning ship into the boiling waves, to meet death instead of waiting for it, unless we believe by a living faith in the deity of the Son of God. But sometimes we are sweetly led into this glorious truth—not merely driven by sheer necessity, but blessedly drawn into this great mystery of godliness—when

Christ is revealed to our souls by the power of God. Then, seeing light in God's light, we view the deity of Christ investing every thought, word, and act of His suffering humanity with unspeakable merit. Then we see how this glorious fact of deity and humanity in the Person of Immanuel satisfies every want, puts away every sin, heals every wound, wipes away every tear, and sweetly brings the soul to repose on the bosom of God. Sometimes, therefore, from necessity, driven by storms of guilt and waves of temptation, and sometimes sweetly drawn by the leadings and teachings of the Holy Ghost, we lay hold of the hope set before us in the essential deity and suffering humanity of the Son of God, knowing that there is a refuge in Him from sin, death, hell, and despair.

Now this it is which makes me love the expression the apostle uses, and which the margin preserves, "the righteousness of our God and Saviour." It is His righteousness as "God," as well as "Saviour." It therefore includes all that He is as God, and all that He did and suffered as man. Every thought He conceived, every word He spoke, every action He performed, were so many deeds of righteousness; His whole course was a course of righteousness. His essential, intrinsic deity implanted as well as stamped merit on every word and work that sprung out of His suffering humanity, and thus wove out a glorious robe of righteousness, which is cast upon the Church of God, clothed in which she stands "accepted in the Beloved," without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, before the throne of God. Now it is through this righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ that we have obtained like precious faith with the saints, apostles, prophets, and martyrs. It is not our own petty doings, our own peddling contrivances, a few alms deeds, a shilling, a half-crown, or a sovereign dropped on the charity plate, a few pious tears, and a few pious resolutions, as though we would truck, barter, and traffic with God, hoping He will accept all this small change in payment for our sins. Bear with my warmth. For if there be a subject on which I feel holy indignation, it is that man should presume to put his petty doings on the same level with the

righteousness of Immanuel, and place his tears and prayers in the same scale with the sufferings and sorrows of God's co-eternal and co-equal Son. But what a blessed truth this is to the heaven-taught soul when realised by a living faith! You are often beset with a host of base lusts and powerful temptations; you see and feel what you are by nature and practice as a son or daughter of Adam; you say, under feelings of deep despondency, how can such a one as I ever have like precious faith with the saints and apostles of God? Yes; if it depended on your doing, you might well sit down in despair, and conclude the case was perfectly hopeless. I repeat it; if this precious faith were to be obtained by anything you may do, or have done, you might well despair of ever having a single grain of it lodged in your bosom; but when you can see the gracious and glorious channel through which this grace is obtained; when you can lift up your believing eyes, and view the heavenly appointed way through which faith comes as the gift of God into the hearts of the election of grace, how it takes your mind away from all petty peddling doings of your own, and leaves you to repose as a poor sinner upon the arms of mercy which are opened wide for such as you. This is a remedy, and an all-sufficient remedy, against self-righteousness and against despair. When you look at Christ and yourself in this light, all pride and self-righteousness are at once beaten down in the heart. We never can exalt the righteousness of our God and Saviour enough when we look upon Him as the divinely-appointed channel through which the mercy of God comes. I do not hold, however, that Christ purchased mercy and grace, or any other gospel blessings; as though God grudged these gifts, and that they were extorted from Him by the sufferings of His Son. I cannot regard the Father of all mercies and the God of all grace in the light of one who needed Christ to fall upon His knees, and extort these blessings from His unwilling hand; but I can see how sin in the Fall dammed back, so to speak, the love of God; and I can see how the Son of God by suffering, bleeding, and dying, the just for the unjust, atoned for sin, thus removed the barrier,

and opened a channel, through His Person and work, whereby the love of God might freely flow into the bosom of the Church. So that, not only without Christ's righteousness there can be no faith, but through it, as an open channel of divine communication, faith, with every other blessing, comes in full accordance with every perfection of Him, who can at the same time be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

Sometimes, upon your knees, perhaps, you feel your guilt and unworthiness so keenly that you can hardly dare to lift up your eyes to God. Now, when the soul is in this state of self-abasement, the Lord will often come with some melting sense of His goodness and mercy, or some sweet testimony of interest in His precious blood and obedience. How your mind is filled with wonder, your eyes with tears, and your mouth with praise, and you say, "How canst Thou bless a wretch like me, who has never done anything but sin against Thee, or backslide from Thee!" The Lord replies, "I do not bless thee for what thou art, or hast been; nor do I withhold My blessing for what thou hast been, or hast done; but I bless thee for My dear Son's sake; the blessing that I give thee flows through the Son of My love." When we can see this by the eye of faith, how it puts prevailing petitions in our lips.

III. But I pass on to show the blessings that the apostle prays for. He says, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you." He desires for them two eminent gospel blessings, one the source and spring, and the other the end and result; one the cause and the other the effect; one that brings the soul near unto God, and the other that keeps it near unto Him. And he prays that these two choice graces might not be given in a common ordinary measure, if I may use the expression, but that they might be "multiplied." God gives as a prince. I have sometimes thought there is great sweetness in the account of the Queen of Sheba receiving the gifts of Solomon's bounty. We read that "King Solomon gave unto the Queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty" (1 Kings 10:13). So it is

with the King of kings and Lord of lords, of whom Solomon was but a faint type and figure. He not only gives us what we ask, all our desire, but out of His royal bounty grants what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of men to conceive of His goodness and love. A king cannot give niggardly; it is unbecoming the dignity of his exalted station. Thus, in our petitions before a throne of grace, we should do as the precept invites, "Open thy mouth wide;" and as the prophet bade the king, make our petitions deep and large" (Isa. 7:11, margin).

i. The apostle then prays for those that "had obtained like precious faith," that to them grace and peace might be multiplied. How suitable the petition! And first, as regards "grace." When we see and feel how we need grace every moment in our lives, we at once perceive a beauty in the blessing thus asked for in an abundant, overflowing measure. We cannot walk the length of the street without sin. Our carnal minds, our vain imaginations, are all on the look out for evil. Sin presents itself at every avenue, and lurks like the Arab in the wilderness, or the prowling night thief for every opportunity of open or secret plunder. In fact, in ourselves, in our fallen nature, except as restrained and influenced by grace, we sin with well nigh every breath that we draw. We need, therefore, grace upon grace, or, in the words of the text, grace to be "multiplied" in proportion to our sins. Shall I say in proportion? Nay, if sin abounds, as to our shame and sorrow we know it does, we want grace to much more abound. When the neap tide of sin flows in with the mud and mire, we want the spring tide of grace to flow higher still, to carry out the slime and filth into the depths of the ocean, so that when sought for they may no more be found. Thus we want grace, free grace; grace to-day, grace to-morrow, grace this moment, grace the next, grace all the day long; healing, reviving, restoring, saving, sanctifying; and all this multiplied by all our wants and woes, sins, slips, and falls, unceasing and aggravated backslidings. We want grace to believe, grace to hope, grace to love, grace to fight, and grace to conquer;

grace to stand, grace to live, and grace to die. Every moment of our lives we need keeping, supporting, holding, and withholding grace; for, as a good man has said, “If the Lord leave us for one moment, He leaves us that one moment too long.”

ii. But to “grace” the apostle adds “peace.” Sin breaks our peace, and sets our souls at a distance from God; trials, too, and temptations, sins and sorrows, occur every day to mar our rest; so we want peace to be multiplied as well as grace. Peace like a river, of which the stream is ever flowing; peace like the sea, of which the tides, if they do ebb, yet rise higher than they fall. We want peace, too, to establish our hearts in the truth, and in the love of it, so as to prevent our being carried about with every wind of doctrine. We are often entangled in the wily snares of Satan, and we want peace to be restored to our soul. When it is thus sadly broken, and sin has filled us with guilt and terror, we want peace to come and heal all those wounds, and establish our souls firmly in the gospel of peace. And when we shall be called upon to enter the dark valley of the shadow of death, how then we shall need “peace to be multiplied,” that we may fear no evil, but find the comforting staff and supporting rod. Thus we never can have too much grace or too much peace. The more we know of sin, the more shall we want grace, and the more we know of sorrow the more we shall want peace.

IV. But I now come to the fourth and last point—the blessed medium through which grace and peace flow, and by which too they are “multiplied.” It is “through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” This opens up a vast field, upon which—my time being nearly gone—I can but briefly enter. There is one expression in the prayer of the blessed Redeemer (John 17) which I very much admire, as full of divine blessedness. “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.” How similar are the words before us. How the language and spirit of the servant resemble those of the Master! “Through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

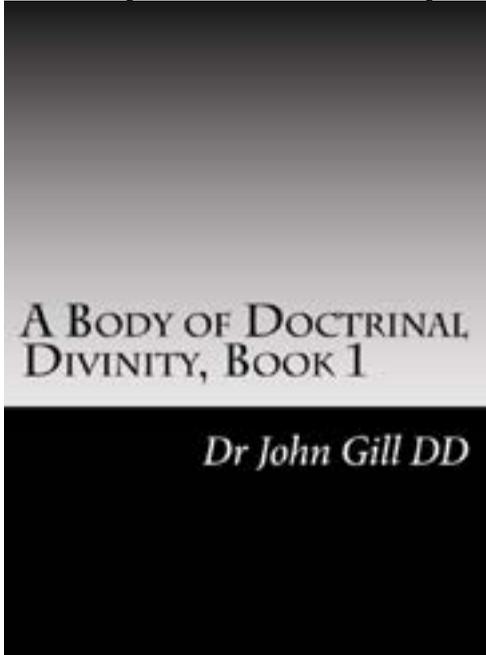
1. The medium through which grace and peace come, as well as the channel through which they flow, is, first, the knowledge of God. Before we can have this saving knowledge of God, we must have a spiritual manifestation of Him to our soul. We can only know Him by His own teaching, only see Him in the light of His own countenance. Otherwise we know Him not to any saving purpose, to any spiritual or sanctifying end. But when He is pleased to manifest Himself to our souls, then we have a living knowledge of Him (“Acquaint thyself with God and be at peace”); so that the more we know of Him by spiritual teaching and divine manifestation, the more will this multiply grace and peace in soul experience. We must know Him as our Father by having the Spirit of adoption breathed into our hearts, and this will produce peace of conscience, a peace that flows from grace. We must know Him as faithful to His promises, and to the Son of His love; and that His word stands as firm as the everlasting hills. This gives a firm foundation for the multiplication of that grace which the promise declares, and of that peace which its fulfilment brings. If we know what He is as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, anything of His everlasting love to His people, of His unchanging purposes of grace and mercy to them, and know Him too as our God, Father, and eternal Friend; a knowledge of this unfolds and communicates grace, and the knowledge of this grace brings with it peace.

ii. Again, there is “the knowledge of Jesus our Lord.” If we do not know Jesus for ourselves, by some spiritual discovery of His person and work, what testimony have we of an interest in His grace? Because there is no grace except that which flows through Him, for “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” This is what we should ever labour after. Our daily, hourly desire and prayer should be to have spiritual discoveries of Christ; to see Him by the eye of faith; to enter into His glorious Person and finished work; to realise His presence, taste His love, and know Him and the power of His resurrection. This is what Paul so earnestly

laboured after (Phil. 3:10); and for the excellency of this knowledge he suffered the loss of all things, and counted them but dung that he might win Christ. To know Him as our Surety and Sin-bearer, our Advocate and Intercessor, our Friend, Husband, and Brother; to know our interest in Him, and our union with Him; our place in His heart, our name on His breast, our memorial on the palms of His hands—what can surpass the blessedness of such a knowledge as this? Through this spiritual, experimental knowledge of Him, grace flows. As a watercourse opening upon a river brings down its irrigating stream into the parched meadow, so a knowledge of Christ opens up a channel through which the grace that is in Him flows into the barren, parched soul. Thus, as through grace alone we know Him, so every fresh communication of grace not only makes Him better known, but flows in through that very knowledge. The grace that comes through this knowledge of Him brings also peace; for He is “our peace.” He has “broken down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace.” He, therefore, came and preached peace “to those which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.” His blood speaks peace to a guilty conscience; His voice says peace to the winds and waves of the surging heart; His last legacy was “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you;” His dying promise was, “In Me ye shall have peace;” and, as the Prince of peace at God’s right hand, He is able to fill us with “all joy and peace in believing,” for His kingdom is “righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” And thus, through a knowledge of Him as our Lord, “grace and peace” are both “multiplied.”

What I want to impress on your minds is this, that “grace and peace,” these two rich gospel blessings, do not spring from anything in self, but are stored up in Christ, and are received out of His fulness. I want to beat down self, whether self in sin, or self in righteousness. Profane self, and professing self, must be alike

beaten down, because till they are we cannot see the righteousness which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. As these are beaten down, faith springs up; a “like precious faith” with the prophets, martyrs, and saints of old. And this precious faith puts us into possession of every gospel blessing. If we have right views of Christ and of His work, and are led by the blessed Spirit, we shall see how suitable these truths are to our necessitous case, and shall bless God for providing a way whereby His grace and peace might be revealed and multiplied to our comfort and His own glory.

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28 Of The Personal Relations; Or, Relative

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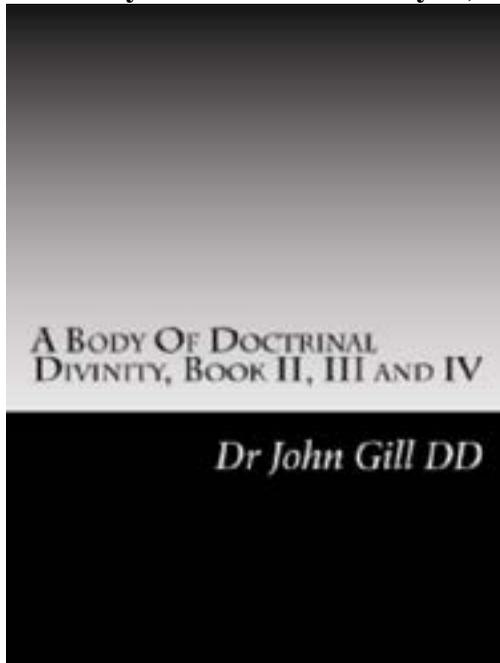
29 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of

The Father.

30 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of The Son.

31 Of The Distinct Personality, And Deity Of The Holy Spirit.

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The contents of Book II treats the subject of Of The Acts and Works of God

Chapter I Of The Internal Acts And Works Of God; And Of His Decrees In General

Chapter II Of The Special Decrees Of God, Relating To Rational Creatures, Angels, And Men; And Particularly Of Election.

Chapter III Of The Decree Of Rejection, Of Some Angels, And Of Some Men.

Chapter IV Of The Eternal Union Of The Elect Of God Unto Him.

Chapter V Of Other Eternal And Immanent Acts In God, Particularly Adoption And Justification.

Chapter VI Of The Everlasting Council Between The Three Divine Persons, Concerning The Salvation Of Men.

Chapter VII Of The Everlasting Covenant Of Grace, Between The Father, And The Son, And The Holy Spirit.

Chapter VIII

Of The Part Which The Father Takes In The Covenant.

Chapter IX Of The Part The Son Of God, The Second Person, Has Taken In The Covenant.

Chapter X Of Christ, As The Covenant Head Of The Elect

Chapter XI Of Christ, The Mediator Of The Covenant

Chapter XII Of Christ, The Surety Of The Covenant.

Of Christ, The Testator Of The Covenant

Chapter XIV Of The Concern The Spirit Of God Has In The Covenant Of Grace.

Chapter XV Of The Properties Of The Covenant Of Grace

Chapter XVI Of The Complacency And Delight God Had In Himself, And The Divine Persons In Each Other, Before Any Creature Was Brought Into Being.

Book III treats the subjects Of The External Works Of God.

Chapter 1 Of Creation In General

Chapter 2 Of The Creation Of Angels

Chapter 3 Of The Creation Of Man

Chapter 4 Of The Providence Of God

Chapter 5 Of The Confirmation Of The Elect Angels, And The Fall Of The Non-Elect.

Chapter 6 Of The Honour And Happiness Of Man In A State Of Innocency.

Chapter 7 Of The Law Given To Adam, And The Covenant Made With Him In His State Of Innocence; In Which He Was The Federal Head And Representative Of His Posterity.

Chapter 8 Of The Sin And Fall Of Our First Parents.

Chapter 9 Of The Nature, Aggravations, And Sad Effects Of The

Sin Of Man.

Chapter 10 Of The Imputation Of Adam's Sin To All His Posterity

Chapter 11 Of The Of The Corruption Of Human Nature.

Chapter 12 Of Actual Sins And Transgressions.

Chapter 13 Of The Punishment Of Sin

Contents Book IV.

Of The Acts Of The Grace Of God Towards And Upon His Elect In Time

Chapter 1 Of The Manifestation And Administration Of The Covenant Of Grace

Chapter 2 Of The Exhibitions Of The Covenant Of Grace In The Patriarchal State

Chapter 3 Of The Exhibitions Of The Covenant Of Grace Under The Mosaic Dispensation

Chapter 4 Of The Covenant Of Grace, As Exhibited In The Times Of David, And The Succeeding Prophets, To The Coming Of Christ

Chapter 5 Of The Abrogation Of The Old Covenant, Or First Administration Of It, And The Introduction Of The New, Or Second Administration Of It.

Chapter 6 Of The Law Of God

Chapter 7 Of The Gospel

Table of Contents Book V

Chapter 1 Of The Incarnation Of Christ

Chapter 2 Of Christ's State Of Humiliation

Chapter 3 Of The Active Obedience Of Christ In His State Of Humiliation

Chapter 4 Of The Passive Obedience Of Christ, Or Of His Sufferings And Death

Chapter 5 Of The Burial Of Christ

Chapter 6 Of The Resurrection Of Christ From The Dead.

Chapter 7 Of The Ascension Of Christ To Heaven

Chapter 8 Of The Session Of Christ At The Right Hand Of God

Chapter 9 Of The Prophetic Office Of Christ

Chapter 10 Of The Priestly Office Of Christ

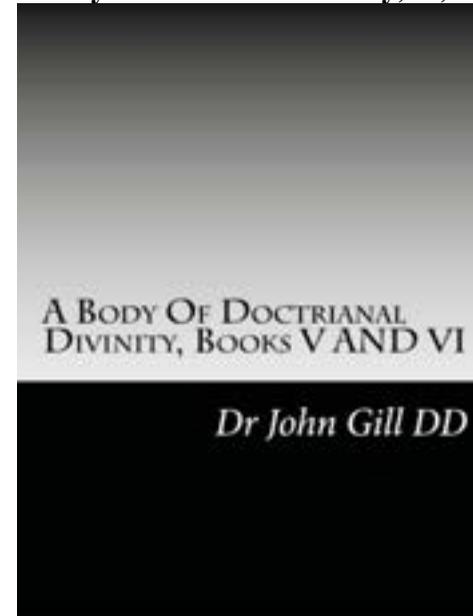
Chapter 11 Of The Intercession Of Christ

Chapter 12 Of Christ's Blessing His People As A Priest

Chapter 13 Of The Kingly Office Of Christ

Chapter 14 Of The Spiritual Reign Of Christ

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, V, VI



A System OF Practical Truths

Book V

Of The Grace Of Christ In His State Of Humiliation And Exaltation, And In The Offices Exercised By Him In Them.

Chapter 1 Of The Incarnation Of Christ

Chapter 2 Of Christ's State Of Humiliation

Chapter 3 Of The Active Obedience Of Christ In His State Of Humiliation.

Chapter 4 Of The Passive Obedience Of Christ, Or Of His

Sufferings And Death.

Chapter 5 Of The Burial Of Christ.

Chapter 6 Of The Resurrection Of Christ From The Dead.

Chapter 7 Of The Ascension Of Christ To Heaven.

Chapter 8 Of The Session Of Christ At The Right Hand Of God.

Chapter 9 Of The Prophetic Office Of Christ.

Chapter 10 Of The Priestly Office Of Christ.

Chapter 11 Of The Intercession Of Christ

Chapter 12 Of Christ's Blessing His People As A Priest

Chapter 13 Of The Kingly Office Of Christ

Chapter 14 Of The Spiritual Reign Of Christ

Book VI

Chapter 1 Of Redemption By Christ

Chapter 2 Of The Causes Of Redemption By Christ

Chapter 3 Of The Objects Of Redemption By Christ

Chapter 4 Of Those Texts Of Scripture Which Seem To Favour Universal Redemption

Chapter 5 Of The Satisfaction Of Christ

Chapter 6 Of Propitiation, Atonement, And Reconciliation, As Ascribed To Christ

Chapter 7 Of The Pardon Of Sin

Chapter 8 Of Justification

Chapter 9 Of Adoption

Chapter 10 Of The Liberty Of The Sons Of God

Chapter 11 Of Regeneration

Chapter 12 Of Effectual Calling

Chapter 13 Of Conversion

Chapter 14 Of Sanctification

Chapter 15 Of The Perseverance Of The Saints

Chapter 9 Of Adoption Of The Liberty Of The Sons Of God

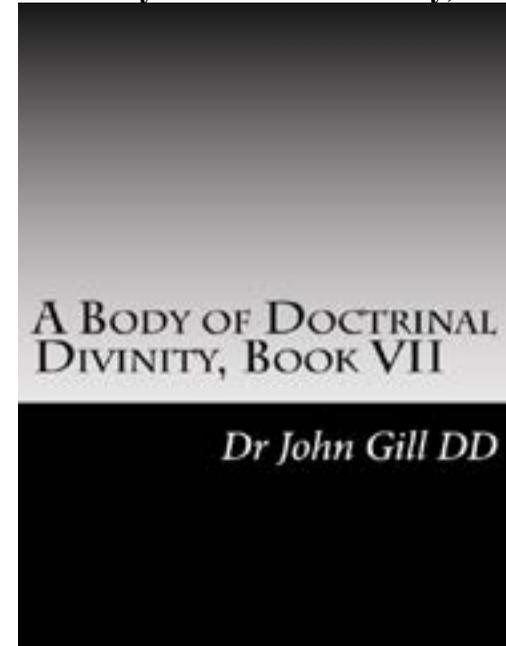
Chapter 11 Of Regeneration

Chapter 12 Of Effectual Calling

Chapter 14 Of Sanctification

Chapter 15 of the perseverance of the saints

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, Book VII



A System Of Practical Truths

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BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

Contents

Chapter 1 Of The Death Of The Body

Chapter 2 Of The Immortality Of The Soul

Chapter 3 Of The Separate State Of The Soul Until The Resurrection, And Its Employment In That State

Chapter 4 Of The Resurrection Of The Body

Chapter 5 Of The Second Coming Of Christ, And His Personal Appearance

Chapter of Of The Conflagration Of The Universe

Chapter 7 Of The New Heavens And Earth,And The Inhabitants Of Them.

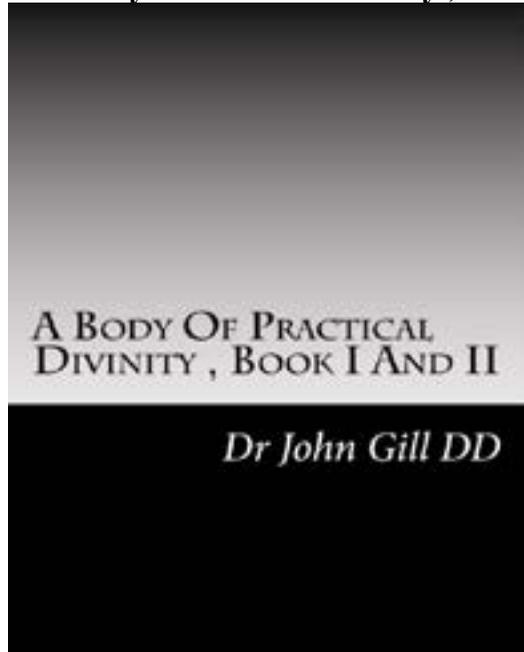
Chapter 8 Of The Millennium Or Personal Reign Of Christ With The Saints On The New Earth A Thousand Years

Chapter 9 Of The Last And General Judgment

Chapter 10 Of The Final State Of The Wicked In Hell

Chapter 11 Of The Final State Of The Saints In Heaven

A Body Of Practical Divinity , Book I, II



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Contents

Book I

Chapter I Of The Object Of Worship

Chapter 2 Of Internal Worship; And Of Godliness The Groundwork Of It.

Chapter 3 Of The Knowledge Of God

Chapter 4 Of Repentance Towards God

Chapter 5 Of The Fear Of God

Chapter 6 Of Faith In God And In Christ

Chapter 7 Of Trust And Confidence In God

Chapter 8 Of The Grace Of Hope

Chapter 9 Of The Grace Of Love

Chapter 10 Of Spiritual Joy

Chapter 11 Of Peace And Tranquility Of Mind

Chapter 12 Of Contentment Of Mind

Chapter 13 Of Thankfulness To God

Chapter 14 Of Humility

Chapter 15 Of Self-Denial

Chapter 16 Of Resignation To The Will Of God

Chapter 17 Of Patience

Chapter 18 Of Christian Fortitude

Chapter 19 Of Zeal

Chapter 20 Of Wisdom Or Prudence

Chapter 21 Of Godly Sincerity

Chapter 22 Of Spiritual Mindedness

Chapter 23 Of A Good Conscience

Chapter 24 Of Communion With God

Book II Of External Worship, As Public

Chapter 1 Of The Nature Of A Gospel Church, The Seat Of Public Worship

Chapter 2 Of The Duties Of The Member Of A Church To Each Other

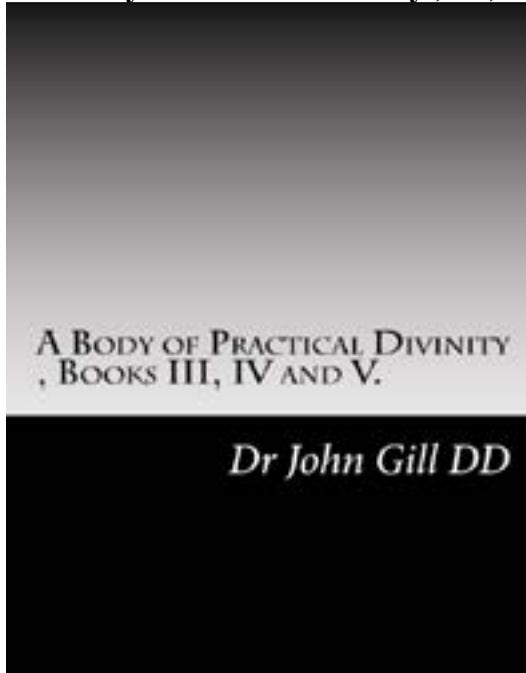
Chapter 3 Of The Officers Of A Church, Particularly Pastors

Chapter 4 Of The Duties Of Members Of Churches To Their Pastors

Chapter 5 Of The Office Of Deacons

Chapter 6 Of The Discipline Of A Church Of Christ

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Book III

Of The Public Ordinances Of Divine Worship

Chapter 1 Of Baptism

Chapter 2 Of The Lord's Supper

Chapter 3 Of The Public Ministry Of The Word

Chapter 4 Of Public Hearing The Work

Chapter 5 Of Public Prayer

Chapter 6 Of The Lord's Prayer

Chapter 7 Of Singing Psalms, As A Part Of Public Worship

Chapter 8 Of The Circumstances Of Public Worship, As To Place And Time Of Private Worship, Or Various Duties, Domestic, Civil, And Moral

Book IV

Chapter 1 Of The Respective Duties Of Husband And Wife

Chapter 2 Of The Respective Duties Of Parents And Children

Chapter 3 Of The Respective Duties Of Masters And Servants.

Chapter 4 Of The Respective Duties Of Magistrates And Subjects

Chapter 5 Of Good Works In General

Chapter 6 A Compendium Or Summary Of The Decalogue Or Ten Commands

Book V

A Dissertation Concerning The Baptism Of Jewish Proselytes.

Chapter 1

A Dissertation Concerning The Baptism Of Jewish Proselytes Of The

Various Sorts Of Proselytes Among The Jews

Chapter 2

The Occasion Of This Dissertation

Chapter 3

The Proof Of The Baptism Of Jewish Proselytes Inquired Into;

Whether There Is Any Proof Of It Before, At, Or Quickly After The

Times Of John And Christ.

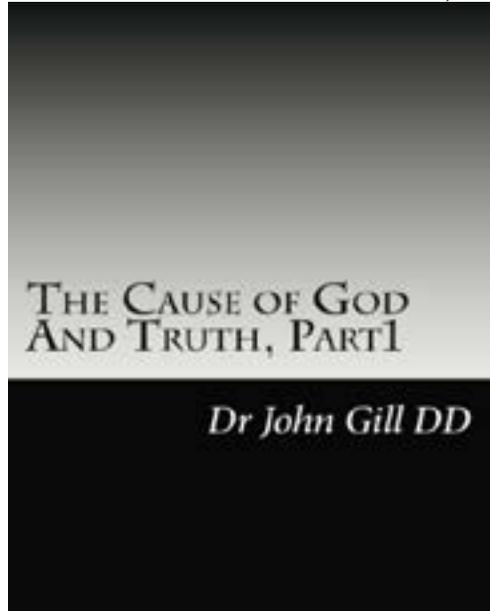
Chapter 4

The Proof Of This Custom Only From The Talmuds And Talmudical Writers

Chapter 5

The Reasons Why Christian Baptism Is Not Founded On And Taken

From, The Pretended Jewish Baptism Of Israelites And Proselytes

The Cause of God And Truth, Part 1

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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

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Contents

Sections 1-60 Scriptural Passages

Genesis 4:7

Genesis 6:3.

Deuteronomy 5:29.

Deuteronomy 8:2.

Deuteronomy 30:19.

Deuteronomy 32:29.

Psalms 81:13, 14.

Psalms 125:3.

Psalms 145:9.

Proverbs 1:22-30.

Isaiah 1:16, 17.

Isaiah 1:18, 19.

Isaiah 5:4.

Isaiah 30:15.

Isaiah 55:1.

Isaiah 55:6.

Isaiah 55:7.

Jeremiah 4:4.

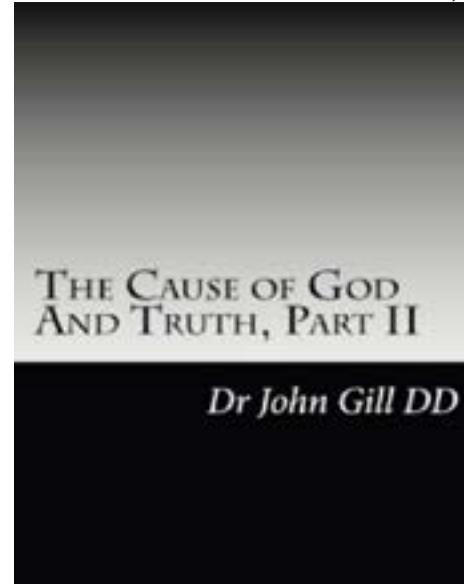
Ezekiel 18:24.

Ezekiel 18:30.

Ezekiel 18:31&32.
 Ezekiel 24:13.
 Matthew 5:13.
 Matthew 11:21, 23.
 Matthew 23:37.
 Matthew 25:14-30.
 Luke 19:41, 42.
 John 1:7.
 John 5:34.
 John 5:40.
 John 12:32.
 Acts 3:19.
 Acts 7:51.
 Romans 5:18.
 Romans 11:32.
 Romans 14:15.
 1 Corinthians 8:11.
 1 Corinthians 10:12.
 2 Corinthians 5:14,15.
 2 Corinthians 5:19.
 2 Corinthians 6:1.
 2 Corinthians 11:2, 3.
 Philippians 2:12.
 1 Timothy 1:19, 20.
 1 Timothy 2:4.
 1 Timothy 4:19.
 Titus 2:11, 12.
 The Epistle to the Hebrews.
 Hebrews 2:9.
 Hebrews 6:4-6.
 Hebrews 10:26-29.
 Hebrews 10:38.
 2 Peter 1:10.
 2 Peter 2:1.

2 Peter 2:20-22.
 2 Peter 3:9.
 1 John 2:2.
 Jude 1:21.
 Revelation 2 and Revelation 3.
 Revelation 3:20.

The Cause of God And Truth, Part II



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BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Systematic

This is volume 2 of this 4 part series and it should be known
 that the following work was undertaken and begun about the year

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Contents

Chapter 1

OF REPROBATION

Proverbs 16:4.

John 12:39, 40.

1 Peter 2:8.

Jude 1:4.

Revelation 13:8.

Chapter 2

OF ELECTION

1 Peter 2:9.

Romans 9:10-13.

Colossians 3:12.

Ephesians 1:4.

Romans 8:28, 29.

John 6:37.

Acts 8:48.

Romans 8:29, 30.

2 Timothy 2:19.

Romans 5:19.

Chapter 3

OF REDEMPTION

Matthew 20:28.

John 10:15.

John 17:9.

Romans 8:34.

Romans 8:32.

Romans 5:10.

John 15:13.

Chapter 4

OF EFFICACIOUS GRACE

Ephesians 1:19, 20.

1 Corinthians 5:17.

John 3:5.

Ephesians 2:1.

1 Corinthians 2:14.

2 Corinthians 3:5.

John 15:5.

John 6:44.

Acts 11:18.

Acts 16:14.

Jeremiah 31:18.

Jeremiah 31:33.

Ezekiel 11:36:26.

Philippians 2:13.

1 Corinthians 4:7.

Ephesians 2:8, 9.

Chapter 5

OF THE CORRUPTION OF HUMAN NATURE

John 14:4

Psalm 51:5.

Genesis 6:5.

John 3:6.

Romans 7:18, 19.

Romans 8:7, 8.

Chapter 6

OF PERSEVERANCE

John 13:1.

John 17:12.

Romans 11:29.

Matthew 24:24.

John 6:39, 40.

Romans 11:2.

Romans 8:38, 39.

Ephesians 1:13, 14.

1 Peter 1:5.

1 John 2:19.

1 John 3:9.

Isaiah 54:10.

Isaiah 59:21.

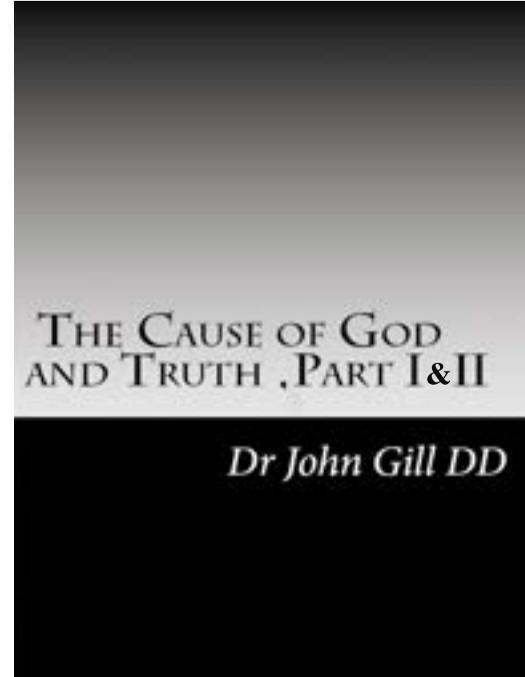
Hosea 2:19, 20.

Jeremiah 32:40.

John 14:16.

John 10:28.

1 Corinthians 1:8, 9.

The Cause of God and Truth Part III

The Doctrines of Grace

Authored by Dr John Gill DD, Authored by David Clarke
CetEd

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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

Psalms 51:5.

Genesis 6:5.

John 3:6.

Romans 7:18, 19.

Romans 8:7, 8.

Chapter 6

OF PERSEVERANCE

John 13:1.

John 17:12.

Romans 11:29.

Matthew 24:24.

John 6:39, 40.

Romans 11:2.

Romans 8:38, 39.

Ephesians 1:13, 14.

1 Peter 1:5.

1 John 2:19.

1 John 3:9. 87

Isaiah 54:10.

Isaiah 59:21.

Hosea 2:19, 20.

Jeremiah 32:40.

John 14:16.

John 10:28.

1 Corinthians 1:8, 9.

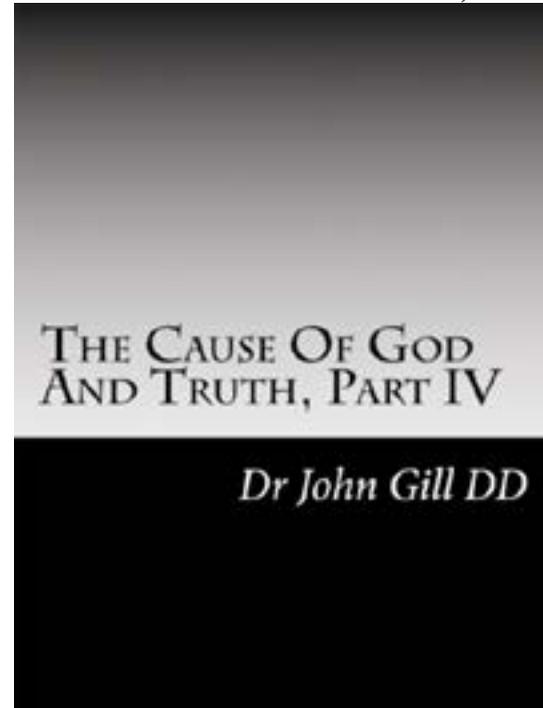
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The Third Part was published in 1737.

The Cause Of God And Truth, Part IV



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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

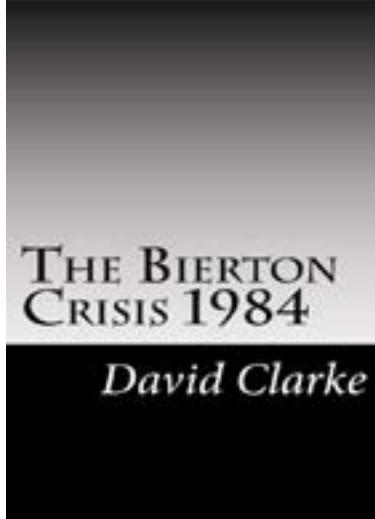
Chapter 3 Or Original Sin

Chapter 4 Of Efficacious Grace

Chapter 5 Of Perseverance

Chapter 6 Of The Heathens

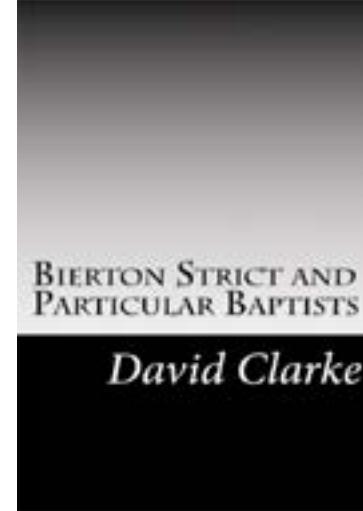
The Bierton Crisis 1984



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 is past life as a religious man in his own defense when persecuted by the jews. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, circumcised the 8th day, Of the tribe of Benjamin, as toughting the Law blameless, not in a way of boasting but to show his past life, even though he was a religious man he considered it as worthless. He had been a Pharisee and from a religious zealous point of view persecuted the church even unto strange cities. He punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blasphemy, and being exceeding mad against them.

When the Apostle Paul was arrested by the lord on the Damascus Rod he fell to the ground and Jesus instructed him that he was to make him a minister and a witness both of the things he had seen and those things He would appear to him.

The author has written this book for this reason to inform the reader of all the that lord Jesus has done for him and to point out those important truths of the gospel of Christ.