

# J.C. Philpot

# Sermons

**Volume 1**  
1837-1841

**Strict and Particular Baptists Minister**

**For 26 years**

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

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

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Joseph Charles Philpot** (1802 – 1869) was known as “The Seceder”. He resigned from the Church of England in 1835 and became a Strict & Particular Baptist minister.



**J C Philpot**

While with the Church of England he was a Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford. After becoming a Strict and Particular Baptist he became the Editor of the Gospel Standard magazine and served in that capacity for twenty years.

Educated at Oxford University, he was elected a fellow of Worcester College, and appeared to have a brilliant scholastic career before him. But he was brought into solemn concern spiritually and the Lord led him into the ministry. He first preached in the Established Church at Stadhampton (Oxfordshire). In 1835, however, he was constrained, for the truth's sake, to sever his connection with the Church of England and to resign his curacy and his fellowship. The letter to the provost stating his reasons was published and went into several editions.

The same year, he was baptized by John Warburton at Allington (Wilts). The rest of his life was spent ministering among the Strict Baptists. For 26 years, he held a joint pastorate at Stamford (Lines)

and Oakham (Rutland). In addition for over twenty years, he was editor of "The Gospel Standard", where many of his sermons first appeared.

"My desire is to exalt the grace of God; to proclaim salvation alone through Jesus Christ; to declare the sinfulness, helplessness and hopelessness of man in a state of nature; to describe the living experience of the children of God in their trials, temptations, sorrows, consolations and blessings."

J. C. Philpot.

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*2 Tim. 2:11-13*

**1 QUICKENING AND MAINTAINING (Eph.1:19)**

Reprinted from The Sower 1932. As Mr Howard, in his Comprehensive Index lists this “extract”, we have accepted it as being an original piece and not extracted from any other written source by Philpot. We consider that what follows is either an extract from a sermon, or very scanty notes taken by a hearer, or the headings of a sermon taken down by a hearer who perhaps expanded on them from memory at a later occasion.

*“The exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe” Eph.1:19*

Consider, first, the difficulties which grace has, so to speak, to encounter in the quickening of a dead soul into spiritual life. View the depths of the fall. See the death of the soul in trespasses and sins; its thorough alienation from the life of God, through the darkness, blindness and ignorance of the understanding, the perverseness of the will, the hardness of the conscience, and the depravity of the affections. View its obduracy, stubbornness and obstinacy; its pride, unbelief, infidelity and self-righteousness; its passionate love to, habitual practice of, and long inurement in sin. Consider its strong prejudices against everything godly and holy; the desperate, implacable enmity of the carnal mind against God himself; its firm and deep-rooted love to the world in all its varied shapes and forms; and remember also how all its hopes, happiness and prospects are bound up in the things of time and sense. O what a complicated mass of difficulties do all these foes form in their firm combination, like a compact, well-armed, thoroughly trained army, against any power which would dislodge them from their position.

Consider, too, the sacrifices which must often be made by one who Reprinted from The Sower 1932. As Mr Howard, in his Comprehensive Index lists this “extract”, we have accepted it as being an original piece and not extracted from any other written source by Philpot. We consider that what follows is either an

10 1 QUICKENING AND MAINTAINING (Eph.1:19)

extract from a sermon, or very scanty notes taken by a hearer, or the headings of a sermon taken down by a hearer who perhaps expanded on them from memory at a later occasion, is to live godly in Christ Jesus; the tenderest ties, perhaps, to be broken; the lucrative or advantageous prospects which have to be abandoned; old friends to be renounced; family connections to be given up; position in life to be lost; and often the shame and contempt to be entailed on one's family and oneself. All, indeed, are not so hedged about with these peculiar difficulties which we have just named; but few are wholly free from them, and he who thus describes them had much personal experience of them in his first setting his face Zionward.

Similarly we have to know, as a fruit of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, the mighty power of God in maintaining divine life in our soul, when it has been communicated. We have to see and feel what mountains of difficulty, what seas of temptation, what winds and storms of error, what assaults and snares of Satan, and the latter more dangerous than the former; what floods of vileness and ungodliness without and within; what strong lusts and passions; what secret slips and falls, backslidings and departures from the living God; what long seasons of darkness, barrenness and death; what opposition of the flesh to the strait and narrow way; what crafty hypocrites, pretended friends, but real foes, false professors and erroneous characters, all striving to throw down or entangle our steps, we had to grapple with; what helplessness, inability and miserable impotency in ourselves to all that is good; what headlong proneness to all that is evil. All these things we have to pass in solemn review.

We have also to ponder over what we have been, and what we still are, since we professed to fear God, and how when left to ourselves we have done nothing but sin against and provoke him to his face from first to last, and yet still have divine life maintained within. And thus as we hold in our hands and read over article by article this long dark catalogue, still to have a sweet persuasion

## GROWTH IN GRACE (Isaiah 18:5, 6)

that the life of God is in our soul, and that because Jesus lives, we shall live also. This to realise, believe and feel, and bless God for his surpassing, super-abounding grace, is to know the exceeding greatness of the power of God to usward who believe, in maintaining divine life after it had been first communicated.

**2 WINTER AFORE HARVEST OR THE SOUL'S GROWTH  
IN GRACE (Isaiah 18:5, 6)**

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Lord's Day  
Morning,

*20th August, 1837*

*"For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches. They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them."*

*Isaiah 18:5, 6*

No one, I think, who reads the Word of God with an enlightened eye can deny that there is contained in it such a doctrine as growth in grace. Peter says expressly, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" 2Pe 3:18. The faith of the Thessalonians was said "to grow exceedingly" 2Th 1:3. And thus we read of degrees of faith, from "little faith" Mt 6:30, "weak faith" Ro 14:1, faith "as a grain of mustard seed" Mt 17:20, to "great faith" Mt 15:28, "strong faith" Ro 4:20, "fulness of faith" Ac 6:8, and "full assurance of faith" Heb 10:22.

Figures also and comparisons are made use of in the Word of truth which clearly point to the same doctrine. Thus the divine life is compared sometimes to the course of the sun: "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto

the perfect day" Pr 4:18; sometimes to the growth of corn, "first the blade, then the ear, after that, the full corn in the ear" Mr 4:28; sometimes to the increase of the human body, as commencing with "new-born babes" 1Pe 2:2, and advancing on to "little children", "young men" and "fathers" 1Jo 2:12-14; sometimes to a race, where the runner "forgets those things which are behind, and reaches forth unto those things which are before" Php 3:13. The very idea indeed of life implies advance, growth, progress, increase. Lambs grow up into sheep, vine buds into vine branches Joh 15:5, slips into trees Isa 17:10 Isa 61:3, sons into fathers 1Ti 1:18 1Ti 5:1. Christians are not gate-posts, but palm trees and cedars Ps 92:12; not loungers on half-pay, but soldiers warring a good warfare 1Ti 1:18; not idlers at home on armchairs and sofas, but travellers and pilgrims seeking a country; not careless, and at ease, like Laish and Moab Jud 18:7 Jer 48:11, but pressed out of measure by trials and temptations, so as at times to despair even of life 2Co 1:8. Their grand distinguishing mark then is, that they grow; and, therefore, absence of growth implies absence of life. Hypocrites, indeed, may grow in hypocrisy, Pharisees in self-righteousness, Arminians in fleshly perfection, dead Calvinists in head-knowledge, proud professors in presumption, self-deceivers in delusion, and the untried and unexercised in vain confidence. But the dead never grow in the divine life, for "the root of the matter" is not in them Job 19:28.

But the question at once arises: "What is growth in grace? What is its nature, and in what does it consist? Is it the same thing as what is usually called 'progressive sanctification'? and is it meant thereby that our nature grows holier and holier, and our heart purer and purer? Does growth in grace imply that besetting sins gradually become weaker, temptations less powerful, the lust of the flesh less seducing; and that our Adam nature, our old man, is improved and transmuted into grace, as the crab tree of the hedge has, by long and patient cultivation, become changed into the apple tree

of the garden?" No, by no means. Painful experience has taught me the contrary, and shown me that progressive sanctification has no foundation in the Word of God, and no reality in the hearts of His people.

The answer, then, to the question, "What is growth in grace?" is contained, I believe, in the text, and I shall therefore endeavour to unfold it in an experimental manner according to the ability which God may give me. The text speaks of three distinct stages in divine life, Spring, Harvest, and an intermediate state between the two which we may call Winter. We shall indeed find as we proceed that the Spring is divided into two stages, the latter of which we may term Summer; and thus growth in grace is compared to the advance of the seasons in the year. But there is this remarkable difference between the natural and the spiritual seasons, between growth in nature and growth in grace, that the succession of seasons is not the same in each. Nature commences with blooming spring, advances on to glowing summer, ripens into yellow harvest, and dies away in dreary winter. Grace, according to the line of experience that I am about to describe, commences with Spring—with "the bud", and "the flower of the sour grape". Thence it advances on to Summer, when "the bud is perfect", and "the sour grape is ripening in the flower". Does not Harvest immediately follow? Alas! no. "Afore the harvest" another seasons comes. Between summer and it, Winter—a long dreary winter intervenes. Thus, the order of seasons in the divine life is not spring, summer, harvest, winter: but spring, summer, winter, harvest.

Let us see if this order agrees with the Scriptures of truth, and with the experimental teachings of God in the soul. All true religion has a beginning, and a beginning, too, marked, clear and distinct. That the entrance of divine light into the soul, the first communications of supernatural life, the first manifestations of an unknown God, the first buddings forth of a new nature, the

first intercourse of man with his Maker; that all these hitherto unfelt, unthought of, uncared for, undesired transactions should take place in the soul, and the soul be ignorant of them, should know neither their time nor their place, is a contradiction. The evidence of feeling is as strong, as distinct, as perceptible as the evidence of sight. I know by sight that this object is black and that white. I know as certainly by feeling that this substance is cold and that hot. I may not be able to tell why the one is hot and the other cold, but I know the fact that they are so. Thus a new-born soul may not be able to tell why it feels, nor whence those feelings arise; but it is as conscious that it does feel as that it exists. It suits well the empty profession of the day to talk about early piety, and convictions from childhood, and Sunday school religion, and baptismal regeneration, and infant lispings, and the dawnings of the youthful mind. "The privilege of pious parents, of family religion, of the domestic altar, of a gospel ministry, of obedience to ordinances, of a father's prayers, of a mother's instruction"—who has not heard these things brought forward again and again as the beginning of what is called Christian conversion and decided piety? Many of these things are well in their place, and not to be despised or neglected; but when they are held up as the almost necessary beginning of a work altogether heavenly and supernatural, they must be set aside. Thousands have had these things who have perished in their sins; and thousands have not had them who have been saved with an everlasting salvation. A true beginning is a beginning felt. I will not say that we must be able to point out the moment, the hour, the day or the week, though the nearer we approach the precision of time, the nearer we approach to a satisfactory evidence. But the season, the time within certain limits, when new feelings, new emotions, new wants, new desires arose in the heart, can never be forgotten by one who has really experienced them. To smother over, to mystify, to smuggle up the

## GROWTH IN GRACE (Isaiah 18:5, 6)

beginning is to throw discredit on the whole. If the beginning be wrong, all is wrong. If there be no divine beginning, there can be no divine middle, and no divine end; and if the first step be false, every successive step will partake of the original error. If a man, therefore, who professes to be walking in the way never knew the door, and never found it a strait and narrow one, he has clambered over the wall, and is a thief and a robber. His sentence is already recorded. "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness" Mt 22:13.

True religion then begins with an entrance into the soul of supernatural light and supernatural life. How or why it comes the soul knows not; for "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit" Joh 3:8. The wind itself is not seen, but its effects are felt. The sound of a going is heard "in the tops of the mulberry trees" 1Ch 14:15, where God Himself is not seen. The voice of the Lord powerful and full of majesty was heard by those who saw no similitude De 4:12. Thus effects are felt, though causes are unknown. Streams flow into the heart from a hidden source; rays of light beam into the soul from an unrisen sun; and kindlings of life awaken in us a new existence out of an unseen fountain. The new-born babe feels life in all its limbs, though it knows not yet the earthly father from whence that natural life sprung. And thus new-born souls are conscious of feelings hitherto unpossessed, and are sensible of a tide of life, mysterious and incomprehensible, ebbing and flowing in their heart, though "Abba Father" has not yet burst from their lips.

A man's body is alive to every feeling, from a pin scratch to a mortal wound, from a passing ache to an incurable disease. The heart cannot flutter or intermit for a single second its wonted stroke without a peculiar sensation that accompanies it, notices it and registers it. Shall feelings, then, be the mark and evidence of

## GROWTH IN GRACE (Isaiah 18:5, 6)

natural life, and not of spiritual? Shall our ignoble part, the creature of a day, our perishing body, our dust of dust, have sensations to register every pain and every pleasure, and be tremblingly alive to every change without and every change within; and shall not our immortal soul be equally endowed with a similar barometer to fluctuate up and down the scale of spiritual life? We must lay it down then at the very threshold of vital godliness, that if a man has not been conscious of new feelings, and cannot point out, with more or less precision, some particular period, some never-to-be-forgotten season, when these feelings came unbidden into his heart, he has not yet passed from death into life. He is not in Christ, if he is not a new creature 2Co 5:17. But the question is arising to your lips, "What are these new feelings? Describe them, if you will or can, that we may compare our heart with them, for as in water face answereth to face, so does the heart of man to man". I believe, then, that the first sensation of a new-born soul is that of light. "The entrance of Thy words giveth light" Ps 119:130. "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up" Mt 4:16. This was the light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, which struck persecuting Saul to the earth, and of which he afterwards said, "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts" 2Co 4:6.

But, together with this ray of supernatural light, and blended with it in mysterious union, supernatural life flows into the soul. "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth" Jas 1:18. "You hath He quickened"—that is, made alive—"who were dead in trespasses and sins" Eph 2:1. Every ray of natural light is not single, but sevenfold, as may be seen in the rainbow, where every distinct ray of the sun is broken into seven different colours. And thus the first ray of supernatural light which shines into the soul out of the Sun of righteousness is really not single, but manifold. Mingled with heavenly light, and inseparable from it, life, feeling and power,

faith and prayer, godly fear and holy reverence, conviction of guilt and hungerings and thirstings after righteousness, flow into the heart. And it is this blended union of feelings which distinguishes the warm sunlight which melts the heart from the cold moonlight that enlightens the head. The latter begins and ends in hard, dry, barren knowledge, like the Aurora Borealis playing over the frozen snows of the north; whilst the former penetrates into and softens the secret depths of the soul, and carries with it a train of sensations altogether new, heavenly and divine.

Thus feeling is the first evidence of supernatural life—a feeling compounded of two distinct sensations, one referring to God, and the other referring to self. The same ray of light has manifested two opposite things, “for that which maketh manifest is light”; and the sinner sees at one and the same moment God and self, justice and guilt, power and helplessness, a holy law and a broken commandment, eternity and time, the purity of the Creator and the filthiness of the creature. And these things he sees, not merely as declared in the Bible, but as revealed in himself as personal realities, involving all his happiness or all his misery in time and in eternity. Thus it is with him as though a new existence had been communicated, and as if for the first time he had found there was a God.

It is as though all his days he had been asleep, and were now awakened—asleep upon the top of a mast, with the raging waves beneath; as if all his past life were a dream, and the dream were now at an end. He has been hunting butterflies, blowing soap bubbles, angling for minnows, picking daisies, building card-houses, and idling life away like an idiot or a madman. He had been perhaps wrapped up in a profession, smuggled into a church, daubed over with untempered mortar, advanced even to the office of a deacon, or mounted in a pulpit. He had learned to talk about Christ, and election, and grace, and fill his mouth with the language of

Zion. And what did he know of these things? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Ignorant of his own ignorance of all kinds of ignorance the worst, he thought himself rich, and increased with goods, and to have need of nothing, and knew not he was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked Re 3:17.

But one ray of supernatural light, penetrating through the veil spread over the heart, has revealed that terrible secret—a just God, who will by no means clear the guilty. This piercing ray has torn away the bed too short, and stripped off the covering too narrow. It has rent asunder “the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, the glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods and the veils, and it shall come to pass that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty” Isa 3:22-24.

A sudden, peculiar conviction has rushed into the soul. One absorbing feeling has seized fast hold of it, and well nigh banished every other. “There is a God, and I am a sinner before Him”, is written upon the heart by the same divine finger that traced those fatal letters on the palace wall of the king of Babylon, which made the joints of his loins to be loosed, and his knees to smite one against another Da 5:5,6. “What shall I do? Where shall I go? What will become of me? Mercy, O God! Mercy, mercy! I am lost, ruined, undone! Fool, madman, wretch, monster that I have been! I have ruined my soul. O my sins, my sins! O eternity, eternity!” Such and similar cries and groans, though differing in depth and intensity, go up out of the new-born soul well nigh day and night at the first discovery of God and of itself. These feelings have taken such complete possession of the heart that it can find no rest except in calling upon God. This is the first pushing of the young bud through the bark, the first formation of the green shoot, wrapped

up as yet in its leaves, and not opened to view. These are the first pangs and throes of the new birth before the tidings are brought, "A man-child is born". "What shall I do to be saved?" cried the jailer. "God be merciful to me a sinner!" exclaimed the publican. "Woe is me, for I am undone!" burst forth from the lips of Isaiah.

This season, then, of first convictions may be called the early spring, the March of the soul. The weather is still cold and the winds chilling and cutting, and the bud dares not yet open its bosom, though it is pushing on in growth and vigour. The brown scales are still wrapped over it, and though swelling and enlarging, it remains as yet closed up in itself.

But after some time, longer or shorter as He sees fit, but generally bearing a proportion to the degree and depth of the convictions, the Lord, I believe, usually bestows some gleam of His smiling countenance on the soul. The cause of this glimpse of love is unknown to the soul that enjoys it. But its effects and the feelings to which it gives rise cannot be hid. The change, the revolution, which this smile creates is well nigh as great as the first awakening. With it commences that manifested growth, that opening of the bud, which I have called the Spring of the soul. The bud when it first pushes through the bark contains in itself the flower, the fruit, and the seed. These are not added to it afterwards, but however covered up or concealed, are in it, an essential part and portion of it, from the beginning.

Thus, when the Holy Ghost quickens the soul, He plants within it, a new creature, perfect in all its parts. The child in its mother's womb has all the limbs of a man. Nor do new-born babes of grace differ from little children, young men, or fathers, in the number of their graces, but only in the growth and development of them. Thus in the new-born soul there is hope, which keeps it from despair; love, which at times gleams out of terror; and faith, which cleaves hard to the promise, in spite of unbelief. These buds,

indeed, not being called forth by the beams of the sun, but being chilled and checked by the north wind that blows over the garden So 4:16, could not expand themselves, and were scarcely seen. But the first rays of the warm sun, the first genial breezes of the south wind that quieteth the earth Job 37:17, awaken, as it were, into a new existence these hidden, unopened buds.

The buds on all trees are formed many months before they burst forth into open leaf. The storms, and sleet, and frost do not destroy them, as in the elect, despair never swallows up hope, nor enmity love, nor unbelief faith. But they cannot unfold and expand their blossom, nor burst into growth, until “the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land”. Then is the season “when the fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell” So 2:11-13. Under this gleam, then, of sunshine, this first smile of a heavenly Father’s love, the bud begins to open and unfold its bosom to meet the genial ray.

The first bud that expands itself to the sunshine is that of faith. But was not faith in the soul before? Yes, doubtless. And did not faith act upon and realise the things that are not seen? Most assuredly. Faith entered into the soul at the same moment as the first beam of supernatural light. Some persons are of the opinion that there is no faith in the soul whilst it is under the law, and that when deliverance comes, faith comes with it. To support their opinion they quote this text, “But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” Ga 3:25, where “faith” means not the grace of faith, but the object of faith—that is, Jesus Christ.

Others assert that there is no faith but the full assurance of faith, and that all that falls short of this is no faith at all. But I would ask, “Is there any difference between a soul dead in sins and one quickened into spiritual life? Are there not fears, terrors,

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GROWTH IN GRACE (Isaiah 18:5, 6)

convictions, pangs, cries, groans, and a host of feelings in the one which are not in the other? Whence arises this sense of guilt and wrath, this remorse for the past, and terror of the future?" I answer because divine faith credits the divine testimony. Before the soul was quickened into spiritual life the holiness and justice of God were the same, His wrath against sin and the curse of His righteous law were the same. But the soul did not feel them. Why not? Because the word was not "mixed with faith in them that heard it" Heb 4:2. A divine principle was needed to credit the divine testimony. He had heard these things by the hearing of the ear in the dead, outward letter. He had not seen them by the seeing of the eye, by an inward revelation. If the soul did not believe the word which entered it, did not credit the commandment which came to it Ro 7:9, how could it fall beneath the power of it? It did not formerly care for eternal realities, because it did not believe them by a divine faith. But now it receives, credits and believes the testimony of God, and this very faith is the cause of its alarm. If it could cease to believe, it would cease to feel.

But whence comes it to pass that faith acts in so different a manner when the Sun of righteousness breaks in upon the soul? Simply because faith credits just such a testimony only as is revealed to it. Faith may be compared to a hand. My hand feels just according to the nature of the object which I grasp. I touch things hot or cold, rough or smooth, hard or soft. The hand is the same, and I touch the object in the same way; but I feel differently according to the different nature of the object. Or faith may be compared to the eye, which receives different impressions according as it looks upon different things; if upon things agreeable, impressions that are pleasant, if upon things disagreeable, impressions that are painful. But the eye is the same, and the mode of seeing is the same. Thus faith is the hand as well as the eye of the soul.

If God reveal to the conscience His wrath against sin, faith

is the hand to receive and the eye to see this divine testimony. If God reveal to the soul pardon and mercy in Christ, the same hand opens to receive, the same eye uncloses to see the heavenly manifestation. Paul recounts Heb 11 the exploits of faith, such as subduing kingdoms, working righteousness, obtaining promises, stopping the mouths of lions, and performing many things of very different and dissimilar kinds. But he never tells us that the faith itself was different, or that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, and the other saints, of whom the world was not worthy, had all a different faith according to their different exploits. When the horror of great darkness fell upon Abraham, and God said to him, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs" Ge 15:13, the faith whereby he credited this divine testimony was the same as that by which he believed in the Lord, when He said, "So shall thy seed be" Ge 15:5, and He counted it to him for righteousness. Nay, Abraham's faith never was so strong as when it acted most in the dark, and bade him stretch forth his hand to slay his son. There is but "one faith", as well as but one Lord and one baptism. And therefore Paul says that "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith" Ro 1:17; that is, the righteousness of God in the law to faith in the law, and the righteousness of God in the gospel to faith in the gospel.

But whilst the soul was labouring under deep convictions, faith was not seen, nor felt to be faith. Unbelief, doubts, fears, guilt, wrath, gloom, misery, all these heavy weights pressed faith down into the bottom of the slough. Faith could not lift up its head out of all the mud, and mire, and filth, under which it lay well nigh smothered. Its eyes were dim with weeping, a dreadful sound was in its ears, its arm seemed clean dried up, and its feet set fast in the stocks. The only sign of life was that it struggled upwards, and spread forth its hands in the midst of the waves, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth his hands to swim Isa 25:11.

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But as the sun shines, the bud of faith expands to receive the fostering ray. Mercy now appears in the place of wrath, and infinite compassion instead of infinite justice. The thick veil which had been spread over the promises, invitations and encouragements, is taken off. The Scriptures appear a new book, the gospel a new sound, the doctrines of grace new truths, and the blood of Christ a new salvation. The soul wonders it never saw these things before, and nothing now seems more easy and simple than to believe in the loving-kindness of God. The stone has been rolled from the sepulchre, and Lazarus has come forth. The night has passed away, and the morning appears. The mists that hung over the landscape have broken off, and the good land, the land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills, lies stretched out to view. As faith credited before the divine testimony of wrath, so now it credits the divine testimony of mercy; and as the heaviness of the one before made it stoop, so the good word of the other now maketh it glad.

The second bud which expands to receive the warm sunshine is that of hope. It was, indeed, in the soul before. There is no new creation of this bud by the rays of the sun, but only an expansion, a development of it. In the midst of all the gloom and despondency which brooded over it, there was a secret something at the bottom of the soul which kept it from despair. When the floodgates of divine wrath are opened in the natural conscience of a reprobate, he is usually swept away by it into the blackness of darkness for ever. Saul falls upon his sword, and Judas hangs himself. In the natural conscience of a reprobate there is wrath in reality; and wrath, too, against the person as well as against the sin. In the spiritual conscience of the elect there is but wrath in apprehension; and that wrath against the sin, not against the person. Thus the vessels of wrath call upon the mountains and rocks to fall upon them and hide them—their persons—from the wrath of the Lamb.

The vessels of mercy cry, "Pardon our iniquity; for it is great". Natural guilt drives the soul from God: "Let not God speak with us, lest we die" Ex 20:19. Spiritual guilt drives the soul to God: "Cast me not away from Thy presence" Ps 51:11; "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens" La 3:40,41. A graceless professor never rides at anchor. He is moored to the shore by a silken thread. The first storm snaps his line, and drives him on the rocks of despair where concerning faith he makes shipwreck 1Ti 1:19. Thus of these castaways some are driven to the madhouse, and others to the halter; some pine away in their iniquities, and others curse God and die.

But an elect vessel of mercy can never be wrecked on such shoals as these. To his own apprehensions, his hope may perish from the Lord La 3:18, and "be removed like a tree" Job 19:10. But it is not really lost out of his heart. He still holds faith, and has not put away a good conscience. There is a "Who can tell?" struggling for life. As Jacob said of Esau, "Peradventure he will accept me"; and as the servants of Benhadad reasoned with their master, "We have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful kings; peradventure he will save thy life", so the new-born soul under spiritual convictions hopes against hope. This anchor holds him firm. And though he often fears his cable will snap, yet the anchor, being within the veil, linked on to the throne of God by the golden chain of eternal love, can neither break nor drive.

But hope in a storm and hope in a calm, hope in the bud and hope in the flower, though they differ not in nature, differ greatly in degree. Night and day do not alter the reality of things, but they widely alter their appearance. Hope shut up in a dungeon and looking through the prison bars, and hope walking abroad in the sunshine differ much in feeling, though they do not differ in kind. But we must not cut off hope's head, nor bury him alive in his cell,

because he is shut up, and cannot come forth. Neither must we say that hope is only born on the same day that he comes out in his holiday attire.

But some would treat hope as badly as they treat faith, and allow him neither place nor name, birthright nor inheritance in the regenerated soul until deliverance comes, though it belongs especially to the poor Job 5:16, dwelleth in the heart that is sick Pr 13:12, and is the portion of those whose mouth is in the dust La 3:29. Such wise master-builders would allow the soldier no helmet 1Th 5:8, the sailor no anchor Heb 6:19, and the prisoner no stronghold Zec 9:12. But if he is joined to the living he has hope; and the hope of a living dog is better any day than the vain confidence of a dead lion Ec 9:4.

But under the genial ray of God's smiling countenance the bud opens, and hope bursts forth. And as it expands it looks upward to heaven, and rises towards its Author and Finisher, its Source and its End. All true grace looks upward, whilst counterfeits look downward. Thus true hope centres in God; false hope centres in self. "Hope thou in God", said David to his soul Ps 42:11. "And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in Thee" Ps 39:7. "That they might set their hope in God, and not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation" Ps 78:7-8. But false hope is a hope in self, that is to say, natural self. It is therefore compared to a rush, which grows out of the mire, and withereth before any other herb; and to the web which the spider spins out of its own bowels Job 8:11-14. I never yet found anything in self—I mean natural self—which raised up a living hope. I have known plenty of things to cause despair, such as pride, lust, covetousness, unbelief, infidelity, enmity, rebellion, hardness and carelessness. I have found in self mountains of sin to press out the life of hope, torrents of evil to sweep away the foundations of hope, and clouds of darkness to hide the very existence of hope. But I have never yet found in vile self, deceitful self, filthy self, black self, and hateful self, any one

thing to beget or keep alive a spiritual hope. If I could, I should fall under that terrible sentence, whose sweeping edge cuts off thousands: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord" Jer 17:5.

But what a mighty revolution takes place in the soul when the bud of hope bursts forth into flower! It was well nigh covered up with despair, as the bud is hidden by the green leaves that close around it; but it springs up out of despair, and the green leaves part asunder. Darkness, guilt, terror, heaviness, gloom, melancholy, forebodings of death and judgment brooded over the soul, like the unclean birds over Abraham's sacrifice. But hope, as Abraham of old, has driven them away. And now hope mounts upward to God. Hope has nothing to do with earth, but leaves flesh and self and the world, the servants and the asses, at the foot of the mount Ge 22:5, that it may have communion with Jehovah Jireh. Thus hope feeds upon the unseen things which faith realises.

Both faith and hope are engaged on the same things, but not in the same way. Faith credits, hope anticipates; faith realises, hope enjoys; faith is the hand which takes the fruit, hope is the mouth which feeds upon it. Thus a certain promise is made to Abraham that he shall have a son by Sarah. This was a revelation of divine possibility in human impossibility Mr 10:27, of supernatural power in creature helplessness Ro 4:19-22, to credit which revelation is the essence of spiritual faith. By faith Abraham realised this promise; by hope he enjoyed it. It was an unseen thing, an event to come to pass at twenty-five years distance, but faith made it present, and as such hope fed upon it. When Abraham held in his arms the newborn Isaac, the pleasure was only a fuller enjoyment of what he had before tasted. He now enjoyed in reality, in possession, what he had previously tasted in prospect, in anticipation. Thus true hope feeds upon present things, but upon present things only as pledges and foretastes of things future. It feeds upon Christ, the same yesterday, today, and for ever, and looks forward to no

other salvation than that of which it now enjoys the foretaste. All other hope than this is a lie. To hope in the forgiveness of sin—of which there is no foretaste; in God—of whom there has been no manifestation; in salvation—of which there has been no pledge; in mercy—of which there has been no token; in everlasting happiness—of which there has been no inward enjoyment; is delusion and presumption. Of this building, ignorance digs the foundation, self-deceit rears the wall, and hypocrisy plasters on the untempered mortar. It is a refuge of lies, which the hail shall sweep away and the waters overflow.

The budding forth of hope and the opening of this heavenly flower, that only grows in the valley of Achor, the vale of trouble Ho 2:15 Jos 7:26, marg., is a season never to be forgotten. Well do I remember the place—a little garden, hidden by buildings, and overgrown with shrubs, where this flower opened in my soul. But the buildings could not hide it, nor the evergreens shade it, nor the damp close it. The bud opened, the flower burst forth, and at the same moment the eye looked up, and the mouth uttered, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee”.

If time permitted, I might show how in this spring of the soul the bud of every grace expanded in a similar way.

Love in the bud had scarcely strength to maintain its existence against the enmity of the carnal mind stirred up by the entrance of the Law. Like a tender graft it seemed as though it must wither away and die. But love in the flower is strong and vigorous. Love in the bud was not seen nor known to be love. The colour and beauty of the flower could not be gathered from the appearance of the bud. But love in the flower is known at once to be love. Like its divine Author, it cannot be hid Mr 7:24, but is known and read of all men.

So amidst the legal repentance and the sorrow that worketh

death, which were wrapped around it, godly sorrow, whilst in the bud, could scarce be seen. It lay crouching beneath the leaves, hidden and indistinct. But being looked upon by the sun, it looks in its turn upon Him whom it hath pierced, and mourneth for Him as one that mourneth for his firstborn.

Godly fear, again in the bud was darkened and obscured by the fear which hath torment. Slavish fear was so strong that it drew away all the sap from filial fear. Darkness and damp, lowering clouds and a threatening sky, cherished the former, whilst they checked and chilled the latter. But as the life of the one is the death of the other, godly fear, when it bursts into flower, soon outgrows the shoot of slavish dread. When Abraham makes a feast for Isaac, Ishmael is turned out of doors. Love which casts out the fear that hath torment is the very life of that spiritual fear which is a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death.

Prayer is another grace of the Spirit which opens and expands its bud in this springtime of the soul. It had always been in the soul from the first entrance of spiritual light. "Behold, he prayeth" Ac 9:11, was the mark of regenerated Saul. But hitherto it had consisted of little else but sighs and groans. Access to God, enjoyment of His presence, sensible communion, holy familiarity, praise and blessing, and similar feelings of nearness were scarcely known. It had hitherto been more cries forced out by terror than prayer drawn forth by love. It was more the howl of the criminal, the cry of the leper, the groan of the desperate, the broken, interrupted gasping of the drowning or the dying than the soft, solemn, gentle, calm stream of nearness and access to God. There are two kinds of spiritual prayer. There is the prayer under guilt, and the prayer under mercy; the prayer of a heart overwhelmed, and the prayer of a heart overflowing; the prayer of distance, and the prayer of nearness; prayer interrupted with sobs and groans, intervals of silence and fits of sullenness, like a mountain stream rushing amid rocks and stones; and prayer flowing calmly and gently into the

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bosom of God, as the river of the valley glides into the bosom of the sea.

During this spring of the soul, all things connected with spiritual religion are full of sweetness. The Word of God is as honey and the honeycomb, the company of His children eagerly sought after, the ordinances of His house highly prized, and the message of His ministers gladly received. Almost every sermon brings some blessing, every prayer some refreshment, and every chapter some instruction or some consolation. Thus the soul grows up like the calf of the stall. Having tasted that the Lord is gracious, it feeds on the sincere milk of the Word, and grows thereby 1Pe 2:2,3.

Under these encouragements the second stage of spring, the summer of the soul, comes rapidly on. This is “the perfecting of the bud, the ripening of the sour grape in the flower”; not the ripening of the fruit, which takes place in autumn, but the ripening, that is, the maturing, the full completing, of the flower, which takes place in summer. “The perfecting of the bud” is its full expansion; “the ripening of the sour grape in the flower” is the ripening of the flower that contains the grape, not the ripening of the fruit after the flower is fallen. The fruit could not be fertilised if the flower were not perfected, but would drop off together with the flower, like the untimely figs of a fig-tree Re 6:13.

Thus, in this time of summer, budding hope expands into hope full-blown, faith in the shoot opens into faith in the blossom, and love in the green leaf ripens into love in the flower. In these warm days of summer, the sky is for the most part without a cloud. The peace of God keeps the heart and mind—the one from idolatry, and the other from confusion. Heaven seems at hand and eternity near; death under the feet, and hell out of sight. To him that walks in this happy path the pleasures and cares of the world, the things of time and sense, the vain pursuits of carnal men, the business of the shop and the field, the empty profession of thousands, the noise

and bustle of a fleshly religion, all seem lighter than vanity. Being “transformed in the renewing of his mind”, and thus conformed, in a faint measure, to Christ’s image, he views things, in some degree, as the Lord Himself views them, for he has the mind of Christ 1Co 2:16, and sees light in God’s light Ps 36:9. Thus sin becomes hateful, the carnal mind a burden, and the earth itself a wretched abode; and the soul cries, “Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest” Ps 55:6.

Who would not think this happy soul near to heaven, when it seems to be thus on the very borders of it? But it may be near it, and yet not enter into it; as the children of Israel were very near the land of Canaan forty years before they took possession of it; forty years of weary wandering in the wilderness, after their first pitching in Kadesh Nu 13:26, which was in the uttermost of the border of Edom Nu 20:16, and therefore close to the Holy Land.

There are lessons to be learnt, of which the soul at present knows little or nothing. There is an experience to be passed through, little, little dreamt of; a road to be travelled, as yet but little, little known. Harvest does not succeed summer in the kingdom of grace, as in the kingdom of nature. “Afore the harvest” another season comes. A long and dreary winter intervenes, and with winter comes the pruning knife of the heavenly Husbandman, who purgeth the vine, “that it may bring forth more fruit” Joh 15:2. “For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, He shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches.” But why should this wintry season be necessary? What need of this sharp and severe discipline? Why should not the soul go on as it has begun? Why should it not proceed from strength to strength, and increase in faith, hope, and love, until its peace should be as a river, and its righteousness as the waves of the sea? Isa 48:18, We have indeed an abundance of preachers who tell us not only that it ought to be so, but that is

actually is so. We have no lack of railway projectors, who will draw us out a line to heaven with neither hill nor dale, and scarcely an inclined place. Nor have we any want of fancy drawing masters, who will sketch us out a beautiful landscape, with heaven itself at the end, as easily as Martin paints his Egyptian colonnades and oriental palaces. But there are such persons as fire-side travellers and chimney-corner voyagers, and such architects as builders of castles in the air. Now, however pretty may be the descriptions of the one, or however beautiful the palaces of the other, the true pilgrim needs a guide who has traveled the road himself, and he that builds for eternity wants an architect who can lay a solid foundation at the first, and afterwards put every stone in its right place. We will leave, then, these speculators to their theories, and instead of speaking of things as they think the ought to be, [To be always telling us what we ought to do, is to bid us draw water with a bucket which has a hole at the bottom; and I am sure free-will never yet mended this hole.] will endeavour to describe things as they are. A little spiritual insight, then, into the human heart may explain the reason why this severe discipline is needful, and unravel this mystery. Together with the spiritual graces that had first budded, and afterwards, under the warm beams of the sun, burst forth into flower, there had shot unperceived an undergrowth of self-righteousness and spiritual pride.

Counterfeits, too, and imitations of divine operations had sprung up, as the offspring of a deceitful heart, or as delusions of Satan transformed into an angel of light. Side by side with spiritual trust, fleshly presumption had imperceptibly crept up. Under the shadow of divine hope, vain confidence had put forth its rank shoots. Natural belief had grown rapidly up with spiritual faith, fleshly ardour with heavenly zeal, universal charity with divine love, and the knowledge that puffeth up the head with the grace that humbleth the heart. Above all things, pride, "accursed pride,

that spirit by God abhorred”, was taking occasion by the very grace of God to feed itself to the full. It was sitting on Christ’s throne, exalting itself and despising others, measuring every one by its own standard, and will nigh trampling under its feet every one of David’s soldiers that was in distress, in debt, or discontented 1Sa 22:2. Forgetting its base original, when it was a beggar on the dunghill, and that a man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven, the soul was in great hazard of sacrificing to its own net, and burning incense to its own drag Hab 1:16. Thus pride was doing that secret work which Hart so well describes;

The heart uplifts with God’s own gifts,  
And makes even grace a snare. Gadsby’s 287

But beside these more obvious and glaring evils, we may remark that self was as yet little known, the deep recesses of a desperately wicked heart little fathomed, the helplessness, beggary and bankruptcy of the creature little felt. The unspeakable value, therefore, of Christ’s blood, the breadths, lengths, depths and heights of distinguishing love, the riches of the goodness, forbearance and longsuffering of God, the depths of misery and degradation to which the Redeemer stooped to pluck His chosen from death and hell—all these divine mysteries, in the experience of which the very marrow of vital godliness consists, were little known and less prized.

Judging from my own experience, I believe there is at this time an indistinctness, a dimness, a haziness in the views we have of Christ. Though the soul loves and cleaves to Him with purpose of heart, yet it does not see nor feel the depth of the malady, and therefore not the height of the remedy. It has not yet been plunged into the ditch, till its own clothes abhor it Job 9:31, nor cast into “deep mire where there is no standing” Ps 69:2. The fountains of the great deep of the human heart have not yet been broken up; the exceeding sinfulness of sin has not yet been fully manifested; the

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desperate enmity and rebellion of a fallen nature have not yet been thoroughly discovered; nor the wounds, bruises and putrefying sores of inward corruption been experimentally laid bare. And thus, as the knowledge of salvation can only keep pace with the knowledge of sin, Christ is as yet but half a Saviour.

A lesson, therefore, is to be taught which the soul can learn in no other way. Books here are useless, Christian friends of little value, ministers ineffectual, and the letter of the Word insufficient. A certain experience must be wrought in the soul, a peculiar knowledge be communicated, a particular secret be revealed, and all this must be done in a way for which no other can be substituted. This, then, is the reason why winter comes afore harvest, and why "the sprigs are cut off with pruning hooks, and the branches taken and cut down."

The discipline thus exercised by the heavenly Husbandman consists of two distinct parts;

1. The first is that which is immediately and peculiarly exercised by Himself: "He will cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches."

2. The second is that which He leaves to be accomplished by other agents. "They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth; and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them."

I remarked that there had shot up a secret undergrowth of natural religion, as well as a plentiful crop of pride, during the spring and summer of the soul. These are the sprigs that had grown up side by side with the bud. Now if these were suffered to continue, they would starve the bud, or overshadow it. A shoot from the old stock, if permitted to remain, will always starve the graft. It is a sucker, so called because it sucks the sap and nourishment from it, and lives and thrives at its expense. A good gardener, therefore, never hesitates for a moment, but takes out his pruning knife and

cut it off close to the stem.

But it may be said, "How will this comparison hold good in the kingdom of grace? The old man and the new are not maintained and nourished by the same sap." It is true that originally they are not, but when grace visits the heart, nature will often adopt new food and take grace's provision. Old nature is not very delicate nor dainty, but will feed on anything that suits her palate or satisfies her ravenous appetite. Sin or self-righteousness, indulgences or austerity, feasting or fasting, truth or error, religion or profaneness, superstition or infidelity, a convent or a brothel, all are alike to nature. She has the appetite of a vulture, and the digestion of an ostrich. She has as many colours as a chameleon, and as "changeable suits of apparel" as an actor's wardrobe. She can play all parts, speak all languages, and assume all shapes. But all her crafts and wiles she employs for one single end—to feed and exalt herself. This is the utmost stretch of her grovelling ambition, and to effect the will compass sea and land, heaven and hell.

Thus when grace comes into the heart, nature first resists and quarrels with the newcomer, who is destined to rise upon her ruins, and set up his throne on her prostrate body. But as opposition only makes grace wax stronger and stronger, nature soon changes her tone, and seeks to ruin him by her friendship, whom she cannot conquer by her enmity. She becomes religious, and puts in her claim for some of grace's food. If grace prays, she can pray also; if grace reads, she too can turn over the Bible; and if grace hears, she can sit under a gospel minister. Nay, she can go far beyond grace, for she has no conscience and he has, and can talk when grace is forced to hold his tongue, and get into a pulpit when can hardly sit in the pew. So the six hundred thousand who fell in the wilderness ate angels' food to the full. Ps 78:25 So Saul was feasted on the shoulder, the choice piece that was reserved especially for the priest 1Sa 9:24 Le 8:32 . Thus nature, become religious, feeds on the provision bestowed upon grace. And this she does so slyly

and secretly, that unsuspecting, guileless grace never discover the robbery. Here, then steps in the heavenly Husbandman, and begins to cut off with His pruning hook the sprigs that are pushing forth so luxuriantly at grace's expense.

In using His pruning hook, the divine Husbandman has two objects in view;

1. To cut off close to the stem the rank shoots of nature.

2. To cut down to their due proportion—their bearing length, the scions of grace. Now natural faith, false hope, and counterfeit love are utterly unable to stand against heavy trials when they are sent for the express purpose of putting us into the balance. They give way and fall to pieces. They vanish away like the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney. It is as Bildad speaks of a hypocrite's hope; "He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure" Job 8:15. And as this sharp pruning hook lops off false religion close to the stem, so it cuts down a good part of that which is true.

It is true that real grace can suffer neither loss nor diminution, but its manifestations and its actings may. Who that possesses faith is not conscious that it ebbs and flows, rises and sinks, is strong and weak, and varies from day to day and from hour to hour? Thus when a sharp trial comes, its immediate effect is to depress faith. It falls upon it like a weight, and bends it down to the ground. Faith may be compared to the quicksilver in a weather-glass or in a thermometer. The quantity of mercury in the bulb never varies, but it rises or falls in the tube according to the weight of the air, or the heat of the day. Thus faith, though it abides in the heart without loss or diminution, yet rises or sinks in the feelings, as the weather is fair or foul, or as the sun shows or hides itself.

Did Job's faith, for instance, mount equally high when "in the days of his youth"—the spring of his soul—"the secret of God was

upon his tabernacle," and when "he cursed his day," and cried, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him?" Was Peter's faith as strong when he quailed before a servant girl as when he was ready to go to prison and death? Or Abraham's when he denied Sarah to be his wife Ge 20:2, and when with but 318 he pursued and smote the army of four mighty kings? Ge 14. If faith never fluctuated, never sinks and never rises, then we have at once the dead assurance of a professor; the faith is in our own keeping; then it does not hang on the smile or frown of God; then we are no more beggars and bankrupts, living on supplies given or withholden, but independent and self-sufficient; then we "have no changes, and so fear not God." But if faith ebb and flow, what is the cause? Is it in self? Can we add to its stature one cubit, or make one hair of it black or white? If not, then must its ebbings and flowings come from God.

But temporal afflictions do not cut down faith, hope and love, nor cut off their counterfeits so severely and closely as spiritual trials. We read of "pruning hooks," which expression denotes more than one. Thus any discovery of the holiness and justice of God, of His terrible wrath against sin and eternal hatred of all iniquity, any piercing conviction of His heart-searching eye flashing into the conscience, any setting our secret sins in the light of His countenance, any spiritual sight of self in appalling contrast with His purity and perfection—any manifestations of this nature will most assuredly cut down to the stump the sprigs of natural religion.

Fallen nature could never yet endure the sight of God. It perishes at the rebuke of His countenance. It goes into the holes of the rocks and the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty. Natural faith never yet bore the touch of God's hand, but crumbled to pieces under it. Thus the first effect of these spiritual discoveries of God is to mow to the ground the thick under-growth of nature. And as the same stroke sweeps away all the consolation which the soul enjoyed, the feeling is as if it had

lost all its religion. Like a person going out of the sun into a dark room, to whom the darkness seem greater than it really is; or like a person to whom a bad piece of news is told, who is so stunned by it that he can think of no one alleviating circumstance; so when darkness suddenly falls upon the soul, and evil tidings from heaven seem communicated to the heart, not only nature totally, but grace, too, partially sinks under the stroke. As a person who swoons away retains life in reality, though it is lost in appearance, so grace faints away under trials, and often recovers but slowly her former strength.

Such is the usual effect of sudden and severe trials. But there is another mode of using the pruning hook employed by the divine Husbandman. And that is, if I may use the figure, to cut half through the branch, and so stop the supply of sap. Many who have enjoyed the spring and summer of the soul, have felt their comfort and peace decline gradually, they could scarce tell how. It was no sudden stroke that befell them, but a gradual withdrawing of light and life, and a gradual discovery of the character of God and of their own vileness. Thus the pruning hook was so slowly and insensibly put under the lower side of the branch to cut it half-way through, that it was not seen.

But its effects were soon felt. Natural religion began to wither. A secret dissatisfaction with self began to creep over the soul. Zeal did not shoot so strong, and faith seemed to hang its head, and hope appeared to droop. Gloom and despondency began to gather over the mind. The feeling grew stronger and stronger that there was something wrong somewhere. Suspicions as to the reality of its religion, and whether there was not something rotten at the very core, now begin to haunt the soul. Under these doubttings it goes to God to seek deliverance from Him. But all is dark there, and the heavens gather blackness. The pruning knife has cut off the supply of sap. The branches of nature wither away, and drop off from the

stem; and the shoots of grace look sickly and drooping.

But there is another branch of this sentence which God does not Himself execute, but leaves to the agency of others. All things that happen flow from the divine decrees. There is no chance work or contingency in the government of God; but "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth". Nevertheless He is not the author of sin; for He "cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man" Jas 1:13. Thus we must divide the decrees of God into His executive decree, and His permissive decree. All that is good He executes with His own hand. All that is evil happens according to His decree, and cannot but come to pass as necessarily as all that is good, but He leaves the execution of it to an evil heart, or to an evil devil. These act unconscious of the divine decree, and think only to fulfil their own evil purposes. Thus to them belongs the wickedness, and to God the glory. Satan when he tempted Judas, and the Jews when they crucified Christ, both fulfilled the divine decree, and formed connecting links of the great chain of redemption; but God did not by any secret impulse instigate them to act wickedly.

Thus in the execution of the second part of the sentence passed upon the tree in the text, God, who cannot be the author of sin, leaves it to be performed by other agents. "They", that is the branches pruned off and cut down, "they shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth, and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them."

The portion of the sentence which God leaves to be performed by other agents is as important, I may say as indispensable, as the portion which He executes Himself. These agents are two-fold:

1. The fowls of the mountains.
2. The beasts of the earth.

We may perhaps discover who are intended by "the fowls of

the mountains” by referring to the Lord’s own explanation of the parable of the sower. We read in that parable Mr 4:4 of “the fowls of the air”, which came and “devoured the seed that was sown by the wayside”, which the Lord thus explains: “When they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts”. But there is something we must not pass over unnoticed in the word “left”: “They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains”, etc. How much is contained in the expression “left”! It is as though the soul were given up, abandoned, forsaken, not indeed fully nor finally, but cast off as it were for a time, and delivered, like Samson, to make sport for its enemies. The tree with its sprigs cut off close to the stem, with the branches that shot up from its roots cut down and taken away, and the graft itself pruned down to a remnant of what it was, stands a melancholy stump. Winter has come; the sun no longer shines. The sap has sunk down into the root; life seems pretty well extinct, and the axe appears ready to finish what the pruning hook has left undone. And now what does it seem fit for? To become a roosting place for every unclean bird. “There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate” Isa 34:15. These keen-eyed fowls of the mountains are always watching their opportunity to alight upon a soul forsaken of God. The eagle “dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off. Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she” Job 39:28-30. And as the “fowls of the mountains” seem to signify the fallen angels, those accursed spirits, whose delight is to destroy all whom they can, and to harass all whom they cannot destroy; so by “the beasts of the earth” we may understand those earthly lusts, carnal desires, and base workings of a fallen nature which war against the soul.

Now it is most difficult, if not altogether impossible, for a tempted soul to distinguish clearly and accurately between the temptations which spring from Satan and those which arise from the carnal mind. And for this reason, that Satan can only work on our fallen nature, and thus we are unable to distinguish between the voluntary lusts of our carnal heart, and those which arise from the suggestion of Satan. He tempts most when least seen. But though when under the temptation, we cannot often, nor indeed usually, distinguish between the suggestions of Satan and the spontaneous lustings of our own hearts, yet, looking at each at a distance, we may draw this distinction between them, that spiritual wickedness, what Paul calls "filthiness of the spirit" 2Co 7:1, may be ascribed to "the fowls of the mountains"; and carnal wickedness, the "filthiness of the flesh", to the beasts of the earth. Thus all those peculiar temptations respecting the being and character of God, which are usually unknown, or at least unfelt by us in our days of unregeneracy, but afterwards often sadly haunt the soul, we may ascribe to the suggestions of Satan.

A temptation, for instance, comes into the soul like a flash of lightning. It may perhaps be an infidel doubt that starts up suddenly in the mind. This hidden poison at first perhaps has little apparent effect, as we at once reject the thought with horror. But as soon as the Word of God is opened, or the throne of grace approached, the black thoughts, the powerful questionings, the harassing suspicions which fill the mind, show us in a moment how the subtle poison is coursing through every vein. The Word of God has lost all its sweetness and power, and the voice of prayer is dumb. Darkness and disquietude fill the soul. The heavens are clothed with blackness, and sackcloth is made their covering. Well do the words of Jeremiah describe this state of soul: "I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains"—the stable foundations

of truth—”and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled” Jer 4:23-25.

I never found anything to sweep away all my religion in any way to be compared with such thoughts as these. Unbelief has often shaken it to the very centre, guilt has covered it with midnight darkness, and fears of death in sickness have cut it down to the root. But infidel doubts sweep away the foundation itself, and “if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” Or, perhaps, some dreadful imagination rushes into the mind, such as Hart justly calls “masterpieces of hell”. These rush in in a moment, when perhaps we are on our knees, or reading the Scripture, or hearing the word. There is something so horrible in them that a man dares not for a moment think of them, even to himself, but strives to the uttermost of his power to banish them from his mind. He will start up from his knees, throw aside the Bible, plunge his thoughts into the world, yea, even into the lusts of the flesh, rather than not drive away such fearful imaginations. It seems as if we were committing the unpardonable sin, as if God would be provoked to cut us off in a moment, and send us to hell; as if the earth itself would open its mouth and swallow up such monsters of iniquity. I will allude no farther to these thoughts than to express my belief that many of God’s children are sadly pestered by them.

The great change which has befallen the soul, the mighty contrast between its present state and what it was “in months past as in the days when God preserved it, when His candle shined upon its head, and the rock poured it out rivers of oil”—this great and unlooked for revolution is of itself sufficient to kindle all the rebellion and enmity of the carnal mind. Upon these, therefore, Satan works. He and his tribe of evil spirits, these “fowls of the mountains”, come flocking down with their flapping wings, and

brood over the stump which God has for a time abandoned to them. They are said "to summer upon it", which expression may signify that they spend a certain season upon the tree cut down; that their visits are not for a day or a week, but for a whole season, a definite and prolonged time. But I think the expression points also to the delight, the infernal glee with which these foul birds come trooping down to their prey. It is their summer when it is the soul's winter.

If the devil ever feels joy, it is in making souls miserable. The cries of the damned are his music, their curses and blasphemies his songs of triumph, and their anguish and despair his wretched feast. Thus when these fowls of the mountains darken the wretched stump, and spread over it their black and baleful wings, it is their summer. And as they brood over it, they breathe into it their own wretched enmity against all that is holy and blessed. Hard thoughts of God, heavings up of enmity against His sovereignty, boilings up of inward blasphemy, and of such feelings as I dare not express, are either infused or stirred up by them. It is the soul's mercy that "the holy seed, the substance thereof, is in it, though it has east its leaves"; and that "there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again" and "through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant" Job 14:7-9. Nothing but divine life in the soul could withstand such assaults as these. And thus there is in the midst of, and in spite of, all the heavings and bubblings of inward rebellion, a striving against them, a groaning under them, an abhorrence of them, a self-loathing on account of them, and at times an earnest cry to be delivered from them.

But there are "the beasts of the earth" as well as "the fowls of the mountains", who sit on this forsaken stump. These are said "to winter upon them"; that is, on the remnants of the broken branches. This expression "winter" points apparently to the season of the year during which the beasts of the earth take up their abode upon it.

And it seems to intimate that they and the fowls of the mountains divide the year between them. The one take the summer, and the other the winter. Thus there is change of visitants, but no respite for the tree; a diversity of temptation, but no relief for the soul.

These beasts of the earth, I observed, seemed to signify the lusts of our fallen nature, the wretched inheritance which we derive from our first parent. "The first man is of the earth, earthy." And, "as is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy" 1Co 15:47,48. The sin of our fallen nature is a very mysterious thing. We read of the mystery of iniquity as well as of the mystery of godliness; and the former has lengths, depths, and breadths as well as the latter; depths which no human plummet ever fathomed, and lengths which no mortal measuring line ever yet meted out.

Thus the way in which sin sometimes seems to sleep, and at other times to awake up with renewed strength; its active, irritable, impatient, restless nature, the many shapes and colours it wears, the filthy holes and puddles in which it grovels, the corners into which it creeps, its deceitfulness, hypocrisy, craft, plausibility, intense selfishness, utter recklessness, desperate madness, and insatiable greediness, are secrets, painful secrets, only learnt by bitter experience. In the spiritual knowledge of these two mysteries—the mystery of sin and the mystery of salvation—all true religion consists. In the school of experience we are kept day after day, learning and forgetting these two lessons, being never able to understand them, and yet not satisfied unless we know them, pursuing after an acquaintance with them, and finding that they still, like a rainbow, recede from us as fast as we pursue. Thus we find realised in our own souls those heavenly contradictions, those divine paradoxes, that the wiser we get, the greater fools we become 1Co 3:18; the stronger we grow, the weaker we are 2Co 12:9,10; the more we possess, the less we have 2Co 6:10; the more completely bankrupt, the more frankly forgiven Lu 7:42; the more

utterly lost, the most perfectly saved; and when most like a child, the greatest in the kingdom of heaven Mt 18:4.

Now, as the nature of the fowls of the mountains cannot be known by merely gazing at them as they hover in the air, so the disposition of the beasts of the earth cannot be learned by seeing them in a travelling show, locked up in the dens of a menagerie. We know them best by feeling their talons. These wild beasts during the summer, when the sun was up, and the day hot, lay crouching in their holes and caverns. "The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens" Ps 104:22. The lewd monkey, the snarling dog, the greedy wolf, the untameable hyena, the filthy jackal, the cunning ape, the prowling fox, the ranging bear, the relentless tiger, and every beast of the forest that roars after its prey—all lay in the depths of the wood, unnoticed and unknown, while the sun was high in the heavens. But winter has come, and the beasts of the earth gather round the hewn-down stump.

In the first awakenings of the soul we do not usually know nor feel much of our fallen nature. We look too much to the branches, and not enough to the root; taste the bitterness of the stream more than that of the fountain, and are more engaged with the statue than the hole of the pit whence it was digged. We feel more the guilt of sin committed than of sin indwelling, and think more of the daily coin that passes through our hands than of the mint—the evil treasure of our evil heart—which stamps it with its image and superscription. Caesar's penny denoted Caesar's power, though those who boasted they never were in bondage to any man, saw not that the money which circulated among them carried with it a proof of his dominion over them. Nor do we see at first very clearly that the sin which stamps every action has the image of Adam engraved upon it. Still less do we know much about sin in the days of spiritual prosperity. The good treasure of the good

heart is then circulating its gold, stamped with Christ's image. But when the day of adversity comes, and beggary and bankruptcy ensue, and the evil treasure again issues forth, we begin to look at the die, and feel—bitterly and painfully feel—that every word, look, thought, desire and imagination, as they pass through the heart, are immediately seized, cast under the press, and come forth bearing sin's coinage upon them. This bank never breaks, this die never wears out, but fresh coin is issued as fast as the old disappears. Guilt, indeed, and a tender conscience would fain stop this circulation, but they can do little else than stand by and count, with sighs and groans and bitter lamentations, the incomings and outgoings of sin's exchequer.

But what are the effects of these trying dispensations? Such as could be produced in no other way. Whatever wonderful effects are ascribed to the letter of the Word, in this Bible-spreading and Bible-reading day, one thing is certain, that it is utterly inadequate to produce in the soul the fruits and graces of the Spirit. Humility, repentance, filial fear, self-loathing, simplicity and godly sincerity, brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, meekness, patience, deadness to the world, spiritual discernment, boldness and faithfulness in the cause of truth, an open heart and an open hand—such and similar Divine fruits cannot be gathered out of the Bible as a man picks hips and haws off a hedge. The notions of them may; and in this day, notions and opinions, doctrines and sentiments, creeds and articles, ceremonies and ordinances, cant and whine, superstition and self-righteousness, formality and tradition, have usurped the place of vital godliness. But the reality, the power, the life, the inbeing, the feeling, the experience, in a word, the spiritual possession of these gracious fruits must be wrought into the soul; made, as it were, part and parcel of it, be the blood that circulates through its veins, the meat it eats, the water it drinks, and the clothing it wears. Now this the letter of

the word never has done, and never can do. A peculiar experience must be passed through; and by means of this spiritual experience alone are these divine effects wrought. Thus the fair tree that shot up its boughs to heaven being pruned down to a stump, and the abandoning of it to the fowls of the mountains and to the beasts of the earth, teaches the soul:

1. Humility. Humility is not obtained by reading texts, and turning over parallel passages which speak of it, but by having something in ourselves, discovered to us in a spiritual way, to be humble for. Thus a man who stands as a forsaken stump of what he was, and has the devil to harass him all the summer, and his own vile heart to plague him all the winter, has something in himself to make him humble. Humility is forced, beaten, driven into him; he is made humble, whether he will or not, and is compelled by sheer necessity to take the lowest room.

These cutting dispensations teach him:

2. His helplessness. A man does not learn that he is a helpless creature by reading Ro 5:6, as he does not learn that his heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked by reading Jer 17:9. A Chelsea pensioner, with both his arms shot off, or a man bed-ridden with the palsy, wants nobody to tell him how helpless he is. It is his daily, hourly, momently experience. Every time he wishes to eat, drink or stir, his helplessness is forced upon him by bitter experience. He cannot deny it, evade it, or escape from it. Thus a man who has had all his natural religion cut down to the ground, and the branches thereof taken away, and burnt before his eyes, needs no one to preach to him "the duty of helplessness". The fowls of the mountains come flocking down; he has no arms to drive them away. The beasts of the earth gather around him; he is palsied, and is forced to lay his body as the street for them to pass over.

From these mysterious dealings he learns:

3. Self-loathing. He cannot be a peacock Pharisee, spreading out in the sun the feathers of good works. He has something to loathe himself for. We cannot hate others without a cause of hatred. Nor can we feel hatred of ourselves, unless there is something in self to hate. A man who falls into a stinking puddle hates his clothes because he loves cleanliness. Thus he who has a holy principle in his heart must needs hate sin. Our modern professors hate other people's sins, but love their own. But a child of God hates himself as being so filthy and polluted before Him whom he loves. He hates the fowls that brood over him with their obscene wings and dismal croakings. He hates the beasts that roar about him for food, and grudge if they be not satisfied. And above all he hates himself, as the wretched stump to which these unclean animals resort.

It would not be difficult to show how patience, meekness, contrition of spirit, tenderness of conscience, and other similar graces are produced in the soul by this dark experience, which every prating fool whom presumption has stuck up in a pulpit has a bolt to shoot at.

But I hasten to an effect that I cannot pass over, and that is, that it produces a case for the Divine Redeemer in which to manifest His power, glory and salvation. With all the great swelling words about religion that are trumpeted through the land, and amongst the troops of professors that everywhere abound, there is scarcely one of a thousand who has a case that needs Christ's heavenly manifestations. They can all see, all hear, all believe, all rejoice, and I am sure they can all talk. They never had their natural religion stripped from them; never had clay smeared over their eyes Joh 9:6, nor the divine fingers put into their ears Mr 7:33, nor their wisdom turned into foolishness, nor their comeliness into corruption. But they say, We see, and therefore their sin remaineth. The light which is in them is darkness, and thus how great is that darkness!

A physician is useless without a case, and the deeper the case,

the wiser and better physician we need. Thus a guilty conscience is a case for atoning blood, a wounded spirit for healing balm, a filthy garment for a justifying robe, a drowning wretch for an Almighty hand, a criminal on the gallows for a full pardon, an incurable disease for a heavenly Physician, and a sinner sinking into hell for a Saviour stooping down from heaven. A man with a real case must have a real salvation. He is no longer to be cheated, fobbed off, deluded and tricked with pretences, as a nervous patient is sometimes cured with bread pills; but he must have a real remedy as having a real disease. Christ in the Bible, Christ sitting as an unknown Saviour in the heavens, Christ afar off, unmanifested and unrevealed, is no Christ to him. "Near, near; let Him come near—in my heart, in my soul, revealed in me, manifested unto me, formed within me—this, this is the Christ I want. O for one drop of His atoning blood, one smile of His blessed countenance, one testimony of His love, one gleam of His justifying righteousness!"

And thus when this divine Redeemer appears in His garments stained with blood, the sinking soul hails His approach, the fowls of the mountains take flight, the beasts of the earth slink off to their dens, the dreary stump pushes forth its shoots, and the voice sounds forth from the inmost depths of the soul, "This is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord, we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation".

And now comes that season to which all the preceding have been but preparatory and introductory—the Harvest of the soul. I do not understand by "the harvest" spoken of in the text the harvest at the end of the world Mt 13:39, the general ingathering of the elect from the four winds, from one end of the heaven to the other. But I understand by it a particular harvest; a harvest in the soul in time; not a harvest of both soul and body at the end of time. As there is a spring, a summer and a winter in experience, so is there a harvest in experience; and as one part of the text is

experimental, so the other part is experimental also.

The peculiar mark of harvest is, that it is the season of fruit. And thus I consider the harvest of grace to consist in the production of fruit in the soul. The only fruit which God will ever acknowledge as such, is that which He Himself produces by His Spirit in the heart. "From Me is thy fruit found" Ho 14:8. "Working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight" Heb 13:21. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained prepared, marg. that we should walk in them" Eph 2:10. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" Php 2:13. The market indeed is glutted with sloes and crabs. These are heaped up on every stall, and hawked about from door to door. But it is the fruit of the graft, not the fruit of the stock, that is worthy of the name, and none other will be put upon the heavenly table. The graft, however, would not bear till it was cut in. "Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it"—that is, dresses and prunes it—"that it may bring forth more fruit" Joh 15:2.

The great secret of vital godliness is to be nothing, that Christ may be all in all. Every stripping, sifting, and emptying; every trial, exercise and temptation that the soul passes through, has but one object—to beat out of man's heart that cursed spirit of independence which the devil breathed into him when he said, "Ye shall be as gods". A man must well nigh be bled to death before this venom can be drained out of his veins. To cut down a giant into a babe a span long; to put a hunch-backed camel into a hydraulic press, and squeeze it into sufficient dimensions to pass through a needle's eye—this is the process needful to be undergone before a man can bring forth fruit unto God. Well might Nicodemus marvel how a man could enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born; and the wonder how a grown-up man becomes a helpless babe is as great a mystery to most now.

The fatal mistake of thousands is to offer unto God the fruits of

the flesh instead of the fruits of the Spirit. Fleshly holiness, fleshly exertions, fleshly prayers, fleshly duties, fleshly forms, fleshly zeal—these are what men consider good works, and present them as such to God. But well may He “who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity”, say to all such fleshly workers, “If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil?” Mal 1:8. All that the flesh can do is evil, for “every imagination of man’s heart is only evil continually”; and to present the fruits of this filthy heart to the Lord of hosts is “to offer polluted bread upon His altar” Mal 1:7. Thus the “pleasant fruits, new and old” So 7:13, of which all manner are laid up at the gates of the righteous for the Beloved, are such only as the Spirit of God produces in the soul. And as He looketh not “on the outward appearance but the Lord looketh on the heart” 1Sa 16:7, so these fruits are not so much outward as inward fruits.

It is within, in the secret depths of the soul, that the eternal Spirit works; and the outward actions are but visible signs and manifestations of His inward operations. A broken heart, a contrite spirit, a tender conscience, a filial fear, a desire to please, a dread to offend the great God of heaven, a sense of the evil of sin, and a desire to be delivered from its dominion, a mourning over our repeated backslidings, grief at being so often entangled in our lusts and passions, an acquaintance with our helplessness and weakness, a little simplicity and godly sincerity, a hanging upon grace for daily supplies, watching the hand of Providence, a singleness of eye to the glory of God—these are a few of the fruits that constitute the harvest of the soul. But why was it necessary that winter should precede? Why does the farmer break up the green sward with his plough, and turn in all the pretty daisies and cowslips, and lay bare the black soil, with all the hidden worms and maggots that lie concealed beneath the turf? Why does he drag his harrows over the fallows, and tear up the couchgrass, and gather it

into heaps, and burn it to ashes? Because he wants a crop of corn to spring from seed which he himself sows, and because the natural produce of the land will not give him wheat and barley. Thus the violets and primroses of nature—the virtues of the natural heart, and all the flower of fleshly religion—must have the share of the winter plough pass beneath their roots, and be buried in mingled confusion beneath the black clods of inward corruption, that grace may spring up as an implanted crop.

By the wintry dealings I have before attempted to describe, independence has been broken to pieces, and the soul brought to hang upon Christ for everything; pride has been cut down, and humility produced; a deceitful heart has been laid bare, and spiritual integrity created; hypocrisy has been detected and sincerity implanted; a form of religion has been crushed, and power set up in its stead; an empty profession of dry doctrine has been rooted up, and a realisation of eternal things been substituted; the reprobate silver has been burnt in the furnace, and the pure gold has come out uninjured. A burnt child dreads the fire, and a broken-down soul dreads an empty profession. A tender wound cannot bear pressure, and a conscience made tender by terrible things in righteousness cannot bear the burden of guilt. “By the reason of God’s highness, it cannot endure” Job 31:23.

The things he has passed through have brought him into an acquaintance with God. He now knows the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent; and he has felt that God is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. He can no longer endure the vain inventions of men, the formalities of a carnal Establishment, the mummeries of priestcraft, the canting whine of hypocrites, the empty babble of chattering professors, the mock holiness of Arminian perfectionists, and the cloak of religion which masks thousands of rotten hearts. He becomes a solitary character. He sets little store by loud prayers or long prayers,

## GROWTH IN GRACE (Isaiah 18:5, 6)

whether they come from the blind mill-horse in the pulpit, or his humble imitator in the pew. He finds that a secret groan is better than a long prayer, a tear of contrition sweeter than an extempore form, and a few words with God in his closet more precious than many words at a prayer-meeting, even though deacons pray.

A line of Hart's hymns relieves his soul, when a noisy choir chanting Dr. Watts loads it with a burden; and half a verse of Scripture melts his heart, when a letter preacher with a long sermon hardens it into ice. He never leaves the company of empty professors without a load, or the sweet company of God without a blessing. He feels Christ to be his best Counsellor. His love most worth seeking, His friendship most enduring, His presence most cheering, and His smiles most to be desired. Men, even the very best of them, often only wound him; the company of God's children is often burdensome; and their advice usually an ineffectual help. His heavenly Friend never deceived him, never violated his confidence, disclosed his secrets, wounded his feelings, carnalised his mind, saddened his spirit, led him into error, or treated him with neglect. But on the contrary, 'pardons his sins, forgives his ingratitude, pities his infirmities, heals his backslidings, and loves him freely.

The Christian thus learns that if he stands, God must hold him up; if he knows anything aright, God must teach him; if he walks in the way to heaven, God must first put, and afterwards keep him in it; if he has anything, God must give it to him; and that if he does anything, God must work it in him. He now "through the law"—that is, through his experience of its killing sentence—"is become dead to the law, that he may live unto God". He can no longer take a killing letter for a living rule, but is deeply conscious that it is only by being "married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that he can bring forth fruit unto God" Ro 7:4. Thus by the presence of God going with him, he becomes separated "from all the people that are upon the face of the earth" Ex 33:16.

Whilst others boast of what they have done for God, he is glad

## GROWTH IN GRACE (Isaiah 18:5, 6)

to feel that God has done something for him; whilst others are handling the shell, he is eating the kernel; whilst others are talking of Christ, he is talking with Him; whilst others are looking through the park palings, he is enjoying the estate; and whilst others are haranguing about the treasure in the Bank of England, he is pleased to find a few coins in his own pocket, stamped with the king's image and superscription. But he finds the truth of that text, "In much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increases sorrow" Ec 1:18. As his inward religion separates him from those who have only an outward one, he becomes a butt for empty professors to shoot at. Those whom he once would have disdained to set with the dogs of his flock, now spare not to spit in his face Job 30:1 Job 30:10. Every consequential Evangelical, who has not an idea about religion but what he has gleaned from Scott or Simeon, condemns him as "a rank Antinomian". Every spruce Academic, hot from Hackney or Cheshunt, who knows no more about the operations of a living faith than of the Chinese language, has an arrow stored in his quiver, feathered with a text to strike him through the heart as "an awful character". Every high-faith professor rides over his head; every dry Calvinist outruns him in the race; every Pharisee outstrips him in zeal; every ranting Methodist thunders at him for sloth; and every doer of duty avoids him as a pestilence.

However various sects differ among themselves, they all unite in condemning him. All other religion is right, and his alone wrong; everyone else's faith is genuine, and his only is spurious. Of him alone the charitable augur uncharitably; universal salvationists cut off him alone from salvation; those that pity the heathen have no pity for him; and those who compass sea and land to make one proselyte, pronounce his case alone as past recovery. And what is his trespass and what is his sin, that they so hotly pursue after him? Ge 31:36. Does he live in sin? No. Is he buried in the world, head over ears in politics, heaping together dishonest gains, or

eaten up with covetousness? None dare say so. Does he neglect prayer, reading the Word, hearing the truth, contributing to the necessities of saints, and living peaceably with all men? No. Why then this universal baying at him from every dog of the pack? For the same reason that Joseph's brethren hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him—the Father loves him, and has clothed him in a garment of many colours, and given him revelations which He has denied to them.

But he has sorrow, too, and opposition within, far more trying to his spirit than the evil names which malicious ignorance heaps upon him, or the unjust suspicions which Pharisaic pride harbours against him. Paul, after being caught up into the third heaven, had given to him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure 2Co 12:7. Go where he would, this thorn still accompanied him, rankling continually in his flesh, hampering every movement, inflicting unceasing pain, and piercing him deeper and deeper the more that he struggled against it. Ten thousand thorns in the hedge do not pain like one in the flesh. And thus ten thousand unjust suspicions of the sons of Belial, though they be “all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands; but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear” 2Sa 23:6,7—ten thousand suspicions, I say, from vulture-eyed professors are but as thorns in the hedge, which only wound us when we go near them, and which a wise man will keep a due distance from. But a thorn in the flesh, driven and fastened in by the hand of God, we can neither ease nor extract.

And thus any one constant harassing temptation, which strikes into the soul of a child of God, will grieve and wound him a thousand times more deeply than a thick hedge of furze-bush professors standing by the roadside. But by these painful exercises he is kept from settling down on the lees of a dead assurance, or resting at his ease on the ground of a past experience. This rankling thorn

preserves him from that vain, wretched, delusive establishment, falsely so-called, which, as a spreading gangrene, has infected well nigh whole churches with the dry rot—an establishment built upon length of profession, upon belief of the doctrines of grace, upon membership in a Particular Baptist Church, upon consistency of conduct, upon a general currency as a believer, upon freedom from doubts and fears, and upon an experience twenty years ago. His thorn in the flesh will not let him stand at ease, or ground his arms, as though the battle were won, the enemy vanquished, and the articles of peace signed. He cannot rest on doctrines, of which the power is not now felt; nor in a past experience, which is not continually renewed; nor in a Saviour in the Bible whose presence is not from time to time manifested; nor in promises, of which the sweetness is not occasionally enjoyed. He cannot thus cast anchor in the Dead Sea. He cannot lie stretched at his ease on this downy bed, for his thorn will not let him rest, but makes him “full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day” Job 7:4.

Thus his establishment consists not in a head furnished with notions, but in a heart established with grace; not in an outward union with a church, but in an inward union with Christ; not in sitting down once a month to the ordinance, but in eating the bread which came down from heaven; not in having repented twenty years ago, but in being often melted by a sense of God's goodness and mercy; not in occupying a corner in an experimental chapel, but in having a place and a name in the church of the Firstborn. He will not indeed despise nor neglect any one of Christ's ordinances, but will look to the power more than to the form; and will think it sweeter to walk into the inner chambers of Zion's palace, and behold the King's face, than to go round about her, to tell her towers, and mark well her bulwarks.

Through the inward conflicts, secret workings, mysterious changes, and ever-varying exercises of his soul, he becomes

established in a deep feeling of his own folly and God's wisdom, of his own weakness and Christ's strength, of his own sinfulness and the Lord's goodness, of his own backslidings and the Spirit's recoveries, of his own base ingratitude and Jehovah's longsuffering, of the aboundings of sin and the super-aboundings of grace. He thus becomes daily more and more confirmed in the vanity of the creature, the utter helplessness of man, the deceitfulness and hypocrisy of the human heart, the sovereignty of distinguishing grace, the fewness of heaven-taught ministers, the scanty number of living souls, and the great rareness of true religion. Nor are these convictions borrowed ideas, floating opinions, crude, half-digested sentiments or articles of a creed, which may be right or may be wrong; but they are things known by him as certainly, and felt as evidently as any material object that his eye sees, or his hand touches.

He has a divine standard set up in his soul by which he measures others as well as himself, for "he that is spiritual judgeth all things" 1Co 2:15; and as he measures them with one hand, he is forced to stamp "Tekel" with the other. He looks into the granaries, and finds chaff stored instead of wheat; he holds up the notes to the light, and cannot discover the water-mark; he walks up to the fold, and sees goats penned instead of sheep; and visits the household to search for the family likeness, but finds it filled with the "sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore" Isa 57:3. All he wants is reality. All that he is in search of is something which bears the divine impress, and carries with it a heavenly and supernatural character. But instead of finding widows "indeed and desolate" 1Ti 5:5, he is pestered with widows of Tekoa 2Sa 14:2; and instead of bankrupt debtors and insolvent prisoners, he encounters scarce any but wealthy merchants, with a flourishing trade and a stock in hand. His soul can, however, only unite with the poor and needy, the stripped and the emptied, the shipwrecked sailor and the

## GROWTH IN GRACE (Isaiah 18:5, 6)

shelterless wayfarer, who, from sheer necessity, from being driven out of house and home, have fled for refuge to the hope set before them in a salvation without money and without price.

And thus a little godly fear, a little living faith, a little groaning prayer, a little genuine repentance—in a word, a little heavenly reality, will kindle a union, when towering pretensions, unshaken confidence, ready utterance, a sanctified countenance, a whining cant, a gifted head, and a tongue that walketh through the earth, will freeze up every avenue of his heart. He has a needle in his soul which has been touched with a heavenly magnet; and the pole that a broken heart attracts, a brazen forehead repels.

Thus growth in grace is not progressive sanctification and fleshly holiness on the one hand, nor a false and delusive establishment on the other. The narrow path lies between these two extremes. On the one side is Seneh, and on the other side is Bozez 1Sa 14:4, Pharisaic holiness and Antinomian security, and between these two sharp rocks lies the path “which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen” Job 28:7. From dashing on either of these rocks, a living man is kept only by the mysterious dealings of God with his spirit, and the internal exercises through which he continually passes. A constant acquaintance with his own vileness preserves him from a self-righteous holiness in the flesh; a daily cross and a rankling thorn keep him from careless presumption. His path is indeed a mysterious one, full of harmonious contradictions and heavenly paradoxes. He is never easy when at ease, nor without a burden when he has none. He is never satisfied without doing something, and yet is never satisfied with anything that he does. He is never so strong as when he sits still Isa 30:7, never so fruitful as when he does nothing, and never so active as when he makes the least haste Isa 28:16. All outstrip him in the race, yet he alone gains the goal, and wins the prize. All are sure of heaven but himself, yet he enters into the kingdom, whilst they are thrust out. He wins pardon through guilt, hope through despair,

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deliverance through temptation, comfort through affliction, and a robe of righteousness through filthy rags. Though a worm and no man, he overcomes Omnipotence itself through violence; and though less than vanity and nothing Isa 40:17 2Co 12:11, he takes heaven itself by force Mt 11:12.

Thus amidst the strange contradictions which meet in a believing heart, he is never so prayerful as when he says nothing; never so wise as when he is the greatest fool; never so much alone as when most in company; and never so much under the power of an inward religion as when most separated from an outward one. Strange mysterious creature! He cannot live without sinning, yet cannot live in sin; cannot live without prayer, and yet for days together cannot pray; continually finds religion a burden, yet would not part with it for the world; lusts after sin as a delicious morsel, yet hates it with a perfect hatred; esteems Christ the Chiefest among ten thousand, and yet is at times tried with doubts whether He is a Saviour at all.

Such, then, is the path, however feebly or imperfectly described, in which the redeemed walk Isa 35:9, a path trodden by them alone, and that too, often sorely contrary to their own inclinations. To walk in this path is not the product of wisdom Da 2:30, the effect of talent 1Co 2:6, nor the fruit of study. On the contrary, all that nature can do is to fight against it. Reason calls it folly, wisdom terms it madness, prudence considers it delusion, learning deems it enthusiasm, free-will counts it presumption, and self-righteousness thinks it licentiousness. Bishops and Archbishops despise it, Deans and Archdeacons abhor it, High Church clergy revile it, Low Church clergy preach against it, Bible and Missionary Societies cashier anyone the least tainted with it, and the devout and honourable expel it out of their coasts Ac 13:50. Graceless Calvinists abhor the sword whose keen edge gives them no quarter; Wesleyans revile the weapon that lays their proud fabric in the dust; worldly Dissenters hate the light that makes manifest their rotten

foundation; preachers made at colleges and academies detest the voice which demands their divine commission; and formalists of all grades, sects, names and denominations loathe a religion which cuts them off from eternal life, and leaves them without the shadow of a hope. One thing is to them sufficiently clear: if this be the only way to heaven, they are not walking in it. This, at any rate, they have discernment enough to see; and thus, if they would justify themselves, they must necessarily condemn the way itself, the people who are walking in it, and the ministers who preach it.

But happy are those of us who, by an Almighty hand and a supernatural power, have been put into this blessed path! We neither placed ourselves in it at first, nor have kept ourselves in it afterwards. If we have done either, we are not in the way at all, but are walking in a side path, and shall end at that door which Bunyan saw to open into hell from the very gates of heaven. He that has no searchings of soul whether he is in the way, no chilling doubts nor sinking fears ever saddening his spirit, no secret groan nor sigh to have his heart right before God, no solemn midnight cries, no anxious prospects nor gloomy retrospects, no trembling apprehensions how it will be with him at the last, no dread of self-deceit, nor suspicions of Satan's delusions—he, I say, who glides securely on without these deep exercises, manifests by his very ease that he is not in the narrow path that leads to eternal life.

By one who is spiritually sincere every step will be more or less weighed, every experience sooner or later brought to the touchstone, and every part of the road anxiously tried. He will love to be searched through and through. He will uncover his bosom to every arrow that flies from the pulpit, to see if it be aimed at him. He will love a searching ministry, and in his right mind cannot be probed too deeply. He will hate the daubers with untempered mortar, and those who sew pillows to all armholes. He will love heart and conscience work, and cleave most to him who most

“commends himself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God”. He desires to have his path traced out, his stumbling-blocks removed, his temptations entered into, and the dealings of God with his spirit described.

Though all condemn men of truth for bigotry and uncharitableness, he cannot think that to be a bad spirit which enters into the operations of the Holy Ghost, pulls down—false religion, tears away rotten props, hunts out lying refuges, delivers souls from hypocrisy and delusion, gives to man all the shame, and ascribes to God all the glory. However hated they be and reviled, he cannot but love those who are blessed to the healing of his wounds, lifting off his burdens, comforting him in his afflictions, and delivering him out of his temptations. He cannot speak evil of that secret power which has accompanied the word to his heart, laid bare its inmost secrets, traced out its most hidden workings, discovered its deepest thoughts, and manifested to his astonishment what he believed none could know but God and himself. Hungry men do not throw bread into the kennel; sick men do not shut the door in the doctor’s face; and prisoners do not strike the arm that sets them free. And thus you who are walking in this mysterious path will love the interpreters of your experience, the guides of your path, the breasts that give you suck, and the hand that ministers to you the bread of life.

But some will say, “Oh that I had a clear evidence I was walking in this path! What would I not give to have a divine testimony that the blessed Spirit was leading me in it!” It is through these very doubts that the evidence is obtained. Doubts lead to cries and groans after a divine testimony; and in answer to these cries the heavenly witness is given. A man without, doubts is without testimonies. Doubts are to testimonies what the mortise is to the tenon, the lock to the key, the enigma to the solution. Testimonies are Ebenezers, “stones of help” 1Sa 7:12, marg.; but the stone must

have a hole dug for it to stand in, and that hole is doubt. Doubts of salvation are to manifestations of salvation what hunger is to food, nakedness to clothing, a thunderstorm to a shelter, a gallows to a reprieve, and death to a resurrection. The one of these things precedes, prepares and opens a way for the other. The first is nothing without the last, nor the last without the first.

Thus, next to testimonies, the best thing is spiritual doubts. To know we are right is the best thing; to fear we are wrong is the second best. To enjoy the witness of the Spirit is the most blessed thing this side of the grave; to pant after that enjoyment is the next greatest blessing. I am speaking, mind, only of spiritual doubts; that is, doubts in a spiritual man, for natural doubts are as far from salvation as natural hopes. The path through the valley of Baca is "from strength to strength"; that is, according to the eastern mode of travelling, from one halting place to another, where wells are dug, and "the rain also filleth the pools" Ps 84:6,7. We do not learn either God or ourselves, sin or salvation, in a day.

The question is, Have we set one step in the way? "Watchman, what of the night?" Is it even, midnight, cock-crowing or morning? Mr 13:35. Is it spring, summer, winter or harvest? The question is not so much whether you have much faith, but whether you have any. It is not quantity, but quality; not whether you have a very great religion, but whether you have any at all. A grain of true faith will save the soul; and I have known many, many seasons when I should be glad to feel certain that I had the thousandth part of a grain. A grain of mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds; and even faith as small as that can move mountains. Have I described any part of your experience, found the least echo in your bosom, unravelled one divine secret of your heart, or touched one heavenly string in your soul? Happy is he that has one divine testimony to his eternal interest in the electing love of the Father, in the atoning blood and justifying righteousness of the Son, and in the divine teachings of the Holy Spirit.

But I solemnly assure everyone who has ears to hear, that this

path is the only way of salvation; and that every one who at the great day shall be found not to have walked in it will fall into the hands of Him who is a consuming fire; and will sink into hell, to lie for ever beneath His avenging frown.

### 3 LAWFUL STRIFE (2 Timothy 2:5)

Preached at Trinity Chapel, Alfred Street, Leicester on Lord's Day Morning,

*December 27 1840*

*“And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he strive lawfully.”*

*2 Timothy 2:5*

The Holy Ghost appears to have made much use of figures and illustrations in the word of God; and I believe we may find more or less of this mode of instruction from Genesis to Revelation. For instance, immediately after the fall, the Lord made use of a visible figure, when he made coats of skins, and clothed in them our first parents. What was this but a visible sign of the garment of imputed righteousness, in which alone they could stand accepted before him, connected with Christ's sacrifice, as the skin of the sacrificed animal was with its poured out blood? So after the flood, the Lord set his bow in the cloud, that, spanning earth and heaven, it might be a visible sign of his covenanted mercy from generation to generation. When we come a little lower down to the period when the Lord brought the children of Israel out of Egypt that they might be to him a peculiar people, He still chose the same visible mode of instruction by type and figure. The paschal lamb, the blood sprinkled on the lintel and the two side-posts, the ark of the covenant, the whole train of sacrifices, rites, and ceremonies, with all the furniture of the tabernacle, were all so many speaking figures, whereby spiritual instruction was communicated to those who had eyes to look through the type to the thing typified.

So when we come down to the times of the prophets, types and

figures were still employed. Jeremiah is sent down to the Potter's house to learn God's absolute sovereignty (Jer. 18); was commanded to wear a linen girdle, and then hide it in a hole of the rock by the river Euphrates, to show how the Lord would mar the pride of Judah (Jer. 13:1-11); and was shown the two baskets of figs, to teach them the difference between the precious and the vile. (Jer. 24.) So Isaiah walked barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder upon Egypt and Ethiopia (Isa. 20:3); and Ezekiel was commanded to take a tile and pourtray upon it the city, even Jerusalem, and lay siege against it. (Ezek. 4:1, 2.) When we come to the New Testament, we find the Lord making great use of this mode of instruction. All his parables were so many speaking figures, under which spiritual wisdom was couched. The sower going forth to sow, the woman hiding the leaven in three measures of meal, the man finding a pearl of great price, the net cast into the sea, the door, the shepherd, the vine to which he compares himself—what are all these but natural figures, which the Lord employs to convey spiritual instruction? Indeed so apt and so beautiful are some of these figures, that it has been a question with some, whether God had not in the original creation of all things a special view to spiritual truths. For instance, when he created the sheep, whether he had not a special eye to the elect; and when he created the vine, whether he had not a spiritual reference to Christ and his members. They thus look upon all outward creation as a type and figure of the new creation. But I think there is one consideration which shows that this view is not founded on truth. We find the apostle Paul employing figures not only altogether of man's invention, but even such as contain in themselves much evil. For instance, in four different places he has borrowed an illustration from the public games of the Greeks, which, like all large and promiscuous assemblies, were doubtless accompanied with much evil. Thus we find him speaking (1 Cor. 9:24-26,) "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do

it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air." The figure here is clearly drawn from the foot race and the boxing match in use among the Greeks at their public games. So again (Heb. 12:1) he says, "Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses," alluding to the multitude of spectators that surrounds the runners for the prize, as a cloud "let us lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us," as the racers threw aside all useless incumbrances "and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." So speaking of his own experience (Php. 3:13, 14), he says, "Brethren, I count myself not to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Here he clearly alludes to the runner in the foot race who never thinks of the ground over which he has passed, in his eagerness to press forward and carry off the prize.

The fourth place where the same apostle borrows the figure of these public games, is the verse from which I intend, with God's help and blessing, to deliver a few thoughts this morning. "And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully."

In order to enter into the spiritual meaning of this text, I must detain you for a few minutes with the natural explanation of it. The Holy Ghost has chosen by the mouth of Paul to convey spiritual instruction under this natural figure; we must therefore break through this shell to get at the kernel, for unless we have a clear view of the figure itself, we shall have a confused idea of its spiritual signification.

The apostle then, as I have already shown, borrows a figure here from the public games in his time, where there were prizes given to those who obtained the victory in one of these five contests, the chariot, and the foot race, wrestling, boxing, and a combat made up of the two last. The "man that strives for masteries," means he

who wrestles, or otherwise contends for victory, the prize being a crown of leaves, which was given publicly to the victor. Now there were certain rules and conditions, laid down beforehand, which were to be rigidly observed by all the candidates for the prize, and if any one of these what we may call “rules of the game” were broken by a candidate, then though he came in foremost, yet he lost the prize, because “he had not striven lawfully.” that is, had not complied with the rules. To borrow a comparison from the horse-races of this country, a practice I condemn, though I use the figure to throw a light upon the text if a horse runs the wrong side of the post, or carries less weight than the rule of the race requires, he loses the prize, though he comes in the first.

Having thus far opened up the natural meaning of the figure, we will now proceed to the spiritual instruction conveyed by it. We gather from it, then, that in spiritual things, there is a striving lawfully, and a striving unlawfully; and that the prize is not necessarily given to him who wins the race, if he has not complied with certain rules laid down.

I think then we may say that there are three distinct ways of striving.

1. There is an unlawful striving after unlawful objects.
2. An unlawful striving after lawful objects.
3. A lawful striving after lawful objects.

Of these three kinds of striving two are wrong, and one is right. To strive unlawfully after unlawful objects is clearly wrong. To strive unlawfully after lawful objects deprives a man of the prize, and it is therefore wrong too. To strive lawfully after lawful objects is the only strife that the Lord crowns, and therefore the only strife that is right.

I. But as what is right is often more clearly shown by holding up what is wrong, I shall attempt to describe first what it is to strive unlawfully after unlawful objects.

1. To strive then after the pre-eminence, to be a Diotrephes in a church (3 John 9), is an unlawful striving after an unlawful object.

There is to be no superiority, or pre-eminence among the followers of Christ. "All ye are brethren," said Jesus to his disciples (Matt. 23:8); "the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is he who is most like a child." (Matt. 18:4.) "The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." (Matt. 20:25-26.) Pre-eminence among brethren is an unlawful object, and must therefore be always unlawfully striven after.

2. All strife about vain and idle questions is unlawful strife. "Of these things," says Paul, "put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers." (2 Tim. 2:14.) So he speaks of those who "dote about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds." (1 Tim. 6:4, 5.) When men of this cavilling, contentious spirit arise in churches, woe to their peace.

3. To seek after a form of godliness, while secretly denying the power thereof, or to have a name to live when dead in sin, is an unlawful striving after an unlawful object. To strive to be a whited sepulchre, a painted hypocrite, a deceiver of the churches, is awful striving indeed.

4. To strive after fleshly holiness and creature perfection is an unlawful strife. God never designed that the flesh should be holy. In his discourse with Nicodemus, Jesus laid it down at the very entrance in the divine life, that "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," thus establishing an eternal and unalterable distinction between them. "I know that in me," says Paul, "that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing." "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other." (Gal. 5:17.) All attempts therefore to improve or sanctify the flesh, are bidding "the leopard change his spots, and washing the Ethiopian white."

5. Again, all attempts to please God by anything that we

ourselves can do, is an unlawful striving after an unlawful object. He cannot be so pleased. The corrupt fountain of our heart is continually pouring forth its polluted streams, and therefore all that comes out of it is polluted. Nothing short of perfect purity can please a perfectly pure God; and as no thought, word, or deed has passed from us by nature which is not defiled, it cannot please God. But how many think that their prayers or their tears or their good actions are acceptable to Him.

6. All attempt to keep the law in its strict requirements is an unlawful striving. That is, it is not done as God would have it done. Jesus, and He alone of all the sons of men, kept the law; and he who would go about to establish his own righteousness, to the neglect or contempt of Christ's righteousness, strives unlawfully.

7. To strive to convert the world, and to turn goats into sheep, to seek to overthrow the eternal lines of distinction between the elect and the reprobate, and frustrate Jehovah's sovereign decrees of judgment and mercy, is an unlawful strife after an unlawful object. To break down the barriers of the church and the world, and reduce to mere nullities the distinguishing doctrines of grace, is indeed to strive contrary to every rule in the word of God.

8. To seek to find an easier and smoother path than the strait gate and the narrow way; to come into the fold, but not through the door of regeneration, as the Porter opens it; to be aiming at any other salvation than an experimental acquaintance with Christ and the power of his resurrection; to set up human talents, and creature religion as sufficient with, or without the Holy Ghost's heavenly teachings; to strive after natural faith, hope, repentance, and love—all are so many branches of unlawful striving after unlawful objects. By unlawful is meant as I said before, not that which is contrary to the letter of the law, not that which is not in strict accordance with the moral law, or the ten commandments, or any branch of the Mosaic law. The words "lawful" and "unlawful" in the text have no reference whatever to the law properly so called. The words "lawfully" and "unlawfully" mean a complying,

or a not complying with certain rules and conditions, laid down in God's word. The laws and rules are not legal, old covenant rules, but gospel, law covenant conditions. Mistake me not. I do not here mean conditions to be performed by the creature, but certain rules, according to which the Holy Ghost works. "We are the clay, and He the Potter;" but the heavenly Potter works according to certain rules; and could it be possible for a vessel to be made contrary to these rules, it would not be a vessel of honour meet for the master's use. I wish to explain myself clearly, for directly a man begins to talk about rules and conditions, there are plenty of persons so ignorant or so prejudiced, that they will be sure to make him an offender for a word. Remember this then, that by the word rules, laws, or conditions, I mean certain modes laid down in God's word, according to which the Holy Spirit acts, when he works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure.

All the striving then of carnal unregenerate professors is an unlawful striving after one or more unlawful objects.

Being destitute of heavenly teaching, lawful objects, that is, such objects as are set before the eyes of the elect, are never striven after by them. God has never enlightened them into the depths of the fall, nor brought his holy law into their conscience in its depth and spirituality. The fountains of the great deep in their heart were never broken up, nor their secret corruptions laid bare. Sin is a burden under which they never groaned, unbelief never grieved and plagued them, the utter alienation of their heart from God was never so discovered to them as to convince them of their helplessness and hopelessness. Isaiah's experience was never theirs, when he cried out, "Woe is me, for I am undone; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Their comeliness was never turned into corruption like Daniel's nor did they ever abhor themselves in dust and ashes, like Job. Had this work been wrought with divine power on their consciences, had the law been inwardly applied, it would effectually have cut them off from all unlawful striving.

Nor on the other hand did the Holy Spirit ever set before the eyes of their mind the gospel of the grace of God. No carnal professor, whether Calvinist or Arminian, ever had a spiritual knowledge of law or gospel. Had he experimentally known the law, it would have cut him off from unlawful striving. Had he known experimentally the gospel, it would have cut him off from unlawful objects. Thus they never had any inward taste of the sweetness of the gospel. The outward scheme and theory they might perfectly understand, and discuss it most exactly and learnedly; but the inward power, the heavenly sweetness, the divine application of it they had never the least acquaintance with. Their heads may be at Mount Zion, but their hearts are at Mount Sinai.

These unlawful strivers after unlawful objects are never crowned. They may indeed seem to arrive first at the goal; and we well know how an unburdened professor outstrips in zeal, activity, and outward religion, the poor heavy laden, panting child of God. But he is not crowned. He has carried no weight. He has run the wrong side of the post. He has won the race and lost the prize. We hear the great Judge at the last day, in reply to all his declarations of his having prophesied in his name, cast out devils, and done many mighty works, refuse the crown of eternal life with this awful sentence; "Depart from me, I never knew you."

I shall have occasion to show as I proceed with my subject, that the Judge of quick and dead gives the lawful victor two crowns, a crown here and a crown hereafter: the crown of his love and approbation in the conscience on earth, and the crown of eternal glory in heaven. The unlawful striver after unlawful objects has neither of these crowns bestowed upon him, for the one is but the foretaste and sure forerunner of the other. He has therefore no secret crown of divine approbation set on his heart. God never smiled into his soul, nor sanctioned with a divine manifestation in his conscience his words and works. Professors of every degree may have bepraised him; but the sealing of the Spirit, the heavenly diadem of God's own putting on, was never felt nor known.

God's children themselves are often entangled in this freewill strife, especially younger days, before the Lord has purged away their filth by the Spirit of Judgment, and the Spirit of burning. We find this much in the case of the disciples, whilst their Lord was with them, before they were baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Though quickened into spiritual life, they were continually striving after pre-eminence, each wishing to be greatest. Thus the sons of Zebedee, fearful of their own persuasive powers, must needs employ the valuable tongue of a woman, that powerful weapon which so few men can withstand, to induce their master to seat them on his left hand and his right hand in his kingdom. So, on another occasion, the same two disciples would have had fire come down from heaven to consume the Samaritans, when they would not receive Christ (Luke 9:54). Thus we in our youthful religious day were striving after many unlawful objects. Holiness in the flesh, to please God by our own exertions, to make ourselves religious, and understand the doctrines of grace by reading all sorts of religious books, to please professors, conciliate the world, avoid the cross, shun the imputation of uncharitableness, soften down carnal relations, and keep up old acquaintances,—who of us has never thus striven after these unlawful objects? But we could never get the Searcher of hearts, to put on our consciences the crown of his approbation. We strove for the mastery but were never crowned because we strove unlawfully.

II. But now I come to another kind of striving, which is unlawful strife after lawful objects. The strife we have just been describing was unlawful strife after unlawful objects. In that the things aimed at and sought after were as contrary to the rules of the word of God as the mode of striving to obtain them. In the strife that we are about to consider now, the objects aimed at are lawful and good, but they are sought after in an unlawful, wrong way.

I repeat again, that lawful and unlawful here do not mean, and have nothing to do with the law properly so called, but signify a compliance or a noncompliance on the part of the striver with

certain rules, which God has laid down in his word. What those rules are we shall see before long.

There are then certain lawful objects, set forth in the word of God, as the things to be aimed at by every one who runs the race set before him by the Holy Spirit. These lawful objects are the blessings which God blessed his church with in Christ Jesus. Who sits at the end of the race to award the prize? What says Paul? "Let us run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." (Heb. 12:1, 2.) Now to whom can the runners in a race look, but to him who sits at the goal? They leave the spectators behind, and without stretched necks look forward to the Judge of the prize. He is "the Author of their faith," giving them power to run, and "the Finisher," by crowning it with his approbation.

To "win Christ" then is the object set before the soul that runs the heavenly race. "That I may win Christ," says Paul. (Php. 3:8.) But what is it to win Christ? Why to have him in our hearts as the hope of glory, to embrace him in our arms of faith and affection, and to be able to say feelingly, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." Again, pardon of sin, manifestations of mercy, visitations of God the Father's presence and love, the Spirit of adoption enabling the soul to cry, "Abba, Father," applications of Christ's atoning blood, and gracious discoveries of his glorious righteousness, these are lawful objects for the living family to strive after. Lawful, not because the law, strictly so called, speaks of them, for the law never did testify of them either outwardly or inwardly, but because the believer's rule, the glorious gospel of the grace of God, sets forth these blessings as the portion of the people of God in the New Testament. Now none but a living soul ever panted and longed after these spiritual blessings. Hypocrites and reprobates may desire heaven to escape hell, as Balaam desired to die the death of the righteous. But I never can believe that any but a living soul desired an eternal heaven. Pardon of sin a reprobate may desire, to escape the gnawing of the worm that dieth not, and the fire that

is not quenched; but I feel fully persuaded, that no one dead in sin longed and panted with intense breathings and burning desires after the manifestations of the pure love of an all pure God.

No natural man, no, not the highest doctrinal professor, ever poured out his soul after the blessed overshadowings of the Holy Ghost. It was never his daily longing, nor midnight cry. Such a blessing he has neither a heart to ask, nor a heart to receive.

But in his gracious dealings with his own children, the Lord usually sets before them certain blessings, of which he makes them feel their deep need, and after which he kindles in their soul intense desires. I well remember how ardently not quite fourteen years ago my soul longed after the knowledge of God. It came upon me in the depths of affliction, unsought, and abode with me for weeks at times night and day. what a spirit of grace and supplication I then had after the internal knowledge of God in Christ!

But there is an unlawful striving in quickened souls after these lawful objects.

Now God has laid down in his word of truth three solemn rules, laws you may call them if you like, which constitute lawful striving.

1. The Holy Ghost must begin, carry on, and finish the inward work of grace.

2. The soul must be brought under his divine teaching to be thoroughly stripped and emptied of all creature wisdom, strength, help, hope, and righteousness.

3. The glory of a Triune God must be the end and motive of all.

Any departure from these three rules of striving makes a man strive unlawfully.

Now in early days with us we are often striving after lawful objects, but our manner of striving after them is not in compliance with these three rules, and therefore we strive unlawfully. We are not stripped and laid low in a day. It is often the work of time. I can speak well from experience here. I was not stripped, nor brought down for several years after, as I trust, the Lord quickened my

soul, though from the first I was led to strive more or less after lawful objects, and could not do without an internal religion. But thorough soul poverty had not laid hold of me, shame and confusion of face had not covered me. I had not then felt what a vile monster of iniquity I was, nor loathed and abhorred myself in dust and ashes. Man's utter helplessness was to me more a doctrine than a truth; I was not acquainted with the mighty overwhelming power of sin, nor had the ploughshare of temptation turned up the deep corruptions of my heart. I therefore strove unlawfully. When I fell as I fell continually, I had some secret reserve in self, some prayers, or repentance, or hopes, or resolutions to help me out of the ditch. Have we not all been more or less here? We had a legal spirit influencing us, and there was a kind of dead hope that if we lived holy lives, believed the promises, looked, as we thought looking then was, to Christ, and kept perseveringly on, we should get the object of our desires. And though we never got a step forward in the matter, there was a dim struggling after progressive sanctification, and seeking the blessings of the gospel by the works of the law. Now what was the result of all this unlawful striving? Did God ever crown it with his gracious smiles and heavenly approbation? We know that he never did. When is the crown put on? "In the day of the espousals, and in the day of the gladness of the heart." (Song. 3:11.) And there can be no espousals, no manifested betrothing of the soul unto Christ in loving kindness, in mercies, in faithfulness, until we are dead to the law, our first husband. Then the crown is put upon the heart. God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another. Our own strivings shall never procure us the looks of his love. Now this denial of the crown to all their ardent desires and earnest strivings sadly puzzles and bewilders the seeking soul. Nay he is almost ready to quarrel with God, and accuse him of unfaithfulness, because he will not smile, and speak peace and pardon. Jeremiah was here, when with intemperate complaint, he cried aloud, "Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed?"

Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" (Jer. 15:18.) But we cannot learn religion, as we learn arithmetic; we cannot take the slate, and copy out the rule, and work the sum. God's teachings are of a very different nature, intended to baffle and confound all the pride and wisdom of the creature. Nor can we hasten God's work. His teachings are not hasty teachings for the most part, but line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little. I cannot stand in your experience; you cannot stand in mine. Neither of us know one jot more nor one jot less than the Holy Ghost has written upon our heart. We do not learn religion in a day. The way from Egypt to Canaan was but a few days journey, but the Lord choose to lead his people about in the wilderness, amid fiery flying serpents, drought, and famine, for forty years. And why, but "to humble them, and prove them, and know what was in their heart?" This was one part of the lesson; and the other was that "he might make them know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord." (Deut. 8:2, 3.) And thus we have to learn by painful experience the inutility of all creature strivings, and to be brought down into that state where all exertions fail.

#### LAWFUL STRIFE

III. But we come now to the only striving which the Lord crowns—a lawful striving after lawful objects.

Of the other two kinds of striving, the first was chiefly the striving of reprobates; therefore not crowned. The second was the striving of quickened souls, but not crowned, because they strove not according to gospel rules.

But now we are dealing with characters brought down to penury and utter insolvency, in the state described in the parable of the two servants, "when they had nothing to pay." What Hart calls "perfect poverty."

'Tis perfect poverty alone  
That sets the soul at large;  
Whilst we can call one mite our own,

We have no full discharge.

To bring this about is the work of the law. The gospel does not reduce the soul to beggary. It only steps in as a friend to pay the debt when all one's own money is gone. The law draws all the money out of the pocket by crying, "Do, do," "work, work." But when all is gone, the law can do no more. The law then has done its office. The law puts a burden on, which burden is carried until the heart is brought down with labour, and the soul falls down, and there is none to help. (Ps. 107:12.) As Paul says, "I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." By this death the soul becomes dead to the law, as Paul says again, "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth." (Rom. 7:1.) When then he dies under the law, he dies to the law, and the law ceases to have dominion over him. All strivings therefore of the elect under the law, end sooner or later in death to the law. Now I appeal to your consciences, whether God ever crowned your legal strivings. What has the law done for you? what can the law do for you, but to bring its curse in your heart, lay guilt on your conscience, and stir up slavish fear in your mind? To strive lawfully then, is not to strive after the law, but after certain rules laid down in the gospel. Well then, they are called laws, as the Holy Ghost uses the word when he says, "I will put my laws into their hearts, and write them in their minds." Now we will begin with the frit rule, which is this, that the Holy Spirit must work in us all the power, wisdom, grace, faith, strength, and life, that we strive with. This work the apostle calls a law in. (Rom. 8:2.) "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." "Whatever is not of faith is sin." "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." "The things of God knoweth no one but the Spirit of God." "When the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." Now whilst striving in our own strength, the power and reality of the Spirit's teachings were little known. We could not lie passive, as helpless as the Potter's

clay. All creature strength was not gone; some little store was left.

The second rule of lawful striving is, that the runners in this race should have no strength. "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." "When we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly." "Without me," said Jesus, "ye can do nothing." The Lord opened his ministry with setting forth his covenant character to the poor and needy. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to set at liberty them that are bruised." So he said, "blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that mourn, for ye shall be comforted." All the blessings of the gospel are promised to the poor in spirit, the outcasts of Israel. But who makes them poor? The Lord surely, according to that word, "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich." A man may indeed after a form make himself poor by wearing rags, and assuming the garb of poverty. I have read of a man who, from some whim or kind of madness, went about the country dressed and living as a common beggar. He had abundance of property, but he chose to dress in rags, and live on alms. Such a man was not really poor, as his apparent poverty was but a mask and a cheat. So spiritually, he that makes himself poor is not one of God's poor; and he infringes just as much upon the work of the Spirit, and is as much guilty of presumption and hypocrisy, as if he made himself rich. And a child of God who strives to make himself poor, strives unlawfully, for he acts against the rule, that all we are and have, all we know and feel aright, must be the whole and sole work of the blessed Spirit. A man that makes himself poor by throwing away outward pride, and putting on outward humility never passes in his soul through the feelings that God exercises his children with. The living family are stripped unwillingly; they cannot believe the Lord is leading them in the right way. Despondency, unbelief, rebellion, infidelity work up in their heart against His teaching. Their former enjoyments, and

what they thought communion are taken away, and they feel as Isaiah speaks, left as “a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on a hill.” (Isai. 30:17.) The word beacon is in the margin, “a tree bereft of branches.” And thus they stand bereft of all their spreading boughs of religion, a leafless trunk stripped of flowers and fruit, naked and bare. Perhaps some of you here never were in this spot—never lost all your religion, and stood before God without a grain, like the tall, leafless, branchless mast on the top of the hill, “O no,” say you, “I have been very far, but was never driven into this spot yet.” Then I will tell you a secret; If you belong unto God, you have to be driven farther than you have been yet. We read (Ezek. 17:24) that “the Lord dries up the green tree, and makes the dry tree to flourish.” Then you must be dried up, for you are a green tree still, before you can flourish in the courts of the Lord. And perhaps when you get to have no religion, it will be the very time for the Lord to give you some of his. We are “to buy of him gold tried in the fire.” Now if we look into the fire, where the gold was being tried, what should we see? why a crucible, that is a kind of earthen pot, with scum and dross and foam, bubbling and boiling. O where is the gold? Out of sight, at the bottom of the vessel, covered with scum and foam. So it is with the soul that is in the furnace. Faith, hope, and love, are all hid at the bottom of the heart, and the scum and dross of unbelief, despondency, and rebellion are alone seen. But when the refiner removes the scum with his rod, then the pure gold shines forth. Now whilst passing through this experience, you are striving lawfully, for you are fulfilling the second rule of the Christian strife. You are a poor needy outcast, who can do nothing. You now are where Paul was, “though I be nothing.” (2 Cor. 12:11.)

And this enables you to comply with the third rule of lawful strife—to give God all the glory. Surely you can take no glory to self, when self has been proved, and found wanting. Then if the Lord has made you poor, in order to make you rich, naked that he may clothe you, a beggar that he may relieve you, a bankrupt

that he may pay all your debts, an insolvent that he may take you out of jail with flying colours in the face of your creditors, and has brought you down to the gates of hell to lift you up to the door of heaven, then surely you must give him all the glory. He has solemnly declared that “no flesh shall glory in his presence,” and “he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord.” But what is so staggering to nature and reason is the way that he brings about this taking to himself the glory. No man in his senses would walk in this way. But God does not act according to our senses, but “according to the counsel of his own will.”

Thus we never strife lawfully till we cease to strive naturally. Then the Holy Spirit begins to strive within with groanings which cannot be uttered. No pretty prayers to tickle rotten professors; no cut and dried sentences with texts nicely assorted and fitted in like the squares of a chess-board, no flowers of eloquence to please those who are all for word and hate power. But the real striving is all inward work, sighing, crying, and groaning to the Lord. “Oh!” say you, “I will tell you what I call striving. It is to go to chapel three times on the Lord’s day, attend prayer meetings, pray privately seven times regularly every day.” Ah, my friend, this is striving after the flesh. The only striving that God acknowledges is the striving of the Spirit and the Spirit never strives effectually, till the flesh has ceased to strive.

Now this inward strivings of the Spirit are a fulfilling of the experience Paul describes. (2 Cor. 12:9, 10.) “When I am weak, he says, then am I strong.” Why so? Because “the strength of Christ is made perfect in weakness.” Then if I am saved, I am saved as a vile wretch, a monster of iniquity, by rich, free, sovereign, distinguishing grace. Not a drop of heavenly favour can reach my heart by my own exertions. I might as well think of taking up the Atlantic ocean in the hollow of my hand, as bring down into my soul a drop of God’s love, or a single smile of his countenance. I may sigh, cry, groan, long, and pant after the shedding abroad of his love, but I cannot bring down one grain or atom of it within.

Then if felt, must not we give to God all the glory?

Now these lawful strivers after lawful objects are crowned, and they only. This crown is two-fold—a crown here and a crown hereafter, a crown of grace set on the heart below, and the crown of glory set on the head above. Thus Paul says, “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” (2 Tim. 4:8.) This crown none will have but those who have striven, striven lawfully to enter in at the strait gate, and striven successfully. The crown below is the crown spoken of in (Ezek. 16:12), “I put a beautiful crown on thine head;” and which the church laments to have lost, “The crown is fallen from our head.” (Lam. 5:16.) This crown is put on the heart, when the Lord smiles approbation and acceptance in the Son of his love. As David speaks (Ps. 103:4), “Who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies.” Now this inward crown is never set on the heart of any but a beggar, that has been on the dunghill. “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and make them inherit the throne of glory.” This beggar is one who is begging for a manifested interest in God’s great salvation, clothed in rags and sitting in dust and ashes on the dunghill of his own corruptions. He and he only is raised up in his soul to sit among princes, the priests and kings, the royal generation, who are invariably crowned with divine favour below, and inherit the throne of glory above.

Now of this internal crowning I believe there are different degrees. There are no degrees in glory, but there certainly are degrees of grace. There are no pious eminent saints above close to the throne, whilst the thief on the cross and Mary Magdalene stand at the door as having been such great sinners. But below there are degrees of manifested favour; there are babes, young men, and fathers. Whenever then you have been enabled by faith to rest on Christ’s blood and righteousness, whenever a drop of

God's favour has flowed into your soul, whenever peace has been felt and known, and a solemn sense of God's goodness and mercy through the blood of the Lamb has been tasted; whenever in the depths of soul poverty and helplessness, help and strength have been found to cast your burden on the Lord, then and there you have been crowned as a lawful striver. O, say some, "We must have full assurance, and there is no faith without it." I believe that all true faith has a measure of assurance in it, but who can say how full it shall be. The leper who merely cried, "If thou wilt thou canst make me clean," had faith, and so had the woman who pressed through the throng to touch Jesus' garment, and so had the Canaanitish woman who sought but for a crumb from the children's table. This was a venturing faith, a faith of necessity, a faith working up and out of trials and burdens. This faith the Lord crowns as his own work, for he never crowns anything else. He crowns not our strivings but his own, not our work but the work of Jesus Christ. Have you then never felt a little of this soul melting work? "Aye," say you, "but it did not last long, and has been but rarely felt." But where is it said how long it is to last, or how often to be felt? To have had the crown on but once, and that but for a few moments, is to have been crowned. You complain that you have lost these sweet feelings. But how could you have lost what you never had? You are saying, "the crown has fallen from my head." Then it must have been there. And I will tell you another thing, that if the crown was ever set on your heart, the rim of it has left its mark behind, and upon that spot where it has left its impression, you are longing to have it again set on. See then to it that you are striving lawfully. Have you run yourself out of breath yet? are your arms withered, your legs and back broken? Then will the Lord himself bear you, as on eagles' wings, to the end of the race, and lay you at the feet of the Judge, where you will learn that "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," but that "God has mercy upon whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

**4 THE HEART'S DESIRE OF EVERY LIVING SOUL (Psalm 106:4, 5)**

Preached at Zoar chapel, Great alie Street  
on Lord's Day Evening,  
June 28, 1840

*“Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; oh! visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.”*

*Psalm 106:4, 5*

There is a blessed unity of Spirit, that runs through the whole of God's Word, as well as through the experience of God's people. And it is a sweet encouragement and a blessed consolation to the family of God, to find their feelings, thoughts, desires, groans, sighs, and tears, all faithfully recorded in the Word of God. In fact, there is no state of soul into which we may be brought, no trial which we may have to pass through, no temptation which we may have to encounter, no difficulty we may have to grapple with, that is not provided for in the Word of God; and there is no breathing of the soul, no desire of the heart, no sighing of a contrite spirit, which we do not find equally traced out in the Word of Jehovah, as experienced by his saints of old. And this makes the Scriptures such a wonderful book; that when the blessed Spirit is pleased to open up the spiritual and experimental parts of God's Word, he shows us how suitable and how applicable they are to our souls, and thus he makes the Word of God to be food indeed to our hearts.

“Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; oh! visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine Inheritance.”

All God's people, sooner or later, are brought to this point—to

see that God has a "people," a "peculiar people," a people separate from the world, a people whom he has "formed for himself, that they should show forth his praise." Election, sooner or later, is riveted in the hearts of God's people. And a man that lives and dies at enmity against this blessed doctrine, lives and dies in his sins; and if he dies in that enmity, he will be damned in that enmity. Every child of God is brought, sooner or later, to see that God has a people; and the longing desire of every living soul is to be manifested as one of that people. There are no cavillings against election, after God has broken a man down to nothing. There may be many cavillings against it, until we are stripped of all; but when a man is stripped of all, made a beggar, a bankrupt, a pauper, a poor needy insolvent, with a huge debt, and nothing wherewith to pay, then election is made manifest in that man's conscience; because he feels that unless God has chosen him from eternity, he will never see his face in glory.

"Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people." There is a "favour," then, that God "bears to his people." And what sort of "favour" is this? It is eternal favour. He never had anything else but favour to them: he loved them from eternity; his heart, his affections were eternally fixed upon them. And this is that favour, which every living soul wants to have manifested; he wants to have the eternal favour of God made manifest to his conscience. Again; this favour of God is discriminating favour. It is fixed upon some and not upon others. And this discriminating favour every quickened soul longs to experience. He does not want to have merely the general providential mercies of God, but he wants to have special tokens of his discriminating favours to his soul. He knows there are but few on whom this favour is conferred; he knows that God has discriminated certain persons, and fixed his favour upon them; and what he wants to experience is this discriminating favour made manifest in his heart and conscience. Again; this "favour" he wants to have shed abroad in his heart, and thus personally and experimentally made known. It does not satisfy

him to read in the Word of God that he has a people, that he bears a favour to that people, that he loves that people; these doctrines, however glorious, will never satisfy a living soul, as long as they are in the mere letter of the Word; he wants to have them applied to his heart, to have them sweetly revealed within, and thus he prays with the psalmist, "Remember me with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people."

And what makes him earnestly long that God should "remember him with this favour?" Because he is a wretch without it; because he is a beggar without it; because he is damned without it. Every living soul is brought to this—that unless "favour" is revealed in his heart by the Holy Ghost, he shall die and be damned; he must go to that place where hope never enters; and therefore the longing cry of every quickened soul is to experience this personal, special, eternal, discriminating favour shed abroad in his heart—sweetly applied and revealed to his soul. The man that is brought here has "seen an end of all perfection;" he has found God's law to be "exceeding broad;" he has been brought in guilty; he has put his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope; he has been stripped of every rag of righteousness, he has had all his strength, wisdom, and power, entirely taken from him; he has stood shivering before God, a naked wretch without a single covering to shield him from the piercing eye of him, whose eyes are as a flame of fire; he has found the inability and the helplessness of the creature to do him any good; he has tasted and felt to his conscience, that no arm of flesh still less his own can deliver him from his feelings, or can do him that good which his soul is earnestly panting after.

He wants to be "remembered." He wants to taste the eternal favour of God that God should "remember him," that he should not pass him by, that he should not overlook him; that he should remember him in the time of necessity, in the time of suffering, in the time of trial, in the time of difficulty, in the time of temptation. He desires then to be "remembered with the favour that God bears

Now, God listens to this cry. Wherever he has implanted this desire, he bows down his ear and grants it. Sooner or later "favour" comes; sooner or later "favour" is revealed; and it melts the heart into humility, gratitude, love, and praise. This favour may be only a drop; but a drop is sufficient to make itself felt. It may be only a crumb; but a crumb is enough to satisfy the soul whilst the crumb lasts. And wherever this "favour" has been shed abroad in the heart, it draws the soul upwards to God; it makes a man a new creature; it solemnizes, spiritualizes, and ravishes his heart, and makes him to know that God is gracious.

"Oh; visit me with thy salvation." You see how fond the Psalmist is of the word "thy," "remember me with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; Oh! visit me with thy salvation." He wants the word "thy;" that is, something connected with God—something that comes immediately from God. This is that which every living soul is panting after; he wants something from God in a direct way—something let into the soul from above—something manifested and shed abroad in the heart from God himself. And what he especially wants is God's salvation; "Oh! visit me with thy salvation."

What is "God's salvation?" It is a salvation from death and hell; a salvation from doubts and fears; a salvation from guilt and condemnation; a salvation from wrath without, and wrath within. It is a salvation long as eternity; a salvation that is what it professes to be—"salvation"—saving the soul from all that it dreads, and all that it fears.

But how is a man brought and taught to want to be "visited with" this salvation? Ps 106:4 He must know something first of condemnation. Salvation only suits the condemned. "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost;" and therefore salvation only suits the lost. A man must be lost—utterly lost—before he can prize God's salvation. And how is he lost? By losing all his religion, losing all his righteousness, losing all his strength,

losing all his confidence, losing all his hopes, losing all that is of the flesh; losing it by its being taken from him, and stripped away by the hand of God. A man who is brought into this state of utter beggary and complete bankruptcy—to be nothing, to have nothing, to know nothing—he is the man, who in the midnight watches, in his lonely hours, by his fireside, and at times, well nigh night and day, is crying, groaning, begging, suing, seeking, and praying after the manifestation of God's salvation to his soul. "Oh! visit me with thy salvation." He wants a visit from God; he wants that God would visit him—come and dwell with him, take up his abode in his heart, discover himself to him, manifest and reveal himself, sit down with him, eat with him, walk in him, and dwell in him as his God. And a living soul can be satisfied with nothing short of this. He must have a visit. It profits him little to read in the Word of God what God did to his saints of old; the mere letter of the Scripture profits him little; he wants something for himself, he wants something that shall do his soul good; he wants something that shall cheer him, refresh him, comfort him, bless him, profit him, remove his burdens, and settle his soul into peace. And therefore he wants a visitation—that the presence and the power, the mercy, and the love of God, should visit his soul.

Now this God at times sweetly gives. If he never meant to give it he would never raise up desires after it; he would never give us liberty to pour out our hearts before him, that we might receive it from him. And, therefore, at times he visits our poor hearts with some sense of this great salvation. And when he visits the soul with his salvation, it is enough. The soul wants no more than salvation. For where salvation comes, the "things that accompany salvation" come in with it! And what are these things? A tender conscience, a broken heart, a contrite spirit, a filial fear of God, a desire to be right, a fear to be wrong, consistency of life, uprightness of conversation, cleaving to that which is good, a fleeing from that which is evil. God has no Antinomians in his family—that is, in the bad sense of the word; he has no loose,

licentious, reckless characters, who "continue in sin that grace may abound." A living soul may fall, and fall foully; but he cannot live in sin. Sin is a hell to him—a hell in his conscience; and "who can dwell with everlasting burnings?" Who will not "flee from the wrath to come!" And therefore if there be any professor of religion or professor of high doctrines, who lives in sin, that man is no child of God; he is a child of the devil, a double-dyed, treble-distilled hypocrite. He has not the fear of Jehovah to his heart; for he puts his fear in their hearts, that they may depart from evil. And therefore continued inconsistency, a life of reckless inconsistency, a walk of careless hardened inconsistency, is not compatible with the grace of God to the heart; for he writes his laws in the hearts of his people, and puts his precepts and truths into their minds, that they may obey them and follow them, and be ruled and governed by them. So that let a man talk as he pleases about the Christ of God, he knows nothing about the Christ of God, if he knows not that which accompanies the Christ of God. If presumption is stamped upon him, he knows not the Christ of God; for the Christ of God and hardened presumption in its reigning power can never co-exist in the same heart. If he lives in known sin, without guilt or shame, he knows not the Christ of God; for the Christ of God "was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." If he lives in continual hardness of heart, searedness of conscience, perpetual barrenness of frame, without any softening, humbling, melting, or tenderness, he is devoid of the Spirit of God. Not but that we have long seasons of barrenness; not but that we have all occasion, who know anything aright, to mourn over our deadness, and coldness, and slothfulness; but, thanks be to God! it is not always so with us; there are refreshing times, reviving times, strengthening times, praying times, and prayer-answering times, and these bring the soul out of that barrenness, and coldness, and deadness, to which some of us walk so much. But for a man to be barren year after year—he is like the parched heath in the wilderness, rather than "the field that the Lord hath blessed." No; the Spirit of God will

do his work in the hearts of God's people. He will, more or less, make them fruitful; he will more or less shed abroad his blessed influences within, and that will make them new creatures.

Now, after we have had a taste of salvation we lose it; the sweetness, the dew, the unction, the power thereof evaporate, and leave our hearts dead and dry. But we cannot rest here. We cannot go back to this past experience, and say—"I enjoyed this so many years ago, I have never enjoyed it since, but I have no doubt of my state, nevertheless." This is not the feeling of a living soul. It is true he cannot get it; it is true, he has no more power to produce it, not one drop of it, than he has power to create a world; but the same Spirit which brought it in, brings the sigh after it from his soul; the same Spirit which first communicated it to him, raises up pantings after it, and makes him restless, discontented, dissatisfied, and miserable without it. Look now at your daily warfare; look at what passes from time to time in your soul. Can you do comfortably without God, from one year to another? Then you are dead in sin. Can you do comfortably without some access to private prayer, for months together? Then you are dead in a profession. Can you talk glibly about religion, and for weeks and months, and perhaps years, never have a sigh, nor a cry nor a groan, nor a tear? Then you are "twice dead, plucked up by the roots. God's people are an afflicted people; for he hath "chosen them in the furnace of affliction." God's people are a tried people, for he "trieth the righteous," and "they are all righteous." God's people are a praying people, for he pours out upon them the spirit of grace and of supplications." God's people are a hungering and thirsting people, for "blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness." God's people offer "spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to him through Jesus Christ" and they belong to the "circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Well, all these things "accompany salvation." Tenderness of conscience, filial fear, humility of soul, brokenness of heart, love to the brethren, consistency of life—these things are not salvation,

but they accompany salvation. "We are persuaded," says the apostle, "better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak; for God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." The soul, then, that is really taught of God, is, from time to time I am not saying perpetually or continually, but it is from time to time, longing after the visitations of God's salvation; and especially in trying seasons, when sickness comes, when death stares him in the face, when providential trials arise, when guilt stings, when condemnation presses as a heavy burden, when doubts and fears rise to the mind, when Satan harasses, when guilt wounds. In these trying seasons, the really quickened soul is saying, "Oh! visit me with thy salvation." It wants a visit; it wants a love drop; it wants a testimony from God, to cheer it, refresh it, strengthen it, rejoice it.

Now, hast thou ever in thy life put up this prayer? I do not say, the words; look at thy heart. Hast thou ever, in the depths of sorrow and trouble, when "deep called unto deep at the noise of God's water-spouts"—to the secret watches of the night, when there was no eye to see and no ear to hear but God's—didst thou ever pour out this prayer? not the words, perhaps, but that which the words convey—"Oh! visit me with thy salvation." And have you wrestled with God, well nigh for the hour together, that he would thus visit your souls? If you have not, you never had it. "For all these things will I be inquired of by the house of Israel;" "seek and ye shall find;" and therefore there is a seeking, before there is a finding. Many persons are glad to talk about salvation, who are very unwilling to walk in the way to obtain it; they are very glad to hear about Jesus and the salvation of Jesus, but they do not like to hear of the internal work, whereby God strips and empties a man, and prepares him for the manifestation of his salvation. But this is that, which a living soul wants to hear. He wants to have the work traced out; he wants to have his experience brought to light; he wants to find whether the finger of God has touched his conscience; he wants to have the steps of the Holy One traced out

in his soul; and he says—Has God done this? am I a quickened character? Is the work genuine? Did I begin with God, or did God begin with me? How was it? And what has been done since? And how glad he is, and what joy comes into his heart, if the spirit of God bears witness that the work is sound, genuine, and real! It makes his very heart dance for joy within him, when he has the witness of the Spirit with his spirit that he is a child of God, and shall have a mansion beyond the skies, when he shall be free from the body of sin and death, and see him whom he loves face to face.

“That I may see the good of thy chosen; that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation; that I may glory with thine inheritance.”

“That I may see the good of thy chosen.” There is a certain “good,” then, that belongs to God’s chosen family. And what is that “good,” but every blessing which the Author of good bestows upon them? “There is none good save one, that is God;” and his gifts are “good gifts” and “perfect gifts,” and “come down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” God confers “good” upon his chosen. Let us see what some of these good things are. It is a “good” thing, then, to have a tender conscience; that is, a good gift of God—a conscience made tender, a conscience made to feel sin, little sins as they are commonly called, heart sins, sins of thought, sins of speculation, sins of imagination, sins continually working up from the bottom of a sinful heart. To have a conscience to feel it, and grieve on account of it, and mourn and sigh and cry on account of the daily workings of an evil heart—that is a good thing; it is a “good gift;” and none but God can give this tender heart. And, again, to have a conscience purged and sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb, to have guilt removed from it, filth cleansed away, condemnation taken off, and simplicity, and humility, and godly sincerity, implanted, so as to have a single eye to God’s glory—this is a “good” thing. Again, to have earnest breathings and longings after God’s favour—this is a “good” thing; to find nothing can really satisfy us but God, and nothing can give us peace but his peace, and nothing can make us

happy but his happiness, and nothing can make us really satisfied but his favour; this is a "good" gift, that God gives to his chosen. To depart from evil, to be separate from the world, to have sweet communion with him, to be privileged and enabled to pour out our hearts before him, tell him our wants, burdens, difficulties, temptations, and trials—this is a "good" thing. To find God has an ear to hear us, a heart to feel for us, and a hand to relieve us—this is a "good" thing.

Now, God's people want to "see" this good. "That I may see the good of thy chosen." They want to see it with their own eyes, feel it with their own hands, hear it with their own ears, enjoy it with their own hearts. "That I may see the good of thy chosen;" so as to be ravished with it, delighted with it, comforted with it, blessed by it; so as to see my unworthy name in the book of life; so as to feel streams of goodness encircling, watering, delighting, and refreshing my soul; so as to taste it, and feed upon it, and enjoy it, and find it to be like honey and the honey-comb; so as to derive a solid satisfaction from it, and to taste in it a "peace which passeth all understanding." This is the "good" of God's chosen; to be "satisfied with favour, and full of the goodness of the Lord." "Oh! taste and see that he is good;" to know that he is good, gracious, and kind; to know that he is on our side; that he will not suffer any to set upon us to harm us, and that "no weapon formed against us shall prosper;" to know that all his perfections are arrayed on our behalf—his strength, his wisdom, his power, his faithfulness, his love; to feel that "all things" are for us, and that therefore nothing can be against us. This is to "see the good of God's chosen." To see it, the veil being taken from our eyes; to see it, our eyes being "anointed with eye-salve," so as to look into it, and see the depths of it, and view the beauty of it; that our eyes may pierce into the secret recesses of this goodness, and drink into it, and be sweetly enlarged, blessed, and filled with it.

This is to "see the good of God's chosen;" not as Balaam, who "saw him, not nigh," but "afar off;" and merely saw him with the

eye of prophecy, the eye of judgment, the eye of speculation, the eye of fancy, but to see him with the appropriating eye of faith and affection, when it sees the object, realises the object, and embraces the object. When you see a person that you love, you gaze upon his features, and as you gaze affection kindles; your eye drinks into that which kindles the affections of your soul; some aged parent it may be, whose venerable features you love to look upon, some dear wife whose countenance beams affection, some child, weak and tender perhaps, and yet whose lineaments are engraved upon your heart, and as you see this beloved object, your eye is scarcely satisfied with looking, but through seeing it, all the affections of your heart are drawn forth and enkindled. This is a different thing from seeing a stranger, from looking at a picture of some unknown person, from seeing a statue. Such is the difference between seeing things in the letter of God's word, with the eye of judgment and the eye of speculation, and seeing them with the eye of faith—that eye which has been “anointed with eye-salve,” that eye from which the veil has been taken away. And therefore Jesus said to his people—“The world seeth me no more, but ye see me; because I live, ye shall live also.” “He that doeth evil hath not seen God.” There is a seeing of him, that is invisible; as one of old, “by faith endured, seeing him who is invisible.” To “see the good of God's chosen,” then, is not that of which the Lord spake, saying, “Ye shall see the prophets in the kingdom of heaven, and you yourselves thrust out;” it is not like seeing people sitting at a banquet, and you standing on the other side of the lattice, as the nuns in a convent see their relations, and cannot come near to them, but are separated and cut off from them. No; this is not the way a living soul wants to “see the good of God's chosen;” but he wants to see it in himself, feel it in himself, know it in himself, and enjoy it in himself. Nothing but thus seeing it can ever satisfy him. And if he sees it thus here, he will see it and drink it in with his eyes hereafter. “That I may see the good of thy chosen.”

Now, did you ever see any good to God's chosen? Oh! “how

goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" Did you ever see what good God has blessed his people with, and how good it is to be one of them? All God's people see that there is a "good" in God's chosen family, peculiar to them, and that they sigh and long for.

But some will say, Had David never seen it when he penned this Psalm? Aye, surely, he had seen it. But did he not want to see it again? Yes; he had lost the sight of it, the sweet vision of it had retired, the old veil had come back, his eyes were dim, he wanted fresh "eye-salve." So with us; we have seen, we trust, at times, "the good of God's chosen," have felt our affections drawn towards them, and drawn up towards God, and have said, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." That was to enjoy the sweet foretastes of heaven. But all these sweet foretastes became clouded; fogs and mists rested upon them, and hid them from our eye. Fresh sin brought fresh guilt, and darkness, and deadness, and doubts, and temptations, and fears, and besetments, came on, of various kinds; and all these beclouded our sight. But we cannot forget the past; we cannot forget the solemn moments when we walked with God and talked with God, nor the sweet feelings that his presence enkindled. However dark, however dead, however disconsolate, however tried, harassed, and tempted, we cannot forget that. And having "seen the good of God's chosen," we want to see again the good sight, to taste again that heavenly banquet. "That I may see the good of thy chosen."

"That I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation." "Now what is the gladness of God's nation?" To be saved "without money and without price;" to be saved by grace—free, rich, sovereign, distinguishing grace, without one atom of work, without one grain of creature merit, without anything of the flesh. This is "the gladness of God's nation;" to rejoice in free grace, grace superabounding over the aboundings of sin, grace reigning triumphant over the dreadful evils of our heart. It is grace that "gladdens" a man's heart. Oh! sweet grace, blessed grace! when it meets our case and

reaches our souls. Oh! what a help, what a strength, what a rest for a poor toiling, striving, labouring soul, to find that grace has done all the work, to feel that grace has triumphed in the Cross of Christ, to find that nothing is required, nothing is wanted, nothing is to be done. It is a full and perfect, complete and finished work. Oh! sweet sound to a poor, striving, toiling, labouring, working, guilty, and condemned soul. Oh! sweet relief to a heavily burdened conscience, that groans under sin night and day. Oh! sweet tidings to one toiling and tugging at the oar of the law, striving to bring the boat safe to the shore, and driven back with every wave and wind. Oh! sweet sound for a backslider, who has "started aside" from God, "like a broken bow," and brought guilt and wrath into his soul. Oh! sweet sound for every despairing son and daughter of the King of Kings. Oh! sweet sound for every weary pilgrim, for every worn-out soldier, for every tempest-tossed mariner, drifting upon the seas without home and without harbour. Sweet sound! to rest in Christ, and in Christ alone, and find salvation in him, "without money and without price;" nothing to pay, he having paid all; nothing to do, he having done all; nothing to work, he having finished the work, and brought in everlasting righteousness, to clothe and shield the naked guilty soul. Oh! sweet sound, when it reaches the heart? and touches the conscience, and is shed blessedly abroad in the soul.

This is "the gladness of God's nation;" this makes their heart glad, that the work is finished, that the warfare is accomplished, that the Church of God "hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins;" this is the comforting sound, wherewith God "comforts his people;" this makes the nation glad, and their heart to leap and dance for joy. Has your heart never leaped at the sound?—only for a moment? Has grace never sounded sweetly in your soul, and made your very heart dance within you? If it has, you know what is "the gladness of God's nation." Oh! they are not glad because they have done their duty, because they have said their prayers, because they have read their Bible, because they have

come to chapel regularly, because they are members of a Gospel Church, because they have lived consistently, because they bear an unblemished character; but they are glad because they are saved by grace, grace superabounding over their abounding sins. This makes them glad; and nothing but this can make them glad.

Now, the living soul wants to rejoice in this gladness—"That I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation." How "rejoice?" By being a partaker thereof. But we read that there is such a thing, as seeing all this, and being ourselves shut out. God says, "his servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit." Isa 65:14 Now, what a cutting thought this is to a poor tried and tempted soul—to see grace, and yet feel not to have it, to see it at a distance, and not be able to grasp it, to see it in others, and not see it in himself; to know who are right, who "are the people," who are the ministers, what is the way, and yet, through doubts and fears, difficulties, temptations, and trials, not to see clearly his own interest therein. Aye, there are many of God's poor children, that know what truth is, that love to hear it, that know who are the people, that can see grace in them, and yet see no grace in themselves. But all such want to "rejoice in the gladness of God's nation." "Oh!" they say, "that it might reach me, that it might visit me, that it might come into my heart, that I might bathe in it and drink into it, and enjoy it, and realize it, and know it, in myself and for myself." The Psalmist, you see, had similar feelings. Some of you are cutting yourselves off, and saying—"I cannot see grace in myself; I can see grace in this person, I can see grace in that person, I know who are right, but I cannot trace those feelings in myself that I want to feel." Well, David was here. Why did he say, "That I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation," if he were at that time rejoicing? Why did he pray to rejoice, if he were in the act of enjoyment? It shows clearly, that at that time he was not enjoying it. If he had been enjoying it, he would not be praying to enjoy it; the words show that he was at that time without the enjoyment.

He was in darkness, and wanted light; he was in deadness, and wanted life; he was in sorrow, and wanted joy; he was in a poor doubting, desponding way, and wanted to be brought out of it, to "rejoice in the gladness of God's nation."

"That I may glory with thine inheritance." Now, the Church is Christ's inheritance. He purchased it by his own blood. He went into captivity for it, and has redeemed it by pouring out his precious blood for it.

This inheritance glories; "That I may glory with thine inheritance." And in whom does it glory? It glories in its covenant head. It does not glory in itself—in its pious self, righteous self, strong self, religious self; "let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me." "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." The glory of the Church is to glory in her covenant head—to glory in Christ, and in Christ alone; to glory in his strength, love, blood, grace, and righteousness; and to glory in it, herself being covered with shame. None can glory in Christ, until he is stripped of his own glory. There is no putting the crown of glory on the head of self and on the head of the Mediator. There is no saying, "I have procured this by my own strength," and putting the crown upon that head. There is no saying, "I have obtained this by my own exertions," and putting the crown upon those exertions. No; a man, to glory in Christ, must be covered with shame and confusion. He must be abased in his feelings; he must have his mouth in the dust; he must loathe himself in dust and ashes before God; he must see and feel himself to be the chief of sinners, and "less than the least of all saints;" he must know and feel himself to be a wretch indeed. And then, when he lies in the dust of abasement, if a sight of the dear Redeemer's glory catches his eye and inflames his heart, he glories in him, and in him alone, and all the "inheritance" of God glory in him. He can glory in nothing else, and his highest attainment is to place all the glory

of salvation, from first to last, simply upon his head, to whom that glory belongs.

Now, these are the feelings of a living soul. Are they yours? "Oh!" he says, "Lord remember me with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; oh! visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance." Did your heart ever long to be one of them? Have you found that by all your strivings and exertions you could not put yourself into the number? Has all hope been cut off? And then, when all was dark and all was gloomy, and all was full of bitterness, confusion, and sorrow, were you taken up out of the dust and out of the dunghill, and made to sit among princes, and to inherit the throne of glory, and found these things sweetly revealed to your soul? You know something of the matter. "The secret of the Lord is with you, and he has shown you his covenant."

But some, perhaps, cannot get as far as this. They can get to desires, but they cannot get to answers; they can get to seeking, but they cannot get to finding; they can get to knocking, but they cannot get to the opened door; they can get to guilt, but they cannot get to pardon; they can get to bondage, but they cannot get to liberty. Well, but you are in the road. It is a mercy to be in the way. Abraham's servant was in the way, when he was brought into the house of his master's brethren. It is a mercy to be in the way. It is a mercy to have the fear of God in your heart as "the beginning of wisdom." It is a mercy to have a conscience made tender by his blessed Spirit. It is a mercy to be weary of yourself. It is a mercy to be out of conceit and out of love with your own righteousness. It is a mercy to be seeking and suing for the sweet manifestations of the Son of God.

Now, I must make the standard low that is to say, as low as I conscientiously can, to take in all the quickened family. Never mind what your head is stored with; that is of little consequence; look to what is passing in your heart. There is the place to look;

see what is going on there. Never mind what you know in your head. Just see what the foundation is. Is the foundation sound? If that is sound, all is sound. Now, what is the foundation? The fear of God. Is that in your soul? That is the foundation; for it is “the beginning of wisdom.” And how is the fear of God manifested? It is “a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.” Then if you have the fear of God, you have a fountain of life, and you depart from evil. This fountain of life goes out in prayers, supplications, sighs, groans, pantings, and longings. This fountain bubbles up, so as to bring your soul into the presence of Jehovah. This fountain is continually bringing some living thing up out of your heart—for it is a fountain of life—some living prayer, some living desire, some living groan, some living feeling, something alive and living, something at work and working, in your soul. And it has caused you to depart from evil—to depart from evil doctrines, to depart from evil practices, to depart from evil worldlings, and to depart from evil professors—and it has brought you in simplicity and godly sincerity to seek Christ, and him alone, and to say with the martyr of old, “None but Christ, none but Christ!” And he that thus seeks shall find; for the Lord has said, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

## 5 CHRIST THE FRIEND AND SURETY OF HIS POOR

*(Psalm 109:31)*

A Sermon Preached at Artillery Street Chapel, Bishopsgate Street, on behalf of the Aged Pilgrims' Friend Society on Wednesday Evening,

*July 8, 1840*

*“For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul. “*

*Psalm 109:31*

The grand truths of the Gospel are revealed as with a ray of light in God's holy word. For instance, the Godhead of Jesus is

revealed in the plainest and most express terms; so that they who deny it are left without excuse. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," will condemn to an eternity of misery all blasphemers against that blessed and holy name. But God has not merely revealed these great and glorious truths, in express terms, throughout his holy word, in terms so express that nothing but the most infernal sophistry can ever elude or deny them; but he has scattered up and down in various parts of his blessed word of truth these very same doctrines, and yet (if I may use the expression) has thrown over them a thin transparent veil, which the blessed Spirit, from time to time, lifts up, and discovers what is contained beneath it to the eyes and hearts of God's heaven-taught family. So that the grand and glorious doctrines of the Gospel are not merely revealed in express terms, for the consolation of the Church and for the condemnation of all blasphemers and opposers, but they are also incidentally scattered up and down the pages of the word; and when the blessed Spirit is pleased to cause a ray of light to shine upon a text, which at first seemed obscure, but then is opened up to the soul, he fulfils that promise, that he will "give it the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places."

"For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul." Who, then, would expect in this text to find the Godhead and the manhood of Jesus blessedly set forth? And yet this verse plainly testifies to the Godhead and the manhood in one glorious person. For who is this "He?" "He shall stand." What is said in the verse preceding? "I will greatly praise the LORD" (in capital letters, signifying "Jehovah"),—"I will greatly praise Jehovah with my month; yea, I will praise him among the multitude. For He shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul." But can Jehovah "stand at the right hand of the poor?" He fills all time and all space; "the heaven of heavens cannot contain him," said Solomon, "much less this house that I have built." He can only "stand," then, by being

brought into a finite compass; God as God only cannot stand. He can only “stand at the right hand of the poor,” therefore, by having a human body, in which that glorious Godhead is lodged. So that the expression, “He shall stand at the right hand of the poor,” can only be explained in this way; that while “He” signifies Jehovah (as is clear from the preceding verse), the circumstance of his “standing at the right hand of the poor,” implies that Jehovah must be in human form.

We thus gather, then, who it is that “stands.” Not Jehovah abstractedly, not Jehovah simply, as filling all time and space; but the second person of the glorious Godhead in human flesh, tabernacling in human form. It is he, that “stands at the right hand of the poor”—Jehovah Jesus—Immanuel, God with us—the God-Man, that is, at one and the same time, and in one and the same glorious person, “God over all, blessed for ever,” and having a perfect human body and a perfect human soul.

But now let us look a little at the character, at whose right hand he stands; and then we shall see the occasion and circumstances, wherefore he stands there. “He shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul.”

The character, then, at whose right hand he stands, is said to be “poor.” The word “poor” occurs much in the Word of God, and it is almost invariably (I might say invariably) used with reference to God’s own family. Of course, there are passages in the Proverbs, which speak of the poor temporally; but still even these will bear a spiritual sense; and in all cases where the word is used in a spiritual sense, it betokens and points out God’s own quickened family.

But how comes it to pass that they are poor? “I am poor and needy,” says the Psalmist, “and my heart is wounded within me.” How come they to be poor? Do they make themselves so? To say this, contradicts the Word of the Lord, for we read in the prayer (or rather the thanksgiving) of Hannah, “The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low and lifteth up.” Therefore, they do not make themselves poor. There are a great many professors

in the (so-called) religious world who make themselves poor; that is to say, they put on the appearance of poverty whereas, they have never been stripped by the hand of God; and their poverty consists for the most part, of expressions. Nothing is easier than to put on the garb, and to use the expressions of a poor man; but this is only a more crafty device of Satan. A man whose heart is full of pride, will not come before you as a proud man; he knows that stinks in your nostrils, and therefore he will come with feigned humility. A man who has never been stripped nor emptied of creature righteousness, and yet has a profession of religion will not come boasting of his own righteousness; he will come with the language of poverty in his mouth. But what matters the garb—the rough garment which he wears to deceive? What matters it, if the widow of Tekoah comes in widow's weeds?—her weeds make her no widow. The rough garment makes no prophet; and the language of poverty does not make a man poor, but may be only a covering of deceit and hypocrisy. None are really poor, but those whom the hand of God has stripped, whom he has brought down, and made to abhor themselves in dust and ashes, and to see and feel themselves destitute of everything good, holy, heavenly, and pleasing in his pure and heart-searching eyes.

Now how does the Lord strip them? He strips them by taking from them every thing which they depend upon, everything upon which they can hang, and everything to which they can look. When the Lord begins to work upon a sinner's conscience, he for the most part, brings against him the open transgressions of his life (from which none of us probably were exempt), and these sink him low; he is thus made to feel, that unless his sins are pardoned, or in some way or other he is enabled to amend his life, so as no longer to go on in these reprobate ways, he must sink forever under the wrath of God. But no sooner does this work begin in the conscience, than the subject of it, being quite ignorant of the work of God upon his soul, or rather ignorant to what God means to bring him thereby, immediately sets to work

to gather together some riches—something which shall stand him in good stead—as much righteousness as he can possibly amass. This conviction is deeply lodged in his heart, that he has to deal with a righteous God, a holy God, a pure God, who “requires truth in the inward parts,” and hates sin with a perfect hatred; and the immediate operation of this conviction upon his conscience is to set him to amass some riches, to get together some treasure, to procure something whereby he shall please God. We have all done this—whoever of us have been convinced of sin; we have broken off old habits, old connexions, old sins, and made a thorough amendment. But this was only to substitute our righteousness for our sins; it was only to put one deceit in the room of another; it was only to prop up our souls with another buttress, when God had thrown down that on which we were previously resting and hanging—such, for instance, as a general hope in God’s mercy. But when the Lord takes a soul in hand really and effectually, he strips away all this righteousness; he will not leave him a single rag, not a particle, no, not an atom. His eyes, “which are a flame of fire,” look into the sinner’s heart, and as they look, they burn up all the hay, and straw, and stubble, and chaff that are in it. As a burning glass, when brought to a focus, burns up the wood against which it is directed, so when he, “whose eyes” (spoken of in the Revelation) “are as a flame of fire,” looks into the soul, searches it through and through, and directs his piercing glance into the secret corners and sinuous recesses of our hearts, he burns up and destroys the chaff, and straw, and hay, and stubble, and rubbish, which we had been amassing with infinite pains.

But there is something else yet to be burnt; a man’s false religion has to be taken away from him, as well as his legal righteousness. For there is a great deal of false religion abroad, dressed up by the craft and subtlety of Satan, and imposed upon a living soul, as though it came from heaven’s mint. There are many Birmingham counterfeits abroad, which may even impose upon God’s children for a time, as though they were stamped in heaven’s courts and

bore the Kings image, though they are nothing but “potsherds covered with silver dross,” as Solomon says, nothing but a little silver thinly plated over the base metal. And thus our prayers and our attainments, and our knowledge, and our reading the Scriptures, and our acquaintance with the doctrines of grace, which are in themselves good (as the silver is good which is plated over the base metal), are used (like the silver) only to cover that which is counterfeit, and thus only add to the deceit of the counterfeit instead of giving it value. So that really all this dry Calvinism, and all these correct views of the doctrines of grace, and all this preferring a pure preached Gospel, and all this esteeming highly God’s sent servants, and all this reading religious books, and those of the soundest character, unless the heart has been previously brought down into the dust of death, unless it has been emptied that the pure gold may run out of the crucible into it, so as to fill it up with sound metal, unless it has been stripped and laid bare, and a place as it were made for the gold to flow into, are only a little plating, a little silver put over it to hide the base metal within. It is like the case of a man, who has a scar or a scab that covers a deep ulcer; the ulcer must be healed from the very bottom (for there the granulations must always commence), and all the pus and matter brought away; for if only the surface of the wound is healed, the original disease will work into the constitution, or break out again in the same, or some other place, with greater virulence. And so the heart must be stripped and emptied, and laid bare effectually by a work of grace that goes to the very bottom, and penetrates into the recesses of the soul, so as to detect all the corruption that lurks and festers within. Nay, many of God’s children, when they have come to die, and have had the silver plating burnt off, have found they had then to seek for that work of grace, in its height, and length, and breadth and depth, in its purity and power, that they thought they possessed. They had indeed some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel, like the child of Jeroboam; but they had not that faith, that confidence, that firm hold of God, that standing in the

Divine life, which they thought they had. There are many of God's children, who are much farther in doctrinal knowledge than they are in Divine teaching and experience. Now, with all that are thus partially deceived (I will not say totally, because there is often at the bottom a real work of grace, and they are restless and uneasy at times in spite of their vain confidence), all this must sooner or later fall to pieces, and the heart must be taken down even to its foundations, that the pure genuine work of the Holy Ghost may be carried on in power within. Mr. Hart, you will find, describes this to have been his experience; he says, "All this while the fountains of the great deep were not broken up." And that is the case with many. The wound has been partially and superficially healed; and it must break out again. Now, the really "poor" man is one who has had everything taken from him; who has had not merely his dim views of a merciful God (such as natural men have) taken from him, not merely his legal righteousness stripped away, but all that kind of notional, traditionary religion, which is so rife in the present day, taken from him also; and who has been brought in guilty before God, naked, in the dust, having nothing whereby to conciliate him, or gain his favour, and only "a step between him and death." This is a "poor" man; and none else are really poor, in the strict sense of the word, who have not had, more or less (for there are degrees even here), something of this stripping work in their heart and conscience.

Now, against this stripping work all professors fight; and I will tell you why. Because it condemns them. They know they have not gone through it, they know that it has not been wrought with power in their souls; and therefore all professors, whether Arminians or Calvinists, fight against the stripping hand of God. But they fight to no purpose; for "the Lord killeth and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up; the Lord maketh poor and maketh rich, he bringeth low and lifteth up," and if they are "vessels of mercy," they will know it to be so sooner or latter.

But this “poor” man has “those that condemn his soul.” “For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul.”

This “poor” man, you see, has a tender conscience; for he has that in him which feels condemnation. It is not a man’s natural conscience that feels spiritual condemnation. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.” It is a new conscience that feels condemnation; what the Apostle Paul speaks of as “a good conscience.” Now that which springs from nature can never be “good,” for it is infected and polluted with nature’s evil; “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights;” and therefore this tender conscience, that feels spiritual impressions, is the gift of God. It is the new heart, which the Holy Ghost breathes into the soul, and which he communicates, when he quickens it into eternal life. It is this new heart, this tender, this good, this pure, this spiritual conscience, that feels condemnation. Natural men feel condemnation according to those words in the Romans, “Their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another.” The natural conscience of the heathen felt natural condemnation; but in order to feel spiritual condemnation, a man must have a spiritual conscience, which is a new conscience, a tender conscience, implanted by the Holy Ghost in the soul. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” This poor man has that; and from the very circumstance of his having that, he has “those that condemn his soul.”

The law, then, is one of those things that “condemn his soul.” The law in its righteous precepts, in its holy requirements, in its terrible sanctions, in its devouring flame, in its awful curse—this “condemns his soul,” and brings him in guilty before God; according to the work described by the apostle—“That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”

Again, the evil workings of his own heart also “condemn his soul.” Let us look specifically and individually at some of these.

One of them is unbelief. Whenever the blessed Spirit takes a soul in hand, he convinces that soul of unbelief. "He shall convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they believe not in me." The Holy Ghost, in his work upon the heart of a sinner, in bringing him in poor and empty, convinces him of his unbelief, and makes him feel and know in the depth of his soul, that he has no power whatever to create faith—no, not a spark of it no, not a grain of it. The Holy Ghost shows a quickened sinner the difference betwixt letter faith and spiritual faith, betwixt the faith which is of the operation of the flesh and that which is of the operation of God. He shows every quickened vessel of mercy, that that faith, which is not of the operation of God, is "a bed too short, and a covering too narrow." He teaches him that he has no power whatever to raise up an atom of living faith in his own soul, and that all the natural faith which he has in the letter of the Word of God leaves him short of that rest, and that hope, and that peace, which alone can calm the raging storm within. Now, this unbelief "condemns his soul." He does not bring forward Antinomian excuses, and say, "If I am saved, I am saved, and if I am damned, I am damned;" he does not say, "As to this unbelief, it is in me by nature, and I cannot get rid of it, and therefore I need not trouble myself about it; if I am to be saved, God will give me faith sometime or other." A living soul, that has "the beginning of wisdom," and is exercised by the tender feelings which the Spirit of God implants, never can fall into such self-justifying language, but he feels, he mourns, he sighs, he groans, he cries, under the weight of unbelief, and says,

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

But further, the dreadful workings up of his carnal mind against God "condemn his soul." He opens the Word of God; he reads there what the saints are—how they say, "Thy will be

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done”—how they submit to the hand of God—how they sit at the feet of Jesus, and hear his word—how they “wash his feet with their tears, and wipe them with the hairs of their head;” he reads all that Paul and the other apostles have spoken in the way of precept, as to “rejoice in the Lord always,” to “be clothed with humility,” and the various directions given in the New Testament to the Church of God. But instead of finding in his own mind the counterpart of this, he feels enmity, rebellion, peevishness, hardness, fretfulness, inability to submit himself to the will and wisdom of God, and that he is “like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke;” like Ephraim, he is “bemoaning himself,” and yet is unable to submit, and cast himself simply and believingly at the feet of the Redeemer. This enmity, and peevishness, and rebellion, condemn his soul. And then again his impotency and spiritual helplessness, his utter inability to deliver himself from these evil workings, the miserable weakness and destitution under which he groans, being burdened, so that do what he will, sin is mixed up with all his actions, think what he will, he cannot raise up his thoughts to God, so as to enter within the veil, and speak what he will, evil streams forth with all his words—this deep destitution of the creature, this inability to do good, or think good, or speak good, or to deliver himself from these exercises and burdens, condemns his soul. But, further, his own backslidings condemn him. The Lord, perhaps, at times, has given him deliverances, bowed down his ear and heard his cry in some providential strait, in some marked and signal manner, brought him up when he thought he must go down into the pit, raised him up from sickness, delivered him from the very jaws of temporal death, and has at times given him a taste and a drop and a sip, so as to stay, and calm, and cheer his troubled mind; and he has forgotten it all, and slipped aside from it all, and started back like a broken bow, and gone after some filthy idol. These backslidings condemn his soul, wound his tender heart, and make him sigh and cry, like one well nigh in despair.

But these things condemn him justly; he is obliged to plead

guilty to them; he can offer no defence, he can bring forward no plea to arrest judgment, he cannot say anything in his own favour that sentence should not be passed.

Other things, however, there are, that condemn him unjustly; and these he feels perhaps almost as keenly as those that condemn him justly. For instance, false professors, that heap up slanderous charges against him, malign his character, undermine his fair fame, impute to him false motives, misrepresent his actions, and go about the country seeking in every way to injure him. These condemn him; but unjustly. What keen wounds some of us have felt from professing friends! Have you never in the openness of your heart told something to one whom you esteemed your friend—perhaps broke to him some temptation that your soul was exercised with—acquainted him with some secret transgression which lay as a heavy burden upon your conscience—whispered to him something of the deep working of your depraved heart; and you thought he was your friend, and with his smooth tongue and holy countenance, he inveigled and entrapped you to open up to him the secrets of your soul, as Samson's wife enticed him to tell her where his great strength lay? And this false friend, this Judas, when he has wormed the secret out of you, has made use of it to misrepresent you, and to hold you up perhaps as having spoken or committed that in reality to which you were only tempted, and has thus magnified temptation into transgression. It has wounded you; it has cut you deeply; it has made sad havoc in your heart. This is an unjust condemnation. Or perhaps professors of religion may have picked up what you may have spoken inadvertently, carried it about the country, spread it through the Churches, and whispered one to another (as "the children of his people talked against" Ezekiel) that which perhaps has fallen from you in a thoughtless moment, and then it comes back upon you with redoubled weight, and your soul is condemned thereby. These are unjust condemnations. So, again, Satan also often accuses this poor man, that he has sinned against the Holy Ghost, that he has committed

the unpardonable transgression, that his name is not in the book of life, that he is nothing but a reprobate, that all his religion is in the flesh, that he began in hypocrisy and has gone on in hypocrisy, and will have his portion with the hypocrites. With all these fearful suggestions Satan sets in like a powerful flood upon the soul; and these condemn him unjustly. When Satan then tells us we have backslidden beyond recovery, it is an unjust condemnation; when he tells us we have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, it is an unjust charge. And when our professing friends, but deceitful foes, and those who hate us on account of the Lord's dealings with our souls, spread their malicious lies, these are unjust accusations; but they wound and cut deeply a tender heart.

Here, then, is the "poor" man, whose soul is condemned; condemned by some things justly, by others unjustly, but feeling most acutely that to which he pleads guilty. Oh! it is the feeling of guilt that presses down a man's soul; when he has not a word to say, nor a plea to bring forward, nor anything whereby he can extenuate the charge. But "he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul," be their condemnations just or unjust.

"He shall stand." And who is this? As I noticed in the beginning of this discourse, it is the God-Man, who alone can "stand"—being God in human form.

The expression, "He shall stand at the right hand of the poor," implies, first, that he appears there as a friend. How cheering, how comforting it is, to have a friend to stand by us when we are in trouble! Such a friend is Jesus. In the hour of necessity, he comes as a friend to stand by the right hand of the poor creature, whose soul is condemned by guilt and accusations. But he stands in a far higher relation than that of a friend; he stands too, as a surety and a deliverer. He goes, as it were, into the court; and when the prisoner stands at the bar, he comes forward and stands at his right hand as his surety and bondsman; he brings out of his bosom the acquittance of the debt, signed and sealed with his own blood,

he produces it to the eyes of the court, and claims and demands the acquittal and ablution of the prisoner at whose right hand he stands. He stands there, then, that the prisoner may be freely pardoned, and completely justified from those accusations that “condemn his soul.” sweet standing!—blessed appearance!—when this God-Man, this mediator betwixt God and man, Christ Jesus—this Immanuel, God with us—”stands at the right hand of the poor;” when he comes forward in behalf of the poor trembling sinner, takes his station at his right hand, and “saves him from those that condemn his soul!” The law brings in its charge; this God-man “stands at the right hand of the poor,” and produces his own fulfilment of that law, which brings in its heavy charge against the guilty criminal. Unbelief, and the workings of a desperately wicked heart, and the stirrings up of that pool of all that is filthy and polluted, and the fearful suggestions of the great adversary of our souls, come forward to condemn us; but he “stands at the right hand of the poor,” and produces his own glorious righteousness. Are we pressed down with unbelief? He communicates faith. Is our mind sinking into despair? He breathes into it hope. Is the heart restless and agitated with the billows and waves of enmity? He pours oil upon those waves by “shedding abroad love.” Is the soul bowed down with guilt, at a distance from God, unable to approach him on account of its heavy temptations? He puts his own arm under this poor dejected soul, and lifts up his bowed down head, and as he lifts it up, the soul looks upwards, and instead of wrath sees the countenance of the Father beaming mercy and love, because the surety is “standing at the right hand of the poor.” Jesus himself has stood at the bar, he himself has been arraigned, he himself has been condemned as a criminal, and has died the death of a criminal (though he was not buried in the grave of a criminal, and he rose with glory and power to sit at God’s right hand, until he hath put all enemies under his feet); and therefore he can sympathise and feel for the criminal, for he “was in all points tempted like as we are,” and “can be touched with the feeling

But “he stands often invisibly at the right of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul.” Does the law condemn you? He “stands at your right hand,” even though you perceive him not, to save you from the curse. Does guilt condemn you? He “stands (unseen) at your right hand” to save you from these feelings of guilt. Does sin condemn you? He “stands at your right hand,” undiscerned, perhaps, yet not less really, to save you from the power of sin. Does Satan condemn you? He “stands at your right hand,” although you behold him not, as he stood before Joshua, and repelled Satan, saying, “The Lord rebuke thee.” And as to those unjust accusations which are brought against you under which your soul is cut and wounded, when false charges have been laid, and when professors have maligned your character, he secretly “stands at your right hand,” to save you from their charges, and will bring you forth one day to the light, that, you may behold his righteousness. When men misrepresent your motives, pervert your words, and prove your enemies, he will “stand at your right hand to save you from those that condemn your soul,” by not merely pouring his blessed consolations into your heart, but also bringing you out clearly, and so that none can lay a single charge against you of those accusations that have been your grief and burden.

“He shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul.”

Now, there are poor naturally, as well as poor spiritually. There are pilgrims of God, who are poor in an earthly, as well as a spiritual sense. And these often have “those that condemn their soul.” Perhaps some of these are obliged, merely for the sake of keeping body and soul together, to run into debt for the common necessities of life; and these debts “condemn their soul.” Perhaps they are obliged to depend upon the bounty of others, from whom, instead of getting smiles, they only receive frowns; and instead of encouragements only meet with repulses; and this condemns their soul. Oh! to be a beggar—to be a child of God, and yet to be

brought down so low in poverty as to have to go to a Christian brother and ask him for an alms, and perhaps get a repulse, or (if not) an excuse, or to have a trifle given with a cold heartless frown!—it “condemns the soul” of many of God’s poor pilgrims. But God will “stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul;” from unfeeling wretches, who never were in the same state themselves, who, perhaps, cast in his teeth the debts he has been entangled in by necessity, and make them an excuse for shutting up their bowels of compassion against him. “To save him from such as these that condemn his soul.” And how? By appearing providentially—perhaps in marvellous ways—perhaps by stirring up some of your hearts, who have worldly substance, to impart to their poverty.

I have to plead for some of these poor this evening. They may have many of these things “to condemn their souls;” and what a mercy, if the Lord should make use of you and me as his instruments to save them from those condemnations. It is a high honour to be thus employed; it is a great privilege if the Lord should use my hand and yours to feed his poor and needy ones; if he has promised not to pass by unheeded “a cup of cold water;” that hand which he thus uses to minister to the wants of his poor and needy children, he will one day abundantly acknowledge.

I will read to you a paper put into my hands by the Secretary of the Society. “The following is a brief account of the Aged Pilgrims’ Friend Society, in reference to the number of persons now on that Society, and also the amount of its income and expenditure. There are 48 pensioners, who receive ten guineas per annum, or 17s. 6d. per month; 83 ditto, who receive five guineas per annum, or 8s. 9d. per month; 207 approved candidates, who receive 4s. per month; making a total of 338 poor aged members of the mystical body of Christ, of various denominations, from sixty years of age and upwards, among whom are distributed monthly £120. The Committee regret to say, that the permanent income arising from annual subscriptions does not exceed £1, , whilst the amount of

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expenditure is upwards of £1,700, leaving a deficiency of more than  
£700 to be made up by donations and collection sermons, wherever  
they can be obtained. Every department is filled gratuitously.”

Now, this is the only religious Society that I belong to; the only Society that I can conscientiously support; the only Society I ever feel inclined to preach for. I look upon this Society as having greater good and fewer evils than any other. In bestowing upon it that which the Lord shall enable us, we are fulfilling a clear command of God, to “do good unto all men, specially unto them that are of the household of faith.” We have no express precept to form Societies, and raise money to send abroad Missionaries and Bibles; but we have a positive precept to do good to the household of faith, and therefore we go upon sure ground, and stand upon a scriptural foundation, when we plead for them, or give our bounty to them. And who can need it so much? They have three claims to recommend them. There is, first, their age; there is, secondly, their poverty, the income from other sources being very limited, of all who receive anything from the Society; and there is (so far as their experience is known), thirdly, the grace of God in their hearts—their belonging to the family of God.

But I am well convinced that the Lord must open a man’s heart; and where he opens a man’s heart to feel for the poor and needy of his flock, he will, more or less, open that man’s pocket. Our carnal nature, our lustful covetous heart, can easily find money for our own gratifications; but when the cause of God and the claims of the people of God come before us, then our heart begins to shrink. If anything that pleases the flesh comes before our carnal mind, our hand very readily finds its way to our pocket; but when it is some destitute pilgrim, some poor cause of God, some needy minister of Jesus, something that does not gratify nor benefit ourselves, our nature begins immediately to contract itself, to put in a veto, to draw a chain round the purse, and whisper in our ears not to spend too much, or we may be poor ourselves one day, that we do not know that these are the people of God, or that tomorrow we may

want the money ourselves. So all that a msn really gives aright is drawn out of his hand and out of his heart by the grace of God in him. But though I have spent in my time a good deal of money, and have deeply regretted all that I ever wasted on the vanities of the world, the lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life, I never yet repented of having my heart opened to communicate to the necessities of God's family; I never went to bed with a heavy heart or rose up with a burdened conscience, because, in a moment of sympathy, I had given more than I meant to give. Of all experience I never had that yet; and therefore I must leave other ministers to preach that experience; my experience is, that I have been thankful to God that I have done anything, and ashamed of myself that I have not done more. And I must now leave the matter with him. If he opens your hearts, he will have the glory; if he opens your hands, it will be for the consolation of his poor aged pilgrims. The money is not to be wasted upon platforms; it is not to be thrown away upon secretaries making expensive journies; it is not to be spent in providing nicely furnished seats for a parcel of people to clap at speeches; it is not to be wasted upon show and glitter. All the officers of the Society acting gratuitously, whatever is contributed goes directly into the pockets of God's people. You are not sending abroad unconverted missionaries to convert unconverted heathen; you are not thrusting out raw youths that know neither God nor themselves, to change natural heathenism into Christian hypocrisy; you are not sending out Socinian translations of the Scriptures, or mangled religious works; you are not scattering abroad tracts, half full of the grace of God, and half of the blind will of man; what you give, you give simply and solely for those who (we may hope) are God's people. Here is a large sum to be raised—£700; and perhaps some of these poor people are anticipating their little income, and saying, "On such a day such a person will call on me, and I shall have such a sum of money;" if the money is not raised, how will they be disappointed! what fretting, and trouble, and grief, and anguish of mind, may be obviated, by the people of God giving to

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the utmost of their power to communicate to their wants.

If the claims of the aged of God's family never touch your heart, I believe you have no heart at all. But may God open your heart, show you that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," and sweetly constrain you to say, "I would rather tomorrow go without my dinner, or put aside till next year having a garment (a bonnet, or a coat, or a pair of shoes), or some other comfort, than that any of God's family should be so distressed." The way to give is to forego something; and that which you forego will gladden and rejoice some child of God. But I might stand here till midnight; unless God is pleased to open your heart, all my pleading will not do it, and therefore I leave it simply in his hand. May he blessedly constrain you to do that which shall be for his glory, and for the good of his poor and needy children!

**6 SUBSTANCE THE INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS** (*Prov.*  
8:20, 21)

Preached , at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London  
on Lord's Day Morning,  
*July 12th, 1840*

*"I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the  
paths of judgment; that I may cause those that love me to  
inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures."*

*Prov. 8:20, 21*

The word "Wisdom" occurs very frequently in the Proverbs of Solomon. And we find on several occasions that Wisdom is represented as addressing herself to the children of men; in other words, she speaks as if she were a person. For instance, in the beginning of this chapter: "Doth not Wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths; she crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors: Unto you, O men; I call, and my voice is to the sons of men" (*Prov. 8:1-4*).

And so in the latter part of the first chapter of this book: “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates; in the city she uttereth her words” (Prov. 1:20, 21). Now this is no poetical or oratorical personification of wisdom; I mean as orators and poets sometimes personify qualities—that is, represent them as persons, and put into their mouths such language as persons only can utter. Nor is it Christ’s pre-existing human soul that here speaks under the name of Wisdom. The dream of the Pre-existarians is utterly and directly contrary to the truth of God; and those that are wrapped up in this delusion found much of their argument upon this eighth chapter of the Proverbs of Solomon. I call it a delusion, and a dangerous delusion too, because it strikes at the very root of the atonement. For if Christ’s human soul existed before the foundation of the world, then that human soul of Christ was never under the law; but we read that “He was made of a woman, made under the law.” But if that soul existed before that law was given, there could be no subsequent, *ex post facto* operation of the law upon that soul; and if it was never under the law, then Christ never could have wrought out the righteousness demanded by the law; and therefore it strikes a deadly blow at Christ’s righteousness and Christ’s atonement. And this is the case with all errors and heresies; Satan will never introduce a trifling error into the Church—his object is to strike a covert, secret blow at a grand fundamental doctrine; and therefore he will bring forward these errors and heresies in such a masked way that men shall scarcely see their tendency, and yet their real aim shall be to strike at some of those fundamental doctrines, on which depend all the hope and salvation of the Church.

Nor, again, does Wisdom here represent God abstractedly; it does not represent Jehovah speaking merely as being the only wise God.

What, then, does it represent? If it represents neither wisdom poetically personified, nor Christ’s pre-existing human soul, nor

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Jehovah abstractedly considered, what does it signify?

Why, I believe it signifies the Head of the Church, speaking in His covenant relationship—the second Person of the glorious Trinity, who “of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” And if we look at Wisdom as representing the Son of God standing up in the eternal councils as the Head and representative of His Church and people, we shall see what harmony and beauty are thrown upon all that He utters in this relationship. For instance: “The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water,” and so on; “then I was by Him, as One brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth, and My delights were with the sons of men.” How aptly and sweetly does this represent the Head of the Church in His covenant relation—the Son of God who was in time to take flesh, Him that was in time to take a perfect human body and a perfect human soul, viewed and looked upon in the eternal councils as the covenant Head of His Church and people, and as such delighting in them!

It is the Son of God, then, as “made unto us wisdom,” that speaks in these words. And now, having seen who the Person is that speaks, our ears may be more open to hear what this gracious Person utters.

What then does He say? “I lead in the way of righteousness in the midst of the paths of judgment; that I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.”

I. The covenant Head of His Church, then, is here represented as “leading” His people; as the good shepherd that goes before his sheep and leads them step by step. We cannot move a single step without Him; only so far as He is pleased to guide us step by step and foot by foot into the way of eternal life, have we any wisdom, strength, or power to walk therein.

“I lead in the way of righteousness.” These words are applicable to His blessed work in the soul, whereby He leads each one whom He is pleased to quicken into eternal life into “the way of righteousness.” We will, with God’s blessing, then see how He leads them, and into what He leads them.

1. We will commence with the first beginnings of His work upon the soul; for in the very first commencement of His work upon the heart it is true that “He leads in the way of righteousness.” And how does He first “lead in the way of righteousness?” By opening up the righteousness of God’s holy law, and thus leading the soul into the law. He leads the soul into “the way of righteousness;” which way of strict unerring righteousness is in the law. For the law requires perfection; the law demands unwavering, unflinching obedience; the law is “exceeding broad,” and takes cognizance of every thought of the heart, word of the mouth, and action of the life. As long as this law is in the mere letter of it, as long as it stands written upon the tables of stone, it affects us not; we are, as the apostle says, “alive”— (“I was alive without the law once”); that is, we are not yet killed by it, not yet brought in guilty, not yet slaughtered, so as to fall down at the feet of God, seeking His mercy. But the way in which Jesus, as the “Wisdom” of His people, leads them at first, is by leading them into the righteousness of the law. He says, “I lead in the way of righteousness;” that is, He leads them into the law by opening up to their astonished minds its length, and breadth, and height, and depth, its holy requisitions, its eternal sanctions, its awful curse, its devouring flame. Thus He leads them into this “way of righteousness;” He opens up this strict unerring righteousness to their heart and conscience, and shows them that they are guilty, and unable to do that which the law demands.

Now this work upon the soul does not in all cases amount to the same depth of conviction. It is not always carried on with the same terrors; nor is the soul, under the application of this righteous law to the conscience, always plunged into the same depth of anguish and trouble. We can chalk out no regular path of this nature;

we cannot say that the convictions shall be so deep, or that the convictions shall be so long. But this we can say—that they must be so deep as to go down to the root; and that they must be so long as to do the work in an effectual manner; but how deep and how long must be left to the unerring wisdom of God. This experience must be wrought with power in every quickened soul—that the mouth should be stopped, and that it should become guilty before God. If the mouth is not stopped, if the soul is not become guilty, if every hope is not cut off, if every prop is not gone, if every rag of righteousness is not cast away as a filthy thing, the law has not done its work; and it must go on extending itself, and widening itself, and spreading its deep roots in the heart, until that work is effectually done. We may illustrate this by a natural figure. We must all die; that sentence passed on Adam must take place in the body of every one of us; but is that sentence executed on every person in the same way? Some are cut down with a raging fever, others linger long under a wasting consumption; some are ill for years before they drop into the grave, and some are cut off in the space of a few days. But all die; they are all brought to the same place; they are all confined in the same narrow tomb. Thus with the law in its effects upon quickened consciences. All the vessels of mercy must be killed by the law; all must be brought to have no hope, no help, and no strength; but we cannot lay down the precise mode, nor fix the uniform manner, in which every quickened soul has that death inflicted upon it. As the apostle speaks, “We had the sentence of death in ourselves;” but we cannot say how sharp this sentence of death may be, nor how long in taking place. I am always more anxious to know to what spot the soul is brought, than to know the road by which it has come. The grand thing to look to is, not so much causes, as effects; not so much the tree itself, as the fruit which that tree produces. If we see the soul brought down into nothing, and being nothing but a mass of sin and guilt—if that is really and experimentally felt—shall we question the work merely because the path has not been set up by our line, rule, and

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compass, and not chalked out in that particular way in which God was pleased to lead some of us?

Jesus, then, leads His people first into “the way of righteousness,” by leading them, through the Spirit’s teaching, into an acquaintance with the spirituality and requisitions of this holy, strict, and condemning law.

2. But this righteousness the creature never could fulfil. Nothing less than a perfect unwavering obedience to it can satisfy its demands. And therefore Wisdom leads also in the way of righteousness by leading the soul into an experimental knowledge of Him who has rendered this obedience, who has wrought out this perfect righteousness. And as He, and He only, can lead the soul step by step into the length and breadth and depth and height of the law, so can He and He only lead the soul into the length and breadth and depth and height of His own glorious righteousness, for He says, “I lead in the way of righteousness.” And how does He lead it? By casting a mysterious light into the soul to see what the Word of God has revealed; and shedding abroad a mysterious power in the heart, whereby faith is created to receive, lay hold of, and credit that which God has made known. We may read the Word of God for ever in vain, unless that Word is made life and light to our souls; and therefore it profits us nothing merely to read in the Word of God, “This is the name whereby He shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness;” but when the Lord the Spirit, whose covenant office and work it is to take of the things of Jesus and reveal them to the heart, sheds a mysterious and blessed light upon those scriptures which speak of Jesus as the law-fulfiller, as having brought in a glorious righteousness, as having finished the work which the Father gave Him to do—when He is pleased to shed forth on these scriptures a blessed and mysterious light, and at the same moment raise up faith and power in the heart to receive, credit, embrace, lay hold of, and handle that which He has thus revealed in the letter of the Word—then by His own persuasive power He leads the soul “in the way of righteousness.” And O!

what a wonderful way it is!—that God should ever find out such a way, as to make all His people righteous by imputing to them another's righteousness! It will be the wonder of all eternity; it will be the theme of the song of the saints through countless ages; it will exhaust all the depths of their finite wisdom to look into these secrets of wisdom, love, and power. Yea, the angels themselves, who so far exceed men in wisdom, are represented as "desiring to look into" these things; and therefore when the ark was made, and the mercy-seat put over the tables which were inclosed therein, the seraphim were framed as looking down upon this golden mercy-seat, representing how the height and breadth and length and depth of these mysteries overpass even the faculties of the angels themselves.

But He leads the soul "in this way of righteousness." It is not merely "walking round about Zion, and telling the towers thereof;" it is not as I might walk round some palace, and admire the harmonious proportions of the building; but it is being led into it—into the personal experience of it, into a rich acquaintance with it, into the sweet enjoyment of it. It is this which sweetly satisfies the soul; and nothing but this can satisfy it. Before petitioners are admitted into the presence of the king, there are ante-chambers and many rooms to pass; but he that is brought into the interior of the building will be led step by step and chamber by chamber into the presence of the king himself. Many poor doubting and fearing souls have but (as it were) just got their feet within the threshold; and they see perhaps others introduced into the presence of the king; and as the chamberlain opens the doors, their eye can catch a glimpse of the glittering apartment, and perhaps even of the person of the king himself; but the door is shut, their turn is not yet come. By this faint gleam, however, they have seen enough of "the king in his beauty" to ravish their hearts; and they are longing for the time when they shall be admitted into his presence. We read of the Lord opening in "the valley of Achor a door of hope;" and so His own dear family, before they are led into the rich enjoyment of these

things, so as to see the King and admire His beauty, are led step by step, and have to wait their turn and bide their time, before they are enabled to fall down at His feet, wash them with the tears of their eyes, wipe them with the hairs of their head, and clasp Him as their all in all.

3. But again; whenever the Lord works by His Spirit in the soul, He implants sincerity and godly uprightness; and a man's religion is rotten at the root if there be not sincerity and godly uprightness in his heart. Now these are not the fruits of nature; for "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Jesus, then, leads His people "in the way of righteousness" by implanting this spirit of uprightness in them, this spirit of simplicity and godly sincerity. Thus He not only makes them righteous externally, by the imputation of His glorious righteousness; but He makes them righteous internally, by the communication of a righteous nature. "The king's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold." Here we have this double righteousness. The "clothing of wrought gold" is the external robe of righteousness, which Jesus wrought upon earth and finished on Calvary; and she is "glorious within," by having the implantation of a principle of uprightness, sincerity, godly fear, and that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." He leads the soul, then, "in the way of righteousness," by making it sincere and upright before Himself, before the Church, and before the world. He makes us sincere in our prayers, sincere in our searching of the Word, sincere in our communion with His family, sincere in the words that drop from our lips, sincere in the actions which we have daily to transact, sincere in all the various relations of life, sincere before Him, as looking to One who "searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins."

In these several ways, then, does Wisdom—that is, the Son of God "made wisdom" as the covenant Head of His Church and people—"lead in the way of righteousness."

II. "I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment." Those that I have mentioned are not the only lessons

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that Jesus has to teach. Some conceive that all the teachings of the blessed Spirit are teachings of consolation. This is an error. "Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, and teachest out of Thy law." It is of this chastening, rebuking, reprovng work that the Lord seems to speak in these words: "I lead in the midst of the paths of judgment." Wherever He commences a work of grace upon the soul, He sets up a court of conscience within. His vice-regent is the fear of God dwelling in a tender conscience. This fear of God thus implanted becomes "a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death;" and it is by virtue of this fear of God in a tender conscience that Jesus leads us "in the midst of the paths of judgment."

But some may say—Why is it that He speaks of "the way of righteousness" in the singular number, but of "the paths of judgment" in the plural?—as though there were but one "way of righteousness," but "many paths of judgment." It is so. There is only one "way of righteousness" (the others I have mentioned being either preparatory to, or flowing from it)—that is, the way whereby He justifies sinners, by the imputation of His own glorious righteousness; but there are many "paths of judgment"—that is, there are various dealings of the blessed Spirit upon the soul, whereby from time to time He acts as "a Spirit of judgment and a Spirit of burning;" there are various modes that He takes to lead the soul into a knowledge of itself, and various means that He employs to chastise and rebuke God's children for their pride and iniquity. And these ways are manifold, though they all centre in one.

"He leads" His people, it is said, "in the midst of the paths of judgment." Not on one side of them, but in the midst of them; and therefore there is no crooked walking here. He leads them "in the midst" of those paths; implying that from time to time He leads them into one path, and from time to time into another.

1. Now these "paths of judgment" are when He with His holy eye scrutinises the heart, and brings to light its secret workings. Nature is continually bringing up from the bottom of a deceitful

heart something that is contrary to the Word and work of God; and hypocritical and deceitful nature is continually cloaking and masking over whatever it secretly brings forth. For instance, it will bring forward presumption, and call it faith; it will come forth with vain confidence, and term it a good hope through grace; it will produce various excuses for sloth, and carelessness, and indulgence of the flesh, and then to cover them will speak loudly of the helplessness and impotency of the creature. And thus nature is continually dressing up some of her deep corruptions, and covering them over “as a potsherd is covered with silver dross,” with false names. But when God leads His people “in the midst of the paths of judgment,” He detects, opens, and uncovers the various deceits of nature, and calls things by their right names. How some of us have been entangled in presumption, and at the time did not know it was presumption—have stepped beyond our experience, and advanced ahead of God’s teaching in our souls! This is presumption. Whatever ground we stand upon which God has not Himself set us down upon with His own hand, that is presumption. Many of God’s people are entangled here. They are drawn on by the example of others. They do not like to come forward in their real character; especially if they belong to a church in which presumption is rife; especially if they sit under a minister who breathes forth presumption with every word that he speaks. “Evil communications corrupt good manners;” and thus by rapid strides they go on in presumption; often mistaking their way, and thinking they are walking in faith. Now when God leads His people “in the midst of the paths of judgment,” by His secret rebukes in the conscience, and by the internal reproofs of His Spirit in the heart, He checks and brings to light this presumption. Presumption is the sin of Calvinists; self-righteousness is the sin of Arminians; and if we shoot our arrows at Arminians for their self-righteousness, they may well shoot their arrows against many who nominally belong to us for their presumption. God’s Spirit will never foster nor pass over presumption. How signally has God punished it!

When Uzzah touched the ark, he was struck dead on the spot for his presumption. When the men of Beth-shemesh looked into the ark, more than fifty thousand were cut off for this act of daring presumption. God has visited signally with most awful marks of His anger those that have been guilty of this sin; and that a child of God may be entangled in it is plain from these words, "Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins." But when God leads His people "in the midst of the paths of judgment," He discovers this presumption, and rebukes it "with the rod of His mouth." He reproveth the soul sharply for having gone into this dangerous path. And of all spiritual sins (that is, sins which a spirit may commit) there are none that cut deeper into the conscience of a living soul than this, because he says "If deceived on this point, may I not be deceived on all?" If he has been treading upon false ground here, why may not every step have been wrong? And thus when he is reproveth and rebuked for the presumption into which he has been led unawares, it seems to throw a desponding hue upon every part of his experience—beginning, middle, and end. Thus, then, when God leads His people "in the midst of the paths of judgment," they are judged. As the apostle says, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged; but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

2. So, again, hypocrisy is a sin which God's people are much guilty of. Not that they are hypocrites; there is a vast distinction between being a hypocrite and having hypocrisy. A deceitful heart must needs have hypocrisy in it; but a hypocrite is one in whom it reigns and rules. So that the children of God are not hypocrites; but they are very often deeply entangled in hypocrisy. Have you never smoothed your countenance? Have you never put on a holy look? Has hypocrisy never in prayer before others brought out expressions from your lips which at the time you did not feel in your heart? Have you never, when a Christian friend has been going from your company, had reason to mourn and sigh that you have been speaking so hypocritically? Not allowedly; but hypocrisy

came out of your mouth, whether you would or no. But when God leads His people “in the midst of the paths of judgment,” He reproves this foul spirit in them; He rebukes this hypocrisy; and He cuts them deeply, and lashes them severely for it.

3. And so, too, when the soul has backslidden—when it has been entangled with some filthy idol—as the apostle says, has “fallen from grace” (that is, not fallen from its standing in grace, but fallen from the reign and power of grace)—has “hired lovers,” like Ephraim—when the Lord begins to open up His Word in anger and indignation against those that so start aside from Him, He scourges, rebukes, and chastises the soul.

Thus, then, He leads “in the midst of the paths of judgment,” by setting up a court of judicature in the heart, arraigning the soul at His bar; not with vengeance, as punishing a criminal, but as a parent, after the child that has been playing truant all day brings that child to book at night, reproves him for his conduct, and perhaps chastises him severely. And think nothing of your religion if you do not know these “paths of judgment;” they are very cutting things, but they are very profitable.

III. “I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment; that I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.”

Here we see why Jesus “leads in the way of righteousness,” and why He guides the soul “in the midst of the paths of judgment;” it is that he may cause those that love Him to “inherit substance.”

The most of men are hunting after shadows. A dim, visionary religion, is all that most professors are possessed of. And it is nothing but the internal teaching of God the Holy Ghost in the soul, that can ever banish these shadows, and give “substance” in their stead.

1. But what is “substance?” It is something solid, weighty, powerful, real, and eternal. It is something that will not fly off at the last, like the chaff out of the floor, and the smoke out of the chimney. It is something which does not float merely in the visions

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of the brain. It is power, and feeling, and life, and dew, and the blessed kingdom of God set up with authority in the soul.

But whence springs it that God causes His people “to inherit substance,” by “leading them in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment?” A few instances will show us. When He leads them first into the way of righteousness by opening up His holy law, it drives away all shadows. We had been heaping together, with great toil, chaff, and hay, and straw, and stubble; we had been like the man spoken of in Scripture, who “dreamed, and behold, he ate, but he awoke and his soul was empty;” so we were dreaming our life away continually with shadows, with a name to live, with a formal religion, with a mere external show of godliness, content with a few ordinances and sermons, and thinking that these would shelter us in the day of wrath. These were only shadows; of no more avail to deliver our souls from the wrath to come than the shadowy form of a mountain in the morning sun. But when the Lord began to “lead us in the way of righteousness,” these shadows vanished. Something was then wanted to conciliate the favour of God; something was needed whereby the soul could escape those piercing eyes that looked it through and through; and the soul began to look after “substance,” want realities, need a voice within from the Lord Himself, a testimony of His eternal favour, and a manifestation of His love. There was “substance” needed. The soul began to “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” to pant and long after the manifestation of Jesus’ love, and to be restless and discontented and weary of everything short of the work and witness of the Holy Ghost. When the mouth is stopped, and the soul has become guilty before God, it wants pardon, peace, mercy, blood, and love; nothing else can satisfy it, and after this it pants with unutterable longings. And when Jesus leads His people “in the way of righteousness” by showing to them His glorious righteousness, they begin to “inherit the substance” after which they were panting. There is no substance under the law; it is but a preparing the soul to receive substance; it is emptying the soul,

that it may be filled; it is stripping the soul, that it may be clothed; it is wounding the soul, that it may be healed; bringing down the soul, that it may be lifted up. But when He “leads in the way of righteousness,” that wonderful way whereby the soul is justified by His imputed righteousness, He causes that soul to “inherit substance;” to inherit it even now upon earth, to have a taste of it, the beginnings of it, the earnest of it, and the first-fruits of it.

2. Again; when He leads the soul “in the midst of the paths of judgment,” as He by the cutting rebukes and reproofs of His Spirit brings to light the mere shadowy dreams in which we are so often entangled, He makes the soul long after Divine teaching. When He by the internal light which He casts into your heart showed you your presumption (for instance) under the name of faith, He raised up in your soul earnest breathings and cries after the communication of Divine faith to your heart. Taking away the counterfeit made you poor, but taking away the counterfeit prepared your heart for the genuine coin. So that when He leads you “in the midst of the paths of judgment” to take away presumption, He causes you to “inherit substance” by raising up in your heart the sigh and the cry after faith, and then communicating it and breathing it in power into your souls; for “faith is the substance of things hoped for,” and therefore he that inherits faith inherits substance. And, again, when He discovered the hypocrisy of your carnal mind, and covered you with shame and confusion of face, that you should have been so inveigled and entrapped into hypocritical looks, hypocritical thoughts, and hypocritical words, He cast a desponding hue over all your religion; but when He did this He raised up in your soul sighs, desires, pantings, and longings after sincerity and uprightness, godly awe, fears to be wrong, and desires to be right; and then, when He breathed into your soul this spirit of sincerity, uprightness, and godly fear, He “caused you to inherit substance.” There is something substantial in sincerity; there is something which has power in it, and reality in it, and life in it, and real weight in it, when the Lord breathes sincerity and

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uprightness into your heart. And so, when you have backslidden from Him, and got entangled with some idol, and your heart secretly departed from your God, and you had the idol taken away and the backsliding manifested, and your soul was brought to sigh and cry after the manifestation of Him whom you loved, and He was pleased once more to lift up the light of His countenance upon you, He “caused you to inherit substance.” Oh! what a dreamy, shadowy thing is a mere profession of religion! And what a delusive cheat is all the pleasure to be gained by sin! How it leaves a soul naked, and bare, wounded, stripped, and guilty before God! We have often promised ourselves pleasure in sin; and what have we found? The wormwood and the gall. All the anticipated pleasure vanished; and its flight left us full of guilt and shame. But if ever God indulged our souls with sweet communion with Him, if ever He brought our affections to centre in Himself, if ever He melted our souls at His feet, if ever He blessed us with the communications of His eternal favour and distinguishing love, there was substance in that, there was weight, there was power, there was the foretaste and earnest of a never-ending eternity.

Thus He “causes those that love Him to inherit substance,” by giving them a substantial religion, something real, something that is dropped into the soul from His own blessed self, something that comes out of Himself and out of the fulness of His own loving heart, to make them rejoice and be glad. And I believe that no living soul can be satisfied with anything short of “substance.” Oh! how he fears to have “a name to live while he is dead,” to be cloaked up in hypocrisy; how he dreads to be wrapped up in the delusions of Satan, and so die under the wrath of God! He wants to have something heavenly, something supernatural, something breathed into his heart by God Himself. He may very weak, and very doubting, and very fearful and trembling, full of his own vile corruptions, and mourning under them; but with all that, he must have “substance,” he must have something solid and real, something from God and from God alone. He cannot trust in doctrines, nor

in opinions of men; all these things are mere shadows to him—he wants that which shall draw the soul up into the love of God, and fill it with that “peace that passeth all understanding.” This is “substance.” And the devil does not care what a man’s head is filled with, if he can keep substance out of his heart. It matters not to him what your creed is, or where you come to worship, or what your head is filled with. It is against “substance,” the kingdom of God in love and power in the soul, that Satan directs his attacks.

3. “That I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance, and I will fill their treasures.” Now this “treasure,” is the treasure of the heart. We read, that “a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things.” When the Lord, then, promises that He will “fill their treasure,” He means that He will fill their treasure-houses; that is, He will fill their hearts out of His own blessed fulness.

And how does He fill them? With the sweet manifestations of Himself. That fills the heart; and nothing else can fill it. Everything but Jesus revealing Himself to the soul leaves an aching void. All hopes, and all feelings, and all desires, and all pantings, and longings, and hungerings, and thirstings—these do not fill an aching void. Appetite is not food; thirst is not the refreshing beverage; and the mere hungering and thirsting after righteousness, though it is a sign of life, and a sweet testimony of God working in your soul, is not real feeding upon Jesus as the bread that came down from heaven. Nothing short of Jesus in the heart as the hope of glory can ever satisfy a quickened soul. And when He does shed abroad His love, when He vouchsafes His gracious presence, when He applies His atoning blood, the heart is filled. It wants no more; it is satisfied—abundantly satisfied. It has all it can enjoy, and all it wants to enjoy. And were it always to enjoy this, it would be heaven below.

“I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love Me to inherit substance;

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and I will fill their treasures.” You see, my friends, who those are that God gives this blessing to. It is to those that love Jesus. And who love Him but those who have felt their need of Him, and have had faith raised up in their hearts to believe in His name? “Unto you, therefore, which believe, He is precious.” This faith that works by love He implants when He leads in the way of righteousness by giving a glimpse of His lovely Person and glorious righteousness. This is the commencement of the kingdom of God in the soul, the first discovery of the treasure hid in the field of the Word. And this treasure enriches the heart by begging it, and writing poverty upon everything else in it but itself. The soul is thus made willing to follow as He leads, even through the paths of judgment, that its treasures may be filled. What are a few coins? They are soon spent and gone. But they teach what gold is, and make the heart long for more. Even the paths of judgment become, if not welcome, at least endurable, when in them treasure is found. But many times we would be glad to have “our treasures filled,” but we do not like God’s way of filling them. But this is what He says, and can His words be altered? We must be led by Himself in the way of righteousness, we must be guided by Himself in the midst of the paths of judgment, and then at times He will cause us “to inherit substance,” and we shall find what a substance there is in His love; and He will fill our hearts with those treasures of wisdom and knowledge, love and power, which it hath pleased the Father should dwell in Him, that out of Him we may receive, and grace for grace.

#### **7 GOD’S METHOD OF ANSWERING PRAYER** (*Psalm 91:15, 16*)

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on  
Thursday Evening,  
*June 10th, 1841*

*“He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him; with long life will I satisfy him, and show him My*

*Psalm 91:15, 16*

It is thought by some, to be a great mark of spirituality of mind and a strong evidence of great attainments in the Divine life, to see Christ in every part of Scripture,—especially in the Psalms of David. Now there can be no doubt, that Christ is sweetly set forth in the Psalms; for we read, that He Himself speaks to His disciples of what was “written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning Him;” there can be no doubt, that much of the Psalms is taken up with descriptions of Him,—that His experience is very largely set forth in the Psalms, and that His glory and His grace are powerfully manifested therein. But it is a very doubtful point, whether it is a decisive evidence of great spirituality and an irrefragable proof of Divine teaching, to be able to see Him in the Psalms. For it comes to this question: whence is this sight derived? Is it not possible to see Him with the eye of speculation—with the eye of imagination? Is it not possible to see Him with the eyes of other men? Is it not possible, to be borne on the wings of fancy, and merely in a way of judgment, in a way of doctrinal speculation, in a way of mere exercise of our intellectual faculties, in a way of mere nature and the flesh, to see Christ in this passage and in that, quite independent of any Divine unction, whereby the eyes are anointed,—quite independent of any sweet manifestation of Christ to the soul by the Holy Ghost,—and quite independent of any spiritual humbling views of Him, as set forth in the Scriptures? Is not this possible? Aye, is it an uncommon occurrence? And therefore before we can positively and decisively say, that to see Christ in the Scriptures is a mark of spirituality of mind and a proof of great attainments in the Divine life, we must ask and answer this question,—Whence does this sight come? What feeling does this sight produce? Who gave us these eyes, and whence is it that we have derived these views?

I believe, that if the soul is blessedly bedewed with the unction

of the Holy Ghost, and in simplicity and godly sincerity, with a feeling heart, with brokenness, contrition, tenderness and humility, is led by the Holy Ghost into the Psalms, as setting forth Christ's sufferings, or Christ's experience, or Christ's grace, or Christ's glory, and feels a sweet melting down under that sight, and viewing Christ there set forth is led into any measure of spiritual communion with Him, so as to have some Divine acquaintance and some heavenly fellowship with Him, then we may have reason to believe, that to see Christ in the Psalms and to feel Christ in the Psalms, is of God. But if it is merely an exercise of fancy, merely the sharpening of one's wits, merely seeing Him with a kind of doctrinal speculation, leading to no fruits within and to no communion with Him as there set forth, but merely floating as a bare speculation in the mind, then of a certainty we may say, that it is very possible to have great and enlightened views of Christ as set forth in the Psalms and other parts of Scripture, and yet not to have received them with power from God Himself.

Now Satan can make use of truth in the Church of God to introduce his own errors, and often makes use of one truth to subvert another truth. Satan is a cunning artificer; he uses no rotten levers, when he wants to overthrow a building, but he will select the strongest and largest and most powerful he can possibly wield. And I have been astonished sometimes, to see how Satan, that crafty magician, that wonderful mechanic, can make use of the lever of one truth to overthrow another truth; how he can bring forward doctrine to upset experience, how he can bring forward doctrine to upset practice, and how he can employ one part of God's Word to upset another part of God's Word. That he does so use truth, is most clear. This very Psalm gives us a certain instance of it. When he would fain that the Lord should cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, he brings forward a passage from this Psalm; he makes use of Scripture, as a lever whereby to overthrow Scripture. "The devil said unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His

angels charge concerning Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." Here was Satan making use of a most certain truth, to introduce (if he could do so) presumption into the mind of the blessed Saviour; employing Scripture to lead the blessed Mediator into an act of daring presumption.

But the point to which I was alluding is this; it is most certain, that Christ is much spoken of in the Psalms. Now this, which is certain truth, has got a footing in the Church of God; it has been set forth by able men and heaven-taught men, and is received as truth in the judgments of many people. And here comes the subtlety of this "old serpent." He says, "It is Christ in the Psalms." Any deep experience in the Psalmist is Christ's experience. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy water-spouts,"—that is Christ speaking. "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon Me, so that I am not able to look up,"—that is the experience of Christ, when the sins of His elect family met upon His head. "Deliver Me from blood-guiltiness, O God,"—that is the experience of Christ, when He was suffering under the weight of sin imputed to Him. Now no doubt there is an experience of Christ set forth in these Psalms; but what is the object of this device of Satan? It is, by setting forth all this experience as belonging to Christ, secretly to cast out the experience as belonging to God's people; it is, by putting it all upon Christ and saying that the Psalms are full of the experience of Christ, not to exalt Christ, but to cast down obedience. The professed object is, to glorify the Son of God and set forth His sufferings; the secret object is to cast out this experience, as a needful thing to be undergone in the souls of God's people, and to blunt the edge of conviction in their consciences. When they read, for instance, in the Psalms, of a certain deep experience the psalmist passed through—"My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness"—conscience says, "Did your wounds ever stink, and were they corrupt, because of your foolishness?" "No." "Oh!" says judgment, "but that is Christ." So—"Purge me

with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow;" "Was that ever your prayer?" says conscience. "Was that ever your experience?" asks the inward monitor. "No." "But," says judgment, "that is all Christ." And so, by setting forth the experience in the Psalms as belonging to Christ, there is a secret blunting the edge of conviction in a man's own conscience, and casting out the experience of the saints as traced in the Word of God. And so we see what a crafty subtle serpent this is,—to come with such truths, with great and glorious views of the Son of God, and to make use of them as a lever to overthrow the experience of God's saints as here traced out.

Now I believe, in the Psalms, as written by the Spirit of God, we have three grand interpretations of them—three grand outlines of heavenly teaching. We have, first, the experience of the Psalmist himself. When he said, "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness," it was the wounds of the psalmist; it was a personal matter, which was personally felt; it was an inward, individual experience, which was inwardly, individually known; he described with his pen what he felt in his heart,—that "his wounds stunk and were corrupt because of his foolishness." But there is another experience, which is the experience of Christ, under the hidings of God's countenance,—the experience of the Lord Jesus, when in our nature bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, and groaning forth the agonies of His soul under the sensations of Divine wrath which were manifest in His conscience: that is another great branch of experience set forth in the Psalms. And then there is a third, which is the experience of God's saints now; the experience which the Holy Ghost works in the hearts of God's people, which tallies and accurately measures with the experience of the psalmist, whoever he was,—sometimes David, sometimes Asaph, sometimes Ethan, sometimes Heman,—and accurately tallies also in measure with the experience of Christ there set forth. And thus we see what a wonderful book the Scriptures are: that they are not, as Peter says, "of private interpretation," to be limited

to one interpretation, to be confined to one individual; but they are of public interpretation, of a public nature, and common to the whole Church of God, as the Spirit of God leads the people of God into truth.

Now if we look at this Psalm, we have the strongest evidence that it speaks of Jesus. We know that it was quoted by Satan to the Lord of life and glory; and had it not referred to Him, Satan would have needed no other refutation.

This Psalm, like other Psalms, has in it the form of a dialogue; there seems to be two speakers introduced. Jehovah begins: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." This seems to be a sentence that comes from the mouth of Jehovah; it was a testimony, a word dropped into the soul of the psalmist from the mouth of God. The soul of the psalmist responds; there is a heavenly echo in his bosom to the voice that came from the mouth of God; sweet hope and blessed confidence are raised up by the application of these words to his heart; and he breaks forth—"I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in Him will I trust." And now the Lord takes up the word, and goes on to the end of the Psalm: "Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence; He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler," and so on. And if you bear this in mind, that very often in the Psalms there are what we may call dialogues between two persons,—the Lord speaking inwardly to the psalmist's soul, and the psalmist (David, or Asaph, or Ethan, or Heman,) speaking to the Lord,—if we bear in mind that many of these are heavenly dialogues, sweet and blessed colloquies, it will explain to us why the person is so often changed.

Now with respect to the words of the text, we find a promise given in them; or rather a declaration which is sealed with a promise. "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him; with long

life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation.”

Who is “he?” Unless we can settle who “he” is, we shall be all abroad; we shall not be able to understand what the declaration is, or to whom the promise is made. And therefore before we can get into the text, we must endeavour to ascertain who the person is, to whom the declaration is made, and in whose heart the promise is sealed.

This “he” must be the same person, who is spoken of throughout the whole Psalm; and therefore the first verse will afford us a clue to the point. Generally speaking, through the Psalms and other parts of Scripture, there are clues, there are keys; and if we can only get the key in our hand, it will fit the wards of the lock; it will open up the Psalm. And therefore my chief desire, in reading a Psalm for my own instruction and comfort, or in preaching from it, is to get hold of the key. If I can get hold of the key, it seems to introduce me into the chambers; if I can get hold of the key, it seems to open all the recesses and lay bare all the treasures of heavenly truth contained in them.

This is the same person, that is spoken of in the first verse of the Psalm. And this is said of him: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” Then every promise that is made in this Psalm, and every declaration that is given in the Psalm to a certain person, applies to that certain person spoken of in the first verse,—the character described by these words, “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High.” Then no man has any right to a single part of this Psalm, no man has any interest in a single promise given in this Psalm, no man has any Divine acquaintance with the blessed mysteries couched in the Psalm, whose name is not written in the first verse,—whose experience is not such as the Holy Ghost has there traced out.

And who is this man, and what is his experience? It is “he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High.” What is “the secret place of the Most High?” It is the same spot of which David speaks

in the seventy-third Psalm—"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end." It is the spot, of which the Lord speaks in Ezekiel—"I will be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." Then this "secret place" is the secret bosom of God. It is an entrance by faith into Jehovah, by a spiritual manifestation of Him, leading us into spiritual acquaintance with Him. "The secret place of the Most High" is that solemn spot, where Jehovah meets with the sinner in Christ, and where He opens up to him the riches of His mercy, and leads him into His bosom, so as to read the secrets of His loving heart. It is called a "secret" place, as corresponding with those words—"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." It is called a "secret" place, as only known to the persons to whom it is especially communicated. It is called a "secret" place, because none can get into it, no, nor desire to get into it,—except the Lord Himself, with His own mysterious hand, opens up to them a part in it, sets them down in it, and sweetly blesses them in it. Then to be in "the secret place of the Most High," is to be brought into something like fellowship and acquaintance with God,—something like communion, spiritual worship, Divine intercourse; so as to know something of Him experimentally, and "run into" Him, as "a strong tower" and there feel solemn safety. The "secret place of the Most High," then, is not to be got at by nature and by reason: flesh never entered there. "Flesh and blood" cannot enter the kingdom of God above; and flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God below. "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth," said Jesus, "that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Therefore they are "hid from the wise and prudent." It is that "path, which no fowl knoweth, which the vulture's eye hath not seen." It is a secret hidden from all, except those to whom God Himself is pleased by His Spirit specially to reveal it. And when He reveals it, He draws the soul by the powerful attractions of love, "with cords of a man, with bands of love," by mysterious

attractions, into that "secret place;" and then he begins to discover a little of those secrets which are stored up in the Son of God—a few of those secrets which are with those who fear God—a few of those secrets, the communication of which makes a man spiritually and eternally wise.

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High," is one who more or less, as the Spirit leads him into it, abides there. "Abide in Me, and I in you; if a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered." When a man once gets, therefore, by faith, into "the secret place of the Most High," he "abides" in it. Not as a matter of present experience, not that he can always feel sweet communion with God; but still it is his home. We all have our home, our fireside, the place where at night we lay our weary bodies down to rest; and it is our dwelling-place. We are not always there; we leave our homes in the morning to go about our business, and come back to our homes at night; but our affections are there, our heart is there, our property is there, and we look for evening time to go home and rest there. It is our dwelling place; and yet we are not always in it. So with this "secret place of the Most High;" it is the "dwelling" place of a Christian; it is the house, the home, where his affections are, where his treasure is, and to which his heart turns; but still he is not always there. He goes abroad and leaves often this sweet home. Yet it is his dwelling-place; because it is there, and there alone, he can solidly rest,—it is there, and there alone, he can lie down and feed and take pleasure.

Here is a soul, then, that is brought by faith, of the Spirit's operation, to know "the secret place of the Most High,"—that is to have some spiritual acquaintance with God in Christ, to enter by faith into the secrets which Jehovah reveals, and to feel that the manifestation of those secrets to his soul makes his heaven here below, and constitutes the real rest and satisfaction of his heart. And to this character all the promises in the Psalm are made; he is interested in every covenant promise, that is there uttered by the mouth of God Himself; and every one of those promises shall be

fulfilled in him, and shall be fulfilled for him.

But the Lord has attached—I will not call it a condition, (it is a word I abhor), but a declaration; which declaration is linked on with the promise. The Lord has appointed a certain path, wherein the soul is to walk. The walking in that path is a necessary step, to obtain the blessing that lies at the end of the path. It is no condition to be performed by the creature; it is nothing that springs out of, or depends upon, human will or human merit; but it hangs upon the Lord's appointment. God has connected certain promises with certain appointments; He has connected certain deliverances with certain trials; He has connected certain blessings with certain states and positions of soul. Therefore if we are to get at the blessing, we must get at it through God's appointment. If we are to reach the home, we must travel by that road which leads thereunto. "What God hath joined together let no man"—and no man ever can—"put asunder." Now the Lord has in the text declared a certain path; He has made a positive declaration; and to this positive appointment He has graciously annexed a certain promise. "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." Then the declaration is as certain as the promise; the one is as much of Divine decree as the other; and he that walks not in the one path, will not have the promise which is connected with that path. In this sense, and in this sense only, can we understand the conditions of Scripture—the ifs; God having linked things together, which are both of His sovereign decree, which are both of His eternal appointment, and which the Spirit graciously brings His people into, and blessedly works in their hearts and consciences. Thus it is no matter of free will, it is no matter of man's righteousness or man's wisdom, whether he shall "call upon God;" it is appointed he should call upon Him. God has said in positive terms—(and His "I will," and His "he shall," never can be broken)—"He shall call upon Me." It therefore does not rest with the creature, whether he will call upon Him or not; its not a matter poised in the balances of the creature, whether he shall pray or not; God has not left it to man, whether he shall take up prayer

or lay aside prayer; but He has made it a part of His own sovereign appointments, of His own eternal decrees, which can no more be frustrated, than salvation itself. Therefore this soul, that “dwells in the secret place of the Most High”—“he shall call upon God.” It is not left to him, whether he will call or not; but it stands in a way of eternal decree, in a way of sovereign good pleasure. He must call upon God, because God says he shall.

But though this rests upon the basis of Divine sovereignty, God does not work it in the soul in that manner. He does not come in a dry doctrinal way into a man's conscience, and say—“I have appointed thee to pray, and therefore pray thou must; He does not come with an abstract truth, which is written in a man's judgment like a rule of arithmetic, for the man to set to work upon that abstract truth, as a child at school sets to work upon a sum. The Lord does not work in that manner; but He works by raising certain wants, by kindling certain desires, by bringing the soul into certain states, and by “pouring out the Spirit of grace and of supplications” upon it,—all which tend to that point, to which God is leading the soul, and all which spring out of God's sovereign eternal appointment.

“He shall call upon Me.” When shall he call? Why, when the Lord pours out “the Spirit of grace and of supplications;” when the Lord lays wants upon his heart; when the Lord brings convictions into his conscience; when the Lord brings trouble into his soul; when the Lord draws forth that “Spirit of grace and of supplications” which He has poured out; when the Lord is graciously pleased to draw forth prayer into blessed exercise, and to enable the soul to pour out its desires and to offer up its fervent breathings at His feet, and to give them out as He gives them in. Thus to call upon the Lord, is no point of duty, to be attained as a duty; it is no point of legal constraint, which must be done because the Word of God speaks of it; but it is a feeling, an experience, an inward work, which springs from the Lord's hand, and which flows in the Lord's own Divine channel. Thus when the Lord is pleased to pour out this “Spirit of grace and of supplications,” we

must pray; but we do not pray because we must; we pray because we have no better occupation, we have no more earnest desire, we have no more powerful feeling, and we have no more invincible and irresistible constraint. The child of God in trouble must groan and sigh; he does not say, "Eight o'clock is come, twelve o'clock is come, six o'clock is come, now I will groan, now I will sigh a little, I will take out my Bible and begin to groan and to sigh;" that is nothing but the groan of the hypocrite, it is nothing but the sigh of the deceived professor. The living child of God groans and sighs, because it is the expression of his wants,—because it is a language which carries forth the feelings of his heart, because groans and sighs are pressed out of him by the heavy weight upon him. A man lying in the street with a heavy weight upon him, will call for help; but he does not say, "It is my duty to cry to the passers-by for help,"—he cries for help because he wants to be delivered. A man with a broken leg does not say, "It is my duty to send for a surgeon;" he wants him to set the limb. And a man in a raging disease does not say, "It is my duty to send for a physician;" he wants him,—to heal his disease. So, when God the Holy Spirit works in a child of God, he prays, not out of a sense of duty, but out of a burdened heart. He prays, because he cannot but pray; he groans, because he must groan; he sighs, because he must sigh; having an inward weight, an inward burden, an inward experience, in which and through which he is compelled to call upon the Lord. And I never think anything of a man's religion, which did not begin in this way. If a man's religion (so called) began in any other way than by the Lord's bringing him to know himself as a sinner before Him, and except those convictions of sin were accompanied by "the Spirit of grace and of supplications," whereby he was enabled to pour out his soul into the bosom of God, and to sigh and cry and groan "being burdened," I never can believe that man's religion began by God's internal teaching. I know mine began so; and I have always stood firm upon that foundation, that a religion that does not begin with the sighs and groans and pourings out of the soul to God under

the pourings in of the Spirit, is a religion that began in the flesh, and never sprung from the mighty operation of God in the soul.

“He shall call upon Me.” What shall he call upon God for? “He shall call upon Me” for everything that he wants internally to feel. A child of God can call for nothing else. He cannot direct his prayers according to the rule of another’s; he does not pick up a few pretty expressions from a gifted man in the table pew. He knows that he has to do with One that searches him through, that he stands before a God that will not be mocked and trifled with; and when he comes before the Lord, he asks Him, with sighs and groans, for those blessings, and those blessings only, which his conscience tells him he wants, and which his soul is hungering and thirsting to enjoy, delivered into his heart from God Himself. He calls upon God for the pardon of his sins; he calls upon God for the revelation of Himself; he calls upon God for the manifestation of Christ; he calls upon God for the application of atoning blood; he calls upon God for the revelation of His eternal favour to his soul; he calls upon God, sweetly to bring him into an experimental knowledge of the Lord of life and glory; he calls upon God for every blessing that is set before his eyes, and for every blessing that is set before his heart, after which he longs and sighs and pants and groans with pantings and groanings unutterable.

Now the Lord says, “I will answer.” “He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him.” I will answer, just as much as he shall call; and he shall call, just as much as I shall answer. They are both linked together; and both stand on the same basis of sovereign appointment and eternal decree.

“I will answer him.” What will He answer? Why, He will answer those prayers, which He Himself has indited. He will answer those wants, which He Himself has created. He will answer those hungerings, which He Himself has produced. He will answer those thirstings, which His own blessed Spirit has wrought powerfully in the soul.

He does not say when; He does not say how. He does not say

it shall be the next hour, next week, next month, next year. He leaves that with Himself; He keeps that in His own hands. He binds Himself by a naked promise. But He does not tell us how He brings about that promise. That He keeps in His own bosom. And it is a mercy that He does. By keeping that in His own bosom He leaves to Himself a wonderful way, in which to work out the accomplishment of that promise. Keeping the manner and the time to Himself, He reserves to Himself different paths, in which He leads His children, merely tying Himself down with a naked promise and not revealing in what way that promise shall be accomplished. It was so with Abraham; He gave him a naked promise, but the way in which it was to be accomplished He kept in His own breast. And so He has given a naked promise to every child of His, that "calls upon Him;" He says, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;" He has tied Himself there, He has bound Himself by His Word, which can never be broken: but He has not said how, nor has He said when.

Now it is this how and when, that so try the child of God, who is calling upon the Lord and not receiving the answer that he desires to receive at His mouth. If he could only just know the time fixed, he could bear with all his trouble patiently; if he could only see the manner in which the blessing would come, he thinks he should find some relief from his trial of soul in calling upon God and finding the answer so long delayed. But the answer that God gives, He gives in His own time. And I believe, many of the children of God have had to cry to Him for days and weeks and months and years, and the answer has been delayed; and then, when expectation seemed to give up the ghost, when there seemed no longer any prospect that God would fulfil His promise, when the hopes of nature (like the body of Abraham) were "now dead," then when flesh failed, just in that hour the Lord fulfilled the promise and brought the answer into the soul.

But sometimes the Lord is pleased to answer our prayers more immediately; He brings us into those straits and troubles from

which we cannot extricate ourselves, and then will answer our prayer and fulfil the promise. But perhaps it is in such a way as we least expect, and yet in such a way as most glorifies Him.

Now there is sometimes in men's minds a kind of confusion in this matter. They are in a certain path, from which they want to be extricated; they are under a trial, from which they want to be delivered; they call upon the Lord to deliver them, and they want some manifestation from Himself, some going forth of His hand, some Divine leading which they are to follow. But the Lord may be working in a very different way from what they think; and they may really be inattentive to the internal voice of God in their conscience, because they are expecting the voice to come in some other part. It was just so with myself. When I was in the Establishment, burdened with all the things I had to go through, and troubled and distressed in my mind, I was calling upon the Lord to deliver me, to lead me out, to show me what to do, to make the path plain and clear. Now that was my sincere cry; but I expected some miraculous interposition, to hear some voice, to have some wonderful leading; and in waiting for that, I was waiting for what the Lord never meant to bestow. And I was brought at last to this internal conviction: suppose I were living in drunkenness, suppose I were living in adultery, suppose I were walking in known sin, should I want a voice from God to say to me, "Leave this drunkenness, come out from this adultery, give up this sin?" should I want some Divine manifestation to bring me out of a sin, when my conscience bore its solemn witness and I was miserable under the weight and burden of it? No; the very conviction is the answer of God to the prayer; the very burden which the Lord lays on us is meant to press us out of that in which we are walking. So I reasoned with myself: "If I am living in sin, if it be a sin to be where I am, if I must do things which my conscience tells me are sins, and by which my conscience is burdened as sins, the very conviction, the very distress, the very burden, is the answer. It is the voice of God in the conscience; not the voice of God in the

air, not the appearance of God in the sky, but the voice of God in the conscience and the appearance of the frown of God in the heart." And on this simple conviction I was enabled to act, and never to this day have repented it. I have, therefore, been led to see by experience that we are often expecting wonderful answers, mysterious answers, and the Lord does not mean to give those answers.

The Lord, you see, reserves the way in which He shall give the answer. Are you in some temptation, passing through some exercise? "Oh!" say you, "I want the Lord to lead me out." Well, is the Lord bearing a solemn witness in your conscience? Is the Lord speaking in that secret court, and manifesting His frown in your soul? That is His answer, and He will not vouchsafe to give you any other. It is to that the soul must look; and he that is enabled to hear this reproof in conscience, must take it as the answer of God to those prayers which he is putting up for deliverance from the temptation or the sin under which he is labouring.

So, again, the soul sometimes shall call upon the Lord to show it sweet manifestations of Christ, to lead it blessedly into Christ, to settle it down into liberty in Christ, to make Christ precious, and lead the soul into blessed communion with Him. Well, these sighs and groans and cries and desires and breathings of the soul come from God; they are His work in the Spirit, and the Lord says: "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." But how will He answer him? Why, by making his shackles heavier, making his fetters more grievous. As it was with the children of Israel in Egypt; they cried to the Lord for deliverance, they groaned and sighed, and their prayers reached the ear of the Lord and their cries moved His heart; but how did He answer? Their burdens were made heavier; they were to make bricks without straw; they were to be put further from deliverance; and every successive prayer seemed to make the king's heart harder, and deliverance more improbable. So perhaps with ourselves. We have been crying to the Lord for years to make Christ precious, to lead us into close communion with Him, to

open up the secrets of His bosom, and bathe our souls in that love of His "which passeth knowledge," and we have found some access to a throne of grace in pouring out those desires. Now, the Lord answers them; but how does He answer them? By bringing us into those spots and those states of experience to which these ideas of Christ are alone applicable. Our feeling would be to loll upon our sofa or to lean in our armchair, and have Christ come into our hearts without any burdens or distresses or griefs or trials or temptations or powerful exercises; we want some sweet manifestation of Christ, but we want it to come through a channel which is not a channel of pain and suffering. Now the Lord says, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;" "He shall see Christ, he shall have a sweet view of Christ, he shall have a blessed manifestation of Christ, he shall be led up into Christ;" but how? "By being placed by My hand in those spots to which Christ alone is adapted, for which Christ alone is suitable, and from which Christ alone delivers." "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him."

Sometimes the soul will pray to have power, inward power, to lay hold of God's promises, and to feel the sweetness of God's promises within. We read the Scriptures, we see such and such promises made to the elect. "Oh!" say we to ourselves, "what know I of this promise? Surely I have not felt this promise; surely I have not tasted the sweetness of this promise; oh! that the Lord would lead me into it!" And the Lord says, "I will; 'He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;' you shall have the promise, aye, all the promise; you shall have the sweetness of it, the blessedness of it." But, mark, you must be in the path to which that promise is suitable, you must be in the trial to which that promise is adapted, you must be in the exercise out of which that promise delivers, you must be in the difficulty which that promise fits. You must have the mortise for the tenon to go into, you must have the emptiness to be filled out of Christ's fulness, you must have the beggary to be supplied with Christ's riches, you must have the bankruptcy to have a sweet and full discharge.

And the Lord, when He is going to fulfil the promise, does not show His hand and say: "Now I am leading you into the promise, now I am fulfilling to you the prayer; see how My arm is now bare, and how I am guiding and leading you into the promise, after which you have been praying." The Lord does not speak thus in conscience, but hides Himself and darkens the cloud in our souls; we get farther off from the promise than ever; get, as it were, miles and leagues away from the point we thought we were going to approach, like the mariner who is driven away by the winds; we are seeking to get into the promise, and we get blown aside by gusts and winds, further from the point at which we are aiming. But the Lord is all the while leading us into it, because He is bringing us down into the spot to which the promise applies. We say, "Lord, make me rich." He says, "I will, but thou must first be made poor." We say, "Lord, let me have a precious view of Christ." "I will, but you must first have a sight of your own self." "Let me know the riches of Christ's blood." "I will, but you must first know the depth of your guilt." "Let me know what it is to stand complete in Christ's righteousness." "I will, but you must first sink down in self-loathing and self-abhorrence." So that the Lord takes His own path, and chooses His own way, to bring about His own purposes, in such a mysterious manner that reason is staggered, nature gives up the ghost, and all the powers of flesh and blood fail and get to their wits' end; and then the Lord brings about the fulfilment of that promise which we have been desiring to get into, and the enjoyment of which we have been longing richly to feel.

So then: "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." The Lord encourages His people to call upon Him for whatsoever they want. Not to go with lip-service, not to go with made-up tales; but the Lord encourages all His blood-bought family, whom He has quickened by His Spirit, to call upon Him for everything their souls long after; be it deliverance from trouble, be it sweet manifestations of mercy, be it blessed enjoyment of Christ, be it for a heart enlarged, be it for the liberty of the Gospel, be it to stand firm

in Jesus, be it to be brought out of any temptation under which they are labouring. "Open thy mouth wide," says the Lord, "and I will fill it." Whatever thou askest, believing, thou shalt receive. "Pour out your heart before Me," says the Lord. Well, the soul is sometimes enabled to do so. Have not you and I, friends, been enabled to pour out our hearts at a throne of grace, and tell the Lord what we really wanted, what we really asked for, and tell Him that nothing but that which He alone could give would satisfy our souls? There have been such times of access to the God of grace. And afterwards perhaps we have forgotten the things we told Him of; we have been heedless of the prayers we laid at His feet; and though very earnest at the time in seeking after certain blessings, we left them at the Lord's feet and forgot them all. But the Lord does not forget them; they are treasured up in His heart and memory; and in His own time He brings them to light, and gives the fulfilment of them. But before He does it, He will bring us into the spot where we want them again; and then we have to tell Him again, and supplicate Him again, and ask Him again, ashamed of ourselves perhaps that we should have asked the Lord for these blessings, and been as heedless of them as though we did not care to receive them at His hand; but still, under trouble, under soul necessity, under grief, we go and tell Him again. And then the Lord, in His own way and time, brings about that very thing we desired of Him. Perhaps it is some temptation under which we have been labouring for months, some grievous sin which is continually put by Satan before our eyes, and into which we are afraid we shall tumble headlong; some cursed bait which that arch-deceiver knows how to dress up in such pleasing colours that our wretched nature wants to grasp it, only it knows there is a hook concealed; some internal weight of guilt, on account of which the soul "groans, being burdened." Here is painful exercise, and the soul cries to the Lord to be delivered from it. "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." There is no use in going with it to man; there is no use in keeping it buried in our breasts. Sometimes we get a sullen fit, and will not tell the Lord any

more—He has delayed the answer so long—like a sullen child that will not eat the very bread the parent lays down; but we must be brought out of this sulky fit. Whatever the Lord means to give He from time to time enlarges our hearts to ask, and keeps us waiting, pleading, sighing, suing, groaning and begging at His blessed feet for those things without which we must perish eternally, without which we cannot comfortably live, and without which we cannot happily die. And so it is no matter of choice, it is no matter left to the free will of man, whether he will pray or not; but it is so laid upon his heart, so pressed out of him by the heavy load upon him, that he is compelled, whether he will or not, to cry to the Lord for things he must have or die. And then, in His own time and in His own way, He brings everything to pass which the soul wants to have brought to pass; opens up ways, brings deliverances, lifts out of trials, removes burdens, makes a way in the deep, which no eye but His could see and no hand but His could open, leads the soul into it, brings the soul through it, and then hides all glory from the creature by making us fall down before His feet and ascribe glory and honour and power and thanksgiving and salvation unto God and the Lamb.

## 8 THE STICKING TO GOD'S TESTIMONIES (*Psalm 119:31*)

Preached, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London  
on Lord's Day Morning,  
*July 12th, 1840*

*"I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame."*

*Psalm 119:31*

If I were to say that every quickened child of God finds, at some time or other of his spiritual experience, the feelings of his soul described in the 119th Psalm, I should not state that which varies much from the truth. Now if we look at the state in which the Psalmist was when God the blessed Spirit worked in him "to will

and to do," and taught him how and what to speak in this psalm, we shall find he was not at this time in the heights of rapturous enjoyment, nor yet in the depths of sinking despair; but he had been brought down by the work of God in his soul to a meek, quiet and chastened state of experience, so that his posture was now at the feet of his Lord, looking up for those words which should drop from His lips, and waiting for some manifestation of His mercy and favour, as his only food and soul-satisfying portion. Thus in the text he reminds the Lord what He had done for him, and what he himself had been mercifully enabled to do, and makes this a ground for asking more. "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame."

I. Let us first, then, see what the Psalmist means by God's testimonies here. Does he mean merely the letter of truth, just so much of the Scriptures as were at that time revealed? The testimonies of God mean something more than this. For whatever reverence the children of God have towards the Scriptures, and however clearly and solemnly they receive them as a revelation from God, yet the testimonies to which they cleave are those that come from the Lord's own mouth into their souls. They do not cleave to the bare letter of the Word—the mere vowels and consonants and syllables of Scripture, but to such testimonies as the Lord Himself is pleased to drop into their heart and conscience through the medium of the Scriptures of truth. Now before we can receive the Scriptures as a revelation from God, it must be shown to us by the Holy Spirit that they were inspired by Himself; and I am well convinced from soul-feeling that no man ever receives the Scriptures as an inspiration from God who has not received some measure of the same inspiration in his own soul. He may believe from external evidences that it is the Word of God, or he may have received it as such "by tradition from the fathers;" but as to any powerful workings in his own soul, as to any solemn feelings in his own conscience, as to any close dealings with God upon the matter, no man, I believe, ever did receive the Scriptures

as a divine revelation from God, who had not something of a divine revelation made in his own soul by the Holy Ghost that inspired and dictated those Scriptures. Thus before we can stick to the mere written testimonies themselves as a whole, distinct from any peculiar act of faith on any one portion, we must have living faith in our souls, faith of God's gift and operation, to believe that the Scriptures really came as a divine revelation from God.

Now here it seems to me is one of the first teachings of the Holy Ghost in the soul, to enable us to receive the Word of God as coming from Him; as the apostle speaks, "Ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God." And why? Because "it effectually worketh in you that believe." But this first reception is not of the whole of the Word of God, but of that part only of divine truth which He shall have Himself revealed to the soul; and then, when the Lord Himself has shot forth a gleam of light into the conscience out of the Scriptures, in that light we see light; and that one ray of truth discovers the reality of all other revealed truth, just in the same way as when one beam darts from the sun through the clouds, that one beam gives us to know the existence of that glorious orb of day. Thus by receiving one truth from God into our soul, we receive the Scriptures as a revelation from God. But, if a man has never received a ray of truth into his soul out of the grand source of all truth, out of Him who is "the way, the truth, and the life," he at present has no real faith that the Scriptures are inspired by Jehovah, and has no real acquaintance with the Bible as a revelation from God Himself.

Well here, then, seems to be the first ray and gleam of heavenly light that shoots into the conscience and darts into the soul from the source of all truth. The Lord the Spirit rides as it were upon this beam into the soul, and conveys by this heavenly ray of light such special truth as He sees fit to bring into the conscience. All the children of God are not, indeed, quickened into spiritual life in the same precise way. The same individual truth is not brought

with power to the conscience of each and all; but truth, that is, some part of truth, the Word of God in the substance and spirit of it, is applied by the Holy Ghost to the conscience of all; otherwise they would not be "begotten by the word of truth," otherwise they would not be "born again of incorruptible seed by the word of God" 1 Pet. 1:23), otherwise the Spirit of truth would not employ truth to convey to them spiritual life.

1. But we come to the particular testimonies which God reveals to His chosen. Now, I believe that one of the first testimonies that God seals upon the heart and conscience of His children is a manifestation of His own being, I mean His spiritual being; some discovery of Himself as He really is, some manifestation of Himself as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures of truth. We may know there is a God of nature by seeing the works of creation; we may in some respects know that there is a God of providence by observing the interpositions of His hand in the various transactions of life; but to know Jehovah as He really is, to have a spiritual acquaintance with Him as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures of truth, to have such a knowledge of Him as is the beginning of eternal life, none can have such except those to whom He is pleased specially to manifest Himself. Then, whatever notions or opinions we may have about God—and they may be most clear and systematic, they may run most completely in the channel of letter truth—whatever outward notions, speculations, or imaginations we may have concerning the being of God, we only know Him spiritually so far as He is pleased immediately to manifest Himself to our consciences. All other knowledge stands in the flesh; it is the mere fruit of the creature, and falls utterly short of that knowledge which is spiritual wisdom and eternal life. But when we spiritually learn that there is a God, in learning His being we learn who He is. We learn also by an inward testimony from Himself, by His own mouth speaking home the Word with power to our hearts, that He is just and holy, and will by no means clear the transgressor, and that His heart-searching eyes pierce even into the very secrets of our souls.

A man may know all this in the letter, but knowing it in the letter produces no spiritual feeling, no spiritual reception, no spiritual acquaintance with the truth thus laid hold of. But whenever the Lord the Spirit brings home the truth of God with power to the soul, He raises up, by the application of that truth, spiritual feelings, spiritual breathings, and spiritual exercises upon that which He is pleased to communicate. How do you measure your knowledge of truth? Is it by the number of texts that you have learnt by heart? Is it by your being able to explain what you see in the Scriptures? Is it by the understanding that you have obtained by comparing passage with passage? If you have no better knowledge than this, it all stands in the flesh, and it is nothing else but dim letter speculation which leaves the soul barren before God. Measure your knowledge by this test, what feelings are produced by it, what exercises before God, what breathings in the presence of Him with whom you have to do, what drawings forth of heart, what solemn questionings of soul before Him in whose presence you from time to time stand. Now this test will apply to every degree and stage and state of spiritual life, so far as that spiritual life is in exercise.

But when we come to a more particular description of these testimonies, we may divide them into two grand classes—testimonies against us, and testimonies for us; that is, in the way of experience. In fact, all God's testimonies, whether of the law or of the Gospel, whether of conviction or of consolation, whether of pulling down or of building up—all of God's testimonies are really for the soul; but looked at as a matter of personal experience, viewed in the light of our own feelings, and weighed in the balance of our own exercises, all testimonies from God dropped by the mouth of God into the soul may be divided into two grand classes—testimonies against and testimonies for us. Now, my object will be to show how the soul that is quickened by God into eternal life sticks and cleaves to both these testimonies; and that it is a mark and test of spiritual life in the soul that it does stick to those testimonies which it has received from the mouth of Jehovah

We will begin, then, by looking at the soul in its first approaches unto God, in the first pourings out and breathings forth of its wants and desires after Him, in the first speakings of its misery and wretchedness into His gracious ear, in its first solemn convictions of the weight and burden of sin, in the first deep-seated and deep-rooted pangs of a guilty conscience. Here, then, is a soul, into whose conscience God has dropped a testimony; that is, to whose heart He has applied the Word with power, be it in the very letter, or be it in the substance of it. This awakened soul has now obtained some sight of His holiness, some spiritual acquaintance with Him as a God not to be mocked or trifled with. Now no sooner has this testimony been dropped into a man's heart and conscience than he sticks to it; that is, he cleaves to it. Not, at first, with affection, but he cleaves to it with faith; and this is the province of faith, and "the work of faith with power," to cleave to that which God applies. Faith is not a traveller that roams up and down God's Word, as our tourists go exploring foreign countries to see their beautiful productions. Infant faith does not take ship, and travel from coast to coast, and from sea to sea of the Scriptures, to explore their beauties and discover their fruits; but it is a stay-at-home grace, whose province is to cleave to that which God reveals, to be exercised upon that which God manifests, and to deal with that which the Holy Ghost brings home. And he whose faith oversteps that which God applies, he whose faith busies itself in anything but that which is brought home with power to the conscience, he whose faith thus wanders abroad unrestrained, has a mark upon him that he has not the faith of God's elect. Well, then, here is the soul in the first solemn teachings of God, cleaving to that which God has revealed. He has made known His heart-searching presence; the soul cleaves to that testimony. He has made known His holiness; it believes it, feels it, is exercised upon, and acts towards it. He has manifested that He is not to be trifled with, not to be mocked, not to be insulted by false worship and the vain offerings of the flesh;

the soul cleaves to this testimony, believes it, and is exercised with respect to it. He manifests to the soul that every thought, every movement, every stirring, every word and action lie open before Him; the soul believes it, is exercised upon it, and cleaves to the testimony which God has thus sealed and applied.

Now, no sooner does a man begin to cleave to the testimony dropped into his soul, and to stick to that which God brings home with power to his heart, than things arise in every quarter to drive him from it. Here is the grand conflict in the soul, betwixt faith cleaving to the testimony which came into the heart from the mouth of God, and the enemies of faith who would seek to drive and dislodge faith from the position given to it. The Lord drops a certain testimony into the soul: no sooner has the testimony come than faith acts upon it and cleaves to it. Now, then, the enemy from various quarters seeks to drive faith from doing that which it is the province of faith to do, and to dislodge it from the ground which it is spiritually entrenched in. For instance, no sooner does faith begin to cleave to the Scriptures as inspired truth, than infidelity begins to start up from the depths of the carnal mind to fight against the solemn testimony which God Himself has brought in. I can speak for myself, that I never knew what infidelity was till I knew what faith was; I never knew what a giant it was, what a son of Anak, and how this giant could carry me away in his arms, resisting indeed and struggling, but unable to resist effectually. No sooner, then, do we receive from God His own solemn testimony that the Scriptures come from Him as a revelation of Himself, and no sooner does faith begin to believe this testimony, than the slumbering giant is aroused, and starts up from his den in the depths of the carnal mind, to grapple with this infant faith, to seize this new-born babe in his arms, and bear it away from that spot where God Himself has placed it. Then here comes the conflict. Faith says, "The Word of God is true;" Infidelity says, "It is not." Faith says, "I believe, because I feel;" Infidelity says, "Your feelings are no evidence." Faith says, "I know, because I have had a discovery

of it to my heart and conscience, I could not resist the evidence;" Infidelity says, "You know nothing about it." So here is the conflict between faith which sticks to God's testimony, and is exercised upon God's testimony, and infidelity which fights against faith, and seeks to bear it down, and to overwhelm it with the floods that are cast out from the mouth of this dragon. But faith must stick to it, because with faith is godly fear, and with faith in its first actings there is guilt and condemnation, and sore exercises, and cutting feelings, and painful maladies and distresses; and all these are so many clasps to rivet down and keep faith in its right spot. Faith, being thus backed by godly fear, seeks to thrust back this infidel monster that would seek to bear it away in his arms. Faith, being mixed up too and working with condemnation, cannot receive the God-dishonouring lie that the Scriptures are not God's word. The soul that spiritually "knows its own grief and its own sore," can never long disbelieve its own feelings, nor give the lie to its own exercises.

Self-righteousness again, is an enemy from another quarter, which seeks to dislodge faith from the position it occupies. What does faith believe in these early exercises? That the law requires a perfect righteousness; that God demands perfect satisfaction; that all our own righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Thus speaks faith, acting upon the testimony of God. But self-righteousness would seek to drive faith from this position, to dislodge it from the spiritual receiving of the truth of God, as God has revealed it; would seek to cover it over with a covering not of God's Spirit, and bedaub and besmear that which the Word of God and the testimony of God has implanted; to plaster it over and bemire it, and hide it up, so that it should not shine in the light of God's countenance. Well, then, here is the struggle between faith, amidst guilt, self-condemnation, self-abhorrence, godly fear, in all their exercises towards God; here is the conflict betwixt these and self-righteousness. We, on the one hand, being spiritually persuaded that we are lost, ruined, undone creatures; and self-righteousness seeking, on the other hand, to lull

these convictions, to obscure this work, and to bury it beneath its own untempered mortar. But living faith, sooner or later, breaks through all disguises, heaves up till the untempered mortar cracks and falls; and thus the soul comes forth naked before God, that it may be experimentally clothed in garments of imputed righteousness. Thus far for testimonies against, and the sticking to them by faith. We come, now, to testimonies for the soul.

2. After a time, then, the Lord shall drop a testimony into the soul that He is gracious, that there is mercy with Him that He may be feared, that there is pardon through the blood of the Lamb, that there is a glorious righteousness through the perfect obedience of the Son of God. He thus raises up, by dropping in some testimony concerning Jesus, some faith "to receive Christ Jesus the Lord" (Col. 2:6) as all our salvation and all our desire. Now, here is still "the work of faith with power" to stick to the testimony. Faith cannot get beyond that spot where God Himself has placed it. If He shows anger, faith believes it and cleaves to it. If He shows mercy, faith believes it and cleaves to it. Whatever the Spirit of God brings into the soul out of the Word of truth, that is the office and province of faith to believe and cleave to. "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies." Well, then, no sooner does faith begin to stick to this testimony, that some word of consolation has been dropped, that some peace has been enjoyed, that some dewdrops of atoning blood have been sprinkled, that some favour has been evidently and manifestly shown; I say, no sooner does the Lord drop such testimony into the heart and conscience than there rises up from the depth of the carnal mind that which disbelieves it, that which fights against it, and that which would fain drive and dislodge faith from that position which it now occupies. O, what a work it is—"the work of faith with power!" Men speak of faith as though faith had no work to do. But there is no workman like living faith. Living faith is always at work; I mean to say when the Spirit of the Lord is working upon it; by "always," I mean to say at such times as the Lord the Spirit is drawing it into exercise; and only so far

as faith is working in the soul, nay, and powerfully working too, have we any evidence that it is "the faith of God's elect," or "the faith of the operation of God." Thus, no sooner does the Lord settle us down into some sweet persuasion that we are eternally His, no sooner is some dewdrop of sweet favour experienced in our soul, than an enemy rises to beat down faith from that position which it now occupies.

For instance, sometimes presumption starts up from the depths of the carnal mind, to drive a man out of that place where God has set him down. Now, all God's people are not delivered in the same powerful way; there are degrees of deliverance. Some are delivered very powerfully, by a blessed revelation of Christ to their soul, so as to bring them at once into all the joy and comfort of the gospel; and in these cases the sweet season usually lasts long, and they have a blessed evidence in their souls that they are the children of God, whom He has loved from eternity. But all God's children are not so dealt with; the deliverance in some is not so manifest; the love of God in some is not so powerfully shed abroad; the testimonies of Jehovah's love and mercy are not so clearly revealed. This visit is short and transient; as it speaks in the Canticles (2:9) of the Beloved just "showing Himself" (or as it is in the margin, "flourishing," that is, moving quickly and hurriedly) "through the lattice;" just as we sometimes see a person move rapidly past our window, whose form we immediately perceive, but cannot distinctly see his features. Thus, spiritually, Jesus sometimes moves rapidly and hastily by the lattice, and just gives a transient glimpse of His lovely Person, His grace, blood, and righteousness. Well, this last manifestation is weak and feeble in comparison with the former; it is more transient, and leaves less deep and enduring impressions, and thus it seems to be not that powerful work which the child of God is seeking after. This very thing, then, lays a foundation for unbelief to work upon—for the antagonist powers of faith to take their ground upon in the heart. A child of God who has not been very powerfully delivered, who

has received some dewdrops of mercy, some glimpses of love, and yet has not been brought out into the full enjoyment of liberty and peace, falls sometimes into company with those who tell him of their wonderful comforts, their blessed consolations, how sure they are that their names are in the book of life, and what a clear evidence they have received of their adoption into the family of God. He begins then immediately to compare what he hears with his own experience; he looks at their large estate, and contrasts with it his own narrow field; and as he views his scanty strip, it all disappears, being swamped and swallowed up by the estate of his wealthy neighbour. Now in some cases up starts presumption, that cursed foe to the child of God; and as presumption starts up, it pushes him beyond the testimony which God has dropped into his soul. The testimony was weak, presumption would say it was strong; the visit was transient, presumption declares it was abiding. Thus presumption steps forward to push the soul beyond its real standing into a false liberty, into which God Himself has not set it down. Well, then, the work of faith is to cleave to God's testimony; and here is the difficulty, presumption pushing it beyond its real standing, and faith cleaving to its true spot against presumption; faith working with godly fear, faith simply cleaving to what it has received from God. On the other hand, in some cases, despair will work. In the cases of some, presumption will push the soul beyond its real standing into false liberty; in other cases, despair will drive it back from the real standing where God has placed it, so as to make it shrink, as it were, and quiver with fear that mercy has never reached it at all. Each is the antagonist of faith, each seeks to dislodge the soul from its position, to drive it from its true standing, the one acting in one way and the other acting in another, the two winds blowing in opposite directions, but aiming each to drive the ship on one or other of these shoals. Then here is faith sometimes cleaving in spite of presumption, sometimes cleaving in spite of despair; here is faith hanging upon the spiritual testimony which God has given it, though finding it very difficult

at times to make out that it was a testimony at all; but still, as it is wrought upon by the Spirit of God, it lives and acts upon that testimony which God Himself has dropped in. "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies." Now if there were no difficulty, no obstacles—if there were nothing in the soul which prevented it from sticking to God's testimony, why does David put the Lord in mind of it? But he puts the Lord in mind that he has stuck to His testimonies, as though he would remind Him not only that He had given him some testimonies, but also some living faith to cleave to them with purpose of heart.

3. But there are other testimonies of another nature, not so much testimonies against, or testimonies for our interest in covenant mercies, as testimonies of divine instruction. The Lord has said, for instance, in His Word, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." That is a testimony from the mouth of God; and how does the soul first receive and then stick to that testimony? By the opening up of the depths of corruption in our heart, by the breaking up of the secret fountains of iniquity, that great deep that coucheth beneath. Now this testimony to deep and desperate corruption does not come at first; it is usually after a man has received some testimony of God's favour; for he could not bear it unless there had been some discovery of mercy to his soul; he could not stand his ground unless there were some rock on which his feet were fixed when the water floods broke forth; he could not travel through this deep bog unless there were some standing ground—some dry tussocks on which he could set his feet—and therefore, usually speaking, little is known of the depths of internal corruption and inward pollution until after some testimony of mercy and love has been dropped into the soul from the mouth of God Himself. Well, then, here is a deep discovery of inward corruption; of the "workings of a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" of the overflowings of an imagination beyond description polluted with evil. His inward feelings now correspond with God's testimony to the desperate

wickedness of his heart. He cleaves to this testimony. "I have stuck to Thy testimonies." That is, let men say what they will about the purity of the creature and the dignity of human nature, or what man is able to do, he cleaves to this testimony, having an inward witness of it, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" that from "the crown of his head to the sole of his feet there is no soundness in him, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores;" and he sticks to this testimony because he feels the truth of it. He is obliged to cleave to it, and that, not in letter, but in spirit; not in doctrine, but in experience; not to the mere testimony of the Word, but to the testimony of God in his soul. He sticks to it with every feeling of his heart, that his nature is fallen—that he is a corrupt and polluted wretch before God—that he stands before Him by nature filthy and vile, however he may stand by grace "accepted in the Beloved," through Christ's righteousness.

Again, God has said in His Word, "I, the Lord, hate evil." Now this testimony the Lord speaks out of the Word into the hearts of His chosen. He writes it as with a sunbeam upon the consciences of His living family that He abhors evil, that He hates it with a perfect hatred; and this He transfers from the Word and stamps upon a man's conscience; and he who has never had that solemn truth stamped upon his conscience is destitute of the knowledge of the only true God. "I, the Lord, hate evil." Then, if the Lord hate evil, and if the hatred of God towards evil is made manifest in a man's conscience, he will have workings and exercises towards this solemn hatred of God against it. If he is entangled in any sin, or caught in any snare of the flesh or temptation of Satan, this testimony of God once dropped into his soul, "I, the Lord, hate evil," works in him, and he works towards it; faith is exercised upon it, and a tender conscience brings him down to the Lord's feet to moan and sigh and groan, and to confess what a vile wretch he is to be so entangled with evil, what a monster of iniquity to be so overcome by evil; what a foul, filthy, polluted beast, to have so

much evil at work in his heart, and continually carrying him away captive.

Again, God has said in His Word that Jesus came "to seek and to save that which was lost." "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Well now, here is a solemn testimony that God has given in His Word, and the substance and the spirit of that testimony He transfers from the Word into the hearts of His people. The soul then is exercised towards this testimony. "What am I?" says the soul, "a poor, guilty, filthy, polluted wretch, lost and undone, full of corruption from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot." Now when the Lord sweetly sheds abroad mercy and love in the soul, He brings in a testimony that He came to save sinners, to seek the lost; that He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; that His blood cleanseth from all sin; and thus faith acts upon this testimony, cleaves to this testimony, is exercised upon this testimony, and cannot be driven nor dislodged from this testimony when God is pleased to keep faith and the testimony close together. Then here is a great work for faith to do. If the work of faith is to stick to God's testimonies, and if the life of a Christian consists in receiving and acting upon various testimonies from God, then faith will have much to do, and will work very busily in the soul. Living faith is no presumptuous security, no Antinomian confidence; it is no wrapping one's self up in the garment of false peace, and lolling on the sofa, or sleeping in the armchair of flesh-pleasing ease; but it is a busy, active, stirring grace in the soul; one which is often hungry and needs food, is often thirsty and needs water, and yet can only feed on that which God Himself speaks with His own mouth to the heart. Then he who finds in his soul no such workings, no such stirrings, no such solemn exercises, has every reason to believe that he is not possessed of the vital faith of God's elect. If there is no testimony to faith in his conscience, and if there is no acting of faith on that testimony; if there is nothing

revealed to faith, and faith has nothing to do with what is revealed to it, then we are bound to conclude that a man in this state is dead in sin, or dead in a profession.

Again, sometimes the soul gets entangled in some temptation, backslides from God, goes out after the cisterns, the broken cisterns which hold no water, deserts the living fountain, and seeks pleasure from its idols. Now the Lord will drop into the conscience some reproof—some solemn testimony of His great displeasure against this inward backsliding and departing from Him to worship the works of our own hands. “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.” “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” This testimony in the Word falls in with the testimony of conscience. And now come the tossings of the body on the midnight couch, and the worse tossings of the restless spirit, the cries and sighs of the soul under the heavy load of God’s displeasure. Well, here is a testimony that God is angry, that He is justly displeased with our offences. Now faith will not cast it off, and say, “Never mind, I am in the covenant; I stand firm upon the Rock; sin cannot damn me; a believer cannot backslide; my new nature cannot commit sin.” I say faith will never stand for a moment in such presumptuous confidence. Faith hates such language from the mouth of ungodly professors. Faith falls down before the testimony of God’s inward reproof, embraces it in the arms of feeling, if not in the arms of affection, receives it as from God, is exercised upon it, confesses before God that which the reproof testifies against, and thus sticks and cleaves to the testimony of God. Whatever God bears witness against in the conscience, that faith cleaves to; whatever God bears witness for, that faith cleaves to. Does He bear witness that we are acting with pure motives for His glory? Faith receives it. Does He bear witness that we are acting from insincere motives? Faith bears its silent though solemn and unanswerable testimony. Does He bear witness that we are backsliding children? Faith receives it; and, as faith receives it, it acts towards God upon it, and constrains the soul to fall down before the throne of His majesty, and loathe itself

in dust and ashes. Well, then, here is the posture of a Christian, not towering aloft in vain presumptuous confidence; not scanning, like the soaring eagle, the whole outstretched prospect; nor hopping from twig to twig of God's Word, as the restless sparrow from branch to branch of a tree. Faith is a dependent grace, that can only move as the Holy Ghost draws it forth, and can receive nothing but what is given it from heaven.

Then if this be the case, the posture of faith will be, as the Psalmist describes, "as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God" (Ps. 123:2). The language of faith will be that of king Jehoshaphat when surrounded by his enemies, "We know not what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee" (2 Chron. 20:12). The eyes, then, of faith, are upon God, seeking for some manifestation; and it stands waiting for some deliverance, suing after some testimony, sighing after the application of some drops of atoning blood, panting after some shedding abroad of His favour, and thirsting as the barren parched ground after some of the refreshing early and latter rain; not resting in presumptuous confidence upon anything which is imagined, but simply hanging upon that which God Himself shall speak by His own Spirit to the soul. Not like Martha, cumbered with much serving, running about the house to procure dishes for her guest's entertainment, in order to gain His favour; but like Mary, "sitting at His feet and hearing His words." Not resembling the mad Gadarene, cutting his flesh with stones; nor like the filthy swine that root up their food from the earth, and wallow in the mire, till at last they rush despairingly down from the mountain to the sea; but like the same Gadarene, "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind," looking up to Him with the eyes of affection and gratitude, and "desiring to be with Him."

Now, my friends, in whatever state or stage of experience you are, it will be your wisdom and your mercy to stick to God's testimony. Has the Lord, then, just begun a work of grace in your

heart? Is He showing to you what you are by nature, and bringing before your eyes the sins of your youth, and plunging you in deep convictions? It will be your wisdom, and it will be your mercy, to stick to that testimony; not to be driven from your standing into despair, nor pushed forward into fleshly confidence; but to stick to that testimony which God Himself has implanted. Not to trifle with these convictions, not to patch up the old garment of self-righteousness, not to ease your restless mind by plunging headlong into doctrines, the power and sweetness of which are not known and felt; not seeking to lull the pangs of conscience by saying, "If I am to be saved, I shall be saved; and if I am to be lost, I shall be lost;" but sticking to God's testimony in your conscience, with as much strength as you have.

Has God made you to sigh and cry from the depths of a broken heart?—to fall down before His truth? Stick to that testimony; He will not put you to shame. Again, if the Lord has done a little more for another of you, shown you the least glimpse of mercy and favour, and given you some little testimony of your interest in the blood of the Lamb; it will be your wisdom and it will be your mercy to stick to that testimony too. You will find those who would push you presumptuously forward, you will find those who would drive you despairingly backward, you will find those who would pull you down into those doubts and fears that their own minds are exercised with, and you will find those who would draw you aside into the vain confidence in which they are themselves standing. It will be your wisdom and mercy to abide by the testimony which God Himself has revealed, and He can work in your soul that faith whereby you can and will stick to His testimony.

But some shall say, "How do I know that I am sticking to God's testimonies?" I would ask what are the feelings of your hearts towards them? Is there godly fear? Is there holy reverence? Is there trembling awe? Is there any exercise of soul, any pouring out of the heart before God, any realising of His presence, any trembling to offend Him, any desire after Him, any solemn feelings whereby

your soul is exercised upon His perfections? Then there is reason to believe there is some testimony of God in your conscience, and that you are sticking to it. But if your religion be such as leads to vain confidence, to self-righteousness, to presumption, to false security, and to a careless, light, trifling, spirit, depend upon it you are not sticking to God's testimony, or else you have no testimony from God to stick unto. But if the Lord is bringing into your soul some sense of His displeasure; if you have trifled with Him, and brought guilt into your soul and trouble into your mind, it will be your wisdom, and it will be your mercy to do as the Lord speaks in Leviticus 26:41—"accept the punishment of your iniquity;" to put your mouth in the dust and confess that you are vile; not to turn aside to presumptuous confidence, as though you would blunt the edge of God's sword in your soul, but to receive it in your heart, embrace it in your conscience, and to cleave to it as the testimony of God Himself. "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies." To cleave to everything which God makes known in the conscience, be it judgment, be it mercy, be it a smile, be it a frown, be it a testimony for, be it a testimony against, whatever it be that comes with power, and is brought to the soul by the application of the Spirit—to cleave to it, keeps the soul in a safe and blessed spot.

But sometimes worldly interest will seek to hinder our sticking to God's testimony. A man is afraid really to stand by that truth which he professes to believe. Sometimes "the fear of man that bringeth a snare" will keep him from sticking to God's testimony; sometimes getting amongst those who fear not God; sometimes a worldly spirit creeping over him; sometimes a light, trifling, careless frame, which is indulged in his carnal mind, and perhaps was first breathed into it from some dead professor—some or all of these hindrances will keep a man from sticking to God's testimonies. Sometimes the secret baits, gins, and traps that Satan lays for our feet will keep us from sticking to God's testimony. Sometimes the applause of empty professors, or even the flattery of the children of God will keep us from sticking to God's testimony,

by making us think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think; and sometimes the frowns and scoffs, the jeers and jibes of those who stand in a presumptuous confidence will drive us from sticking to God's testimony. But conscience, as a faithful inward monitor, and the workings of godly filial fear will urge us to stick to God's testimony. Whatever professors or profane may say against us, the work of conscience wrought upon by the Spirit, the work of faith in the conscience is to stick to God's testimony, whatever the testimony be. Whatever has been received in power, whatever has been brought home into the soul with light and life and feeling, whatever has been riveted and fastened down by Jehovah Himself, to that the child of God is bound, and will, as the Lord enables him, cleave and stick. It is the bond of experimental union between God and his soul; it is the link which binds him to the eternal throne; it is the solemn clasping of him in the firm hold of God: and thus, while all the desires of his soul will be to cleave to this testimony, all the opposition in his soul will be to drive him from this testimony. "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies." Aye, stick to them at whatever cost, stick to them at any price, stick to them through evil report and through good report, stick to feeling, stick to an experimental religion, stick to vital godliness, stick to the inward teachings of the Spirit, stick to that which God works in the soul, for he that sticks to that will never be put to shame. The raven flies abroad over the dripping earth after the carcasses; but the dove cleaves to the ark with the olive branch in her mouth.

I know, by soul experience, that sticking to these testimonies has kept me from many errors. When I have been placed years back, before my mind was established in the truth, in circumstances of great trial; when I have seen dear friends fall around me, on the right hand or on the left, some into one error, and some into another, and my own mind was driven to and fro by these winds and gusts, it was this solemn conviction that made me stick to that testimony which God had dropped into my heart, not to go into things which I had not known, not to rush into doctrines which I was

not spiritually taught. I have seen some friends dropping first into Arianism, then into Socinianism; others I have known to become Irvingites; some going into one error, and some into another. And what then kept me? Why this solemn conviction, which I trust the Lord Himself had implanted, to stick to God's testimony, to cleave to what I had felt, to abide by what I had known, and to hang upon that as the only link which held me up from making shipwreck altogether. And thus the Lord kept me by this powerful though invisible tie, when those who seemed to know more than I departed on the right hand and on the left. Therefore, by soul experience, I can, in some measure, say,—“I have stuck unto Thy testimonies;” and since then, I have felt the solid benefit of sticking to God's testimonies in my conscience, though it has cost me many sacrifices, and often made me on the right hand and on the left to encounter friend and foe. But to stick to God's testimonies will bring peace at last.

II. “I have stuck unto Thy testimonies; O Lord, put me not to shame.” You see it is the want of sticking to God's testimony, that puts a man to shame. If a man does not stick to God's testimonies at any risk, at any sacrifice, at any cost, he will be put to shame. If he sacrifice his conscience for worldly profit, he will be put to shame. If he does not abide by God the Spirit's teachings in his soul, but swerves from them to the right hand or to the left, he will be put to shame. He that will not be put to shame is he that sticks to God's testimony, for the Lord will own and bless and keep such, when thousands fall on the right hand and on the left. “O Lord, put me not to shame.” Now there are solemn moments when the soul is afraid of being put to shame. Our religion, perhaps, may cost us the sacrifice of all we have. Some of us in this place, I believe, can bear witness to it, that you could not keep a good conscience and keep worldly possessions, that you could not hold the world in one hand and religion in the other; and, therefore, you were obliged “to take cheerfully the spoiling of your goods,” and “counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” Well

then, we were afraid lest we should come to poverty. Many a child of God has been harassed, lest his religion should bring him to the workhouse: this makes him cry, "O Lord, put me not to shame." "Here I have been obliged to make sacrifices; I have been obliged to give up this source of gain, and to give up that means of living; I have lost customers in business; I have been compelled to leave advantageous situations for conscience' sake." "O Lord, put me not to shame." Let me pay every man his own; keep me from disgracing Thy cause and "feed me with food convenient for me."

Sometimes the child of God is afraid that he will be put to shame in that solemn hour which must come upon all and each of us, the hour of death; lest when he comes to pass through the dark valley he should be put to shame; lest his religion in that solemn moment should be sifted clean away, and his hope should prove a delusion; and therefore he says, "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies; O Lord, put me not to shame in that solemn hour when I must stand before Thee, without any one to help, or any thing to hope in, except Thyself." Now, he that sticks to God's testimonies will not be then put to shame. He that has known an angry God, and he that has known a smiling God; he that has felt the teaching of God in his soul, and known the power of God in his heart will not be put to shame; he will not die in despair, he will not die blaspheming, but he will die in the fear and love of God; or, at any rate, will die with a good hope through grace in His mercy, with some rest of soul, and some sweet confidence that he is His.

Sometimes the child of God is afraid of being put to shame openly before men, by being overcome by some sin; but he says, "I have stuck to Thy testimonies." Thou hast said, "I hate evil"—I believe it, Lord. Thou hast shown me what a desperately wicked heart I have—I believe it, Lord. Thou hast shown me my ignorance, and inability to keep myself—I believe it, Lord. Thou hast warned me by solemn rebukes; thou hast hedged me up by inward reproofs; thou hast shown me what I am, and what there is in my heart—I believe it, Lord. Let no sin entangle me, no disgrace overtake me,

no corruption prevail against me. Let not the enemies of truth shout "Ah, ah! Ah, ah!" against me. "O Lord, put me not to shame." Again, the soul is sometimes afraid lest a furnace will come, when all his religion shall be proved to be untrue, when Satan shall say, "It is all a deception; it is nothing but the spawn of base hypocrisy; it was not the teaching of God; it was not the manifestation of God to thy soul; mercy never was received; it was but excited imagination; it was but the heated working of thy carnal mind." The soul says, "I have stuck unto Thy testimonies; O Lord, put me not to shame. I cleave to Thy work, I hang upon it, I have nothing else to cleave to. O Lord, put me not to shame."

Thus, we see the connexion betwixt sticking to God's testimony, and the Lord not putting us to shame, and we gather this from it, that those who have never received God's testimony, or those who do not stick to God's testimony will be put to shame. Now, there are many men who are in a vain presumptuous confidence, who are soaring away to the heights of presumption, God Himself never having placed them in their present standing. Well, if these are the children of God—and there is reason to believe there are some such, who have been puffed up beyond their real standing—the Lord will put them to shame. He will put them into the furnace; He will bring them into straits which they never before knew. They are not sticking to His testimony, they have gone beyond His testimony, and He will put them to shame, and His people shall see that they are not that which they profess to be. Again, there are others who trifle with sin, who say that it will not do them any harm, who are now standing, as they say, firm in Christ, when they are really standing firm in their own confidence; not sticking to God's testimonies of the helplessness, misery, ruin, and guilt of the creature; not sticking to His testimony, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" not sticking to the testimony, that none are safe but those whom God keeps. The Lord will put them to shame; perhaps, even, by letting them fall, by showing them that they can backslide and do backslide into sin, by

making them naked before their enemies, and thus covering them with confusion. Ah, my friends, have not you and I been sometimes put to shame before God and His people, by not sticking to those practical testimonies which have been riveted in our conscience? And have we not had to confess with Ezra, 9:6, "I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to Thee?" I have known both sides of the question,—to stick to them, and not be put to shame, and not to stick to them, and to be put to shame. And there are those in the professing church whom He will put to eternal shame, when He pours upon them the fulness of His wrath. So that we have three different classes. We have, first, the tried child of God, who has received Divine testimonies, and sticks to them. The Lord will keep him as the apple of His eye. He never shall be put to shame. Then we have a second class, who have had testimonies, but by the power of Satan and their own deceitful hearts have not stuck to these testimonies in experience or in conduct. These the Lord will put to shame in this world, though not in the next. He will put them to shame here, so as to prevent their everlasting shame hereafter. He will bring them down from their false standing by painful exercises; by the fiery furnace within, if not by open disgrace without. He will put them to shame, and they will blush and be confounded, that they did not stick to God's testimony, but rushed beyond His work in their soul. And then there is a third class who have neither received God's testimony, nor have stuck to it; who have nothing from God in their souls, and therefore, nothing to stick to. These shall be put to shame and everlasting contempt, in that day when the Lord shall manifest the secrets of all hearts, and pour out His eternal wrath upon the transgressors.

### 9 THE REPROACH ANSWERED (*Psalm 119:41, 42*)

Preached , at Arlington, near Devizes  
on Sunday Morning,  
August 9, 1840

*"Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord; even*

*thy salvation, according to thy word. So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word."*

*Psalm 119:41, 42*

Unless we have a right conception of the situation in which a person is, we shall form very inadequate opinions as to the expressions which that person utters. Mere detached sentences of this nature, taken separate from their connexion, will often no more enable us to understand their meaning, than to see the broken branches of a tree scattered on the ground will enable us to gather what was its majestic form and beautiful foliage in the situation which it lately occupied. So, to understand the expressions which many of God's saints have made use of in the Scriptures of truth, we must know the peculiar situation in which those saints were placed, before we can enter into the real meaning of the words which fell from their lips.

For instance, when we find Job expressing himself in this passionate language Job 3:3, "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived; let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it;" if we did not know the peculiar circumstances in which Job was placed, Satan tempting him, God hiding his face from him, and everything without and everything within conspiring to write bitterness upon his path, we should be staggered that a gracious man should ever give vent to such unbecoming expressions. So when we find the prophet Jeremiah exclaiming Jer 20:14,15, "Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed; cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee, making him very glad;" if we were unacquainted with the peculiar temptations under which at that time Jeremiah was labouring, we could scarcely conceive that such God-dishonouring language could ever fall from his lips. So again

in the case of King Hezekiah; if we did not know that the sentence of death was written in his heart at the time, we could scarcely understand him when he cries Isa 38:10,11, "I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave: I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living; I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world."

Now, so it is with respect to the words, from which I mean, with God's blessing, to deliver a few thoughts this morning. If we do not know the precise situation in which David was when he uttered the words, we shall form very inadequate conceptions of their meaning, and we shall be very much at a loss to gather what he intended by them. Before, therefore, I can enter upon my text, I must endeavour to show from the Psalm the peculiar situation in which the Psalmist was when these expressions fell from his lips.

He was not then in the full assurance of faith. He was not at this moment seeing his name clearly written in the book of life. He was not living under the shinings in of the Sun of righteousness; he was not "rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory." This is clear from Ps 119:25,28 Ps 119:81,82 Ps 119:120 Ps 119:143 Ps 119:153,154 Ps 119:174,176, as well as from the words of the text itself. But then, on the other hand, he was not by any means on the brink of despair: he was not sinking, in the despondency of his soul, into utter blackness and darkness. He was if I may use the expression in a kind of medium state—in that average experience, which the greater part of God's people are walking in. He was not in the enjoyment of light; he was not in the depths of darkness. He was not bathing in the love of God; neither was he without a firm hope of God's mercy in his soul. For we find him saying lower down, "Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." "This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy word hath quickened me." "They that fear thee will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in thy word." "My soul fainteth for thy salvation, but I hope in thy word." So that if you

look through the expressions of this Psalm, you will find them to be those of a soul which is exercised, harassed, tried, and tempted; and yet having an abiding hope in the mercy of God; like a ship at sea, tossed with the storm, and heaved up with the waves, yet having the anchor firm down in the sand.

That he had this firm anchorage we gather from the last clause in the text: "So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word." But how came he to trust in God's word? Was it letter faith? Was his trust a mere notion or opinion? Was it mere moral or natural persuasion? Was it in any respect the fruit and creature of his own heart? No; his trust arose from this, that he had felt the power of God's truth in his soul; that he had experienced the life-giving effects of the promise applied to his heart; for he says, "Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope:" that word which God had brought home to his soul; that word which had been commended with life and power and feeling to his conscience, and had raised up faith and hope with all their blessed train.

His state then was this—hanging, relying, depending upon, and trusting to that word of promise which the Holy Ghost had applied with power to his conscience; not relying upon the bare letter of truth, but leaning upon the sure word of promise which had been brought home with power to his heart. He had been quickened by it, strengthened by it, comforted by it, and encouraged by it, and was therefore now hanging upon it, as a child hangs upon its mother's breast. And mingled with this trust there was a pressing case of need; so that these three things, like the three strands of a rope, were entwined together in his heart; need—faith—and desire.

Being, then, in this state, he only had a greater hungering and thirsting after further food. What he had already received from God had not brought into his soul lasting satisfaction; it had rather enkindled his appetite for more. Fresh wants called urgently for fresh deliverances; new diseases required anew the healing hand. This is the effect of the first word which the Holy Ghost drops

with power into a man's heart. It deadens him and sickens him to all letter religion, and all creature faith, and all taking God at his word, and at the same time enkindles in his soul an appetite for, and a breathing after other testimonies, which shall come in the same way, and be let down into his heart by the same golden cord from the throne of mercy and grace above. He had just enough given to him to make him long for more; just enough to open up a ray of light into God's truth; just enough to write beggary, poverty, and bankruptcy, upon all creature attainments; just enough to anoint his eyes to see the insufficiency and inability of everything the creature could do for him; and at the same time just enough to kindle in his soul burning desires and breathing longings after increased and increasing testimonies and manifestations of God.

Now, this I may perhaps be allowed to call an average experience; the medium experience in which most of God's people walk. They are not, for the most part, sinking into despair; they are not, for the most part, rising in assurance. They have received that which has opened their eyes to the poverty of everything else; they have tasted that, which by its mysterious entrance into the soul has brought with it feeling, power, unction, dew, and sweetness. They have experienced enough to make them earnestly desire to enjoy the fulness of that of which they have received the foretaste: so that they are not cloyed by it, nor yet satisfied with it; but only fitted and prepared to receive more gracious communications out of Christ's fulness. And they are continually brought into those situations and trying straits to which alone Divine help is suitable.

Being in this state, then, the Psalmist was made dead to everything that the creature could do for him, and was brought into a waiting posture—into an earnest expectation of further good—into a longing desire to receive that which alone could satisfy him. His eyes being now opened to see what God was, and his heart having a drop of this Divine good let down into it from the fountain of all grace, his affections were inflamed and his heart wrought upon, so as to be satisfied with nothing short of fresh

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communications of the Divine favour.

Being in this state, then, he “longs after the mercies” of God, and he “hungers” after his “salvation.” But what was the peculiar state of soul in which he was that made him hunger after these “mercies,” and thirst after this “salvation?” There was something in his heart more than desire. There was a very pressing need. He was driven as well as drawn, impelled by urgent necessity as well as allured by Divine encouragements. An enemy was at hand who dogged his steps, an accuser with a heavy bill of charges was waiting at his gate. It was “that he might have wherewith, to answer him that reproached him.” Though not in despair, he yet felt daily that there was that which reproached him, and he found daily an inability to return an answer to these reproaches; and being thus struck dumb, he was wrought upon by the blessed Spirit to seek and sue unto God after his mercies, that “the coming in of mercies and the manifestation of salvation” might furnish him with the answer that he needed. Now, none but a spiritual beggar and bankrupt could ever put up such a prayer as this. None but a tender conscience can feel reproach; and none but a soul made alive unto what God is, and spiritually led into the secrets which are with those that fear Him, could ever seek such an answer from God as should be a sufficient reply “to him that reproached him.”

With God’s blessing, then, we will look, first, at a few of those things which reproach a living soul; then at the poverty, helplessness, and inability of the creature to answer any of these reproaches; then at the desires and breathings of the soul after such a manifestation of mercy as shall afford a sufficient answer and lastly at the way in which these answers are communicated.

I have just now hinted that there are many accusers that reproach a living soul. One of these is the law of God, which reproaches every soul to which it is spiritually applied. And what does it reproach that soul for? Disobedience to it. Every one to whom the law is applied with power is reproached, and put to shame, and brought in guilty, because he cannot fulfil the requirements of that

law. Wherever the law is written upon a man's conscience, he will find a thorough inability in himself to answer its reproaches. A self-righteous pharisee can always furnish an answer. The law says, "Do, and live." His answer is boldly, "I do, and therefore I live." And why can he make this answer? Because the law in its holy requirements, in its length and breadth and height and depth, in its magnitude and spirituality, is not opened up to his heart and conscience; and, therefore, by the performance of a few duties he is easily able to answer the reproaches of the law, as long as it stands in the external letter. But a living soul, whose eyes are open to see its inability to perform that which the law demands, and who feels these reproaches cutting it through and through with piercing and sharp convictions, is brought in utterly unable to return an answer. This is that to which the apostle points, when he says, "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." That the mouth may be stopped; that is, unable to "return an answer." Here all self-justification is cut off; here all fleshly excuses are put to an end; here the soul falls down guilty before God, unable to utter a word, or bring forward a single plea why judgment should not take place; and, therefore, the living soul which is wrought upon by the application of God's holy law is so convinced of its inability to answer the law charges, of the utter imperfection of everything it performs, of the entire helplessness of every movement, of the thorough beggary and bankruptcy which are written upon it, that it falls down before God, crying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" instead of seeking to answer the reproach which the law brings against it.

Again: our own heart is continually reproaching us, according to those words of John, "Beloved, if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Our heart, then, often reproaches us, that is, condemns us. And what does it condemn us for? It condemns us for our shortcomings in all we desire to perform to God's glory. It condemns us for the base lusts which are continually working up from the bottom of that filthy

puddle which is within us. It condemns us that we cannot live as we would, think as we would, pray as we would, speak as we would, or do anything as we would: and thus our heart is continually casting reproaches upon us, condemning us, and bringing us in guilty.

Now, we have no answer to make: we can offer no excuse; we can bring forward no plea nor self-justification. We cannot, as many do, throw it off upon the old man, and say unto God, "Why hast thou made me thus?" Why didst thou create me as I am? Why didst thou cause me to come into this world to add to my iniquities? All such pleas and self-justification, and all such excuses are effectually cut off; and the soul can return no answer to the reproaches of the condemning conscience, but in its right mind falls beneath them, and cries, "Guilty! guilty!"

But again: professors of religion are continually casting their reproaches upon us. They treat us as Peninnah treated Hannah. Peninnah had children; Hannah had none; typical of how the mere professor of religion is abundantly fruitful in zeal and good works, whilst the living soul is barren, because it is unable to produce anything in the strength of the flesh, and must have all its fruits wrought in it by the power of God. It, therefore, accounts nothing as fruits but those which spring from the immediate operation of the Holy Ghost: and thus, whilst the bondwoman has abundance of children, the real wife, the free-born spouse, the beloved Hannah, is barren, and unable to produce those fruits which she considers as such. Professors are continually casting into our teeth our want of zeal, our carelessness about the perishing heathen, our neglect of what they call the means of grace, our not getting up a number of duties which are highly esteemed in their eyes, our not joining ourselves to a variety of associations for which the word of God gives no precept, and which the Lord himself never has enjoined. These reproaches we may despise; but there are others that they bring, to which we often find that we have no answer to make. They say, for instance, "Why don't you read the Bible more? Why don't you pray more? Why don't you bring your children up with

greater attention to that which becomes godly parents? Why are you not more liberal in the cause of God? Why do you not show more by your life, conduct, and conversation, that you are what you profess to be?" These reproaches are cast in our teeth, and we often feel unable to answer them; for our own hearts condemn us, and we groan under the burden that we cannot do the things that we would.

Again: even the world will sometimes reproach God's people. They can often see in them a spirit of covetousness, whereas they profess to have their hearts and affections set on things above. They often observe in them a spirit of worldliness, when they profess that their kingdom is not of this world. They often perceive in them a slanderous tongue, when they profess to have the mind of Christ, and to walk in love as he walked. They often discern in them resentment of injuries, when they profess to be meek, and to be followers of Him, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. They often see in them a levity, frivolity, and carelessness, when they profess to have their hearts drawn up from the things of time and sense, and their minds engaged in spiritual things.

Well, these reproaches are often cast in their teeth, and they have no answer to make to them, because their conscience brings them in guilty. Where the conscience is not wrought upon by the Spirit so as to have life in it, it can make excuses, and can retort angry word for angry word. But where the conscience is quickened into spiritual life and feeling, and is made tender, it sooner or later falls beneath the accusation; it pleads guilty to the charge; it is unable to lift up its head, and says, I confess that I am guilty of the things which are brought against me.

As I observed before, this experience has been wrought in the conscience, viz.—the utter inability of the creature to return an answer. Our helplessness and miserable impotency are so deeply engraved upon the table of our hearts, that we are unable to say a word in self-defence, or reply boldly. These charges are untrue.

Again: Satan often reproaches the children of God. In Re

12:10, he is therefore called “the accuser of the brethren.” We know how he reproached Job, and even accused him unto God when he said, “Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?” As though Job was a mercenary character, as if he had a religion which only lived and prospered as long as worldly things flourished with him, and that if God only put forth his hand, he would curse him to his face. Thus Satan is continually reproaching the children of God; and, like a base wretch as he is, he will be perpetually seducing God’s people by the pleasing baits and allurements which he presents before their eyes into some forbidden lust, or unhallowed gratification; and then, when he has entangled them fast in his snare, he will turn round upon them, and become their accuser. Nay more; this base devil will continually inject his own infernal thoughts into our hearts, and then turn round upon us, and reproach us as if they were ours. He will stir up the infidelity of our carnal mind; he will inject blasphemous thoughts; he will present before our eyes horrible pictures; he will breathe into our hearts most abominable imaginations; and when he has insinuated these hellish feelings into our depraved nature, he will come in another form, and reproach us with them as though they spontaneously arose from our own hearts, and then will say, “There is no hope for you; a child of God never had such feelings as these; if you were a living soul, you never could have such workings in your heart.” Thus he turns round on the soul, and tries to sink it into despair by making it feel guilty of the very things that he himself has injected.

Now a living soul wants to return an answer to him that reproaches it. But he cannot do it of himself, for he has not a word to speak in self-justification; that is utterly cut off; and therefore he wants to have that which shall furnish him with an answer to these reproaches. And what alone can furnish him with an answer? The mercies of God in his soul. “Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word; so shall I have

wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me.” The coming in of “mercies” into the soul, and the manifestation of “salvation” to the heart afford an answer “to him that reproacheth us.” If you will observe, the word “mercies” is in the plural number, there being many mercies; but “salvation” is in the singular number, there being only one salvation. In what way, then, did he want these “mercies?” Merely as standing in the letter of the word? Only as recorded in the inspired word of truth?—as things to look at—as objects hung up, as it were, in a picture, merely for the eye to gaze upon? No; he wanted them in his heart, “to come to him,” to visit him, to be breathed into him, to be made part and parcel of him, to be the life-blood that should circulate in his veins, to be the very kingdom of God set up with power in his soul. And why did he want internal mercies? Because he had internal reproaches. Why did he need mercies in his soul? because condemnation was in his soul. It was there the sentence of death was written; it was there the sentence of acquittal was to be recorded. It was there that reproach was felt; it was there the answer to the reproach was to be given. If the reproach were merely outward, the answer might be outward also; but the reproof being inward—in the heart, in the conscience, in the feelings—it was needed that the answer should be in the same place, written in the same spot, engraved in the same tablets, and brought home with the same or far greater power, so as to be a sufficient answer to the reproaches of him that reproached him.

Well, here is the law then, which brings its cutting reproaches against a man, and that in a man’s conscience, accusing him, and bringing him in guilty. Where shall he find an answer to this? Can he bring forward his good works? No; the sentence of the law is within, and good works, could he perform them, are merely external thing? Can he bring forward resolutions, and promises, and vows to do better for the future? No; these promises, resolutions, and vows spring from the flesh, but condemnation is written in his spirit. Shall he answer these reproaches by his own prayers? No; for the condemnation of the law is written in his spiritual conscience,

and only as far as prayer is indited by the Spirit, will it go up out of a spiritual heart. The malady, therefore, being so deep, the remedy must be deeper still; the condemnation being so poignant and internal, the answer to condemnation must be carried deeper still, into the secret recesses of the soul, that it may meet it in its very spot, that it may come into the very place, that it may encounter it at the very fountain head, and answer it in the very court where it is speaking against him so that the way in which the soul is brought to want internal mercies, and an internal voice speaking in power the inward whisper of love, and the inward testimony of God that we are his, is by the deep feeling of inward condemnation. If I have a mere external wound, an external plaister will cure it; but what if I have an internal disease preying on my vitals? Then I must have an internal remedy. So, if I have an internal condemnation, I must have an internal acquittal: if I have internal guilt I must have internal pardon; if I have internal damnation, I must have internal salvation: and if I have an internal devil whispering his internal accusations, I must have an internal Christ to answer this internal devil. So that none but the man who has these internal reproaches, and this internal condemnation, will ever want to have internal manifestations and internal testimonies. All others have the scratch of the finger which a little sticking plaister will cure; but really sin-sick souls, who have the disease preying upon their vitals, must have the blood and love of Jesus applied to the same place, and coming in to the very same spot.

As I remarked before, the word “mercies” is in the plural number; and I shall now endeavour to show how the different mercies of God answer the different accusations.

When the law speaks guilt, mercy coming into the heart answers that reproach—for mercy flows through the atoning blood of the Saviour; mercy comes through the channel of Christ’s glorious righteousness, which was a satisfaction paid to the law: and therefore when the law says, “guilty,” mercy, speaking with the voice of atoning blood—mercy, using the language of imputed

righteousness, answers that reproach and says, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." Does the law then condemn? Christ has fulfilled the law? Does the law speak wrath? The blood of Jesus speaks better things than the blood of Abel; for "by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." So that mercy testifying in the soul of the atoning blood of Jesus and speaking of his glorious righteousness furnishes the inward answer to the inward reproach.

Again, our own heart condemns us, for our shortcomings, our imperfections, our frailties, our numerous backslidings, our continual spiritual idolatries. Now when mercy comes into the soul, it covers, overflows, superabounds over all these frailties, imperfections, backslidings, and shortcomings. And thus mercy entering into the soul answers the reproaches. Do I come short? I do. Am I inwardly reproached for my shortcomings? I am: but is there any shortcoming in God's mercy? Am I reproached for backsliding? I am, daily and hourly: but is backsliding beyond the reach of Jesus' blood? Is backsliding beyond the outstretched arm of his mercy? Is the guilt of backsliding so great that atoning blood has no power to redeem or heal? So that when atoning blood comes into a man's conscience, it answers the reproach, "You are a backslider." I confess it; I acknowledge it; I feel it; I mourn over it; but is it beyond the power of Jesus' blood to put it away? So that when the blood of Jesus is sprinkled upon a man's conscience, it opens its mouth for the dumb in the cause of him that is appointed to destruction; it pleads the cause of the poor and needy, and answers the charge, not by denying it, but by bringing in a sentence of acquittal. When the soul, then, is reproached by internal condemnation, it does not escape the charge by pleading innocency, but by pleading guilty; and then the surety coming in to plead his atoning blood, the internal reproach is internally answered, and internal condemnation is taken off—not by saying, "We have not done the thing," but by owning it and confessing it, and feeling in our heart that "where sin has abounded, grace doth

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much more abound.”

So again, professors cast their reproaches on us for our barrenness, our slothfulness, our worldliness, and the many things which tarnish our life and conduct in their eyes. We want an answer to their reproaches. And what answer! Sometimes the answer of a good conscience towards God, when innocent of their unjust accusations. At other times, God makes our conscience tender to own the charge, and avoid these things for the future. When he plants his fear in the heart, to be “a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death”—this is a mercy. When he raises up in our soul a sense of weakness and helplessness, and at the same time a piteous cry to hold us up that we should not fall; and in answer to this piteous cry strengthens our souls, so that we “stand in the evil day, and having done all, stand”—then this mercy is an answer to him that reproaches us.

So when Satan comes in with his accusations; when he tempts us, for instance, to believe that we are hypocrites, and a sweet spirit of sincerity is breathed into our hearts, it is a mercy that comes into the soul; and coming in as a mercy into the soul, it is an answer to this charge of hypocrisy. When Satan injects his hellish suggestions against the work, person, blood, and love of Jesus; when the conscience is made tender to hate these fiery darts, when the mind shrinks from them with holy horror, when the very spirit trembles, and the soul cries unto God to be delivered from such dreadful imaginations, it is a mercy; and this mercy is an answer to him that reproaches us, our hatred to them showing that they are not ours. When Satan says there is no hope for us; when God drops his own blessed word into the soul, it is an answer to this reproach by communicating hope. When Satan tells us we are deluded and deceived; and a desire to be delivered from all deceit and a solemn dread of all delusion are implanted in the heart, it is an answer to this reproach.

Thus as the world, our own hearts, professors, and Satan, all bring in these internal reproaches, and the soul is unable to answer

them in its own wisdom and strength, and is brought to sigh and cry unto God that his “mercies” may come into the heart; when his “mercies,” in answer to that prayer, do come into the heart, they are a sufficient answer to these internal reproaches and condemnations.

But again: the Psalmist not merely wanted to have “mercies” come unto him, but he wanted “salvation”—“even thy salvation according to thy word.” It was internal salvation that his soul was longing after, the experience of it, the enjoyment of it, the sweet earnest and foretaste of it; and he wanted to have this in his heart, lodged deep and safe in his conscience. Now, this is the grand answer to him that reproacheth us, to have the testimony of salvation in the soul. If the law reproaches, salvation in the heart is an answer to its reproach. If our own heart condemns us, to have a sense of God’s salvation in the soul is an answer to every reproach that the heart can bring. If the world condemns us, casts out our names as evil, imputes to us practices which we abhor, tarnishes our fair fame, and throws upon us every base imputation, if we have salvation in our hearts, it is a sufficient answer to all the reproaches that are cast upon us. If professors say how slothful we are, how lazy we are, how little we care for the means of grace, how little we trouble ourselves about the perishing heathen, and so on; if we have salvation in our hearts, written there by the finger of God, it is an answer to these reproaches. What need we do for ourselves when Christ has done all? Why need we be busy, anxious, and restless, when He has finished the work which his Father gave him to do? The strength of the child of God is to sit still “stand still, and see the salvation of God”; to have no will, no power, no wisdom, no strength; to be a beggar and a bankrupt, and live upon daily alms; to be a dependant upon Jesus to supply him every day and every hour: this is the state of a happy, blessed child of God. Now, if he can have the enjoyment of this in his soul, if he can have the sweet manifestation of this in his heart, why need he care for the reproaches of them that reproach him? Is he lazy who does

nothing but simply receive out of Christ's fulness? Let them term it laziness; but is the vessel lazy that merely receives as it is filled out of the fountain? Is the child lazy that lies reclining upon its mother's lap? Is the aged man lazy who cannot walk without support? Is the fond wife lazy who loves to recline on her husband's bosom? Is the vine or the ivy lazy because its tendrils clasp round the oak? No man calls the weakness of these objects laziness, because their very blessedness, happiness, and satisfaction is to lean upon another. We read of two sisters, of whom one was active, and the other, in her sister's opinion, was very lazy, one must needs bustle about the house, whilst her sister was sitting at Jesus' feet, hearing his word: and the busy Martha must not only condemn her sister for her laziness, but must needs involve the Saviour in the same reproach, saying, "Lord dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me." She was so zealous, active, and busy, that she was not satisfied with reproaching her sister for her laziness, but must needs cast an imputation on the Saviour also. But what did he say? Did he sanction her reproach? He said "Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her." One thing was needful; and what was that "good part," but to sit at his feet, to hear his word, to drink in of his spirit, to gaze on his countenance, and to draw rich draughts of love out of his loving bosom? So it is with the soul that is really taught these blessed lessons: it never does so much as when it does nothing; it is never so active as when it is most passive; it is never so strong as when it is most weak: it is never so full as when it is most empty; it is never so wise as when it is most convinced of its own folly; and it is never so satisfied with Jesus as when it is most dissatisfied with itself.

Here, then, we have a striking contrast betwixt the feelings of the living soul—and the restless, busy activity of a mere unhumbled, puffed-up professor of religion. The hardened conscience feels no reproach; it glances off from it as an arrow glanced off the armour of some ancient knight in chivalry. The law never touches him; the

world never condemns him; his own heart never convicts him; he is never brought in guilty, internally guilty; because his heart is like Leviathan, of whom we read in the book of Job—"His heart is as firm as a stone; yea, as hard as a piece of the nether millstone. The sword of him that layeth at him cannot hold: the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon. He esteemeth iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make him flee; sling stones are turned with him into stubble. Darts are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the shaking of a spear." Such is a carnal, dead, unhumbled, conscience-seared professor; nothing touches him, nothing moves him, nothing condemns him, and nothing reproaches him. But where the conscience has been wrought upon by Divine teaching, so as to become tender, sensitive, and quick, it feels keenly reproaches cast upon it. These reproaches being internal, it must needs have an internal answer to them; and this internal answer is when God sweetly and blessedly satisfies the soul as to its own eternal interest in the blood and love of the Lamb, fills it out of Christ's fulness, and gives it grace for grace.

But you will observe that the Psalmist was not enjoying this at the time; he was panting after it. It was indeed the longing desire of his soul, but he was not settled down in the sweet comfort of it: and yet, as I have endeavoured to show you, there was that in his heart which was preparing him for it; which had opened His eyes to see the beauty of it; which had raised up a longing and panting in his soul that he might enjoy it: and therefore he adds, "Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word." What word was this? Not the bare letter of the word, though salvation always comes agreeing with the letter of the word, without money and without price, rich, glorious, unbought, and free. But the word of which he is here speaking is the word which God had applied to his soul, upon which he had caused him to hope; the first testimony which he had dropped into his heart, the first living evidence in his conscience, sealed there by a Divine witness. Now, this word which had quickened him, upon which

God had caused him to hope, in which he trusted, and upon which faith was exercised and hanging, had respect to salvation, and God's salvation, not man's. "Even thy salvation." He had been put then, into a waiting posture; he had been brought into that state of emptiness, helplessness, insufficiency, and creature-nothingness, which had prepared his soul for the manifestation of this rich salvation. He wanted no half-salvation, no mixed salvation; no blended medley part of grace and part of works; but he wanted God's salvation, and God's salvation alone; for he says, "Even thy salvation"—salvation designed by thee, salvation accomplished by thee, salvation manifested by thee, salvation bearing thy stamp, and carrying thine impress, salvation witnessed by thine own power, salvation lifting up the soul into the enjoyment of thyself. Now, nothing else than that salvation can ever satisfy a soul which has had the word applied to it, upon which God has caused it to hope. All other salvation will never reach to the spot where condemnation is. Everything external here falls; everything outward is here at fault. God's salvation, ratified by God's power, attested by God's Spirit, and brought home to the soul by God's own operation, is the only salvation that can give an answer to him that reproacheth us; and this will always flow in sweet accordance with the word of promise upon which God has caused the soul to hope; it will always flow in sweet union with that word which has dropped into the heart, and by dropping into the heart has communicated life, light, and feeling.

If you are a living soul, you will know some of these workings. Is there a day in your life that you escape reproach? Do you escape it from the world? If you do, it is because you are of the world. Do you escape it from your own heart? If you do, it is because your heart is like a piece of the nether millstone. Do you escape it from professors? If you do, it is because you are one with them. Do you escape it from the devil? If you do, it is because you are a subject of his kingdom. But if you are brought out of the world, out of the professing Church, out of the kingdom of Satan, and set down into

the kingdom of God, you will have all these inward reproaches working death and condemnation in your soul; and you will be so convicted of your own helplessness, inability, and impotency to answer any one of these charges that the longing cry and panting desire of your heart will be, that the mercies of God should come into your heart, and the salvation of God visit your soul; that by them, and them only, you might have wherewith to answer them that reproach you.

But you may be very weak in the Divine life, very tried and exercised in your minds, very full of doubts and fears in your souls; and yet here is the door by which you can come in. I am not going to open the door wider; it is as wide open as it can be to let in every quickened soul. Every quickened soul knows these three things: internal reproach—"For thy sake I have suffered reproach;" helplessness and inability to answer these reproaches; and a longing desire that God, by the manifestation of his salvation, would plead our cause, bring us to the light of his countenance, and overcome our enemies by giving us an answer of peace and love in our soul. Now, every living soul can come in with these three evidences—reproach, helplessness, and longing desire after God's salvation. Is not this a low standard? Well, if you can come in here, there is reason to believe that God the Holy Ghost has put these evidences into your heart. And these will be no half-hearted evidences; they will not be perpetual, I grant, but they will be at times kindled most fervently in your soul. And the more reproach comes in, the more you will want reproach answered; the more you feel condemnation, the more you will need salvation; and the more you feel your own helplessness, the more you will want God to manifest his strength in your weakness, and give that answer to these accusations which you are unable to give yourselves.

I leave these remarks in God's hands: and if you have an internal testimony that you have experienced these things in your souls, may it be His blessed will to seal home these words with power upon your heart, that you may have all the comfort, and

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then you will render to God all the glory.

### 10 THE RISING OF THE DAY STAR (2 Peter 1:19)

Preached at Allington, near Devizes, on Lord's Day Afternoon,  
August 9, 1840

*“We have also a more sure Word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”*

2 Peter 1:19

Many persons are of opinion that had they lived in the times of the apostles, had they seen what their eyes saw, had they witnessed the mighty miracles which Jesus wrought, had they heard the gracious words which dropped from His lips, they would, they must have believed in Him. But do we find that this was the case with hundreds and thousands who witnessed His miracles, and heard the words, which fell from His lips? Did not the eyes of multitudes gaze upon Him as He bled upon the cross; and did a sight of His body there agonizing move or melt their hearts? Did not this piteous sight rather inflame their minds with frenzy, and draw forth from their hearts the scoffing cry: “Let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.” “He saved others; Himself He cannot save?” So with us here present: had we seen the same sights, heard the same words, and witnessed the same miracles, we should have been as hard as they, as unbelieving as they, and as blaspheming as they, unless the Spirit of God had raised up faith and feeling in our souls.

In this chapter Peter tells us that his endeavour and desire was that those to whom he wrote might be able after his decease to have the things he set before them always in remembrance; and he tells them that he and his brother apostles “had not followed cunningly devised fables, when they made known unto them the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses

of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came to Him such a voice from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount." That which Peter's ears heard, Peter could not doubt; and that which was commended to his conscience, he felt, knew, tasted, handled and enjoyed for himself. But though he might communicate to us a description of what he heard, he could not communicate to us the same faith, which he himself felt. He might assure us in the clearest terms of what he himself had experienced, but he had no power to convey into our hearts a similar experience, nor to raise up in our souls a similar faith to that which he enjoyed himself; and therefore he goes on to say, "We have also a more sure Word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts."

What does he mean by saying, "We have a more sure Word of prophecy?" Does he mean to say that "the Word of prophecy" is more sure than the voice which he heard when he was with Christ in the mount? Does he intend thereby that the oracles of God, which we have received from our fathers are more sure and certain than the very voice of God which he heard with his outward ears when God the Father bare witness, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?" Not more sure to him, for nothing could be more sure than that which his eyes saw, and that which his ears heard; but more sure to us; because however certain he was of what he heard, however strong was his faith, however indubitable was his evidence, he could not convey to us the same certainty which he had himself; he could not set before us the same sight; he could not present to our ears the same sounds; he could not raise up in our hearts the same faith; and therefore however sure and however certain the word was to his own mind which he heard when he was with Christ in the heavenly mount, yet being unable to convey to us the same evidence which he enjoyed himself, he

adds, "We have a more sure Word of prophecy."

Now what does he mean by this "Word of prophecy?" Does he mean the mere prediction of future events, of which we have such ample records in the Word of God? Does he intend to say that the predictions of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so on, were more sure and more certain than "the voice which came from the excellent glory?" No; he does not mean by the word "prophecy" the mere prediction of future events; but he means that declaration of the mind of God, which is in the Scriptures of truth. The word "prophecy" signifies originally not a prediction of future events, but a speaking in behalf of God; so that a prophet is one, not so much who predicts future events, as one who speaks for God, who is the ambassador of God, the interpreter of God, the mouthpiece of God; and as God has been pleased to record His mind and will in the Scriptures of truth, it has come to pass that the Scriptures of truth have become the Word of prophecy.

But how do they become a more sure Word of prophecy? They only become a sure Word of prophecy when they are brought home and applied with power to the heart. Standing in the bare letter they have no power; as long as they are merely couched in so many letters and syllables they have no effect; but when the incarnate Word makes use of the written Word for they both bear the same title to manifest the truth of God, and brings it home with power to the soul, then, and then only, does it become "a sure Word of prophecy" to those whose hearts He opens, as He opened Lydia's, to receive it.

Now if we look at our text, we shall find marked down in it the successive steps of faith in the soul; and it will be my object in the following discourse, if the Lord shall enable me to speak aright, to trace them out. For you will observe that faith always exists in the living soul; and faith will never quit its abode until faith is turned into sight, and hope is changed into enjoyment. Therefore we read of strong faith and weak faith; and that the Lord is the author of faith and the finisher of faith; implying that in the very

beginning of the divine life there is the implantation of faith, and in the very end of the divine life there is still the existence of faith, until that faith is turned into complete fruition; so that in this life we stand by faith, walk by faith, live by faith, and everything which we receive we receive by faith. It is therefore incumbent on every one who would be mouth for God to trace out the successive steps of this work of faith in the soul, that the people of God may have some inward testimony that they are possessors of that living faith whereby the soul shall be saved.

Now the first step of faith is, “a taking heed to the more sure Word of prophecy; .... whereunto ye do well that ye take heed.” This sure Word of prophecy is spoken of as “a light that shineth in a dark place.” As I said before, this sure Word of prophecy is not the mere prediction of future events; but it is the general revelation of the mind of God in the Scriptures of truth; and therefore we read lower down that “no Word of prophecy is of any private interpretation; for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost:” implying this, that whatever God has recorded and revealed in His Word of truth is the common property of the children of God. It is not of any private interpretation; that is to say, it is the public property of the whole family of Jehovah. For instance, we read in Ps 51 David’s confession of sin; but David’s confession of sin applies to every soul that is condemned on account of sin. So that when David says in that sweet Psalm, “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin: against Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight; purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow,” and so on; all this is of no private interpretation, as though none but David made these confessions, poured out these complaints, and sank with these heart-sinkings, but the interpretation, in the Spirit’s hands, is common to the whole family of God who feel guilt, and is the public property of all living souls upon whose conscience guilt is charged by the Holy Ghost.

So when the Lord said to Joshua, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” it was a promise specially given to Joshua; it seemed to be confined to that individual; it appeared to be of private interpretation, as though Joshua and Joshua alone was entitled to that promise. But we find the Apostle Paul bringing forward this promise as the general property of the whole church of God: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have; for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” Heb 13:5 “He hath said.” To whom? To Joshua; but in saying it to Joshua, He said it to the church of God; in giving Joshua the promise, He gave that promise to every soul that needed with Joshua His help, that feared with Joshua to be forsaken, that wanted with Joshua His sustaining hand; and therefore this private promise to Joshua was not of private interpretation, but when applied by the blessed Spirit, suits every living soul that is placed in similar circumstances with the individual to whom that promise was addressed.

Now this it is which makes the Scriptures such a wonderful book—that the feelings there described are the feelings of God’s family; the experience there written is the experience of Christ’s people; the trials there set forth are the trials of all the elect throughout the world; and the promises there made are the promises which “are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God,” for the whole assembly and church of the First-born. This makes the Scriptures such a wonderful book—that when the Holy Spirit is pleased to open it up, He makes that to be ours personally and individually which is in the Word, and seals that with holy unction upon our hearts which we read in the Word of God as belonging to others.

No prophecy, then, of the Scripture is of any private interpretation, but the common property of the family of God; and “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;” the Holy Ghost so influencing and working upon their minds as to make them bring forth out of their hearts that which should be

suitable to the whole family of God. When Job, for instance, poured out his piteous complaints, he was speaking, though he might know it not, for the children of God to the remotest time. When Hezekiah on his sick bed vented the breathings and desires of his troubled heart, he was, unwittingly perhaps to himself, expressing the wants and pining complaints of every languishing soul. When the bride in the Song of Solomon tells her love-tale, and whispers the affection of her heart into the ears of the Bridegroom, she was pouring forth the affectionate feelings of every soul brought to love Jesus. The Holy Ghost Himself moved all the sacred writers so to speak and write, that He might make the Word of God to be a treasure-house of consolation, the grand reservoir of holy truth, out of which He might take sometimes promises, sometimes rebukes, sometimes consolation and sometimes instruction, as He might see fit; according to the testimony which God Himself has given of the Scriptures, that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Well, then, here is “the sure Word of prophecy;” that is, the mind of God revealed in the Scriptures of truth. This is compared to “a light shining in a dark place.” This dark place is the heart of man—and a dark place it is; and the light shining in the dark place is when the Spirit of God pours His own heavenly light into the dark heart. The Spirit of God works by the Word of God. He makes use of the Scriptures of truth, by means of these blessed Scriptures to communicate light. There is no light in the Scriptures themselves: they cannot teach a man to profit, that being God’s prerogative. I might compare the Scriptures to the moon; the moon has no light in herself, but she borrows all her light from the sun. Blot out the sun from the sky, and the moon would cease to shine.

Or I might compare the Scriptures to what James compares them Jas 1:23: “If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass.” Here

the Scriptures are compared to a mirror, or looking-glass. But light must shine upon the glass. Of what use is a looking-glass in a dark night? It reflects no image; it presents to you no likeness; you discern not your features therein; it might be nothing else but a naked board, as far as any reflection it gives of your face. But let light come into the room, or let the sun rise and shine upon it, and your countenance is reflected therein. So with the Word of God; it is ineffectual until the Spirit shines upon it; and when He shines upon it, He casts at the same time a ray of light into your heart; and as He shines with this two-fold ray, first upon the Word and then into your soul, He reflects from the Word your very image, and you see yourself just as you are, clearly portrayed.

Now this is the light shining in a dark place—the light of God’s truth shining into your dark hearts. This becomes a sure Word to you; faith is raised up in your heart to credit what God has revealed; the shining in of this light into the dark place causes you to believe; and you, believing in the light, which is thus come into your dark heart, receive the Word of prophecy as a sure Word.

Now sometimes this word “prophecy” signifies the preached gospel 1Co 14:24: “If all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.” So lower down he says, “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all be comforted.” Now from the effects, which the apostle here ascribes to prophecy, we find what this prophecy was. There was in some cases a discovery of the secrets of the heart, which is under preaching; according to those words in Hebrews, “The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

How often have you, under the preaching of the Word, had your very heart turned out, your inmost feelings described, the secret workings of your mind brought to light, and you were forced to fall down and acknowledge that God was in the man who so turned out your heart of a truth?

So again we find that prophecy is spoken of as a way of instruction. “For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn.” Here was instruction communicated agreeably to that which is said of the Scriptures 2Ti 3:16, that they are “for instruction in righteousness.” “And that all may be comforted”—implying that the preached Word is for the consolation of God’s people, the building them up on their most holy faith, the administration to them of comfort through the manifestation of Christ therein.

The first step of faith, then, is to believe in the light, which shines in darkness. That is, the Word of prophecy, the Word of inspiration, the Word spoken by the mouth of one of God’s servants, or read in the Scriptures of truth, comes as a light into a dark heart, and shining as a light into this dark place, the conscience takes heed thereto. The first step of faith, then, is to “take heed to the sure Word of prophecy.”

This “sure Word of prophecy,” then, makes manifest the counsels of your heart, brings to light the secret workings of your hypocritical nature, tears away your false props, pulls down your lying refuges, stamps beggary and bankruptcy on all you are and have, writes Tekel on all your attainments, and makes you poor indeed. You may seek to resist the light, and fight against it, and try with all your might and main to oppose these powerful convictions in your conscience; but the light has shone into the dark place; and the light having thus shone has stamped an impression never to be erased; it has left its footsteps behind; it has engraved a record never by human hand to be blotted out, because it has come with discernment, with conviction, with power, with feeling, with divine authority; as the fingers of a man’s hand wrote upon the plaster of the wall of Belshazzar’s palace.

It is then from the shining in of the light into this dark place that the soul is brought to take heed. It never took heed before; all warnings previously were slighted; all reproofs previously fell upon a disobedient ear; all exhortations to flee from the wrath to come never sank into the heart; all preaching, however pleasing to the natural ear, left no weight with it, caused no impression, produced no conviction, wrought in the soul no sense of misery, guilt, helplessness and woe, because light had not shone into the dark place; but light shining into the dark place produces that conviction whereby a taking heed results as the necessary consequence. It is like a fish in whose jaws the hook has been entangled; it may struggle to get away, but the angler will draw it to land. It is like a wounded deer, into whose flank the arrow has been shot; it may seek to bound away with the herd; it may try to rub the arrow out of its side by getting amongst the trees of the park; but the arrow sticks; and as the arrow sticks the blood flows; and as the blood flows, the strength becomes exhausted; and as the strength becomes exhausted, the poor wounded deer sinks and drops in its place. It must take heed to the arrow, because the arrow is in its flank.

A living soul cannot but take heed. Shall not a sick man take heed to his sickness? Shall not a wounded man take heed to his wound? Shall not a man with a broken leg take heed to his fractured limb? He cannot but take heed. And why take heed? Because it is forced upon him, wrought in him. The painful feeling will cause attention; it is no matter of choice, it is no matter of free-will, it is no matter of uncertainty, whether he will take heed or not. He is compelled to take heed by the painful feeling, which has been produced. Most men are like a man in a consumption; they take no heed to their disease. "O, I have only a cough," they say; "when the spring comes, I shall soon get better. I have but a little pain in my side. When that is gone I shall soon get well." They take no heed to the real nature of their complaint, and so they drop into the grave. And why take they no heed? Because it has never been forced on

them that they are sick; they are deluded, cheated, deceived by the very nature of the disease, and thus sink into the grave before they are aware. So it is with thousands of professors. They are in a consumption; they have the plague in their very vitals; they have the disease in their very souls. But they know it not, and they go dancing down to the grave.

But to what does the living soul take heed? Why it takes heed to the “sure Word of prophecy”—to what it teaches, to what it reveals, to what it makes manifest; according to those words Eph 5:13, “Whatever doth make manifest is light;” and therefore it takes heed to what the light makes manifest. It begins then to take heed to what God has spoken; for instance, God has said, “The soul that sinneth it shall die.” It takes heed to that. God has said, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” It takes heed to that killing sentence. “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” It takes heed to that word of condemnation, which cuts off thousands. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” It takes heed that “without faith it is impossible to please God.” It takes heed to God’s warnings, to the denunciations of His wrath against sin, to all that He has threatened to pour out upon the ungodly. It takes heed, also, to the workings of its own heart, to the base corruptions that spring up from the bottom of that deceitful deep, to the filthy passions of its depraved nature, to the suggestions of its own unbelieving mind, to the horrid thoughts that it sometimes has of God. It takes heed to its own impotency and helplessness, to its beggary and insolvency, to its inability to think or speak or do a single good thing, to the utter poverty of the creature, and to its thorough powerlessness spiritually to live unto or please God.

Again; taking heed to the “sure Word of prophecy;” it takes heed for the most part to all that God speaks against it, and cannot yet take heed to that which God in His Word speaks for it. Therefore when the soul in this state is brought under a heart-searching ministry, it takes heed to the path, which this heart-

searching ministry casts up. It takes heed to the distinctions that are drawn betwixt a work of the flesh and the work of the Spirit. It takes heed to the evidences, which are insisted upon as belonging to gracious souls. It takes heed to the nice distinctions, which an experimental minister of truth draws betwixt letter faith and spiritual faith. It takes heed to the narrow line which he traces out betwixt the righteous and the wicked, betwixt those that fear God and those that fear Him not. It takes heed to these things as a sure Word. It feels that it is not following "cunningly devised fables." It is no longer a matter of indifference whether it hears them or not; but it believes on the sure testimony of God that in these things is life or death. Many poor, tried, tempted souls are often questioning with themselves whether they have a grain of faith; and why are they questioning it? Because they cannot find in their hearts that which faith is said in the Word of God to perform. They cannot believe in Christ; they cannot receive the atonement; they cannot rejoice in Jesus with "joy unspeakable and full of glory;" they cannot triumph over the world; they cannot find the operation of that faith which works by love, and purifies the heart; and therefore, not being able to trace in their hearts the love, joy and peace which the Scriptures speak of as the fruits of faith, they write bitter things against themselves, and conclude that they have no faith.

Now if they had no faith they could not feel. Take away faith, and you take away feeling; take away belief in the sure Word of prophecy, and you take away a taking heed to the sure Word of prophecy. Why does the quickened soul take heed? Can it take heed without faith? The taking heed springs out of faith; it is the offspring of faith, the child of faith, the fruit of faith. If I were to tell you that between here and Devizes, or any other place I might choose to name, when you had got half way there was a precipice, and that you would be very likely to fall down this precipice unless you were very cautious in looking to your steps, if you did not believe my words you would go heedlessly on; but if you credited what I said, you would take heed to your steps; you would be

saying every moment, "How far is it to the precipice? Is it in this direction? is it in that?" and you would be extremely anxious to know the exact spot where the precipice was. But why this extreme anxiety? Why this wary walking? Why this taking heed? Because you believe what I tell you, that there is the precipice in the road.

How then can a soul take heed to its way, to its feelings, to its secret thoughts, to God's warnings, and to the work of grace that He is carrying on, unless it has faith? Had it no faith, it would be unfeeling, indifferent, careless, reckless, carnal, worldly, earthly-minded. But it is this inward root of faith, which produces these fruits of faith; and it is because it has faith in the sure Word of prophecy that it takes heed to the sure Word of prophecy. Do you not sometimes tremble when you sit under a minister whom you believe to be a man of God, with fear what your sentence is to be? and are you not afraid sometimes that this sentence should drop from his lips, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, but art in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity?" And do you not dread sometimes lest this word should come from his mouth to your conscience, "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away and cast him into outer darkness, that he may have his portion with the hypocrites?" What causes you thus to fear and tremble? What leads you to desire to be right? What makes you dread to be wrong? What induces you to cry to God to search and try your heart? What draws out your soul in breathings after His presence? Can unbelief do these things? Can you of yourself produce these feelings? Can the flesh bring forth these fruits? Can you at all times command this spirit of prayer and anxious desire in your soul?

Here, then, is the first step of faith—a taking heed to the sure Word of prophecy, because the sure Word of prophecy has been a light in a dark place. Now if you never felt that your heart was dark, if you never had light shining in that dark place, if you never had the Word of prophecy commended to your conscience as a sure Word, and if you never took heed to it, it is because you have no faith. But if light has shone, if darkness has been felt, if the Word

of prophecy that is, the preached Word has been brought home to your conscience, and you have taken heed thereto by trying your own standing by it, by bringing your evidences to the light, that the light may shine upon them to see whether they be of God—if you have experienced these things, you have faith, aye, true faith, the faith of God’s elect, though it may be in your feelings as weak as a bruised reed, and as small as a grain of mustard seed.

But now we come to the second step of faith. “We have also a more sure Word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn.” Why surely if a man is an unbeliever he cannot “do well;” and therefore the very expression, “ye do well that ye take heed,” implies that a taking heed must be a spiritual gift; for nothing is good but that which is spiritual, and a man cannot do well until, as it is said in Isaiah Isa 1:17, he “learns to do well”—until he is instructed therein by the Holy Ghost; and he does do well when he acts under the spiritual operation of Him who worketh in him “to will and to do of His good pleasure.” He does well then when he is but the passive clay in the hands of the heavenly Potter, who moulds him with His divine fingers. He does well when he listens to the voice of his only-wise Teacher; he does well when he acts in obedience to His dictates.

The second step, then, is “the day dawning.” What is this dawning? A larger measure of light in the soul; and not merely a larger measure of light in the soul, but light to produce gladness. When we are abroad before the sun rises, the first thing that strikes our mind is the gradual increase of light. We find this spoken of in the Proverbs Pro 4:18 where it is said, “The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

Well, this dawn is, I believe, the general manifestation to the soul of the mercy of God in the face of Jesus Christ, without any particular revelation of that mercy to ourselves. Whence does the light come which gladdens our eyes when we see the dawn? It comes from the sun. But can we see that glorious orb of day? Is he

not yet concealed by the horizon? And yet the rays and beams of that glorious source of light and heat come over the atmosphere, and are refracted thereby; so that though we do not see the sun itself, yet we see the rays and beams that issue out of it. So it is with respect to the mercy of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The only light that we enjoy by day comes from the sun; so the only rays of mercy ever felt in quickened souls beam forth from the Sun of Righteousness. But must our eyes see the Sun of Righteousness that they may drink in His beams? Is not the orb itself often concealed when its beams are manifest? Is not the sun itself unrisen at the very moment when we see the dawn of day? So it is with respect to the manifestation of the mercy of God in the face of Jesus Christ; that is, an encouragement is shed abroad in the heart, just as the rays of light are shed abroad in the sky; scattered gleams of light break forth upon the soul, by which it is seen that there is mercy with God that He may be feared; that there is an Almighty Saviour, and that there is mercy in the mind of God towards every one who believes in that Saviour.

These streaks of dawn in the sky bring indeed no personal assurance, no individual testimony of our own acceptance; but they shed abroad a sweet and blessed feeling that there is mercy to be found by every one that seeks it. It is not now all blackness of anger against sin; it is not one lowering sky of wrath, and wrath alone; it is not one dark midnight of justice, in which there is no beam whatever; but rays of light shoot across the dusky sky as the dawning clay rises over creation, and they gild the soul with the scattered gleams of mercy. And yet at this time there is no individual assurance, no sure and certain testimony of the name being written in the book of life; but still there is such a general sense of God's mercy as encourages, strengthens, enlarges and comforts the soul.

Now this is an experience, which persons do not often describe. They say it must be either one or the other; it must be either despair or assurance. I say it is no such thing. There is a

medium state of soul I know the feeling well in which the dark clouds of despair are banished, and yet the Sun of Righteousness has not risen. There is a state of soul in which it is encouraged to knock and pray, to seek and sue, to wait at the door-posts, to be on the watch-tower looking out for light; to be found on its knees begging for mercy, and at times to be lifted up to believe that the messenger has left the palace with glad tidings in his hands, that the vision is for an appointed time, and though it tarry to wait for it. Now when your soul has got to this point, it has crossed the line, as Huntington somewhere says. The tail of the storm is now only upon it: the lightning has ceased to blaze, the thunder has ceased to roar; the rain still falls, the sky may still in a measure be lowering, but it is only the end of the storm; and the soul becomes settled down, waiting for some manifestation of God's individual grace and love. This is the second step in the actings of divine faith.

And now comes the third step, which is the day star rising in the heart. "Until the day dawn, and the day star arise in the heart." What is the day star? A bright luminous speck, different from the dawn. It stands by itself, a bright spot in the clear sky; it shines as the herald of the sun—the messenger, the sure token that he is about to rise. The day star was once hidden, as the sun is still beneath the horizon; but that bright star, that clear luminous spot, that sure harbinger of day, has arisen, and the sun will follow. This then is the third step of divine faith; and it springs out of the application of some sweet promise, the dropping into the heart of some token of love from the fountain of love, a gentle whisper from Jesus to the soul encouraging it to wait: not assurance yet; not certainty yet; the book of life with its fair leaves not unfolded yet; "Abba, Father," not shed abroad in the heart yet; love unto the Father of mercies not enjoyed in its fullest manifestation yet.

Well, but, say you, how does this differ from the state which you were just describing? It differs thus. When the day dawns it is a general light: you cannot say there is any particular spot brighter than the rest, but it is a general dawning of the light, akin to the

general manifestation of the mercy of God in the word of truth. But the day star is a particular speck, a star in the east that attracts the eye, that draws to it observation; it is a bright luminous spot which shines by itself in the sky. Now here is all the difference betwixt a general indistinct acquaintance with the mercy of God I mean of course an experimental acquaintance and a special promise, a particular sign, an individual token, which has dropped into the heart.

But you say, Does not the application of the promise always bring with it assurance? That must depend upon what the promise is. Suppose, for instance, this promise was applied with power to the soul "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out;" does that bring with it assurance? No, it merely encourages the soul to come, and that if it comes it shall not be cast out. Or take another passage. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters;" does that invitation bring assurance? No, it persuades the thirsty to come to the waters. Take another promise: "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden;" does that bring assurance? No, it is an invitation to the heavy laden to come to Jesus. But how does it then differ from the general sense of mercy? Why, in the special application of the promise. How does the day star differ from the dawn? In this way: it is in the midst of the bright sky, and yet is alone in the midst of the bright sky; it is surrounded by a halo of light, and yet it stands alone as a luminous spot in that clear light. Now so is the promise of God applied to the soul, the Word brought home to the heart with power. It is in the midst of the light because it stands up in the light of the mercy of God: but it is something more; it is a bright speck, a luminous spot in the heart which shines there in solitary beauty, distinct from, though surrounded by the light of the dawn.

If you ever had a promise of this kind applied to your soul, you have had the day star. And where does it arise? In the heart. O Peter, how ever could you have applied such a lever to overthrow all the interpreters of modern prophecy? This word "arise in the

heart” cuts down at a single stroke all the interpretations of those who are looking for nothing else but the mere outward fulfilment of temporal prophecies. The day star is to arise in the heart, in the feelings, in the soul, in the spiritual conscience, in the new nature. It is to arise within a man, not without a man—to beam spiritually, not to shine temporally—to be an earnest of everlasting happiness, not of earthly prosperity. And therefore this expression of the day star arising in the heart shows that it is a divine blessing put into the heart, which gives light to the heart, which stands up as a luminous spot in the heart, and therefore is a foretaste of salvation in the heart.

And now comes the fourth step, which is the Sun of righteousness arising with healing in His wings. This is more than the day star; it is brighter than the day star; it overwhelms the day star: it shines in its own clear light; it brings with it its own evidence; it is accompanied with its own sure and certain seal. And this is the witness of the Holy Spirit to the souls of God’s people that they are born of God, the personal revelation of Christ, the individual manifestation of Jesus as the Bridegroom of the bride. The shining into the soul of the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and the betrothing of the soul unto Himself, is the day of its espousals in a wedding tie never to be dissolved. This is the fourth and last step of faith; and then comes all the trial of faith, and all the struggle of faith, and all the embarrassments of faith, and all the difficulties of faith; as Hart says,

When the pardon is signed and the peace is procured,  
 ‘Tis then that the conflict begins.

That is, begins in its intensity. It has begun before, but now it begins to be a fight indeed. It was a skirmish before, just the light troops traversing and fighting at intervals; but then the heavy troops come into action, and the battle begins indeed.

These, then, are the different steps of faith: not that they can be always clearly traced out, but these are for the most part the four successive steps of faith in the soul—the same faith, wrought by the

same power, given by the same God, working in the same way, but producing different effects.

Well, but say some, how can it produce different effects if it is the same faith? My eye—to which faith is compared, as when the Lord says, “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth”—my eye, to which faith is here compared, does it not see every object in the same way? But does it always see the same objects? I may see things most pleasant to my eye, and I may see things most painful to my eye. But do I see them in a different way? No, it is the same organ, but it looks on different objects. So faith sometimes sees painful things, distressing sights, unpleasant objects; and sometimes it sees blessed things, delightful prospects, Mount Pisgah views. It is the same faith, acting in the same way, but beholding different objects.

Faith is sometimes compared to tasting: “If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious; .. O taste, and see that the Lord is good.” But does my tongue always taste pleasant things? Is there no bitter medicine? no wormwood and gall? no unpleasant draught to be swallowed, as well as honey, milk and wine? Yet the same palate tastes the bitter and the sweet.

So also faith is compared to the ear: “Hear, and your soul shall live; .... Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” But does my ear always hear pleasant sounds? It may hear sweet music—it may hear most discordant notes; yet it is the same ear that hears both. So faith may hear the thunders of the law, or faith may hear the jubilee trumpet of the gospel: but it is the same faith, as it is the same ear.

Again, faith is sometimes compared to the hand, as when it is said, “Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me;” where faith is compared to a hand. But my hand may grasp a nettle, or my hand may touch swans down; how different are the sensations! yet it is the same hand that lays hold of each. And so faith may take hold of threatenings, rebukes and cutting reproofs; and faith may take

hold of love, righteousness and atoning blood; yet it is the same faith taking hold of different objects.

By these familiar illustrations we may see that the province of faith is to see, to taste, to hear, to feel; and that it is the same faith, though the objects of faith differ. Thus in these four successive steps it is the same faith that takes the first step, the second step, the third step, and the fourth step; but these steps are different, though it is the same limb that moves. I may walk, naturally, sometimes over smooth ground, sometimes over rough ground—sometimes in miry places, sometimes over the green turf. Do I want a different foot to walk on different ground? Do I want one kind of foot to walk on smooth ground, and another kind of foot to walk on rough ground? No, I walk with the same foot in both cases. So it is with faith. We walk by faith, and therefore faith will be affected, as my limbs are affected, according to the road by which I walk. If I travel in a very thorny road, my feet will be lame and sore; if I walk in a green grassy path, my feet will be in comparative ease and comfort. So faith walks sometimes in a rough and thorny path; but it is faith still. It sometimes walks in a pleasant path, in the garden of the Lord; it walks in liberty, as David speaks Ps 119:45, supported by Christ, and in the love and blood of Christ, but is still the same faith—for there is but “one faith,” as well as but “one Lord, one baptism.” Faith, like its author, is not divided, but is one and the same.

Now some here present may have only got to the first step—light shining in darkness; just light enough to see and mourn over their darkness, just grace enough to feel their corruption, just fear of God enough to tremble at His Word. Well, these are taking heed; they cannot sit under dark ministers, they cannot herd with dead professors, but they are taking heed to “the sure Word of prophecy.” They will come for miles to hear those men who speak with feeling and power to their hearts. They think no obstacle too great, no hindrances too numerous, to prevent them from hearing “the sure Word of prophecy.” They are like Mary, who “pondered

these things in her heart.” They lay up the truths that they know and feel in their souls; as David says, “Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee.” Thus they are brought to take heed, and ponder, and scrutinize, and weigh the path in which they are walking. This is the first step, and a painful step it is when the conscience is compelled to take heed to all that passes within, and all that passes without. Some of you perhaps have got a step beyond this; you have been lifted up in your soul by a sense of God’s love in giving His dear Son, and have been encouraged from time to time to hope in His Word, to trust in His goodness, to cast yourselves at His feet, and ask mercy from Him from whom alone mercy comes. But you are tried in your minds because you have never had a promise specially given you: you are exercised because there has been no Word spoken with power to your heart; and yet you have felt faith and hope working in your souls. Well, it will come by and by; the day star will arise in the appointed time.

There are those perhaps here who have had the Word of promise, the application of some scripture with power, some love token dropped into their hearts, some sweet testimony from God in their souls. Well, you have got the day star. And there may be one or two, or a few—I know not their number—who may have seen one of the days of the Son of Man, and had the glorious Sun of righteousness arising in their souls, with healing in His wings. These are, as long as it lasts, walking in the light of His countenance, exalting and praising Him to the utmost of their power, and the utmost stretch of their faculties.

But all and each have the same faith.

Let not the strong the weak despise;

Their faith, though small, is true.

It is all from the same source—a less or greater drop from the same fountain, a smaller or larger crumb from the same loaf. They are all of the same family, as the babe in its mother’s arms is the brother or the sister of the eldest of the children. And the time shall come when they shall all see eye to eye. This shall be when

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the Lord brings again Zion. Then there shall be no difference. They shall all sit on the same throne, they shall all wear the same crown, all see the same God, be all conformed to the image of the same Lord, all see Him face to face, and all be filled with the same glory. It is the purpose of God that there shall be differences here, but when this world shall have passed away like a dream of the night, all distinctions shall cease. All shall meet around their Father's throne, ascribing salvation to God and the Lamb.

### 11 THE EARNEST CONTENTION FOR LIVING FAITH (*Jude 1:3*)

Preached at the Opening of Trinity Chapel, Alfred Street, Leicester. On the Morning of  
*December 25, 1840*

*“That ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”*

*Jude 1:3*

We often read in books the praises of primitive Christianity, and there seems to be a general persuasion in the minds of men that primitive Christianity was, with scarcely any exception, of a superlatively excellent nature; and many speak and write as if the churches mentioned in the New Testament consisted entirely of such eminent saints as have never since appeared, and will never appear again. Now whence are we to derive our evidence of the nature of primitive Christianity? Our only certain and infallible authority must be the word of God; by which I mean, in this instance, the Epistles of the New Testament. But what do we gather from these epistles but the startling fact that though persecution in its most dreadful forms stared them in the face, there were some of the vilest characters possible in the churches formed immediately by the apostles! The saints among them were saints indeed; “great grace was upon them;” and their “work of faith, patience of hope, and labour of love” abounded exceedingly. This fact admits of no

denial; but this acknowledged truth seems to have thrown another no less certain fact into the back ground, namely, that there were very rank tares among this wheat, “ungodly men who were before of old ordained to this condemnation;” and that these vile characters, described at large in the second Epistle of Peter, and in this Epistle of Jude, were members of these primitive churches. And thus the New Testament churches seem to have closely resembled Jeremiah’s baskets of figs: “One basket had very good figs, even like the figs that are first ripe; and the other basket had very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad.” (Jer. 24:2)

Now it appears that the discerning eye of Jude saw these evils in the churches; and that they were not confined to one or two churches, but were spread through them all. Under heavenly inspiration, therefore, he wrote this “General Epistle,” so called because not addressed to a particular church, as at Corinth, Rome, Ephesus, or Thessalonica; but directed and sent abroad to the whole body of Christians, all the visible churches then existing. His mind seems to have been impressed with two prominent feelings. First, “to write to them of the common salvation;” that is, to set before them the glorious truths of salvation, common to the whole body of the elect; and secondly, to “exhort them that they should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” But why was he so pressed in spirit to exhort them thus earnestly to contend? Because his discerning eye saw a dark cloud coming over the churches. The faith once delivered unto the saints was in danger; not in any eternal danger as to the faith of the elect failing, or of God’s ceasing to have a church on the earth; but in temporary danger; and that not from without, but from within; not from open persecutors, but from false brethren.

Time will not allow me to enter fully into this Epistle, nor trace out these blots in the primitive Church, these “spots in their feasts of charity.” And yet it may be as well to endeavour to throw a little light on these characters, as briefly as possible, since the same awful characters infest, more or less, most, if not all, of the

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Calvinistic churches now; and some light may also be thus shed upon the text itself.

It is necessary, then, to observe that these characters were not casual hearers, outer court worshippers, merely members of the congregation, but that they were members of the church. They were clearly in church fellowship, for they sat down to the ordinance. "These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear." These feasts of charity! or love were not indeed the same thing as the Lord's supper, but they always followed the ordinance, and none sat down at the one, who did not sit down at the other. They were therefore in church communion with the rest. They are said also to have "crept in unawares;" that is, into the church, but in an under-hand, crafty, and deceitful manner. But, as Jude has drawn their characters, we will, with God's blessing, enter a little into the description that he has given.

They are said, then, "to speak evil of those things which they know not, but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves." (Jude 1:10) There were things then which they knew not, and there were things which they knew. They spoke against the one, and they corrupted themselves in the other. What were the things which they knew not? The work of the Holy Ghost on the heart, the manifestations of God's presence, the shedding abroad of his love in the soul, the application of the blood of sprinkling, as well as the trials, difficulties, temptations, exercises, doubts, fears, and bufferings, that are the lot of the people of God. These were the things that "they knew not;" they had no personal, inward, divine, experimental acquaintance with them; they therefore "spoke evil of them," and called them madness, nervousness, enthusiasm, excitement, delusion, gloom, melancholy, or any plausible or evil name which they could devise, whereby they could cast a slur upon the teachings of God in the soul. But what were the things which "they knew naturally?" The doctrinal truths which they had received in their judgment, the

glorious truths of salvation which they had learnt naturally, and therefore only knew naturally. For we must bear in mind that Arminianism had not then been introduced into the churches, but the pure truth was still preached by the apostles. But “in these things they corrupted themselves,” that is, they held truth in unrighteousness, sinned that grace might abound, and “turned the grace of God into lasciviousness,” that is, abused the doctrine of grace as encouraging licentiousness. And why? because they never knew the doctrines of grace in soul feeling and personal experience; but held them in a hard heart, a reprobate mind, and a seared conscience.

But they carried about with them certain marks, which Jude’s discerning eye saw, and his clear hand traced out.

1. They had “gone in the way of Cain.” What was Cain’s sin, here called Cain’s “way?” Enmity against his brother. And why? Because the Lord had accepted Abel’s offering, and rejected his. Thus in the heart of dead professors there is a deep-rooted enmity, inward murder, against the real people of God; and the root of this enmity is, because God accepts the one, and rejects the other.

2. They had “run greedily after the error of Balaam for reward.” What was Balaam’s error? Light without life, gifts without grace, slavish fear without spiritual fear, a willingness to curse, and a compulsion to bless; a seeing but not now, a beholding but not nigh, a desiring the death of the righteous, and a being slaughtered with the Midianites.

3. “And perished in the gain-saying of Core;” that is, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Nu 16 And what was this gainsaying? “an envying of Moses in the camp, and of Aaron the saint of the Lord.” (Ps. 106:16). Thus these characters whom Jude condemns thrust themselves forward to partake of the privileges and blessings peculiar to the people of God, aspired to the ministry, formed a party in the church, and allowed no separation of the precious and the vile; but, declared that “all the congregation was holy, every one of them, and that the Lord was among them;” and that therefore

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to be a member of the church was necessarily to be a child of God.

But they were towering professors, with all this enmity and ungodliness in their heart; and Jude has used several figures, which point to great appearances, but all destitute of reality.

4. "Clouds they are without water, carried about with winds." What is a cloud? A harbinger of rain, a receptacle of fertilizing moisture, suspended in the air, ready to drop down fatness upon the earth. Sometimes we see the earth parched up and dry, chapped and brown. We look into the sky, like Elijah's servant, if we can see clouds arising to dissolve in fertilizing showers. O! there we see one in the horizon, pregnant with rain. It comes over our heads. But alas! it is "a cloud without water," an appearance without a reality, covering the sun, but wanting the only thing that makes the cloud desirable or valuable. No dew, no rain, no moisture. Such are these dry towering professors. Lofty in their pretensions, but all their conversation devoid of dew or savour, soaring in the air, hiding the sun, darkening the sky, but dropping no rain, producing no fertility. But instead of quietly dropping down blessings, carried about with winds of error, gusts of passion, and the storms of their own lusts.

5. "Trees whose fruit withereth." The elect are trees, as the Spirit says, "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified." These too are trees, but "trees without fruit," internal or external, "having not the Spirit," (Jude 1:19) and therefore devoid of his gracious fruits. But fruit they have such as it is, "whose fruit withereth;" that is, even their natural fruit of zeal, consistency, liberality, and simplicity withered up, the juice gone, and the dried skin only remaining. "Twice dead," dead in sins, and dead in a profession; "plucked up by the roots," so that a discerning child of God sees that the root of their religion is in the flesh, and they themselves stand plucked up, and cast over the vineyard, in God's own time, before his eyes.

6. "Raging waves of the sea." The sea bears on its ample bosom the produce of all countries, and its waves bring the loaded ships

into harbour. But these only rage and foam against God's tried people, and threaten to bury them, rather than bear them, though in swelling high against the teachings of the Spirit in the hearts of the elect, they only foam out to discerning eyes their own shame.

7. "Wandering stars." Not fixed stars to guide the mariner, not the polar star for him to direct his course by, but stars that wander over the sky, and therefore only deceive instead of instruct, betray him upon the shoals, instead of leading him into the desired haven.

8. But these persons have no doubt of their state, for "their mouth speaketh great swelling words" in self-commendation. They are not plagued as other men. Therefore "they feast and feed themselves without fear." They feed on the letter of truth, on the doctrines of grace in their brain, on the deepest mysteries of vital godliness held in a seared conscience. Therefore they "feed without fear." No godly fear, no trembling awe, no solemn reverence, no holy anxiety, no desire to be right, no dread to be wrong, no doubt if it be presumption to draw nigh, no groanings under inward hypocrisy and presumption, no midnight cries to a heart-searching God to see the ground of their heart, no fervent wrestlings to be upright and sincere before him, no guilt nor self-condemnation nor self-loathing at coming unworthily. O fatal mark! O black stamp, to be devoid of that which is "the beginning of wisdom," and which "God puts into the hearts of his people, that they should not depart from him!"

Now we have no reason to believe that these characters were living in what is termed open sin and profaneness. Had it been so, they would have been turned out of the church; but it is evident that when Jude wrote, they were still in church membership. Their sins therefore were carried on in secret. But Jude's discerning eye, enlightened by the blessed Spirit, saw through all their hypocrisy, and penetrated into their real character, through all their "changeable suits of apparel, veils, wimples, and mantles." He saw then that the faith was in jeopardy, and observing this dark cloud lowering over the churches, wrote this epistle to exhort those that

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were “sanctified by God the Father, preserved in Christ Jesus, and called,” to “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints.” And are times less perilous now? Do not the churches amongst whom the bulk of God’s people are swarm with the very same characters that Jude here points out? The saints of God, then, are similarly called upon now to “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints.”

Thus much for introduction, long indeed but perhaps not unnecessary, considering the light it may throw on the text.

And now we come to our text; and the first word which seems to demand our notice, is the expression, “faith;” for on that word as on a pivot the whole text seems to turn.

I think we may understand two things by the expression, “the faith once delivered to the saints,” first, the doctrines preached by the apostles, and secondly, that inward faith whereby these doctrines are believed in by the heart unto righteousness, and confession made of them by the mouth unto salvation. The doctrines of grace were delivered to the saints by the Lord and his apostles: they were entrusted to the saints as to a living repository, and by them they were to be handed down to those who followed them in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. This seems to be the prominent and primary meaning of the text. But on that I shall not this morning dwell, but shall confine myself to what I consider its secondary and no less important meaning—the faith that dwells in the heart of the manifested people of God.

Now in examining the faith thus spoken of, it may be as well to see what it is not, before we look at what it is. The faith, then, which is delivered into the heart of the saints from the mouth of the Lord is not, in the least respect or degree, the fruit or production of the creature. “That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” (1 Cor. 2:5) It is a faith not to be learnt of man, nor to be procured by the exertions and strivings of the flesh. It cannot be got from the scriptures by hard study; nay, all the exertion of the creature cannot bring into the heart one grain or

atom of it. Natural faith, believing traditionally in the scriptures, receiving them as a divine revelation upon the authority of others, and a bare intellectual knowledge of texts and passages, doctrines and mysteries, all fall infinitely short of the saving faith which God communicates to his elect.

The faith delivered unto the saints stands wholly and solely in the power of God. He is the author and finisher of it in the soul; nor have we one jot more, nor one jot less than he is pleased to communicate. This heavenly grace is breathed into the soul by God the Holy Ghost out of the fulness of the Son of God. "We are the clay, and He is the potter;" and so far as we are vessels of mercy, "we are the work of his hand." This faith, then, can only be known by an inward experimental possession of it, and all description of it must fall short of what it really is in soul feeling. Now this faith is breathed into the soul when the Holy Ghost first quickens it into spiritual and eternal life; and the work and province of this faith is to lay hold of, embrace, and realize those truths which the Holy Spirit lodges in the conscience. For it is "the substance of things hoped for." That Almighty teacher casts a divine light upon certain revealed truths, and brings them out of the word into the heart, where they are fastened and riveted by an almighty power. And faith's business and employment is to act upon, and solemnly deal with these truths, which the Holy Spirit thus brings in and makes known. Faith, therefore, does not sail forth upon the letter of God's word, that vast and fathomless ocean of truth. Faith stays at home, and does as Mary did, "ponder these things in her heart." All that comes with light, life, and power, all that is commended to the conscience, all that is experimentally brought into the heart, faith deals with. Whatever truth comes with power from God into the soul is faith's food, and true faith can feed on nothing else. But here many of God's children are often staggered. They read in the word what faith is, and what faith does: as for instance, that it removes mountains, works by love, overcomes the world, purifies the heart, and is accompanied with love, joy, and peace. Such a

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faith as this many of God's people cannot find in their heart. Again, they see glorious truths set forth in the letter of the word. They see Jesus there spoken of as a great and glorious Saviour. The security of the church in her covenant Head, the solemn truths of election and predestination, the certainty of salvation to the elect, the blessed teachings of the Spirit in the hearts of God's people, these and other divine truths, many of the quickened family of God see clearly written in the scriptures. But they cannot get at them, so as to realize them as certainly and eternally theirs. They believe that they are true; but they cannot believe them for themselves, so as to rejoice in them as sealed with power in their own hearts. Now here they are baffled; and feeling that their faith does not relieve them from burdens, remove guilt, pacify conscience, and conquer death, they conclude because they have not this faith, that they have no faith.

But is this the necessary, or scriptural conclusion? If faith can only realize, and feed upon the truths which the Holy Ghost brings in, faith in its beginning will deal with what is brought in at the beginning. Now what is a sound beginning? "The fear of the Lord," for that is declared to be "the beginning of wisdom." (Ps. 111:10) But the fear of God cannot exist without the knowledge of God, for we cannot fear him whom we do not know. Therefore the Lord Jesus said, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Faith then, in its early infantile state, acts upon, and is engaged with this inward knowledge of God, which springs from what the Holy Ghost has revealed of him to the conscience. But this knowledge of God embraces the knowledge of what God is, of his holiness, purity, power, justice, hatred of sin, and eternal wrath and displeasure towards transgressors. And as we see light only in God's light, when He sets our secret sins in the light of His countenance, faith begins to act upon, and deal with these eternal realities. Thus the soul is convinced of sin, made acquainted with the spirituality of God's law, and arraigned at his bar as a transgressor. Under this

discovery, sin and corruption work, temptations beset the soul, doubts and fears arise, and guilt and condemnation are powerfully felt. Well, but where is faith all this time? Out of sight indeed, but not out of the heart; nay, busy at work, and dealing with these solemn realities, as the Holy Spirit keeps bringing them in. But how is faith evidenced? By feeling. Were there no faith, there would be no feeling. But the presence of feeling shows the presence of faith. Thus the very guilt that the soul feels, the earnest anxiety which it manifests in fleeing from the wrath to come, its groans and sighs for mercy, its struggling forward into light and liberty, as the babe from the prison of the womb, the very doubts and fears that retard its progress, and all the numerous and varied exercises that attend the quickened soul, all, all manifest the presence of faith. Eternal realities are believed in, and from this belief all these inward exercises spring.

Now after a time, there shall be a change. The Holy Spirit holds up Jesus in the word as a suitable and precious Saviour, and brings into the heart some savour of his Person, work, and precious blood. Faith, as before, sees, realises, and feeds upon this heavenly food. What the Spirit reveals, faith embraces, deals with, and acts upon. Perfect love indeed has not yet come to cast out all “fear which hath torment.” But a measure of peace is felt in believing, and faith has at times something more of a comforting nature to feed upon.

It is usually at this season that we are exposed to, and are often entangled by Satan, false professors, and the deceit of our own heart. On one side of the path of life is despair, and on the other side is presumption, two deep ditches, into one or the other of which we are very liable to fall. The soul, then, being somewhat lifted up with views of Christ, often runs eagerly forward, and thus is thrust beyond its real experience. Confident professors always on the rock, preachers crying out against doubts and fears, and the heart’s own deceitfulness, all push the unwary child of God forward into head knowledge beyond heart knowledge. One does not like to be snuffed at and snubbed by professors, looked down

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upon with suspicion, and treated as a babe, a weakling, a beginner, and all one's religion perhaps called in question by those who have no doubt of their own. The flesh is pained thereby, galled, fretted, and mortified. So having some little ground to go upon, the inexperienced and perhaps unballasted vessel of mercy, unless well held in, starts forth into the letter of God's word, to sail on that wide and boundless ocean, without either chart, compass, or rudder. But let a man once go beyond God's teaching, and where will he not get to, unless the Lord bring him back? Well, on the stripling goes, pretty boldly and pretty firmly. Light and life received, with rays of hope and consolation, give him some entrance into the doctrines of grace, into which therefore he boldly steps. Doubts and fears begin to remove, trials and temptations lose their sharp edge, and a temporary ease and consolation are felt. This emboldens him yet more to go farther and farther still with confidence and assurance, as he now finds some comfort and security more and more drawn from the letter of truth. Now, if the Holy Ghost did not keep him, he would rush forward into all the hardened confidence of a dead professor. But the Lord never has left, and never will leave him; nor was he really easy with all his false confidence. Some heavy trial, some powerful temptation, a bed of sickness, such as I believe was made useful in this way to me ten years ago, death near, and hell in sight, begin to pull down this vain confidence. The soul loses all its fancied treasures and supposed acquirements, and sinks into poverty and beggary. False hopes begin to vanish, rotten props to be knocked away, and refuges of lies to be discovered. Towering confidence flies away, and the soul falls down into darkness, and well nigh into despair. But why all this? What is the Lord doing now? Why, teaching the soul what faith is, by teaching him what faith is not. He had been making bricks, and collecting slime to build up a Babel with, to escape the wrath to come; touching the ark with Uzzah, looking into it presumptuously with the men of Bethshemesh. Now faith comes back to her true old work, to stay at home, and ponder the things inwardly felt. Our religion is now

weighed up, and much, perhaps all, to our feelings, found false. The greater part of it stood in the flesh in more or less of presumption. Now then the soul is driven to close dealings with God, forced up into a corner, whence there is no escape. Before, whilst the soul was in an easy, smooth, lukewarm path, there were few or no close dealings with God. There were indeed seasons of prayer, moments of compunction and contrition, but no close, solemn, personal dealings with a heart-searching Jehovah. Hezekiah was a good man, and had offered an acceptable passover, as well as received answers to prayer and a striking deliverance before ever "he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore." But he never had close dealings with God, until he had sentence of death in his soul. This pulled down all his religion, stripped away his fleshly hopes, and drove him up into a corner. But where is faith now? Why, busy with the perfections of God, his majesty, heart-searching eye, and unalterable purposes, and suing, sighing, and groaning after manifestations of mercy. It is not falling on one's knees, nor uttering prayers merely, that is close dealing with God; nor do I believe there are any of these close quarters until the soul is stripped and laid low. Now it comes as a sinner ready to perish, as a poor outcast, who must have mercy inwardly revealed. Like the poor woman diseased with the issue of blood, it longs to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. In this conflict the soul learns what faith is. Hezekiah was brought to feel that "by these things men live, and in all these things was the life of his spirit."

Under these sharp exercises we learn what faith is, and what faith is not; what faith does, and what faith does not. The dross and tin are purged away in this furnace, and in it faith learns its real measure and stature, its true work and business. The soul is taught in the fires to seek and sue after personal manifestations of mercy, is brought off the bare letter of the word, and breathes after the teachings of the blessed Spirit as applying the scriptures with power. What it now therefore receives, it receives as a free gift, for which it must sigh, beg, and groan. Its faith can only stand now in

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the power of God, and is utterly helpless without him. And when the Lord in mercy sends help and strength, power and feeling, and draws up the affections to himself, the soul knows what faith is, by its presence as well as by its absence; by what it can do, as well as by what it cannot do. Thus according to the measure given, the heart is purified, the love of the world cast out, fleshly religion dethroned, and Christ made all in all. There is now a solid acquaintance with the truth, and the poor, needy, naked, and helpless soul rests and hangs upon Christ alone. This faith, according to its different measure in each, was once delivered unto the saints, delivered, not merely in the preaching of Christ and his apostles, but delivered into their hearts. For this faith then we are earnestly to contend, as an abiding reality, a separating path between presumption and despair. A faith which stands wholly and solely in the teachings, guidings, and leadings of the Holy Comforter, and received only in such measure, and at such seasons as He delivers it into the heart. But why earnestly contend for it? Why not have peace in churches, smuggle matters up, put goats and sheep into one pen, and so preach and talk as to have a good name among professors? Why not call all that profess, "brethren," and keep things quiet and comfortable? Because having more or less proved the nature of this faith in our own souls, and seen the deceits and dangers of all counterfeits, we must earnestly contend for it. And what then? Why, we must have divisions, troubles, and difficulties. Contend we must therefore for this faith, not bitterly nor angrily, but earnestly and affectionately; contend for it as a thing of infinite importance, as the only thing really worth contending for; contend for it through smiles and frowns, whether men will hear or forbear.

Jude does not say, Contend for church order, though a good thing in its place; nor for doctrines, though true and valuable; nor for your own reputation, though personally dear; but, "for the faith once delivered unto the saints." Because it has made us, each according to our measure, new creatures, wrought an effect on our souls, and upon the possession of it hang our hopes of eternity;

because it is the grand turning point between sinner and saint, between life and death. All the people of God quickened into spiritual life have faith, the weakest as well as the strongest; the babe of yesterday as well as the saint of a fifty years' profession. Their faith differs in measure, not in kind. To contend therefore for divine faith, is to embrace all the living family, and reject all dead professors. If therefore we contend for it, we must give place to its opposers, no, not for an hour. We must make no hollow truces, no false treaties, no rotten alliances and give no quarter to any faith that stands not in the power of God the Holy Ghost. We must allow none to have a grain of real religion, who possess it not. My conscience would condemn me if I did not contend for it earnestly, but my conscience would equally condemn me if I were to contend for it bitterly. I trust in this spirit I have come to Leicester. I feel that I have not come here to oppose any man, or disparage any man, to minister to any man's pride, to set any man up, or pull any man down. So far as I know my own motives, and our hearts are so deceitful that it is hard always to know them I have come here with a desire after God's glory. Films will come over the eye, when we think and wish it to be most single; but I have felt, that there being a door opened in this town for experimental truth, a chapel built, and a pulpit set up, I could comfortably and conscientiously enter it to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints." God will own and bless no other cause and no other preaching but that which contends for the faith that He himself once delivered. I desire to contend for it earnestly, simply, fully and affectionately; and may we ever contend for it at home and abroad, in our words and actions, as well as in our life, conduct, and conversation.

In this mixed multitude there must be persons assembled from various motives. Some to hear a new preacher, some to pick up something from the pulpit which they may carry away to make me an offender for a word, some to see the new chapel, and some, I trust, to hear what the Lord may speak to their soul. To the last I would by way of conclusion address myself.

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If you have any measure of this spiritual faith, you will have plenty of trials with it. The Lord says—Rev. 3:18, “I counsel thee to buy of me gold;” but what gold? “tried in the fire,” no other. Wherever, therefore, the Lord gives faith, he gives trials to prove it. “That the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire” (1 Pet. 1:7) Thus we are tried with unbelief, infidelity, doubts, questionings, and fears tried in providence; tried by bodily afflictions; tried by the enmity of the world, the opposition of carnal professors, the deceit of false friends, but most of all by our own dreadfully vile and wicked hearts. And yet, with all these trials some more and some less, all who have any measure of this heavenly faith will and must earnestly contend for it, as the only thing that supports the soul under trials, and as feeling that this faith only “will be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” You therefore, into whose heart God has breathed this faith, will have a cross to carry. You that have it not, and contend only for doctrines, a name to live, rites, forms, and ceremonies of man’s invention, and an outside religion, will be loved by the word, and meet with neither outward nor inward opposition. But may we who desire to fear God, be willing to endure these things, “receiving the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.”

## 12 THE MIGHTY PUT DOWN, AND THE LOWLY EXALTED (*Luke 1:52, 53*)

Preached , at the Opening of Trinity Chapel, Alfred Street, Leicester on Friday Afternoon,

*December. 25, 1840*

*“He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.”*

*Luke 1:52, 53*

It is a question often agitated, whether it be right to set up a certain fixed standard in religion. There are those who say that

there can be no uniform standard of experience set up; and there are others who contend that there must be such an undeviating standard, and that without it all is confusion and perplexity. As to myself, I cannot for a moment doubt that there must be a standard set up, for without it we can have no guide to discern between the precious and the vile, and no rule of measurement amongst the members of the living family themselves. Without a standard, the living and the dead, as well as the babes, young men, and fathers, are all jumbled together in one mingled mass of confusion. Whether, then, there is to be a standard or not, is, to my mind, a question very easily disposed of. If a man denies there is a standard, I put to him these questions:—Can a man be saved without faith? To which if he answer, “No;” then I say, “Is not then faith a standard?” Or can he be saved without repentance? Then repentance must be a standard. Or is there any internal distinction between the living and the dead? Then such internal distinction must be a standard. So that, unless we deny the power of vital godliness altogether, we must commence at the very threshold with a standard. The real difficulty, to my mind, is, “What shall this standard be? how high, or how low?” I think we move on safe ground when we say that it should be so high as to be beyond the reach of every hypocrite and self-deceiver, and so low as to take in all the quickened family of God. Now, if we look at the Word of God, I think we shall find there set up a standard of this nature. We see there a standard embracing two opposite extremes, a standard for depth, and a standard for height; and either extreme too deep, or too high for any, save the living in Jerusalem. This standard dips down into poverty, helplessness, beggary, bankruptcy, and thorough insolvency. Therefore we cannot do with any standard of experience that does not descend into the felt poverty, guilt, filth, nakedness, helplessness, condemnation, and self-abhorrence that lie at the bottom of a spiritually instructed heart. A standard that shall not measure the Spirit’s teachings in the conscience must be radically defective. Again, if we are to have a standard that shall

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embrace things essential to salvation, it must be high enough to reach manifestations of mercy and love, testimonies of God to the soul, visitations of his presence, and the enjoyment of his kingdom set up in the heart. Both these extremes are equally out of the reach of all but the living family. But now we come to another question. Is there any fixed way in which the soul is to be brought down to the depth, or up to the height of this standard? Or is there any prescribed time for these truths to be learnt in? My firm persuasion is, that there is no such prescribed way, and no such fixed time. The question with me is not so much what has been the road, as what is the spot where the traveller has arrived. There were no roads tracked out in the wilderness, and yet the Lord “led forth the children of Israel by a right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.” It is not so much whether a man has been three months, three years, or thirty years, learning that he is a poor needy insolvent, helpless, guilty, and filthy wretch, as whether he has really and effectually learnt it by God’s teaching in his soul. Nor whether he has been three weeks, three years, or thirty years, learning the mercy and love of God in the face of Jesus Christ, but whether he has been taught it by Divine manifestations. The Philippian jailor seems to have learnt more in three minutes, both of judgment and mercy, than some of us have learnt in three or thirteen years. “A day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” The one Infinite Eternal NOW takes no note of time.

The chief standard set up in the Word of God is not a standard of way or time, but a standard of character. To explain my meaning more fully. I observe certain characters addressed in the Word of God as objects of mercy, and certain characters spoken of as objects of wrath. For instance, the poor and needy, the outcast, the broken-hearted, the captive, the mourner, the weary and heavy laden, the hungry and thirsting, the lost and undone, sinners without help, hope, wisdom, or strength—to such characters I see in the Word of God promises, invitations, and encouragements, addressed. Again, the proud and lofty, the stout hearted, the mirthful, those that are

at ease in Zion, that put far away the evil day, that are settled on their lees, “that anoint themselves with the chief ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph”—against these, and the like characters, I see judgments denounced. With characters, then, not with persons, I have to deal, and therefore, if I follow the Word of God, my standard this afternoon must be a standard of character.

Thus in the text we find two opposite and distinct characters spoken of.

First, those whom God calls “mighty,” and whom he is said “to put down from their seats;” and, secondly, those “of low degree,” whom he is said “to exalt.” We meet with the same two distinct characters in the second verse of the text, where we read of “the hungry, whom he feedeth with good things,” and “the rich, whom he sends empty away.”

“The mighty,” then, and “the rich,” are the same characters, viewed in different points; and “the lowly” and “the hungry” are the same characters, viewed also in different bearings; and it will be my business, with God’s help and blessing, to unfold these two distinct and opposite characters, and show the separate end of each.

1. We will begin, then, with “the mighty,” whom the Lord puts down from their seat.

“The mighty,” here, may be looked at in two different points of view. If we look at it with respect to the experience of her that used the words, the Virgin Mother of the Lord Jesus, she seems to have had a special eye to the great and noble matrons of Israel, whom the Lord had put down from their seats of pride and dignity, by passing them all by, and conferring upon her, a despised maiden, the glory of bringing forth the promised Redeemer. Thus we may apply the expression to all those mighty professors of religion, who deem themselves worthy of God’s favour, and pride themselves upon possessing something in self which may conciliate the Divine approbation.

But there is another sense in which the word “mighty” may

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be considered, and that is as pointing out a certain unhumbled  
mightiness in the hearts of God's people.

All that are mighty are to be put down from their seat; for "the day of the Lord of Hosts is to be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low." Isa 2:12 "The loftiness of man carnal and spiritual shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men elect and reprobate shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." With this striking difference, that the one are put down in wrath and eternally, and the other in mercy and experimentally. The same observation applies to the characters called in the second verse of the text, "rich." There are those who are "rich" in self-righteousness and vain-confidence, whom the Lord has never beggared in the slightest degree; and there are those amongst God's quickened people who have never been thoroughly broken down into the depths of soul poverty. Both are sent empty away; the former, because the Lord never bestows upon them one grain of pure gold; and the latter, because whilst in this Laodicean state, the Lord never drops into their heart one smile to make them rich indeed.

Thus, in opening up the characters of "the mighty," and of "the rich," I shall endeavour to show, first, who they are strictly and wholly so, whom God puts down and sends empty away in judgment; and secondly, those who are partially and delusively so, whom the Lord puts down and sends empty away in mercy. This will be drawing a narrower line, and coming to closer quarters, than if we considered the mighty and rich reprobate only, and did not trace out the internal dealings of God, as well as the external.

Let us first cast a glance, then, at the mighty, as pointing out a large class of nominal professors. As the Virgin Mary was blessed with a spiritual blessing in being the mother of the promised Messiah, she, doubtless, viewed the mighty as such not in a worldly, but in a religious light. The mighty, then, are not necessarily kings and princes, but the strong, wise, religious, and confident in self, the unstripped and unhumbled, the unbeggared and unemptied.

These having never felt the powerful hand of God in their heart, are strong in righteous self, in religious self, in professing self, in undiscovered, unmasked self. Their eyes stand out with fatness, their heart is as hard as a piece of the nether millstone, and their tongue walketh through the whole earth. They have never had their heart brought down with labour, never abhorred themselves in dust and ashes, never tasted the wormwood and gall, never groaned under weakness, helplessness, guilt, and bondage. Sin and temptation, doubts and fears, and the plague of an evil heart have never sapped their strength, nor brought them down into the dust of death. Therefore waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.

But these mighty ones are said to have “a seat.” “He hath put down the mighty from their seats.” The word “seat” seems to carry with it various meanings. There is, first, an idea of security and ease. A sitting posture implies quiet and rest, an absence of labour and toil, a state of indolence and repose. Thus, these mighty ones are what some people call “established Christians.” That is, not established in a sense of their own misery and God’s mercy, of their own helplessness and Christ’s strength, of their own folly and the blessed Spirit’s wisdom; but settled down in a dry doctrinal establishment. They are not sitting at Christ’s feet; no, nor sitting with the princes of his people, as being lifted up out of the dunghill, but seated in an easy chair of carnal security. Their vile heart does not plague them, there being in them no opposition between flesh and spirit; the devil does not harass them, because he holds them fast in delusion; the world does not hate them, because they are one with it; and God does not chastise them, because he reserves his rod for his children.

Again, there is the seat of judgment. To sit is the posture of the judge, to stand that of the criminal. Thus these mighty ones enthrone themselves on the judgment seat, and there pass their sentence of condemnation on all who differ from them, but especially on those of God’s living family, who feel themselves criminals at his bar. They have never stood at the felon’s bar themselves. Their court

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of judgment never arraigned self. All God's people have "a Spirit of judgment and a Spirit of burning," which passes sentence first on self. For judgment begins first at the house of God; the sword is first undrawn in the sanctuary Eze 9:6; and "if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." But these high and mighty judges never began, where God begins, at self. Therefore, having no internal sentence of death and condemnation to engross all their thoughts, they have abundant leisure to look at others; having no lawsuit at home to make them cry, "Let my sentence come forth from thy presence," they can quietly sit to pass judgment on their neighbours. But whom does the judge pass sentence upon? Not upon the nobles of the land, because they are privileged by birth to sit on the same bench; not on the bystanders and spectators, who are looking uninterestedly on; but on the trembling criminal. Thus these mighty ones pass no sentence on those that are at ease in Zion, or on the idle lookers-on, but on the poor children of God who stand as criminals. They pass sentence on their experience as wild and visionary, on their trials as of their own making, on their temptations as part lunacy and part delusion, and on their persons as troublers in Israel, perverters of the truth, and possessed with a bitter and bad spirit.

And there is also another seat, and that is the seat of the scorner. A man soon passes from the seat of judgment to the seat of scorn and contempt. Sentence is passed first, and execution follows. To condemn a man first, and scorn him afterwards, are steps not widely separated. Thus the Jews first condemned Jesus, and then mocked him.

But it is said in the text that the Lord "putteth down the mighty from their seats." How does he perform this act of judgment on his enemies? Why, in various ways. Sometimes he enlightens the eyes of God's people to see through them, and clearly discern all their emptiness and hypocrisy. When a soul has been well plagued with internal temptations, and been much and long exercised and harassed with, a body of sin and death, it is often led into the

sanctuary of the Lord's presence, and seeing light in his light, reads the end of all such characters. Thus Asaph Ps 73:17, after being long plagued with those "who were not in trouble as other men," learnt their real condition and awful end. And by their inward teaching God put down before the eyes of his mind these mighty ones from their seat of security, judgment, and scorn. Their first seat, then, he envied not, their second seat dreaded not, and their third seat he heeded not. He saw them fall whilst they were yet in slippery places.

The children of God, who have passed through temptations and trials, carry scales and weights in their hands. In these balances of the sanctuary they weigh up others as well as themselves, and they soon find these strong, self-confident professors, false weight. Having had their own religion well weighed up, they look to quality more than to quantity; and looking to find that in others which they want to find in themselves, they readily perceive a total deficiency. Thus the Lord experimentally puts down these mighty ones from their seat in the conscience and judgment of his people. He removes the film from their eyes, and gives them to see that a religion which does not stand in the power of God is no religion at all; that where there is faith, there will be the trials and exercises of faith; that those who have no changes fear not God; that where there is no humility, there is no spiritual exaltation; that those who have no fear are devoid of the beginning of wisdom; and that those who have no chastisements are bastards, and not sons.

Again, sometimes by solemn judgments, the Lord puts down these mighty from "their seats." Some he lets fall into sin, and some into despair. Some go into the world, and others fall into error. Some renounce their profession, and others walk so carelessly, that all men see their shame. Some become eaten up with covetousness, others with the pride of life, and others with their fleshly lusts. Thus concerning faith they make shipwreck, and tumble headlong from their seat into the jaws of eternal despair. And in this way the Lord makes manifest to all men the end of a religion which stands

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in presumption, and has not himself for its author and finisher.

But, as I hinted above, there is another and a very different class, who may in a certain sense be said to be “the mighty,” whom the Lord puts down from their seat. And this includes those of God’s people who are for a time internally infected with a similar disease. “Can a man touch pitch, and not be defiled?” Thus some of God’s own living family prove, by painful experience, that “evil communications corrupt good manners.” They are, perhaps, connected in a church with those that are at ease in Zion. The Lord for a time leaves them to themselves that they may be filled with their own ways. He suspends the use of the rod. The world smiles; prosperity in worldly circumstances attends them; health is strong, and family affliction at a distance; trials and temptations in a measure cease, and all is calm without and within. Now is the time for them to drink into the spirit of delusion, and mistake this false peace for the assurance of faith. Thus “they cover themselves with a covering not of God’s spirit, and add sin to sin”—the sin of presumption to the sin of hypocrisy. Now, then, they seem established in faith. And why? Because the storm is lulled, and they have a temporary ease. They have slunk out of the battle, and call that peace, which is really desertion. Tired with storms, they creep into a little harbour, and think that the end of the voyage. And the Lord having a secret purpose in view, winks for a while, and disturbs not their ease. Now, no sooner has a living soul drunk down this intoxicating draught, than he becomes one of the mighty, and gets into a seat—first the seat of carnal ease and security, then the seat of secretly judging and condemning the tried and exercised family of God, and then the seat of secretly scorning all experience which does not centre in the unwavering assurance of faith. But the Lord has a rod reserved for this fool’s back, and knows how to put down this mighty one from his seat. Thus, he brings some trouble into his soul, or breaks down the hedge, and suffers Satan to shoot his arrows at him, or causes fearfulness and trembling to take hold of him, or sets his secret sins in array before him,

or afflicts his body, or takes away his property, or works a secret condemnation in his conscience. "Thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down." Under these sore and painful exercises, this mighty one tumbles down from his seat; first, from his seat of security. As Job says, "God thrusteth him down, not man," and he thrusts him down effectually. All his fake faith, hope, and confidence, vanish as a dream, and he falls into deep soul trouble. The same hand thrusts him down from the seat of judgment. He has now plenty of work to do at home. Like Ephraim, he is now "broken in judgment." Ho 11 He has so much sin discovered in his own heart, that he cannot pick up stones to throw at others; and is so confused and baffled in judging what is his own religion, that he shrinks from passing judgment on his fellow-sinners. He has now some solemn transactions to carry on with him, "by whom actions are weighed;" and having close business between God and conscience, he leaps off the judgment seat, and takes his station as a trembling criminal at the bar. He had long dropped down from the seat of the scornful—a place which he will never occupy again.

The Lord's subsequent dealings with him, we shall see in that part of the text which speaks of his "exalting them of low degree," which I therefore pass over for the present, and proceed to his work of sending the rich empty away.

2. But who are these "rich?" Why, I believe, as we have seen in the case of the mighty, that two distinct characters are set forth, the mighty dead and the mighty living, so in the expression "rich," we have the rich amongst the reprobate, and the rich amongst the elect shadowed forth. Looking, then, at the rich in this light, we may say they are not such as are rich temporally. The Lord himself, indeed, said that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God," though he added, that "though this was impossible with man, with God all things were possible." When the text, then, speaks of "the rich whom God sends empty away," it means those who are rich religiously, rich in self-confidence, rich in self-righteousness, in a

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good opinion of their own religion, and resting upon these things to save them. Like the rich fool in the Gospel, they say, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry." Poverty has never come upon them like an armed man. Their houses are safe from fear; want and beggary have never entered into their souls, nor eaten and drunk up all their stores. But whence come they to be so rich? Because they have never had a glimpse of what real riches are. They are like a lunatic who has collected shells and stones, and thinks them money. So these have no inward consciousness of what Divine riches are, and know not that all is poverty and want which is not communicated and breathed into the soul by the Holy Ghost. If notions, opinions, doctrines, texts of Scripture, false confidence, consistency of life, and church membership can make a man rich, they are rich sufficiently. But when there is no gold but that bought in the fire, and no religion, not an atom or a grain, but what God himself communicates, all their riches are but heaps of dirt.

Now, these the Lord in judgment "sends empty away." That is, he never feeds their soul with the bread of life. They do not go empty away with respect to that which they themselves call riches. They may have a clearer insight into gospel mysteries, a more accurate understanding of a text, a judgment better informed, a conscience somewhat more pacified, a vain confidence more strengthened, a self-righteousness more established. The Lord himself "chooses their delusions," and "feeds them with judgment." But they are sent empty away, with respect to power and Divine teaching. No filial fear, no humbling sense of God's love, no taste or sip of his mercy, no spiritual rebuke nor reproof, no unction, dew, or savour, no humility, tenderness, or brokenness, no contrition or godly sorrow, no meekness nor self-loathing, no breaking up or melting down, no ardent cries nor burning desires were ever let down from above into the heart of a reprobate. On these rich self-sufficient professors, the God of all grace never deigned to smile, nor did he ever let fall one drop of his love into their soul. He never did and

never will sanction and crown with his presence a religion that stands in the flesh. He never indulged such with soul communion and the secret of his manifested presence; for “the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and to them and to them only will he show his covenant.” His presence never went up with his enemies, nor did his favour as a cloud of the latter rain ever drop into their hearts.

But there are those who are “rich” in another sense, as I before hinted, that is, those of God’s awakened family who have never been reduced to soul beggary. That the children of God may fail into this snare is clear from the Laodicean Church, who said that she was “rich and increased with goods, and had need of nothing, and knew not that she was wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Re 3:17 This was a Church of the living God, though sunk into this self-deceiving condition. Solomon speaks of “a making haste to be rich,” and says of all such that they “shall not be innocent.” He also says, “He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.” Pr 28:20,22 Our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and thus, unless powerfully restrained, we soon rush into error. Many of God’s quickened family get impatient of the yoke, and grow wearied of ploughing always in the same toilsome furrow. They then begin to run after dry doctrinal preachers, who shoot their arrows at all doubts and fears, and set up a standard of unwavering assurance. As these men are abundantly furnished with texts, they soon preach them into what they call liberty, but which is really presumption. Thus they become rich and increased with goods.

But the Lord has his own mode of dealing with such. Having godly fear at the bottom, a dread of self-deceit, and a living desire after honesty and sincerity, they are not really easy in their consciences. The hardened professor, the old dead Calvinist, has no spiritual life at the bottom of his religion. There is therefore no secret lever turning him up from the foundation. But the living

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child, though he may be too rash in building hay, straw, and stubble, has the foundation right, though the superstructure is wrong. And as grace and nature, spirit and flesh, never really united, there was always a secret rent between the two. Now, the Lord sends these rich children of his empty away. Their hearts really desire something beyond texts and doctrines. There is a secret sigh after power and feeling, an inward longing after manifested favour; but they are so covered up with false riches, that the Lord sends them empty away. Thus he never gives them a smile whilst in this state, nor a look of love, nor a token for good, nor a visitation of his presence, but sends them empty away of such favours. They have got, perhaps, into a cavilling, criticising, censorious mood, discontented with self, and with everybody else, and the Lord sends them empty away from the chapel, from his mercy-seat, from the table. Their only spiritual food from him consists in rebukes, reproofs, and frowns, producing a guilty conscience; but as to the rich savoury meat of the Gospel, of that they are sent empty away.

3. But we will proceed to the other characters, which are not only distinct, but diametrically opposite. The poor, and those of low degree, not merely differ from the mighty and the rich, but are poles asunder from them. These represent those of God's people, in whose hearts he has wrought a sense of poverty, beggary, and utter insolvency; and whom, having thus brought down, he proceeds to lift up and bless.

The first character that we will take notice of is, he who is called in the text "of low degree." "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree." The translation here seems rather to have departed from the original; and I prefer the old rendering preserved in the Common Prayer-book, "the humble and meek." For the word here has a reference not only to degree and station of life, but to spiritual qualities. I would, therefore, rather call them "lowly," than of low degree,—"humble," as made spiritually so by God himself. These lowly souls, then, whom God exalts, are such as he himself has first brought down. For "the Lord

maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up.” This humility, then, is not feigned, but real humility; not tongue humility, whilst all the time the heart is as proud as Satan; not a humility of dress, or of countenance, or of manner and appearance, or of religious regimentals, still less of hypocrisy, can’t, and whine; but a humility of soul, wrought there by the hand of God himself. If a man is humble, he must have had something to humble him, or else it is the worst covering of hypocrisy. Humility is not to be cultivated; no, nor plucked out of the Scriptures, as a man plucks a flower of the garden, but is to be beat, driven, and forced into a man. He that is really humble has had a true right of himself, and carries about with him a deep and abiding sense of his vileness and filthiness. The base pride, presumption, and hypocrisy, of his fallen nature has been turned up by the share of God’s plough in his conscience. He therefore loathes himself in his own sight as a monster of iniquity, and feels that he has sin enough in his heart to damn a thousand worlds. He sees and feels himself one of the most abominable, carnal, sensual, earthly, and vile wretches that can crawl on God’s earth. He feels that he contains in himself the seeds and buddings of those crimes that have brought hundreds to the gallows. And these feelings he carries about with him, not as a theory floating in his brain, nor as a doctrine gathered from the Scriptures, but as a solemn reality, lodged and planted by God himself in his soul, a conviction fastened and screwed into him by an Almighty hand. This is the way that a man learns humility, not as a cultivated grace or religious duty, but as a lesson spiritually taught him. Now, he sees what a base, helpless, needy, naked wretch he is. Such were David’s feelings when he exclaimed, “From the ends of the earth will I cry unto thee when my heart is overwhelmed.” Ps 61:2 As though he were the farthest distance possible from God—the whole width of the earth asunder from him. And what drove him thus, as it were, to the end of creation? It was the solemn sense he had of God’s holiness, and of his own filthiness before him. This infinite disparity between a holy God and a guilty soul, drove him,

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as it were, to the very limits of creature existence, the remotest spot where man could dwell. The Lord never throws away his favours. He will teach us to prize them before he bestows them. He never clothes the already dressed, sends bread to a full cupboard, or enriches those who have money in the bank. Nor does he give the Spirit to those who can do with the letter, nor communicate power to those who are satisfied with the word. But those who are nothing, and have nothing, who cannot stir an inch, nor lift a finger to help themselves—to these he freely communicates out of Jesus' fulness. "He exalts them of low degree."

But how does he exalt them? In self? Oh, no! not in self. He has dethroned that idol; he will not set it up again, as the image of jealousy in the holy place. But he exalts them out of self into Christ. He sets before their eyes Jesus and his great salvation, holds up in their heart his suitability, grace, glory, atoning blood, dying love, and justifying righteousness. He shows them that he is mighty to save, able to save to the uttermost, all that come to God by him. The Holy Spirit kindles faith in the soul to receive the testimony that he has given of Jesus in the Word, and thus exalts Christ in the affections, as all its salvation, and all its desire. In Jesus they see all that they want for time and eternity; and receiving him into their souls as their only hope, cling and cleave to him as their all in all. Instead of exalting this debases self. The vile monster self is never so low as when the soul is brought in faith and feeling to sit at Jesus' feet. Thus the Lord exalts the lowly, and lifts them up into a knowledge of Christ, into an experimental acquaintance with the treasures of his atoning blood and justifying righteousness. They are thus made to sit together with Christ in heavenly places, and they love him as the only salvation for their needy guilty souls.

4. But we find the living family of God set forth also under the character of the hungry, whom he feedeth with good things. Let us see what they are hungering after. Is it pleasure, honour, promotion, respectability? Oh, no; these toys and baubles cannot satisfy the spiritual hunger of a living soul. They cannot hunger

after that on which they cannot feed. They hunger, then, after righteousness, as the Lord said—"Blessed are ye that hunger and thirst after righteousness." They hunger after God himself in his blessed manifestations—"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." Ps 42:1 They hunger after the bread of life which came down from heaven, that a man should eat thereof and not die. They hunger after Christ and his manifestations of himself. Christ, in the letter of the word, cannot satisfy their keen appetite. They must feed upon him internally, or their famine still continues. Hunger implies desire accompanied with pain, an appetite after food which must be gratified or the body perishes, and this is, appetite after suitable food. To these hungry famishing souls, to have Christ in the letter is like a starving beggar standing outside a shop where there are plenty of provisions, and not to have a farthing to buy them with. What is Christ in the letter? Will a sight of Christ in the Word of God remove the burden of guilt, bring peace into the soul, purge the conscience, subdue the power of sin? Will the mere doctrine of Christ draw up the affections to him, cast out the world, dethrone self, or purify the heart? Alas! we say, by painful experience, not one jot, not one jot. But the presence of Christ in the soul can at once do all these things. Thus a hungry famishing soul can only be pacified by Christ coming into his heart, as the hope of glory.

I spoke of a standard in the beginning of this discourse with two ends to it,—the one dipping down into the felt misery, ruin, and helplessness, that the awakened soul groans under; the other reaching up to the discoveries of mercy and love. Cannot you come in at one end, if you cannot reach the other? What are you hungering after? Can anything satisfy your soul but a revealed Christ, and are you not at times earnestly panting after the visitations of his blessed presence? Are you not longing after the dew drops of God's favour in your soul, to fill you with that peace which passeth understanding? What are all your sighs, cries, groans, tears, and midnight wrestlings, but after the coming down into your soul of

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a loving Jesus; and do you not cast aside all consolations but those which spring from him? Then you are one of the hungry whom the Lord will feed with good things. A child of God cannot do with counterfeit food, and his appetite soon teaches him to see through all deceptions.

But what are some of “the good things” that the Lord feeds the hungry foul with? Whatever he feeds them with must be good, as coming from the source and fountain of all good.

Pardon of sin is one of these good and perfect gifts. Guilt makes the soul hunger after pardon, and fits the conscience for the reception of it. A filthy conscience and atoning blood sweetly suit one another, just as a starving body and a loaf of bread are well met. None of God’s children can die until fed with this good thing, for “he pardons all those whom he reserves.” But he does not say how much, or how long they shall hunger after it before they are fed.

A drop of God’s love is another good thing that he feeds, sooner or later, all his hungry children with. But what a previous longing, panting desire, what a stretching forth of the hands, what a reaching forth of every breath of the soul after it! “Oh,” says the soul, “were it only a drop! I want no more. One drop! one drop!” And what anxious listening after the voice that shall inwardly whisper it! what sinking down into the old spot of condemnation, doubt, and fear, when denied the eagerly sought favour!

Communion with God is another good thing that he feeds the hungry soul with. What is all prayer, falling down upon one’s knees, and offering words to the Most High, where the heart is not engaged in the work? This will satisfy Pharisees and hypocrites. But living children are hungering after soul communion; to feel their whole heart and affections drawn upwards to God; to be enabled and privileged to drink at the fountain head; to feel able to walk with God and talk with God, as though they and he were alone in one solemn sacred spot, and there was no other believer on the face of the earth.

Deliverance from temptation is another good thing that the Lord feeds his hungry people with. Oh, the power of temptation over a man! Oh, his weakness and helplessness against it! Oh, the struggles, groans, sighs, prayers, and tears to be delivered from it! Oh, the importunate, almost angry, petitions to be saved from its power and presence! None but tempted souls know these conflicts. When the Lord delivers the godly out of these temptations it is a good thing; for none but he can break the hurtful snare, and let the poor prisoner free.

A good hope through grace that we belong to Jesus is a good thing that the hungry soul is sometimes fed with. When the Lord gives the tempest-tost soul to feel that there is for it a peaceful haven and quiet dwelling place after all the storms of life, and drops down some foretaste of it, and enables the soul to cast anchor within the veil, until that harbour is entered, that is indeed a good thing.

Time will not suffer me to enumerate all the good things that the hungry are fed with, as they include all the spiritual blessings that God hath blessed the Church with in Christ.

But, my friends, in order to get at any or all of these good things a certain path must be travelled in. There is no climbing over or creeping under the strait gate and the narrow way. It is a path which the vulture's eye hath not seen, contrary to flesh and blood, opposed to human reason, and mortifying to all the pride of man. None are in the path of life but those that are, more or less, lowly, teachable, sincere, simple, hungering and thirsting, tender hearted, and feeling. Oh, it is a good thing, when inwardly, in the depth of soul extremity, in poverty and nakedness, we can feel and find something stirring in our hearts, which has been breathed there out of the eternal fountain of life and love. To have something brought into our heart that wears a spiritual stamp, and carries God's own impress upon it.

But he that will get at these things must get at them in God's way. And, therefore, the soul that is anxious after these blessings, so great, so unspeakable, speaks thus—"My flesh shrinks from

the trials, but my spirit wants the blessings. Has God joined them together? let me not seek to put them asunder. Let me be made willing to walk in a painful path, not one strewn with flowers, but of the Lord's own choosing. Though my flesh may rebel, make me, O Lord, willing to be nothing. Let me only be favoured with thy smiles, and not be one of the rich whom thou sendest empty away."

### 13 THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT (*Hebrews 4:12*)

A Discourse at Trinity Chapel, Alfred Street, Leicester.  
Delivered on Lord's Day Afternoon,

*December 27, 1840*

*"For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Hebrews 4:12*

If we look at this passage in connexion with the context, there appears at first sight some ambiguity. What are we to understand by the expression "the Word of God?" If we read the verse that immediately follows the text, "the Word of God" seems to be a person. "Neither is there any creature which is not manifest in his sight but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." The pronoun "his," and the words, "the eyes of him with whom we have to do" clearly point out a person; and yet no person has been before mentioned but "the Word of God." But again, if we look to the effects ascribed to the Word of God in the text, they seem more applicable to a thing than a person. So that we may say that there appears at first considerable doubt whether by "the Word of God" we are to understand the Incarnate Word, the second Person of the glorious Trinity, of whom John speaks in the beginning of his gospel, as "with God" and as "God;" or whether we are to understand the written Word, that is, the Scriptures of truth, the lively oracles handed down to us from our fathers.

Now, I conceive that this very apparent ambiguity has a great beauty in it, and throws much light on the meaning of the text. Much is said in our day about the Scriptures, and wonderful effects are ascribed to them. By their instrumentality and universal diffusion, it is expected by many that the whole world will be gradually converted. But whilst so much is said in praise of the written Word, little is said in praise of the power of the Incarnate Word, and men talk and preach as though the Scriptures possessed in themselves some inherent power to regenerate the nations. Now the written Word has no power whatever but in the hands of the Incarnate Word; no, no more power than a sword has to leap out of the scabbard and slay a man, independent of the arm that wields it; no, no more power than a law passed by Parliament has to execute itself, or a medicine to administer itself. Thus I look upon this very ambiguity, if ambiguity it be, as full of beauty. Paul, speaking of the effects of the written Word, and how it acts as a two-edged sword, immediately glances off to the Incarnate Word, in whose hands it is alone effectual; just as a man describing the edge and temper of a Damascus blade, would turn from the sword to the swordsman, from the dead weapon to the living hand, without whose skill and strength its sharpness were of no avail. So that if we look at the words of the text they describe the written Word as producing certain powerful effects; but only so when wielded by the Lord of Hosts, the King of armies, the Word of the living God, who rides forth, girt with his sword upon his thigh, conquering and to conquer. And that this is the true meaning of the passage is clear from Re 1:16, where, in the description of the Son of God, as seen in Patmos by John, we read that "out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword;" implying that the written Word is then only a two-edged sword, when it comes out of the mouth of the Incarnate Word into the hearts of God's people.

Bear in mind, then, that all the effects which in opening up the text I shall ascribe to the written Word, are to be ascribed to it wholly and solely as an efficacious instrument in the hands, and

out of the mouth of him, who is Lord and King in Zion.

“For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Now, if you and I have ever felt anything of the power of God’s truth in our souls we shall be able, if the Lord shines upon his own work, to trace out in our own experience some of those effects, which the Holy Ghost here ascribes to the written Word in the hands of the Incarnate Word.

1. The first word, then, that demands our attention is the expression, “quick.” “The Word of God is quick.” But before we go into the meaning of this expression, we are stopped at the very threshold with this question—Does the written Word of God, of which the text speaks, mean the very letter, the exact text of Scripture as it stands in our Bibles? In other words, is it the letter of Scripture, or the substance of Scripture, that is a two-edged sword? and must a man feel the direct application to his conscience of the exact words of the Bible, or is the substance and meaning of the words sufficient? I believe, for my own part, that however sweet and beautiful the exact words of Scripture are, yet that the substance of them is sufficient to do God’s work in the soul. What does the Lord say? “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” It is the truth, then, contained in the Scripture that produces the effect, and we may have the substance of the truth, without having the very exact letter of truth. I grant that it is more clear and satisfactory when we have the very words of Scripture; but I believe we have many spiritual feelings, the first entrance and subsequent maintenance of which in the soul it would be somewhat difficult to trace up to the application of exact passages of Scripture, and yet they are spiritual feelings, and have been produced by the power of the Holy Ghost working in and through the Scriptures, for we know and experience nothing aright which is not in, or out of, the Scriptures. For instance, we carry about with us more or less of a

sense of God's heart-searching eye, and of his unblemished purity, and hatred of sin. Whence arise our feelings of guilt and trouble under the burden of sin, but from some such consciousness in the secret chambers of our heart? But if we were very strictly and closely questioned what were the precise Scriptures in the exact letter, chapter and verse, by the direct application of which these feelings were produced, we might, some of us at least, be much puzzled to put our finger on the very passages. And yet how should we know that God was the searcher of our hearts, and hated sin with perfect hatred, if he had not told us so first in his Word, and then told us so out of the Word in our consciences? But it is the truth, not the letter of the text,—”I the Lord search the heart and try the reins,” “I the Lord hate evil”—that has produced that inward consciousness; and I, for my part, would sooner have the spiritual feeling produced in my heart by the substance of truth, than a doctrinal knowledge produced in my head by the letter of truth. The light cast into the heart from the word of truth is like a ray of light reflected from a mirror; there is no light in the mirror itself, but it casts upon that object to which it is directed a ray from the sun. So the Word of God has no light in itself, but only reflects that light which the Sun of righteousness communicates to it. Now, suppose a man were to take a number of small pieces of looking glass, and so adjust them that they each should reflect their separate rays on one object, and meet in one focus; then there would be an assemblage of various rays, each intermingling its light, and it would be difficult to say from which piece of the looking-glass all the light came. Thus one text speaks of God's heart-searching presence, another of his infinite purity, another of his hatred of sin, another of his inflexible justice, and so on. All these detached texts, when shone upon by the Divine Spirit's light, and brought to bear in one focus on a sinner's conscience, cast a mingled light within, in which he sees light, and he falls under the convictions which this light produces. But how can he turn to a text, and say, “This passage showed me God's presence, and

that verse convinced me of God's purity," and so on, when he is too much occupied with the feelings themselves to analyze them rigidly, much less to examine how they were produced? Paul fell to the ground under the light which struck him down on his way to Damascus, and I dare say did not stop to examine whether it came north, south, east, or west.

I speak this because I know that many of God's people are often exercised because conviction or consolation has come into their minds without the exact letter of Scripture, or even without the Scripture itself. A word or sentence from the pulpit not in the language of Scripture, or a line from a hymn, or a passage in the writings of a good man, has afforded relief; but this not coming in the exact words of Scripture, Satan and unbelief have pulled at it till they have pulled away all its consolation. Well, but if it be Scriptural, if it be in strict accordance with Scripture, if it be contained in other parts of God's Word, why need we care because it did not come in the very letter of Scripture? We want power, not word; spirit, not letter; substance, not shadow; truth, not letters and syllables; wine, not the wine glass; unction, not the oil flask. If we have the spirit and substance of Scripture, we may let the letter and form go: and though I acknowledge, to have both is more sweet, abiding, and convincing, as coming in a more direct channel, yet if I can have but one, I would sooner have the feeling without the word, than the word without the feeling.

Now, the first thing that is said in the text of "the Word of God" that is, as I understand it, the truth of God in the hands of the Spirit, is that it is "quick." What is meant by this expression? That it moves with swiftness and velocity? It is certainly said of God's Word Ps 147:15 that "it runneth very swiftly;" but that is not the meaning of the word "quick" in the text. It there means "living," and corresponds with the expression Ac 7:38 "lively or living oracles." It is an old English word signifying "living;" as in the expression, "who shall judge the quick and the dead" 2Ti 4:1—that is, the living and the dead. So we read of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram

“going down quick that is, alive into the pit.” Nu 16:30 So the Lord is said to have “quickeneth that is, made spiritually alive those who were previously dead in trespasses and sins.” Eph 2:1 The word “quick,” then, means not moving with velocity, but living, or rather communicating life, and thus distinguished from the dead letter. Truth, as it stands in the naked Word of God, is lifeless and dead; and as such, has no power to communicate what it has not in itself, that is, life and power, to the hearts of God’s people. It stands there in so many letters and syllables, as lifeless as the types by which they were printed. But when the Incarnate Word takes of the written Word, and speaks it home into the heart and conscience of a vessel of mercy, whether in letter or substance, then he endues it with Divine life, and it enters into the soul, communicating to it a life that can never die. As James speaks Jas 1:18—“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.” And so Peter—“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.” 1Pe 1:23 Eternal realities are brought into the soul, fixed and fastened by an Almighty hand. The conscience is made alive in the fear of God; and the soul is raised up from a death in sin, or a death in profession, to a life heavenly, new, and supernatural.

But now we come to the experience of this life. How do we know that it has been communicated? How, I might ask, do we know that we are naturally alive? Why, we perform certain actions that can only be performed by living persons. I eat, I drink, I breathe, I talk, I walk, I think, I feel. All these are living actions, and I have besides an inward consciousness of possessing life. So spiritually if there is life, there will be the movements and stirrings, the breathings and actings, that are peculiar to that life.

Let us look a little back, then. Can we find a beginning to our religion? And if so, when and what was that beginning? A good clear beginning is a blessed evidence, when the Lord shines upon it, to help us through many a dark day; and I believe that a good beginning usually goes on to a good middle, and terminates

in a good ending. But all God's family cannot find this good beginning,—at least not such as is good in their eyes; for their good beginning is a striking beginning, and God does not give to all his children this striking beginning. We must come, then, to fruits and effects. If the fruit is good, the tree must be good; if the effect is spiritual, then must the cause be spiritual; and if there is supernatural life in the soul, then there must have been a beginning in that supernatural life. What I want is to put my hand on that life, and touch the secret strings and chords of Divine feeling in your conscience, that when I strike the keys, as a player on an instrument, there may be a sound in your soul, an echo in your heart, that shall thrill and vibrate under the touch.

Now, what is the first fruit and effect of Divine life? Is it not the fear of God in a tender conscience; according to those words, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?" Now, what fear is this, filial or slavish? for we read 1Jo 4:18 that "perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment." But surely one grace of the Spirit cannot cast out another grace; and, therefore, the fear cast out by perfect love is not the filial fear that is the beginning of wisdom, but the slavish fear which is a member of the old man. But the fear which is a grace of the Spirit is a new covenant blessing, and put into the heart by the Father of mercies; according to those words, "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Jer 32:40 But before perfect love casteth out slavish fear, both kinds of fear work in the hearts of God's quickened family; and it is sometimes very hard in soul experience, to find out the difference between them. We see this slavish fear working in Peter's mind, when, struck with the miraculous draught of fishes, "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Lu 5:8 Here the very same fear worked in Peter's mind which Job speaks of as in the mind of the reprobate, "who say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not a knowledge of thy ways." Filial fear does not drive

the soul from God, but carries it up in solemn reverence to God. Therefore we read that “in the fear of the Lord is strong confidence” Pr 14:26; and that it is “a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.” So we read of the Churches “walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” Ac 9:31 Then what is the cause of slavish fear? The law of God, as a ministration of death and condemnation and gendering to bondage, produces this slavish fear, which works in the carnal mind, until cast out by the Spirit of adoption and perfect love. Filial fear will be manifested by a holy reverence of God, by a trembling at his word, by a desire not to offend him, by solemn feelings of his presence, by a hatred of hypocrisy and deceit, and by honouring him in our inmost thoughts. But, say you, “How am I to distinguish between these two fears? I feel myself a guilty, filthy wretch, an unclean monster of iniquity, and I am afraid I shall be cast into hell, and be damned for ever. Is this filial or slavish fear?” Now, let me ask you, how does this fear work? Does it work by faith? Does it bring you to God, or drive you from God? Does it work in sighs, cries, groans, desires, pantings after God, and hungerings and thirstings after Christ or does it work in a kind of reckless despair that never keeps you from sin? If it works in the latter way, then it is slavish fear which hath torment. But these two kinds of fear are, after all, so blended, that we can hardly distinguish them; but when the Lord, after a time, brings Christ near, and a sense of his mercy is tasted, then slavish fear slinks back, and filial fear goes forward; slavish fear retires into the depth of the carnal mind, and filial fear goes upward with faith, hope, and love, into the presence of God.

Thus when the Lord by his Spirit condescends to visit the soul, it is like the magnet which approaches the iron filings on a table; every grace of the soul leaps forward to meet him—faith, hope, love, humility, filial fear. But this same heavenly magnet repels slavish fear, because, being of the old nature, it can have no union or affinity with the Lord. If ever you have had your affections drawn forth to Jesus, faith has received him, hope anchored in him, love

embraced him, and fear revered him. You did not say, "Depart," but, "Come near," you did not cry, "Torment me not," but "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." And I firmly believe that this filial fear must exist, and does exist, before there is the spirit of adoption to cry "Abba, Father," as a child may fear his father, before he can call him "father," or know him as his father; but when the Spirit of adoption comes, it will be more fully known as filial fear, and will be fed by and work with the spirit of adoption. Now, if you have anything of this filial fear, the Word of God has been made life to your soul.

Again; wherever the life of God is in the soul, there will be faith. Now, the province of faith is in the depths of the heart. There is all "the work of faith with power." For faith is "the substance," that is, the realisation, of "things hoped for;" and where can the truths of God be realised and turned into substance but in the heart? and it is likewise "the evidence of things not seen," that is, by the natural eye; and therefore this evidence must be a witness within to the truths without. Again, it is said, "to purify the heart," and therefore must be in the heart that it purifies. Faith then realizes and bears testimony to those truths which the Holy Spirit takes out of the Word of God, that vast magazine and storehouse of truth, and turns them into food and substance. Faith, therefore, can never outstep the Spirit's inward teaching. The moment that faith sails abroad into the letter of the Word, and steps beyond or aside from the Spirit's inward teachings, it becomes presumption. Thousands of dead professors are here, whose faith stands not in the power of God, but in the wisdom of man. They stand in presumption from first to last, beginning, middle, and end; and all their religion, so called, is one enormous act of presumption. Aye, and the child of God, too, may be, and I believe often is, entangled in a snare, by being thrust beyond his own experience into a presumptuous faith. But say you, "Can a child of God be entangled in presumption?" Not so as to damn him, not so as to reign and rule in him, but certainly so as to entangle and cast him down. Let us hear the prayer

of a child of God. "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." Ps 19:13 Had David no fear of presumption when he poured forth this cry? Surely he had felt its secret workings, and had groaned under it as the great transgression. And I believe, from what I have known and felt of the matter, that there are two classes of sins which cut deepest into a living conscience—the base lusts of the flesh as carnal sins, and presumption and hypocrisy as spiritual sins. There is no sin more rife among the Calvinistic Churches, than that of presumption; and it is the besetting sin of Calvinists, as self-righteousness is the besetting sin of Arminians. But whenever a child of God gets upon this ground, he has an internal conviction that he is on trespass, that he is treading in slippery places, and he fears lest an earthquake should open under his feet. He therefore has to fall back upon the blessed Spirit's teachings, and has no more religion than he feels his Divine operations. Faith, therefore, being thus hemmed and shut in, walks only as the Spirit leads, and feeds only on what the Spirit gives. As the Spirit unlocks the storehouse of God's Word, faith receives the provision as it is dealt out. When the Spirit opens a promise, faith advances; when he applies a rebuke, faith draws back; when he brings home a precept, faith bows its neck and puts on the yoke; and when he makes Christ known, faith leaps into the Saviour's arms. Thus faith and fear work together in every quickened soul, and he that knows nothing experimentally of these things is destitute of the life of God. I am not setting up here a standard six feet high, and cutting off everybody's head who cannot reach it, but endeavouring to put my hand into your conscience, that I may touch the secret springs of life in your soul. What know you of a spring of living water within, such as the Lord spoke of to the woman of Samaria? "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" not a rain-water tank, not a dead pool of doctrinal knowledge, always stagnant and often stinking, not a

cistern of human wisdom, not a reservoir of creature ability, but a spring of living water, ebbing and flowing, sometimes out of sight, sometimes running over, but always fresh, and more or less as the Spirit secretly calls, "Spring up, O well" bubbling and gushing forth in living actings towards a living God. He that has felt anything of this springing well, has experienced that the Word of God is "quick," he having been quickened by it into the inward life of God. The next thing said of the Word of God in the hands of the Incarnate Word, is that it is powerful. "The word of God is quick and powerful." By "powerful" is here meant its efficacious work in the heart and conscience of the elect. "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power;" and it is through the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit, that this kingdom is set up in the soul. All God's people are agreed on this point, that they have no more religion than they have inward power. And all the living family are sighing, each according to his measure and season, after the manifestation of this Divine power in their souls. Those that are under the law, and toiling under heavy burdens, are sighing after relief, and for that relief to come in Divine power—power that shall cast all their sins into the depth of the sea. Those who, having tasted that the Lord is gracious, have lost their first love, are at times breathing out their inmost desire after power to revive their souls. Those who are beset with powerful temptations, and struggling, often ineffectually, with base lusts, are crying after power to deliver their feet from the fowler's snares. Those who are hard, need power to soften them; those who are doubting and fearing, need power to give them faith; the backsliding need power to return, and the sinking need power to swim. By power I understand something solid, real, substantial, heavenly, supernatural. How do we measure the capabilities of a steam engine? We say that it has so many horsepower. But who in his senses would construct a steam-engine of two hundred horse power to break sticks, and pick up straws? We measure power by its effects. We proportion the one to the other. Now, the Holy Ghost, the God of all power and might, would not put forth his

mighty and efficacious hand to break sticks and pick up straws in the soul. No. His work is worthy of a God; a “work of faith with power,” because springing from a God of power. The God of Israel is not a Baal that is sleeping and needs to be awakened, or gone a journey and therefore too far off to come when needed, but “a very present help in time of trouble.” By this secret power, false hopes, are swept away, rotten props removed, creature righteousness brought to an end, and the soul helped and enabled to lean upon the Lord. This power is not noise and rant—if I speak loudly now, it is only that I may be heard—but the still small voice of Jesus in the soul. The people of God want no outward voice though they often are so earnest after the blessing, that they look and listen with almost suppressed breath, as I have sometimes done, hoping and expecting some voice to sound behind, or around them, but they are seeking after that secret voice of atoning blood in their conscience, that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. The inward whisper of heavenly love sounding in their soul—not the earthquake of terror, not the fire of Divine wrath, but the still small voice of pardon and peace—makes them bow themselves before the Lord, and wrap their faces in their mantle. The Queen of England need not shout aloud in her palace, to give her commands effect. Where the word of a king is, there is power, whether from an earthly monarch or from the King of Zion. We want, therefore, no noise, bustle, and excitement, no raving and ranting about religion; but we want inward feeling, the very kingdom of God set up in the heart.

3. But we come now to another distinguishing mark and test of the power of God’s Word when divinely applied. It is said in its effects and operations to be “sharper than any two-edged sword.” Here it is not only compared to a sword, but is said to exceed any two-edged sword in its sharpness, and piercing, penetrating effects. Wherein consists this sharpness? Why, in this; that the sharpest blade that human artificer ever forged, however fine its temper, polished its surface, or keen its edge, never could do more than

divide asunder soul and body. A natural sword can never produce anything greater or higher than natural effects. But “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow.” But how does this two-edged sword divide asunder soul and spirit? I believe in this way. A natural man has but two things, a body and a soul; but a spiritual man has three things the third being superadded in regeneration, body, soul, and spirit. Therefore the Apostle says, “I pray God, your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1Th 5:23 Now, in natural men who have a natural faith, and hope, and love, and so on, where is the seat of this natural religion? Surely not in the body, which is but a lump of flesh, sinews, blood, and bones. The seat of their natural religion, then, must be in their soul; for that alone can think and feel. The word translated, “natural,” in 1Co 2:14 “the natural man,” means literally “the soul man,” or rather “the man possessed of a soul” and no more, in contradistinction to “the spiritual man,” who has “a spirit,” or a spiritual nature; according to those words, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit” Ro 8:16—”The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” So the same word is used Jas 3:15. “This wisdom is not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish;” where the word “sensual” literally means “belonging to the soul,” as opposed to that which belongs to the spirit. I look upon “the soul,” then, in this passage, and in others where it is distinguished from the spirit for sometimes it is used synonymously with it, to signify the seat of natural religion. Now, as the elect have two kinds of religion in them, natural and supernatural, fleshly and spiritual, the religion of the first Adam in their natural conscience, and the religion of the second Adam, as a quickening Spirit, in their natural conscience, a separation, a dividing asunder must needs be made between the precious and the vile religion that is in them. And this nothing can do but the two-edged sword of the Spirit, which with its piercing point and double edge, penetrates between these two religions, letting

out the life-blood of natural faith, natural hope, natural love, and natural prayer, and rends them asunder from the work and witness of the Holy Ghost in the man. All false hopes, lying refuges, dim expectations of general mercy, self-applause and vainglory are maimed and wounded, as this two-edged sword enters. So nicely guided is this keen blade, that it never touches or wounds the life of the spirit, though it makes sad work with the flesh. But in soul-feeling this piercing sword cuts away all our religion. Were you ever here? Has this work been done in you? And if so, when and where? Did you ever lose all your religion, and stand before God without an atom, in soul feeling? If not, depend upon it the two-edged sword has never yet entered into you to divide asunder soul and spirit. Were you ever in those situations and trying hours, when natural faith, hope, and love, all gave up the ghost, cut asunder by the piercing sword of God's Word, as holding forth salvation only to the elect, and to them only as possessing a divine supernatural work in their consciences? The man that was never cut off by the Word of God, was never brought in by the Word of God; and he that was never wounded by the truth, has never been healed by the truth. "But how cruel and unkind," say some, "to cut and wound the soul!" Cruel and unkind! Is the gardener cruel and unkind to the tree, when he sees the ivy clasping and strangling it in its embrace, pulls out his knife, and cuts it to the ground? I believe in my conscience, that there are many in this town so strangled and clasped by the ivy of false religion, so grappled by forms and ceremonies and doctrines and duties, that there is scarcely anything of life visible in them, but a few green leaves by way of tuft at the very top of the stem, which the ivy has not yet reached. But all this green and bushy religion for you know how thick and bushy this evergreen ivy is with all its slender stem must be cut away, and the tree left naked and bare to keep it from being strangled.

And what is a minister worth, who never uses this two-edged sword, and never divides and separates between fleshly and

spiritual religion? Can he be “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,” who knows nothing of this work in his own soul, and never in his ministry divides asunder soul and spirit? He cannot faithfully preach the Word of God, if the two-edged sword be not in his hand.

4. But this two-edged sword is said also to divide asunder “joints,” as well as soul and spirit. What are joints naturally? Why, certain hinges of the body, pivots and centres of motion, without which a man would be as motionless as a log of wood. By joints I move my arm to take food, by joints I move my limbs to walk. I understand, therefore, by “joints” spiritually what are usually called “motives.” Now all that we do and say springs from motives; and as we possess two natures, so our motives will be some spiritual, and others carnal. These secret motives man cannot see. As our natural joints are concealed and buried in our body, so are our spiritual joints—the secret motives and workings of our minds—concealed from the view of others; aye, and from our own, until the two-edged sword of the Spirit pierces and divides them asunder. Oh! what a discovery is made of crooked, selfish, base, filthy, hypocritical motives, when these inward joints are riven asunder, and our carnal motives are laid naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do! Oh! what searchings of heart as to the root and ground, the reality and spirituality of our religion! “Did I begin with God, or did God begin with me? Did I take up religion, or did religion lay hold of me? What were my motives for making a profession? Were they natural or spiritual? Was there any secret under-hand rotten motive? Was it natural fear or filial fear; fleshly convictions or spiritual convictions; the work of God or the work of the devil? Is my faith feigned or genuine; my hope an anchor within the veil, or a spider’s web; my love to Christ and his people natural or spiritual?” The two-edged sword of the Spirit pierces even to the dividing asunder of these motives, and rends them apart so that they shall not cleave together. What know you of this solemn soul examination, with sighs and cries to

have your heart right before God, and an inward condemnation of all your fleshly motives? For remember, that a child of God is full of crooked motives, but in his right mind he allows them not, and would fain have none but spiritual motives alive within him.

I should like to know what motives have brought you here this afternoon, and how many of them are spiritual. Some of you are perhaps come as spies, to watch something from my lips, lest I drop a word to disparage any other minister, that you may run home with it, and make out of it a wonderful tale. I am not going to gratify you, as I did not come here for that purpose, but to preach the truth, as far as I am acquainted with it. But the work and business of a man of truth is to run his sword right up into motives and lay them naked and open before the eyes of an enlightened conscience.

5. But we read of this two-edged sword piercing also to “the marrow.” What is spiritually meant by marrow? By the spinal marrow all feeling is communicated from the brain to every part of the body. From it, as it passes down the spinal column of the back, nerves are continually given off, which communicate what is called nervous energy and feeling to every muscle, limb, and organ, internal and external. This I understand the marrow to signify “feeling;” and as the two-edged sword divides asunder soul and spirit, and rends apart the joints—natural and spiritual motives—so it pierces and separates between natural and spiritual feelings.

And here is the grand deceit and awful delusion of natural religion, that it has feeling as much connected with it naturally, as spiritual religion has feeling connected with it spiritually. Feeling, therefore, in itself is no test of true religion, as there are false feelings as well as true feelings.

I know this is tender ground, but I equally know that it is true ground. Had Esau no feeling, nor Herod, nor Felix, nor Judas Iscariot? Aye, and deep feelings too. And so a child of God may have what many think religious feelings, which are not spiritual

feelings. He may have tears, and sighs, and burdens, and griefs, and sorrows, and these not produced in his soul by, nor flowing from, Divine operations. He may be melted naturally and cheered naturally, mourn naturally and rejoice naturally; and think himself all the time that his feelings are spiritual. Now, the two-edged sword of the Spirit, opening up the secrets of his heart, divides asunder that which is natural and spiritual; and thus, when He produces heavenly feeling, there accompanies it a Divine evidence of its birth and origin. There is a depth, and a power, and a sincerity, and a reality, and a solemn feeling of God's presence, and a drawing upwards of the soul, which all stamp spiritual feelings as divine and heavenly.

But a man who has never had light shine in his conscience, to see and feel the difference between natural and spiritual feelings, can never have had the two-edged sword in his marrow, and is as much exposed to Satan's delusions as an angel of light. Old nature has its crocodile tears, as well as its joys of crackling thorns. Ec 7:6 But there is one test that marks them both as of the earth earthy, and that is, that they centre in self, and feed self-righteousness at the very moment that they are at work, whereas all spiritual feelings, whether of sorrow or joy, mount upward to the source whence they came down.

6. But to draw to a close; the last effect mentioned in the text of the Word of God, when spiritually applied, is, that it is "a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." These words seem to show that the joints and marrow have been correctly explained, as the apostle drops the metaphor, and uses once more plain language. Now these four things—motives, feelings, thoughts, and intents—may be, and indeed are, all partly natural and partly spiritual. As there are natural motives and natural feelings, so there are natural thoughts and natural intents; and so likewise there are spiritual thoughts and intents, as well as spiritual motives and feelings. Now, the word of God in the soul, as the light of life, the candle of the Lord searching its inward parts, discerns, that is, finds out the

difference between natural and spiritual thoughts, and natural and spiritual intents. That is, so far as they wear a religious garb. And it passes an unsparing sentence of condemnation on all religious thoughts and intents that are not spiritual thoughts and intents.

For instance, some such flaming sentence as this is written on the conscience, “The flesh profiteth nothing,” “That which is born of the flesh is flesh,” “Without me ye can do nothing,” “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin;” the substance of these revealed truths works in the soul, and as each fleshly thought and intent comes forward it is seized, examined, tried, and condemned. No thoughts are considered good but what God gives, and no intents are deemed right that the Spirit does not prompt; and thus all a man’s religion is inwardly weighed up and stamped as it passes through his heart.

And now, my friends, what know you and I of this religion? Depend upon it, if the Word of God has ever entered our heart, it has produced, more or less, some of these effects. And it is to be feared, if you never knew anything of these searching separating operations of the Spirit in your conscience, you are dead in sin, or dead in a profession. It has been my endeavour this afternoon to take forth the precious from the vile; and it is my desire that God may be glorified and his people profited; that his enemies may be covered with shame, but upon himself his crown flourish.

#### **14 THE SACRIFICE BOUND TO THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR** (*Psalm 118:27*)

Preached , at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London  
on Lord’s Day Evening,  
*June 6th, 1841*

*“God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.”*

*Psalm 118:27*

It is very sweet and blessed to trace in the Old Testament saints the same experience which God the Holy Ghost works in

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the hearts and consciences of the saints now; and I believe there is no one gracious feeling, whether it be in the depth of spiritual distress, or whether it be in the height of spiritual enjoyment, which we cannot find, if the Lord is pleased to give us light to see it, traced out in the experience of the Old Testament believers. In fact, it cannot be otherwise. There is but one God and Father of all; there is but one Lord, one faith, one Spirit; there is but one Teacher of the Church of God; and therefore all the saints in all ages have been taught the same lessons, and instructed by the blessed Spirit in the same divine mysteries. Now there seems to be one feature which is common to every saint in whatever stage of spiritual experience he may happen to be, and that is an absolute renunciation of self, and an absolute dependence upon the Lord to work in him to will and to do of His good pleasure. Let men talk about the wisdom of the creature, or boast of human righteousness, or human merit, or any other such vain figment, you will never find any of the Bible saints breathing forth any other language than a complete renunciation of the creature in all its bearings, and a simple hanging and dependence upon the Lord of life and glory to manifest Himself to them, to bless them, to teach them, and to lead them into all truth. Thus the experience of the saints stamps the lie upon the whole fiction of human merit, creature wisdom, and fleshly righteousness. Nor do I believe that any spiritual man ever came before a holy God to pour out the desires and breathings of his soul before Him, and to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to Him through Jesus Christ, who came in any other frame than a complete renunciation of creature righteousness, wisdom, and strength, and a simple, sincere hanging and dependence upon God “to work in him that which is well-pleasing in His sight.” “God is the Lord, which hath showed us light; bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.”

The text sets forth two apparently unconnected things—the showing of the light and the binding of the sacrifice. What these are, and how they are connected, we shall endeavour, with God’s

I. The Psalmist was clearly possessed of light, for he says, "God is the Lord, which hath showed us light." He was evidently, then, possessed of light; and this light was in him as "the light of life." This light had shone into his heart; the rays and beams of divine truth had penetrated into his conscience. He carried about with him a light which had come from God; in this light he saw light, and in this light he discerned everything which the light manifested. Thus by this internal light he knew what was good and what was evil, what was sweet and what was bitter, what was true and what was false, what was spiritual and what was natural. He did not say, "This light came from creature exertion, this light was the product of my own wisdom, this light was nature transmuted by some action of my own will, and thus gradually rose into existence from long and assiduous cultivation." But he ascribes the whole of that light which he possessed unto God the Lord, as the sole author and the only giver of it. Now, if God the Lord has ever showed you and me the same light which He showed His servant of old, we carry about with us more or less of a solemn conviction that we have received this light from Him. There will, indeed, be many clouds of darkness to cover it; there will often be doubts and fears, hovering like mists and fogs over our souls, whether the light which we have received be from God or not. But in solemn moments when the Lord is pleased a little to revive His work; at times and seasons when He condescends to draw forth the affections of our hearts unto Himself, to bring us into His presence, to hide us in some measure in the hollow of His hand, and give us access unto Himself—at such moments and seasons we carry about with us, in spite of all our unbelief, in spite of all the suggestions of the enemy, in spite of all doubts, fears, and suspicions that rise from the depths of the carnal mind, in spite of all these counter-workings and underminings we carry about with us at these times a solemn conviction that we have light, and that this light we have received from God. And why so? Because we can

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look back to a time when we walked in no such light, when we felt no such light, when everything spiritual and heavenly was dark to us, and we were dark to them.

If God the Lord, then, hath showed us light, He hath showed us light both with respect to Himself and with respect to ourselves. He hath showed us with respect to Himself who He is; He has stamped something of Himself upon our consciences; He has brought some testimony concerning Himself into our hearts; He has discovered something of His glorious character to our souls; and brought us, under the operations of the Holy Ghost, into His presence, there to receive communications of life out of Christ's inexhaustible fulness. Thus in this light we see and feel that we have to do with a heart-searching God; in this light we see and feel that we have to do with a sin-hating God; in this light we see and feel that we have to do with a God who will not be mocked nor trifled with; in this light, as He is pleased to reveal it to us, we see and feel that every secret of our heart, every working of our mind is open before Him; and in this light, so far as He is pleased to manifest it, we see what we are in His holy and pure eyes—a mass of sin, filth, and corruption, without help, without strength, without wisdom, without righteousness, without creature comeliness, without anything of which we can say that it is spiritually good.

Again, God the Lord showing us light hath showed us more or less of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. He has not only showed us what we are by nature, but He has in a measure condescended to show us what we are by grace; not merely brought into our hearts some acquaintance with Himself as a God of perfect justice, but He has also brought, more or less, into our souls some acquaintance with Him as a God of mercy; and has thus brought us in some solemn measure to know Him, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent; and thus to have the springing up of spiritual life more or less, each according to his measure, in our souls.

II. But if we look at the text, "God is the Lord, which hath

showed us light," it seems to be connected with the latter clause, "Bind the sacrifice." There is a connection betwixt the two clauses of this text. "God is the Lord, which hath showed us light." He hath. And He hath showed us light in this way—that there is a binding of the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. This is the chief reason for which the light is given, the main object on which the light is cast, the hidden mystery which the light discovers. As Moses turned aside to see the great sight of a bush burning and not consumed; as Abraham on Mount Moriah lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a ram caught in a thicket by his horns, so the great object, to see which light is shown, is the sacrifice bound with cords to the horns of the altar. What sacrifice is this which is bound to the horns of the altar? This sacrifice, primarily, no doubt, signifies the Lord Jesus Christ, who offered Himself as a propitiation for the sins of His people; who according to eternal decree and covenant engagements, yielded up Himself as a spotless sacrifice, that, by the offering of Himself once upon the cross, He might for ever put away the sins of the elect. Now this sacrifice is said in the text to be "bound unto the horns of the altar." The "horns of the altar" were four prominences or projections at each corner of the brazen altar, to which the victim was attached; and the very circumstance of the intended sacrifice being bound by cords to these horns of the altar shows that there was a repugnance in the victim to be there offered; that the struggling animal was bound by cords to the horns of the altar lest it should escape the knife, and burst away from the hands of the priests.

1. Thus, spiritually, the one great sacrifice, the Lord of life and glory, the God-man Mediator, was bound to the horns of the altar. There were certain covenant engagements, which indeed He had freely and voluntarily undertaken, but which, being once entered into, bound Him to the horns of the altar. To take upon Him the seed of Abraham, to suffer, bleed, and die, and thus offer Himself a spotless sacrifice on the ever burning coals of Jehovah the Father's displeasure, was a great part of the solemn engagements of God

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the Son, according to those words, "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book—the book of eternal decree—it is written of Me) to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:5-7).

But again, not only was He bound by covenant engagements, but He was bound also with the strong, the equally strong ties of affection and love; and bound by these to the horns of the altar, bound to execute to the letter what He had undertaken, bound to go through that which He had covenanted, bound to fulfil the work which He had taken upon Himself in the solemn engagements of the Three-One God. But why was the victim bound? It implies that there was a repugnance, a shrinking, an inward horror which would fain drive it from the altar to which it was bound by these strong cords. So, in this great sacrifice of the Lord of life and glory, there were sufferings to be undergone, there was the cup of bitter anguish to be drunk, there were the solemn pangs of agony and horror under a sense of the wrath of God against sin to be endured, and by which He was well nigh overwhelmed when deep called unto deep at the noise of God's waterspouts, and all the waves and billows of divine vengeance rolled over His head; and therefore He says, "If it be Thy will, let this cup pass from Me." Here was the shrinking of the Victim; here was His human nature borne down by the load of imputed guilt, and only held up from being utterly crushed and overwhelmed, by the divine nature supporting it. There was the shuddering of nature recoiling from the agonising death; there was the horror of soul shrinking from the wrath of the Father; there was the heavy burden of imputed guilt pressing the blood from His brow; and all these things centring and meeting together, so as to make the sacrifice to be, what it was, a sacrifice in every sense of the word. He was bound, then, to the horns of the altar; bound by covenant engagement, bound by the strong affections of His soul; and yet bound there as a struggling sacrifice; that is, feeling those strugglings within which made Him three times groan forth the agonising cry, "O My Father, if it be possible,

let this cup pass from Me.” There was the shrinking of the victim. “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” There were the cords that bound Him to the horns of the altar, the unextinguished coals of God’s ever blazing wrath against sin, and bound there to bear that weight of wrath to the uttermost.

2. But there is another sense which these words will easily bear. We read that “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise;” and, therefore, there is not merely the binding of the great sacrifice, the Lord of life and glory, the God-man Mediator—there is not merely the binding of Him to the horns of the altar as the one great atoning sacrifice, the alone propitiation for sin; but there is also, in a secondary and inferior sense, the binding of the broken and contrite spirit to the horns of that altar on which the Lord of life and glory bled and died. Now, if this is true, if “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,” then he alone is bound to the horns of the altar whose heart is broken, whose spirit is contrite, whose soul is humbled, and who is feelingly laid at the foot of the cross. There is no binding of a whole, unbroken heart to the horns of the altar, that is no sacrifice. There is no binding of a light, trifling, proud, presumptuous self-confident spirit to the horns of the altar—that is no sacrifice. There is no binding of a speculative knowledge of doctrine as it stands in the letter, to the horns of the altar—that is no sacrifice. There is no binding of a heated imagination and a deluded heart to the horns of the altar—that is no sacrifice. The heart must be broken first and made contrite; it must be laid low, meekened and softened by the operation of God the Holy Ghost in it and upon it, before it can be spiritually bound to the cross of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, when you hear men or ministers setting forth the cross of Christ, and speaking of themselves as interested in that great sacrifice, and you see them light, trifling, boasting, presumptuous, proud, covetous, worldly—such men carry with them their own stamp, that they have a lie in their right hand. They are not bound to the horns of the altar, because they are not

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bound there as a broken-hearted victim. They are not bound there by the cords that the Holy Ghost has wreathed round their soul; they are merely bound by the light with which they themselves have twined round their own presumptuous hearts, by the cords of doctrine, or the bands of profession, to what they call the cross of Christ, but which is no more the cross on which the Lord of life and glory died, than the painted crucifix of a popish chapel.

But what cords are these by which the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit is bound to the horns of the altar? There is, first, the strong cord of necessity. By necessity I mean, felt necessity. I mean not necessity in the way of degree, but necessity in the way of inward experience. What binds a sinner to the cross of Jesus? One cord thrown round his tender conscience and broken heart is the strong cord of necessity; or rather, to speak more correctly, faith working through and with necessity that he cannot do without the cross, that his conscience is guilty and needs to be purged with the blood of sprinkling, that he is lost and needs to be saved, that he is afar off and needs to be brought near, that he is a ruined wretch who needs a manifestation of mercy to his trembling heart. And, therefore, around the tender conscience of a living soul, the strong cord of necessity is bound. As the apostle says, "Necessity is laid upon me," so necessity is laid upon the child of God to cleave to the cross, a strong conviction that from the cross alone comes the blood of sprinkling, which "speaketh better things than the blood of Abel."

But there is not only the strong cord of necessity; there is also the strong cord of affection, or rather, faith working by affection, as the apostle speaks, "faith which worketh by love." The real cord is faith, both in necessity and in affection, but I call these cords the cords of necessity and affection, for these are their prominent features, as experimentally felt. Where Christ is made in any measure experimentally known, He has gained the affections of the heart; He has, more or less, taken possession of the soul; He has, in some degree, endeared Himself as a bleeding, agonising

Saviour to every one to whom He has in any way discovered Himself; and, therefore, the strong tie of love and affection is more or less powerfully wreathed round the tender spirit and broken heart, and by that it is attached to the horns of the altar. His name is more or less as "ointment poured forth." There is a preciousness in His blood, there is a beauty in His Person, though more marred than the sons of men; there is that secret loveliness in Him which wins and attracts and draws out the tender affections of the soul; and thus this cord of love twined round the heart binds it to the horns of the altar, to keep it fast and firm to the cross of the Lord Jesus.

But as remarked before, the expression "Bind the sacrifice with cords even unto the horns of the altar," implies that the victim needed to be bound. Why was the victim bound literally? The knife was to be applied to the throat, pain was to be endured, blood was to be shed, life was to be yielded up; and, therefore, the victim naturally, literally, was bound to the horns of the altar that it might not escape—that it might not get away, but that it might bleed and die upon the spot. Now this implies spiritually and experimentally, that there is that which would drive us from the cross of Christ—that as the victim would gladly break away from the knife held out to its throat, that as it trembled and shrank from suffering and death, so there is in the children of God a struggling, a shrinking, a flying back from the suffering which is to be endured, an endeavouring to break away, if it were possible, from the cross to which they are attached. Who would not willingly escape convictions? Who would not evade the pangs of guilt? Who would willingly wade through seas of trouble? Who would groan and sigh under a body of sin and death? Who would smart under wounds that "stink and are corrupt because of his foolishness?" Who would have the leprosy break out in his forehead, and stand before God full of "wounds and bruises and putrifying sores?" Nature shrinks from it; the flesh abhors it: the carnal mind will have none of it. And, therefore, the strong cord of necessity is wreathed round the soul

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that it may not get away from the cross. Are we not continually, my friends, trying to find out some smooth flowery path in which to walk? Are we not in various ways seeking to evade and escape from trouble, sorrow, and difficulty, and endeavouring to chalk out a pleasanter, easier road? Yes, continually. We want to get away from the cross, we would gladly find some easier path in which to walk; but conviction, guilt, fear, condemnation lying as a heavy load upon the conscience, bind us to the horns of the altar, as knowing that only so far as we are attached to that altar, do we derive any efficacy in our souls from the sacrifice that was once offered upon that altar. There is a case that occurs to gracious men sometimes. They have had a good experience; they have been favoured with some testimony from God to the pardon of their sins; they have had some visitation of God's love in their consciences. When the savour of this has been lost, and no fresh trials succeed, they often get into a smooth easy path. The Lord suffers them for a while to walk in this path, and they retain their past confidence, they stand in their old experience, and thus they secretly get away from the cross, holding now in the hand of nature what they once held in the hand of grace, maintaining in creature strength that which can only be really maintained by the Spirit of God in them. Thus by getting away from the cross in suffering, they get away from the cross in spiritual manifestation; and stand in the letter of their old experience, not in the sweet renewings of the Holy Ghost. But in thus getting from the cross they become light, trifling, frivolous, proud, presumptuous, worldly, covetous, high-minded. And why? Because they are not exercised in their souls, because they are not tried and tempted in their minds, because sin and guilt is no burden to them, and because the Lord suffers them for a while to walk in a way of their own devising. But he whom God is pleased to instruct by His blessed Spirit day by day never can long get away from the cross. His carnal nature shrinks from it, but the Lord so leads him into those paths which are connected with the cross of Christ that he is afraid, in his right mind, to get away from the

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cross, feeling that the moment he loses sight of the cross he falls into guilt and condemnation.

But further. He that is bound to the horns of the altar has many sacrifices to make. He that will walk in the path which God has chosen for him will have to meet with every opposition to his walking therein. Infidelity, unbelief, rebellion, pevishness, impatience, the assaults of Satan as an angel of darkness, the delusions of Satan as an angel of light, false friends, secret or open foes, the flattery of professors, and often the frowns of God's children, the loss of worldly interests, the sacrifice of property—all these things are entailed upon him that will walk in the strait and narrow path that leads to eternal life. They are all connected with the cross of Christ, and cannot be escaped by him who is bound to the horns of the altar. Nature, therefore, shrinks back. It finds the struggle too great; it feels the sacrifices of such a kind that it cannot consent that those sacrifices should be undergone. Well, here is the struggling of the victim; here is the endeavour on the part of the child of God to run away from the cross, to break the cord, and to escape from those things which are so painful to flesh and blood. But, "bind the sacrifice with cords;" yea, "even unto the horns of the altar." The broken heart, the contrite spirit, the tender conscience, are bound with such strong cords of necessity, and, at times, with such strong cords of affection, that however repugnant it be to the carnal mind, however strewn the road be with thorns, however the knife glitter at the throat, the soul is still bound to the horns of the altar, and from the horns of that altar it cannot get away.

3. Again, those things which the Spirit of God enables a man to do, are in Scripture sometimes called sacrifices. "That we may offer," we read, "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, by Jesus Christ." The apostle speaks of "receiving of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from the brethren at Philippi; an odour of a sweet smell; a sacrifice acceptable and well-pleasing to God;" (Philippians 4:18.) So he says to the Hebrew church: "But to do good

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and communicate, (that is, to the wants of God's people,) forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased;" (Hebrews 13:16.) Well, then, these spiritual sacrifices which a man offers unto God are bound also to the horns of the altar. They are not well-pleasing in the sight of God, except they are bound to the horns of the altar, so as to derive all their acceptance from the altar. Our prayers are only acceptable to God, as they are offered through the cross of Jesus. Our praises and thanksgivings are only acceptable to God, as they are connected with the cross of Christ, and ascend to the Father through the propitiation of His dear Son. The ordinances of God's house are only acceptable to God as spiritual sacrifices when they are bound to the horns of the altar. Both the ordinances of the New Testament—Baptism, and the Lord's Supper—have been bound by the hands of God Himself to the horns of the altar; and no one either rightly went through the one, or rightly received the other, who had not been first spiritually bound by the same hand to the horns of the altar. Every act of liberality, every cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple, every feeling of sympathy and affection, every kind word, every compassionate action shown to a brother; all and each are only acceptable to God as they ascend to Him through the mediation of His dear Son. And, therefore, every sacrifice of our own comfort, or of own advantage, of our own time, or of our own money, for the profit of God's children, is only a spiritual and acceptable sacrifice so far as it is bound to the horns of the altar, linked on to the cross of Jesus, and deriving all its fragrance and odour from its connection with the incense there offered by the Lord of life and glory.

But, from these sacrifices being bound to the horns of the altar, we gather that there is a repugnance, a struggling, a shrinking back, in the offering of them. To offer up carnal prayers is easy; to offer up spiritual prayers is difficult, nay, impossible, except so far as God works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. To eat the bread and drink the wine with our mouth is easy; to eat the flesh of the Son of God is difficult, yea, impossible, except so far as

it is spiritually revealed and made known to us, and faith is drawn out in our hearts to receive Christ as our soul-satisfying portion. To communicate to the wants of God's children in distress, merely from feelings of pity and compassion is easy; but to give unto them from feelings of love to Christ, and from a heart full of sympathy to them as members of Christ, is difficult, yea, impossible, except so far as the Lord is pleased to work that feeling in us. To be kind and compassionate and tender-hearted, and to have bowels of mercy for the poor and needy, the tried and exercised and distressed of God's family, so as to weep with them that weep, and mourn with them that mourn, may be easy to those whose natural tears readily flow at the sight of suffering; but to sympathise with them spiritually, and bear them on our hearts before God, when the spectacle of woe is removed from our eyes, and the fire of natural compassion is burnt out, is impossible, except so far as the Lord works it in us. A man may make many sacrifices; but unless he is moved to make those sacrifices by some ties of affection to the cross of Christ, all such sacrifices fall short of any real value. A man may come before God, as he thinks sincerely; and yet, if he comes not through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, if his sacrifices are not bound to the horns of that altar, he has no spiritual access to the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort. It was the solemn testimony of Jesus: "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Thus, the Father only accepts His people's persons, as being bound to the horns of the altar by the eternal ties of electing love and covenant decree; and only so far accepts their words and works, as they are bound there by the Holy Ghost casting the cords of affection round their tender spirits and broken hearts.

But we may further observe that the words, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar," are spoken in the form of a precept. It is not merely a solemn declaration that the sacrifice is bound with cords to the horns of the altar, but it runs also in the way of positive injunction. It seems couched in this form, first, as though to remind, as it were, the Father of His covenant

272 14 THE SACRIFICE BOUND TO THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR engagements. "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." For we must recollect that this Psalm was penned some centuries, a thousand years at least, before the Son of God took flesh and "was made in the likeness of men." It seems also spoken as though the Church would remind the Holy Spirit that He should bind the great Sacrifice with cords, yea, "even unto the horns of the altar;" and strengthen and uphold Jesus in finishing the work which His Father gave Him to do. It seems also spoken in the way of supplication, that the same blessed Spirit would by His work of grace upon the heart, bind it as a sacrifice to the horns of the altar, and keep it fast and firm by the cross of the Lord Jesus. And it seems addressed to the same heavenly Teacher, that He would graciously condescend to bind every word and work spoken and done in the name of the Lord to the horns of the altar, that it might be a sacrifice acceptable and well-pleasing to God.

Therefore, if we have any evidence that we are the Lord's, all that we spiritually are, and all that we spiritually have, is bound to the horns of the altar. Our persons, if we stand accepted before God, are bound with cords, the cords of electing love, and the cords of strong necessity, and the cords of spiritual affection to the horns of the altar. If the Lord has wrought upon us by the blessed Spirit, and made our consciences in some measure tender before Him; if He has given us anything like meekness, and humility, and godly fear; and broken our heart into any contrition and love, by this internal work He has bound us with cords to the horns of this altar. Then if this be the case, if we are bound, not only by covenant engagements in the councils of eternity, but also by spiritual ties in personal experience,—if we are bound with cords "even unto the horns of the altar," we shall drink a little into the spirit of Him who was first bound there. If He was bound there as a brokenhearted victim, we shall be bound there with a measure of His spirit. If He was bound there with filial fear working in His heart, and "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared"

(Heb. 5:7), we shall be bound there also in some measure with filial fear working in our hearts, with sighs and cries springing up out of our spirit unto Him who is able to save us from death eternal. Therefore no presumptuous confidence, no lightness in heavenly things, no towering aloft in head knowledge and vain notions; none of these things are consistent with cleaving to the cross of the Lord of life and glory. Where the soul is firmly bound to the horns of the altar with the strong cords which the Holy Ghost Himself has wreathed, there will be humility, there will be meekness, there will be simplicity and godly sincerity, there will be brokenness of spirit and contrition of heart, there will be an entrance by faith into the kingdom of Christ, there will be a lying at the feet of Christ, and there will be an earnest desire to rest our heads upon His bosom. In such a spot God's people long to be; to the foot of that cross they, at times, intensely desire to come; on that face, more marred than the sons of men, they desire to look. If they are bound there, they will see the blood which there was shed; if they are bound there, they will see Him who was bound there before them; if they are bound there, they will look up in His countenance, and as they look upon His countenance, they will in a measure drink into His spirit. We may easily measure men's religion, then, by this test; not where they are in doctrine, not where they are in vain notions, not where they are in presumptuous confidence, not where they are in towering speculation; but where are they in brokenness of heart, tenderness of conscience, contrition of spirit, meekness of soul, godly fear, filial awe, and trembling reverence? Where is the mind of Christ visible in them? Where is the image of a suffering Lord stamped upon them? What has the altar done for them, or what has a sight of the altar done in them? It is indeed vain confidence to be always talking about Christ, and to know nothing of the Spirit of Christ. It is indeed vain talking to profess to know the cross of Christ, and never have any reflection of Christ's image in us. It is indeed the worst delusion to believe ourselves interested in the blood of the Lamb, without feeling the conscience not merely

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bedewed with that blood as cleansing it from all sin, but softened with that blood so as to be made meek and tender before God. And it is the worst of folly and the height of presumption to boast of ourselves as accepted children of God, when there is nothing of the image of a broken-hearted Lord stamped upon our soul, or visible in our demeanour.

Are you, then, a poor broken-hearted child of the living God? Is there any measure of the Spirit of Christ in you? Is there any faint resemblance of His meekness and holy image stamped upon you? Then you feel yourselves bound with cords to the horns of the altar. You feel the strong ties of necessity, and you feel the strong ties of affection binding you there. But with this you feel also that you are a struggling victim; that you would gladly escape the troubles and trials that being bound to the horns of the altar brings upon you; you would gladly get into an easier path if you could; or if you dared, would willingly set up yourselves some altar made after the pattern of Damascus (2 Kings 16:10); and would gladly, like the Roman Catholic, worship with your body a material cross, instead of worshipping in your soul the adorable God-man who hung and bled there. You would gladly, if you could, step out of a self-loathing, tried, harassed, and tempted path, to get into the flowery meadow of doctrine and speculation, and there walk at ease without one pang in your conscience or one trial in your soul. But the Lord has said, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." You are bound to the horns of the altar. From those horns you cannot escape. You may fume, fret, and rebel against all or any of these cords, but you cannot break them. Aye, you may, in your strugglings, stretch to their utmost extent these cords; but they are too firmly fastened round your tender conscience, and too strongly wreathed round your broken heart for you to burst them. They would sooner cut your heart in two than you should break them, or escape from them. And in your right mind, you would not be otherwise than bound with cords to the horns of this altar. In your right mind, you want the cords tightened, and so to

be drawn nearer and nearer unto it, and to have the blood that was shed upon it sprinkled upon your conscience. In your right mind, you want to see with the eye of faith the Victim that once lay bleeding and writhing there; and as you look upon Him, to drink into His image, and to feel the melting power and softening efficacy of that sight.

But then, connected with it, there are such trials, such temptations, and such sacrifices, that you, in your fits of rebellion or flesh-pleasing ease would at times as gladly get away as at others you would gladly get near. Vile wretches that we are, who would often prefer to serve the flesh and the world, and take our chance, as men speak, for eternity, than suffer trials and temptations as the followers of Christ! But it is our mercy that we can neither make nor unmake, do or undo, bind nor break any one cord of eternal love; but that, in spite of the creature God will “fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power.”

O, friends, may the Lord keep us from a vain presumptuous confidence. If there is one thing more to be dreaded in this day than another, it is being plastered over with untempered mortar, walking in a vain show, resting in the doctrines of grace without feeling the power of those doctrines in our heart, and trusting in the letter of the Word without feeling the spirit and power of truth in our souls. It is the peculiar danger of the Calvinistic churches; and is, I believe, the peculiar temptation to which the children of God are exposed in this metropolis, to get under a presumptuous ministry, and sit under those preachers who are high in the letter, but know little of the savoury operations and humbling teachings of God the Holy Ghost in their souls. Christ in the letter will suit a whole heart, but Christ in the Spirit can only suit a broken heart. Christ in the letter will stand very well with worldliness, pride, and covetousness; but Christ in the teachings of the Holy Ghost, formed in the heart the hope of glory, can only stand in a tender conscience and a contrite spirit. He will most surely humble every soul to whom He manifests Himself, and He will keep that soul

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more or less humble. He will bring it to the cross, and keep it at the cross; and as He keeps it near to Himself, He will stamp more or less of His own image upon it. Would you know, then, whether you are bound to the horns of the altar? What know you of these strong ties wreathed round your soul? What know you of anything of the preciousness and sweetness of Jesus in secret moments? What know you of coming to the Father through the application of His atoning blood? What know you of communion and sympathy with the Lord of life and glory? These are the marks to try our souls by, whether we have received Christ, whether we know Christ, whether He is really precious to our souls—what union and what communion we are seeking with Him as broken-hearted followers of Him, what we seek to know of Him as crucified for our sins, how much we desire to drink into His image, and how much we desire to be impressed with His Spirit, and how much we abhor and shrink from all knowledge and all doctrine and all confidence that is not connected with the cross as made experimentally and feelingly known to our consciences. “God is the Lord, which hath showed us light.” Hath He showed us this light, that we are ruined, lost, guilty, polluted, filthy, and undone? “God is the Lord, which hath showed us light.” Hath He shown us the cross? Hath He shown us light in His light so as to catch any glimpse of mercy in the face of the Mediator? Then if He has shown us any of these things, He has bound us with cords, and these cords He has attached to the horns of the altar, that we may cleave to this altar as our propitiation to atone, our righteousness to justify (Rom. 5:9), our food to satisfy, and our pattern to walk by. And then we shall desire to abide by this altar, not merely for the pardon of our deep-dyed and aggravated sins, but also there to feel and be experimentally blessed with the work of the Holy Ghost, in renewing our spirits and reviving our souls. O that in all our approaches unto God, and in all our solemn dealings with Him, in what we are in the world, and in what we are in the Church of God, we might feel ourselves thus bound with these cords of love

and bands of a man to the horns of the altar, that the world may be crucified unto us and we unto the world, and the life we live in the flesh may be a life by the faith of the Son of God. And O that we may not only live by the altar and in sight of the altar, but die in the sight of the altar, for he that dies in sight of the altar will rise one day to be with Him—with the King in His beauty, who though He once there suffered, is now risen and glorified. The sacrifice that is bound with cords to the altar below, and thus receives of the blood that falls upon his conscience from that altar, now stands before God accepted in the Beloved, and will surely rise with the risen Lord of life and glory; “for if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him;” and “if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.” Yes, all such shall rise into a fruition of His eternal life, to see Him as He is, to enjoy His eternal presence, and to bathe in that river of pleasures which is at the right hand of God for evermore.

But to those vain presumptuous professors who live and die without having a broken heart bound with cords to the horns of this altar, whatever they may talk about Christ, however they may prate and chatter about the doctrines of grace, this solemn sentence will drop from the judge of all, in that awful day when they stand before His throne: “Depart from Me, ye cursed; I never knew you. You professed to know Me, but I never knew you; depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.” May the Lord raise up in our hearts a sweet testimony that He has more or less, each according to the measure of our faith, bound us with cords to the horns of the altar, and may He shed abroad in our souls a sweet love and affection to that altar; that in the sight of it we may live, and in the sight of it we may happily and peacefully die.

### 15 PRAYER, AND ITS ANSWER (*Psalms 91:15*)

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

*June 10th, 1841*

*“He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him.”*

*Psalm 91:15*

It is thought by some to be a great mark of spirituality of mind, and a strong evidence of great attainments in the divine life, to see Christ in every part of Scripture—especially in the Psalms of David. Now there can be no doubt that Christ is sweetly set forth in the Psalms, for we read that He Himself spoke to His disciples of what was “written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning Him.” Nor can there be any doubt that much of the Psalms is taken up with descriptions of Him—that His experience is very largely set forth in the Psalms, and that His glory and His grace are powerfully manifested therein. But it is a very doubtful point to me, whether it is a decisive evidence of great spirituality, and an undeniable proof of divine teaching, to be able to see Him in the Psalms. For it comes to this question: whence is this sight derived? Is it not possible to see Him with the eye of speculation, or with the eye of imagination? Is it not possible to see Him with the eyes of other men? Is it not possible to be borne on the wings of fancy; and merely in a way of judgment, in a way of doctrinal speculation, in a way of mere exercise of our intellectual faculties, in a way of mere nature and the flesh—is it not possible, aye, is it not a common occurrence, thus to be able to see Christ in this passage and in that, quite independent of any divine unction, whereby the eyes are anointed, quite independent of any sweet manifestation of Christ to the soul by the Holy Ghost, and quite independent of any spiritual, humbling views of Him, as set forth in the Scriptures—is not this possible? Aye, is it not a common occurrence? And, therefore, before we can positively and decisively say that to see Christ in the Scriptures is a mark of spirituality of mind, a decisive proof of great attainments in the divine life, we must ask and answer these questions—Whence does

this sight come? What feelings does this sight produce? Who gave us these eyes, and whence is it that we have derived these views?

Now, I believe that if the soul is blessedly bedewed with the unction of the Holy Ghost, and in “simplicity and godly sincerity,” with a feeling heart, with brokenness, contrition, tenderness, and humility, is led by the Holy Ghost into the Psalms, as setting forth Christ’s sufferings, or Christ’s experience, or Christ’s grace, or Christ’s glory, and feels a sweet melting down under that sight, and viewing Christ there set forth is led into any measure of spiritual communion with Him, so as to have some divine acquaintance and some heavenly fellowship with Him, then we have reason to believe that to see Christ in the Psalms and to feel Christ in the Psalms, is of God. But if it is merely an exercise of fancy, merely a sharpening of one’s wits, merely a seeing Him with a kind of doctrinal speculation, leading to no fruits within and to no communion with Him as there set forth, but merely floating as a bare speculation in the mind, then of a certainty we may say that it is very possible to have great and enlightened views of Christ as set forth in the Psalms and other parts of Scripture, and yet not to have received them with power from God Himself.

Now Satan can make use of truth in the Church of God to introduce his own errors, and often makes use of one truth to subvert another truth. Satan is a cunning artificer—he uses no rotten levers when he wants to overthrow a building; but he will select the strongest and longest and most powerful he can possibly wield. And I have been astonished sometimes to see how Satan, that crafty magician, that wonderful mechanic, can make use of the lever of one truth to overthrow another truth; how he can bring forward doctrine to upset experience, how he can use doctrine to upset practice, and how he can employ one part of God’s Word to upset another part of God’s Word. That he does so use truth is most clear. This very psalm gives us a certain instance of it. When he would fain that the Lord should cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple, he brings forward a passage from

this psalm as his warrant—he makes use of the very truth of God as a lever whereby to throw down the Son of God; for he says, quoting Scripture, “If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down; for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone.” Here was Satan making use of a most certain truth, to introduce (if he could do so) presumption into the mind of the blessed Saviour; employing Scripture to lead the blessed Mediator into an act of daring presumption.

But the point to which I was alluding is this—It is most certain that Christ is much spoken of in the Psalms. Now this, which is a certain truth, has got a footing in the Church of God; it has been set forth by able men, and heaven-taught men, and is received as truth in the judgments of many persons. And here comes the subtlety of this “old serpent.” He says, “It is Christ in the Psalms.” Any deep experience in the Psalms—it is Christ’s experience. “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy water-spouts”—that is Christ speaking. “Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up”—that is the experience of Christ, when the sins of His elect family met upon His head. “Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God”—that is the experience of Christ, when He was suffering under the weight of sin imputed to Him. Now, no doubt there is the experience of Christ thus set forth in the Psalms; but what is the object of this device of Satan? It is by setting forth all this experience as belonging to Christ, secretly to cast out the experience as belonging to God’s people; it is by putting it all upon Christ, and saying that the Psalms are full of the experience of Christ, not to exalt Christ, but to cast down experience. The professed object is to glorify the Son of God, and to set forth His sufferings; the secret object is to cast out this experience as a needful thing to be undergone in the souls of God’s people, and to blunt the edge of conviction in men’s consciences. When they read, for instance, in the Psalms of a certain deep experience that the Psalmist passed through, as “My wounds stink and are corrupt

because of my foolishness”—conscience says, “Did your wounds ever stink, and were they ever corrupt because of your foolishness?” “No.” “Oh!” says judgment, “but that is Christ.” So—”Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” “Was that ever your prayer?” says conscience—”Was that ever your experience?” asks the inward monitor. “No.” “But,” says judgment, “that is all Christ.” And so, by setting forth the experience in the Psalms as belonging to Christ, there is a secret blunting the edge of conviction in men’s consciences, and a casting out the experience of the saints as traced out in the Word of God. And so we see what a crafty, subtle serpent this is—to come with such truths, with great and glorious views of the Son of God, and to make use of them as a lever to overthrow the experience of God’s saints as there traced out.

Now I believe, as to the Psalms, as written by the Spirit of God, we have three grand interpretations of them—in other words, we have three grand outlines of heavenly teaching. We have, first, the experience of the Psalmist himself. When he said, “My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness,” it was the wounds of the Psalmist that stunk because of his foolishness; it was a personal matter, which was personally felt; it was an inward, individual experience, which was inwardly, individually known; he described with his pen what he felt in his heart—that “his wounds stunk and were corrupt because of his foolishness.” But there is another experience, which is the experience of Christ under the hidings of His Father’s countenance—the experience of the Lord Jesus when, in our nature, He bare our “sins in His own body on the tree,” and groaned forth the agonies of His soul under the sensations of divine wrath which were manifested in His conscience; that is another great branch of experience set forth in the Psalms. And then there is a third, which is the experience of God’s saints now, the experience which the Holy Ghost works in the hearts of God’s people, which tallies and accurately agrees with the experience of the Psalmist, whoever he was—sometimes

David, sometimes Asaph, sometimes Ethan, sometimes Heman—and accurately tallies also in its measure with the experience of Christ there set forth. And thus we see what a wonderful book the Scriptures are; that “they are not,” as Peter says, “of any private interpretation,” to be limited to one interpretation, to be confined to one individual; but they are of public interpretation, of a public nature, and common to the whole Church of God, as the Spirit of truth leads the people of God into all truth. Now, if we look at this psalm, we have the strongest evidence that it speaks of Jesus. We know that it was quoted by Satan to the Lord of life and glory; and had it not referred to Him, Satan would have needed no other refutation.

This psalm, like some other psalms, seems to be in the form of a dialogue; there appear to be two speakers introduced. The Lord begins: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.” This seems to be a sentence that comes from the mouth of Jehovah; it was a testimony, a word dropped into the soul of the Psalmist from the mouth of God. The soul of the Psalmist responds; there is an heavenly echo in his bosom to the voice that came from the mouth of God; sweet hope and blessed confidence are raised up by the application of these words to his heart, and he breaks forth—“I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in Him will I trust.” And now the Lord takes up the sentence, and goes on to the end of the psalm: “Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence; He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust; His truth shall be thy shield and buckler,” and so on. And if you bear this in mind, that very often in the Psalms there are what we may call dialogues between two persons—the Lord speaking inwardly to the Psalmist’s soul, and the Psalmist speaking to the Lord—if we bear in mind that many of these are heavenly dialogues, sweet and blessed colloquies, it will explain to us why the person is so often changed.

Now, with respect to the words of the text, we find a promise given in them, or rather a declaration which is sealed with a promise—"He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him."

But who is "he?" Unless we can settle who "he" is, we shall be all abroad; we shall not be able to understand what the declaration is, or to whom the promise is made. And therefore, before we can get into the text, we must endeavour to ascertain who the person is to whom the declaration is made, and in whose heart the promise is sealed.

This "he" must be the same person who is spoken of throughout the whole psalm; and therefore the first verse will afford us a clue to the point. Generally speaking, through the Psalms and other parts of Scripture, there are clues, there are keys; and if we can only get the key in our hand, it will fit the wards of the lock—it will open up the psalm. And therefore my chief desire in reading a psalm for my own instruction and comfort, or in preaching from it, is to find out the key. If I can discover the clue, it seems to introduce me into the chambers; if I can get hold of the key, it seems to open the recesses, and lay bare the treasures of heavenly truth contained in them.

Then "he" that shall call upon the Lord is the same person that is spoken of in the first verse of this psalm. And this is said of him: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Then every promise that is made in this psalm, and every declaration that is given in this psalm to a certain person, applies to that certain person spoken of in the first verse—the character described by these words, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High." Then no man has any right to a single part of this psalm, no man has any interest in a single promise given in this psalm, no man has any divine acquaintance with the blessed mysteries couched in this psalm, whose name is not written in the first verse—whose experience is not such as the Holy Ghost has there traced out.

And who is this man, and what is his experience? It is "he that

dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High.” What is “the secret place of the Most High?” It is the same spot of which Asaph speaks in the seventy-third psalm—“Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.” It is the spot of which the Lord speaks in Ezekiel—“I will be to them as a little sanctuary in all the countries where they shall come.” Then this “secret place” is the secret bosom of God. It is an entrance by faith into Jehovah, who by a spiritual manifestation of Himself leads the soul into a spiritual acquaintance with Him. “The secret place of the Most High” is that solemn spot where Jehovah meets with the sinner in Christ, and where He opens up to him the riches of His mercy, and leads him into His bosom so as to read the secrets of His loving heart. It is called a “secret place,” as corresponding with those words, “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.” It is called a “secret place,” as only known to the persons to whom it is specially communicated. It is called a “secret place,” because none can get into it—no, nor desire to get into it—except the Lord Himself, with His own mysterious hand, opens up to them a way into it, sets them down in it, and sweetly blesses them in it. Then to be in “the secret place of the Most High” is to be brought into something like fellowship and acquaintance with God—something like communion, spiritual worship, divine intercourse; so as to know something of Him experimentally, and “run into” Him as “a strong tower,” and there feel solemn safety. The “secret place of the Most High,” then, is not to be got at by nature and by reason; flesh never entered there. “Flesh and blood” cannot enter the kingdom of God above; and flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God below. “I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth,” said Jesus, “that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” Therefore, they are “hid from the wise and prudent.” It is that “path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen.” It is a secret hidden from all except those to whom God Himself is pleased by His Spirit specially to reveal it. And when He

reveals it, He draws the soul by the powerful attractions of love, "with the cords of love, and the bands of a man," by mysterious attractions into that "secret place;" and then He begins to discover a little of those secrets which are stored up in the Son of God—a few of those secrets which are with those who fear God—a few of those secrets the communication of which makes a man spiritually and eternally wise.

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High," is one who more or less, as the Spirit leads him into it, abides there. "Abide in Me, and I in you; if a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered." When a man once gets, therefore, by faith into "the secret place of the Most High," he "abides" in it; not as a matter of constant experience, not that he can always feel sweet communion with God; but still it is his home. We all have our home, our fireside, the place where at night we lay our weary bodies down to rest; and it is our dwelling-place. We are not always there; some of us leave our homes in the morning to go about our business, and come back to our homes at night; but our affections are there, our heart is there, our family is there, and we look for evening-time to go home and rest there. It is our dwelling-house, and yet we are not always in it. So with this "secret place of the Most High; "it is the dwelling-place of the Christian—it is the house, the home where his affections are, where his treasure is, and to which his heart turns—but still he is not always there. He goes in and out, he goes abroad, and often leaves this sweet home. Yet it is his dwelling-place; because it is there, and there alone, he can solidly rest; it is there, and there alone, he can lie down, and feed and take pleasure.

Here is a soul, then, that is brought by faith, under the Spirit's operation, to know "the secret place of the Most High:" that is, to have some spiritual acquaintance with God in Christ, to enter by faith into the secrets which Jehovah reveals, and to feel that the manifestation of those secrets to his soul makes his heaven here below, and constitutes the real rest and satisfaction of his heart.

And to this character all the promises in the Psalms are made; he is interested in every covenant promise that is there uttered by the mouth of God Himself; and every one of those covenant promises shall be fulfilled in him, and shall be fulfilled for him.

1. But the Lord has attached (I will not call it a condition, as it is a word I abhor)—the Lord has attached a declaration, which declaration is linked on with a promise. The Lord has appointed a certain path, wherein the soul is to walk. The walking in that path is a necessary step to obtain the blessing that lies at the end of the path. It is no condition to be performed by the creature; it is nothing that springs out of, or depends upon, human will or human merit; but it hangs upon the Lord's appointment. God has connected certain promises with certain appointments; he has connected certain deliverances with certain trials; he has connected certain blessings with certain states and positions of soul. Therefore, if we are to get at the blessing, we must get at it through God's appointment. If we are to reach the home, we must travel by that road which leads to it. Therefore, "what God hath joined together, let no man"—and no man ever can—"put asunder." Now the Lord has, in the text, declared a certain path; He has made a positive declaration; and to this positive appointment He has graciously annexed a certain promise: "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." Then the declaration is as certain as the promise; the one is as much of divine decree as the other; and he that walks not in the path will not have the promise which is connected with that path. In this sense, and in this sense only, can we understand the conditions of Scripture—the ifs, God having linked things together, which are both of His sovereign decree, which are both of His eternal appointment, and which the Spirit graciously brings His people into, and blessedly works in their hearts and consciences. Thus, it is no matter of free-will, it is no matter of man's righteousness or man's wisdom, whether we shall "call upon God." It is appointed he should call upon Him. God has said in positive terms (and His "I will" and His "he shall" never can be broken)—"he shall call upon

Me.” It therefore does not rest with the creature whether he will call upon Him or not; it is not a matter poised in the balances of the creature, whether he shall pray or not. God has not left it to man, whether he shall take up prayer or lay aside prayer, but He has made it a part of His own sovereign appointments, of His own eternal decrees, which can no more be frustrated than salvation itself. Therefore, this soul that “dwells in the secret place of the Most High”—“he shall call upon God.” It is not left to him, whether he will call or not; but it stands in the way of eternal decree, in a way of sovereign good pleasure. And, therefore, he must call upon God, because God has said that He shall.

But though this stands in the way of eternal decree, though this rests upon the basis of divine sovereignty, God does not work it in the soul in that manner. He does not come in a dry doctrinal way into a man’s conscience, and say—“I have appointed thee to pray, and therefore pray thou must.” He does not come with an abstract truth, which is written in a man’s judgment, like a rule of arithmetic, for the man to set to work upon the abstract truth as a child at school sets to work upon a sum. The Lord does not work in that manner; but He works by raising up certain feelings, by communicating certain desires, by kindling certain wants, by bringing the soul into certain states, and by pouring out the Spirit of grace and of supplications upon it—all of which tend to that point, to which He is leading the soul, and all which spring out of God’s sovereign and eternal appointment.

“He shall call upon Me.” When shall he call? Why, when the Lord pours out “the Spirit of grace and of supplications,” when the Lord lays wants upon his heart, when the Lord brings conviction into his conscience, when the Lord brings trouble into his soul, when the Lord draws forth that “Spirit of grace and of supplications” which He has poured out, when the Lord is graciously pleased to draw forth faith into blessed exercise, and to enable the soul to pour out its desires, and to offer up its fervent breathings at His feet, and to give them out as He gives them in. Then to call upon

the Lord is no point of duty which is to be attended to as a duty; it is no point of legal constraint, which must be done because the Word of God speaks of it; but it is a feeling, an experience, an inward work, which springs from the Lord's hand, and which flows in the Lord's own divine channel. Thus when the Lord is pleased to pour out this "Spirit of grace and supplications," we must pray; but we do not pray because we must; we pray because we have no better occupation, we have no more earnest desire, we have no more powerful feeling, and we have no more invincible and irresistible constraint. The child of God in trouble must groan and sigh; he does not say, "Eight o'clock is come, twelve o'clock is come, six o'clock is come, now I will groan, now I will sigh a little, I will take out my Bible, and begin to groan, and to sigh;" that is nothing but the groan of the hypocrite, it is nothing but the sigh of the self-deceiving professor. The living child of God groans and sighs because it is the expression of his wants, because it is a language which pours forth the feelings of his heart, because groans and sighs are pressed out of him by the heavy weight upon him. A man lying in the street with a heavy weight upon him will call for help; he does not say, "It is my duty to cry to the passers-by for help;" he cries for help because he wants to be delivered. A man with a broken leg does not say, "It is my duty to send for a surgeon;" he wants him, to set the limb. And a man in a raging disease does not say, "It is my duty to send for a physician;" he wants him, to heal his disease. So, when God the Holy Spirit works in a child of God, he prays, not out of a sense of duty, but out of a burdened heart. He prays, because he cannot but pray; he groans, because he must groan; he sighs, because he must sigh; having an inward weight, an inward burden, an inward experience, in which, and out of which, he is compelled to call upon the Lord. And I never think anything of a man's religion which did not begin in this way. If a man's religion (so-called) began in any other way than by the Lord's bringing him to know himself as a sinner before Him, and except those convictions of sin were accompanied by "the Spirit of

grace and supplications," whereby he was enabled to pour out his soul into the bosom of God, and to sigh, and cry, and groan, "being burdened," I never can believe that man's religion began by God's internal teaching. I know mine began so; and I have always stood firm upon this foundation, that a religion that does not begin with the sighs, and groans, and pourings out of the soul to God under the pourings in of the Spirit, is a religion that began in the flesh, and never sprang from the mighty operation of God in the soul.

"He shall call upon Me." What shall he call upon God for? "He shall call upon Me" for everything that he wants internally to feel. A child of God can call for nothing else. He cannot direct his prayers according to the rule of another's: he does not pick up a few pretty expressions from a gifted man in the table-pew, and go with these prayers to God. He knows that he has to do with One that searches him through, that he stands before a God that will not be mocked and trifled with; and when he comes before the Lord, he asks Him, with sighs, and cries, and groans, for those blessings, and those blessings only, which his conscience tells him he wants, and which his soul is hungering and thirsting to enjoy, delivered into his heart from the mouth of God Himself. He calls upon God for the pardon of his sins, he calls upon God for the revelation of Himself, he calls upon God for the manifestation of Christ, he calls upon God for the application of atoning blood, he calls upon God for the revelation of His eternal favour to His soul, he calls upon God sweetly to bring him into an experimental knowledge of the Lord of life and glory, he calls upon God for every blessing that is set before his eyes, and for every blessing that is laid upon his heart, after which he longs and groans and sighs and pants heartily with pantings and groanings unutterable.

II. Now the Lord says, "I will answer." "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him." I will answer just as much as he shall call; and he shall call just as much as I will answer." They are both linked together, and both stand on the same basis of sovereign appointment and eternal decree.

“I will answer him.” What will He answer? Why, He will answer those prayers which He Himself has indited. He will answer those wants which He Himself has created. He will answer those hungerings which He Himself has produced. He will answer those thirstings which He Himself has, by His own blessed Spirit, wrought powerfully in the soul.

He does not say when; He does not say how. He does not say it shall be the next hour, next week, next month, next year. He leaves that with Himself, He keeps that in His own hands. He binds Himself by a naked promise; but He does not tell us how He will bring about that promise. That He keeps in His own bosom. And it is a mercy that He does, because, by keeping it in His own bosom, He leaves to Himself a wonderful way in which to work out the accomplishment of that promise. Keeping the manner and the time in His own breast, He reserves to Himself different paths, in which He leads His children, merely tying Himself down with a naked promise, and not revealing in what way the promise shall be accomplished. It was so with Abraham; He gave him a naked promise, but the way in which it was to be accomplished He kept in His own breast. And so He has given a naked promise to every child of His that “calls upon Him.” He says, “He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;” He has tied Himself there, He has bound Himself by His word, which can never be broken, but He has not said how, nor has He said when.

Now it is this how and when that so try the child of God, who is calling upon the Lord, and not receiving the answer that he desires to receive at His mouth. If he could only but know the time fixed, he could bear with all his trouble patiently; if he could only see the manner in which the blessing would come, he thinks he should find some relief from his trial of soul in calling upon God and finding the answer so long delayed. But the answer that God gives, He gives in His own time. And I believe many of the children of God have had to cry to Him for days, and weeks, and months, and years, and the answer has been delayed; and then, when expectation seemed

to give up the ghost, when there seemed no longer any prospect that God would fulfil His promise, when the hopes of nature (as in the case of Abraham) were become dead, then the Lord fulfilled His promise, and brought His answer into the soul.

But sometimes the Lord is pleased to answer our prayers more immediately; He brings us into those straits and troubles from which we cannot extricate ourselves, and then will answer our prayer, and fulfil the promise. But perhaps it is in such a way as we least expect, and yet in such a way as most glorifies Him.

Now there is sometimes in men's minds a kind of confusion in this matter. They are in a certain path, from which they want to be extricated; they are under a trial, from which they want to be delivered; they call upon the Lord to deliver them, and they ask for some manifestation of Himself, some going forth of His hand, some application of His promise, some divine leading which they are to follow. But the Lord may be working in a very different way from what they think; and they may really be inattentive to the internal voice of God in their consciences, because they are expecting the voice to come in some other way. It was just so with myself. When I was in the Establishment, burdened with all the things I had to go through, and troubled and distressed in my mind, I was calling upon the Lord to deliver me, to lead me out, to show me what to do, to make the path plain and clear. Now that was my sincere cry; but I expected some miraculous interposition, to hear some voice, to have some wonderful leading; and in waiting for that I was waiting for what the Lord never meant to bestow. And I was brought at last to this internal conviction: suppose I were guilty of drunkenness, suppose I were living in adultery, suppose I were walking in known sin, should I want a voice from God to say to me, "Leave this drunkenness, come out from this adultery, give up this sin?" should I want some divine manifestation to bring me out of a sin, when my conscience bore its solemn witness against it, and I was condemned under the weight and burden of it? No, the very conviction is the answer of God to the prayer; the very

burden which the Lord lays on us is meant to press us out of that in which we are walking. So I reasoned with myself: "If I am living in sin, if it be a sin to be where I am, if I must do things which my conscience tells me are sins, and by which my conscience is burdened as sins, the very conviction, the very distress, the very burden, is the answer. It is the voice of God in the conscience, not the voice of God in the air, not the appearance of God in the sky, but the voice of God in the conscience, and the appearance of God in the heart." And on this simple conviction I was enabled to act, and never to this day have I repented it. I have, therefore, been led to see by experience that we are often expecting signal answers, wonderful answers, mysterious answers, and that the Lord does not mean to give those answers.

The Lord, you see, reserves the way in which He shall give the answer. Are you giving way to some temptation, or under the power of some lust? "Oh!" say you, "I want the Lord to lead me out." Well, is the Lord bearing a solemn witness in your conscience? Is the Lord speaking in that secret court, and manifesting His frown in your soul? That is His answer, and He will not vouchsafe to give you any other. It is to that the soul must look, and he that is enabled to hear this reproof in conscience must take it as the answer of God to those prayers which he is putting up for deliverance from the temptation or the sin under which he is labouring.

So, again, the soul sometimes shall call upon the Lord to show it sweet manifestations of Christ, to lead it blessedly into Christ, to settle it down into the liberty of Christ, to make Christ precious, and lead the soul into blessed communion with Him. Well, these sighs, and groans, and cries, and desires, and breathings of the soul come from God; they are His work in the conscience. Now the Lord says—"He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him." But how will He answer him? Why, perhaps by making his shackles heavier, making his fetters more grievous. As it was with the children of Israel in Egypt; they cried to the Lord for deliverance, they groaned and sighed, and their prayers reached the ear of the Lord,

and their cries moved His heart; but how did He answer? Their burdens were made heavier; they were to make bricks without straw; they were to be put further from deliverance; and every successive plague only seemed to make the king's heart harder, and deliverance more improbable. So perhaps with ourselves. We have been crying to the Lord for years to make Christ precious, to lead us into close communion with Him, to open up the secrets of His bosom, and bathe our souls in that love of His which "passeth knowledge;" and we have found some access to a throne of grace in pouring out those desires. Now, the Lord answers them; but how does He answer them? By bringing us into those spots and those states of experience to which these views of Christ are alone applicable. Our feeling would be to loll upon our sofa or to lean in our armchair, and have Christ come into our hearts without any burdens, or distresses, or griefs, or trials, or temptations, or powerful exercises; we want some sweet manifestation of Christ, but we want it to come through a channel which is not a channel of pain and suffering. Now the Lord says, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him"—he shall see Christ, he shall have a sweet view of Christ, he shall have a blessed manifestation of Christ, he shall be led up into Christ—but how? By being placed by My hand in those spots in which Christ alone is precious, to which Christ alone is adapted, for which Christ alone is suitable, and from which Christ alone delivers. "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him."

Sometimes the soul will pray to have power, inward power, to lay hold of God's promises, and to feel the sweetness of these promises within. We read the Scriptures; we see such and such promises made to the elect. "Oh!" say we to ourselves, "what know I of this promise? Surely I have not felt this promise; surely I have not tasted the sweetness of that promise; oh! that the Lord would teach me the sweetness of this promise! Oh! that the Lord would impart to me the enjoyment of that sweet promise!" And the Lord says, "I will; 'he shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; you shall

have the promise, aye, all the promise; you shall have the sweetness of it, the blessedness of it." But mark! you must be in the path to which that promise is suitable; you must be in the trial to which that promise is adapted; you must be in the exercise out of which that promise delivers; you must be in the difficulty which that promise fits. You must have the mortise for the tenon to go into; you must have the emptiness to be filled out of Christ's fulness; you must have the beggary to be supplied with Christ's riches; you must have the bankruptcy to have a sweet and full discharge.

And the Lord, when He is going to fulfil the promise, does not show His hand and say, "Now I am leading you into the promise, now I am fulfilling to you the prayer; see how My arm is now bare, and how I am guiding and leading you into the promise after which you have been praying." The Lord does not speak thus in conscience, but hides Himself, and darkens the cloud in our souls; we get farther off from the promise than ever—get as it were miles and leagues away from the point we are trying to approach; like the mariner who is driven away by the winds, we are seeking to get into the promise and are blown aside by gusts and winds further from the point at which we are aiming. But the Lord is all the while leading us into it, because He is bringing us down into the spot to which the promise applies. We say, "Lord, make me rich." He says, "I will; but thou must first be made poor." We say, "Lord, let me have a precious view of Christ." "I will; but you must first have a wretched view of self." "Let me know the riches of Christ's blood." "I will; but you must first know the depth of your guilt," "Let me know what it is to stand complete in Christ's righteousness." "I will; but you must first sink down in self-loathing and self-abhorrence." So that the Lord takes His own path, and chooses His own way, to bring about His own purposes in such a mysterious manner that reason is staggered, nature gives up the ghost, and all the powers of flesh and blood fail; and get to their wits' end; and the Lord brings about the fulfilment of that promise which we have been desiring to get into, and the enjoyment of which we have been longing

richly to feel.

So then, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer Him." The Lord encourages His people to call upon Him for whatsoever they want. Not to go with lip-service; not to go with made-up tales; but the Lord encourages all His blood-bought family whom He has quickened by His Spirit to call upon Him for everything their souls long after; be it deliverance from trouble, be it sweet manifestations of mercy, be it a blessed enjoyment of Christ, be it for a heart enlarged, be it for the liberty of the gospel, be it to stand firm in Jesus, be it to be brought out of any temptation under which they are labouring. "Open thy mouth wide," says the Lord, "and I will fill it." "Whatsoever thou askest, believing, thou shalt receive." The Lord encourages His people to open their mouth and tell Him what they have need of. "Pour out your heart before Me," says the Lord. Well, the soul is sometimes enabled to do so. Have not you and I, friends, been enabled to pour out our hearts at a throne of grace, and tell the Lord what we really wanted, what we really longed for, and tell Him that nothing but that which He alone could give would satisfy and comfort our souls? There have been such times of access to the throne of grace. And afterwards, perhaps, we have forgotten the things we told Him of; we have been heedless of the prayers we laid at His feet; and though very earnest at the time in seeking after certain blessings, we left them, as it were, at the Lord's feet, and forgot them all. But the Lord does not forget them—they are treasured up in His heart and memory; and in His own time He brings them to light, and gives the fulfilment of them. But before He does it He will bring us into the spot where we want them again, and then we have to tell Him again, and supplicate Him again, and ask Him again, ashamed of ourselves, perhaps, that we should have asked the Lord for these blessings and been as heedless of them as though we did not care to receive them at His hand; but still, under pressure, under trouble, under soul necessity, under grief, we go and tell Him again. And then the Lord in His own way and time brings about the very thing

we desired of Him. Perhaps it is some temptation under which we have been labouring for months; some grievous sin, which is continually put by Satan before our eyes, and into which we are afraid we shall tumble headlong; some cursed bait, which that arch-deceiver knows how to dress up in such pleasing colours that our wretched nature wants to grasp it—only it knows there is a hook concealed; or some internal weight of guilt, under which the soul “groans, being burdened.” Here is a painful exercise; and the soul cries to the Lord to be delivered from it. “He shall call upon Me, and I will answer Him.” There is no use going with it to a man; there is no use keeping it buried in our breasts. Sometimes we get a sullen fit, and we will not tell the Lord any more what we feel—He has delayed the answer so long; like a sullen child that will not ask his parent for the very bread that he wants to eat; but we must be brought out of this sulky fit. Whatever the Lord means to give, He from time to time enlarges our heart to ask; and keeps us waiting, pleading, sighing, suing, groaning, and begging at His blessed feet, for those things without which we must perish eternally, without which we cannot comfortably live, and without which we cannot happily die. And so it is no matter of choice, it is no matter left to the free-will of man, whether he will pray or not; but it is so laid upon his heart, so brought into his soul, it is so pressed out of him by the heavy loads put upon him, that he is compelled, whether he will or not, to cry to the Lord for those things. He must have them or die. And then, from time to time, in His own time and in His own way, He brings everything to pass which the soul wants to have brought to pass; opens up ways, brings deliverances, lifts out of trials, removes burdens, makes a way in the deep, which no eye but His could see and no hand but His could open, leads the soul into it, brings the soul through it, and then hides all glory from the creature by making us fall down before His feet and ascribe glory, and honour, and power, and thanksgiving, and salvation unto God and the Lamb.

16 MAN'S DEVICES AND THE LORD'S COUNSEL 297  
16 MAN'S DEVICES AND THE LORD'S COUNSEL (*Proverbs*  
19:21)

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on  
Thursday Evening,  
17th June, 1841

*“There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless  
the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.” Proverbs 19:21*

Divine sovereignty is stamped upon every page of the Scriptures. I do not mean that the doctrine of divine sovereignty is stated in every chapter of God's Word, but that we shall not find a chapter in which divine sovereignty may not, more or less, be traced. If we open, for instance, the prophecies, divine sovereignty is the basis of them all. If we read the historical books of the Old Testament, divine sovereignty is to be traced in the actions which are there recorded. If we look at the promises which are made to God's people, divine sovereignty is stamped upon them, for they all rest on the immutability of God's counsel; and therefore we may take almost any chapter of the Scriptures at random, and we shall find divine sovereignty engraved upon it.

But divine sovereignty is not merely a matter of inference—not merely a doctrine to be gathered from the prophecies and their fulfilment, from the lives of the patriarchs, or from the promises that God has given, and has accomplished to His people. If divine sovereignty were a matter of mere inference, the enemies of God's truth might challenge us to bring forward direct passages of Scripture, where the sovereignty of God is set forth; and, therefore, besides the general current of the Scriptures, we have express texts, so as to leave the enemies of God's truth without excuse, and to afford us power to answer their challenge, when they demand of us something more positive than inference. Thus we read, that the Lord will “fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power” (2 Thess. 1:11); that He “worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11); that “He

doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Dan. 4:35). And in the verse which I have just read, and from which I hope, with God's blessing, to deliver a few thoughts, we have the same doctrine declared, "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."

Now this doctrine of divine sovereignty, nature can never brook. It is so contrary and so repugnant to every feeling of our carnal minds, that nature will not submit to it as a truth from God. But say some, "I think you must be mistaken in this assertion. Is it not a matter of daily experience, and do we not hear from the mouths of ministers, yourself amongst them, that there are many characters in the professing Church of God, who have received the doctrine into their judgments, without feeling the power of it in their hearts?" Certainly. But is that any proof that nature can receive the doctrine of divine sovereignty?

Let those very persons who have received this doctrine into their judgment, be tried to the quick upon the point; let them be put, for instance, into that situation where Job was placed, let God "put forth His hand, and touch all that they have;" then those who have received the doctrine of divine sovereignty into their judgment, but have never had the feeling power of it in their hearts, would do that which Job did not, "curse God to His face." It is one thing to receive the doctrine as a doctrine, and another thing to submit to it as the truth of God; and no man knows this who has not felt God's eternal and unalterable counsels clash with the purposes of his heart and the intentions of his will, and overturn well nigh every scheme and plan that he has chalked out; and so to have come, by inward experience, to the spot to which the Lord brought His prophet Jeremiah: "Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed" (Jer. 20:7). "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."

Now the Lord, in these words, seems to open up to us a little

of what the real state of the case is betwixt man and Himself. He gives us a glimpse of what is going on in the restless bosom of man; removes the veil, as it were, from that busy workshop, displays to us the artificer in full operation, and shows us what is transacting in that busy scene. "There are many devices in a man's heart;" and if you and I know anything of our hearts, we shall say, that God has well depicted what they are, and that which takes place in our minds, day by day, continually.

We gather also from these words that there is an opposition and a conflict betwixt the devices that are in a man's heart, and "the counsel of the Lord;" that these do not move parallel with one another—are not in strict accordance—do not run side by side in concurrent harmony, but that there is an opposition betwixt the two; and yet, though there is this opposition betwixt the "devices in a man's heart" and "the counsel of the Lord," yet "the counsel of the Lord" must stand, and the "devices of a man's heart," when they are opposed to that counsel must go to wreck.

If we look a little through the Old Testament Scriptures, we shall see how the Lord frustrated, in a way of divine sovereignty, the devices that were in a man's heart. For instance, there was the device of the brethren of Joseph; their secret thought was to bring his dreams to nought, to frustrate, if it were possible, those intimations which the Lord had miraculously given, and to overturn those purposes of God, whereby He was about to manifest Joseph's superiority and their inferiority. They had many devices in their hearts, but "the counsel of the Lord" stood; and He made use of their very device to sell Joseph into the hands of the Ishmaelites as a means to bring to pass that which He had purposed in His own eternal mind.

We have another striking instance in the case of Haman. Haman had purposed to cut off the whole nation of the Jews; that was the "device of his heart;" that was the darling project which he indulged in his mind, for the gratification of which he was willing to make the greatest sacrifices, and to run the greatest hazards.

But “the counsel of the Lord” stood, and “the counsel of the Lord” was, that Haman should be hanged upon the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai; “the counsel of the Lord” was, that Mordecai should be “the man whom the king delighteth to honour,” and that Haman, who hated him, should be the very person that should put that honour upon him.

But perhaps the conduct of the Jews, when Christ was upon earth, was one of the most striking instances of the devices in a man’s heart, and yet of “the counsel of the Lord” standing in opposition to these devices. What was their infernal project? It was utterly to destroy and get rid of Him, who, by His preaching “tormented” them; it was to remove Him out of the way, by putting Him to a violent death. Well, these devices in part succeeded. They were allowed to do that which they had purposed, but the Lord wonderfully overruled the very devices of their hearts, that they, by fulfilling their own purposes, might fulfil His and that His counsel might yet stand, though their devices seemed for a time to succeed.

Now, these which I have mentioned, are cases in unregenerate men, but we find it also to stand good in regenerate men, that “there are many devices in a man’s heart,” but that “the counsel of the Lord” alone shall stand. What a crafty device there was in David’s heart, to hide his adultery! What base methods he took to conceal that crime from coming to light! But “the counsel of the Lord” was that that crime should come to light, that it should be made manifest before the eyes of men; and therefore, whatever were the devices of David’s heart, the Lord took care that His “counsel should stand.”

So in the case of Abraham and Sarah, there was a device in their hearts, that they should have a son in some way which was not appointed of the Lord, that they should hurry the Lord’s work, and hasten the Lord’s time, and thus introduce the child of promise, not, as the Lord had purposed, in a way of miracle, but in a way accordant with nature. Such was the device of their hearts, but “the counsel of the Lord still was made to stand.” Isaac must be

the seed of promise; and their devices, in a measure, succeeding, only served to introduce bondage and misery into their house.

But to come to those particulars which more immediately concern ourselves.

Let us look then at a child of God, before the Lord is pleased to quicken his soul into spiritual life. Though dead in sin, he is “a vessel of mercy afore prepared unto glory,” yea, chosen before the foundation of the world as a vessel, to be made meet for the master’s use. But how many devices are there in that man’s heart, to frustrate the purposes of God concerning him! How he would have damned his soul a thousand times, if the Lord had let him! How he was suspended continually, as it were, by a hair, over the very brink of the precipice, and how in those times, though he knew not the Lord, yet still the Lord “girded him,” as He girt Cyrus (Isa. 45:5), and he was preserved in Christ, before he was “called” (Jude 1:1) to the knowledge of “the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent!”

All through the life, then, of a vessel of mercy, before the Lord calls him by His grace, there is the standing of “the counsel of the Lord,” in opposition to the “devices” that have been working in that man’s heart. But we will now look at him, just a little before the Lord begins the work of grace upon his soul. I believe in most cases, there is a concurrence of providential circumstances, often in a way of affliction; the Lord perhaps brings down the body by disease, or removes some idol, or cuts off the desire of his eyes at a stroke, or brings him into circumstances of temporal distress, and thus, usually speaking, there are some concurrent circumstances, which, though they do not prepare a man’s heart to receive grace for “the preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord”, yet they put a man into a certain posture, place him in a certain position which is the most suitable place for God to meet his soul in, and to visit him with the Holy Spirit.

Well then, here is one whom the Lord is about to meet with His grace—whom He is about to quicken into spiritual life. Now the

Lord shall perhaps give a stab to all that man's worldly prospects; he shall make, as it were, a cut at every fond desire and every airy vision and every lofty castle, which that man is endeavouring to erect: or He shall bring sickness and disease upon him; or some cutting disappointment, so as to separate him from the world;—so that the things of time and sense shall wear a sickly aspect, and he shall find no pleasure, and take no comfort in them. Yet all this time the man is devoid of spiritual life—destitute of the grace of God, but still, through a concurrence of providential circumstances, brought into that posture, and into that place where the grace of God, when it comes into his heart, will find him in a position suitable to receive it.

I have often thought of the way in which the Lord seemed pleased to begin His work of grace in my heart. I was, at that time, a young man at Oxford, not indeed what is called “a gay young man”—not living an immoral life, but still utterly dead in sin, “without God and without hope in the world,” looking forward to prospects in life, surrounded by worldly companions, and knowing as well as caring absolutely nothing spiritually for the things of God. Well, the Lord, in His mysterious providence, removed me from that place, and took me to Ireland, contrary to the wishes of my friends, and shut me up, as it were, for more than a year and a half away from the society of the world, brought me into great natural affliction of mind, and then, in that affliction of mind He was pleased, as I trust, to communicate His grace to my soul, and quicken me into spiritual life.

Now I have looked sometimes with wonder upon the circumstance of His taking me from all my former companions, and putting me there in quietness and solitude. When life came, this quiet and secluded nook seemed to be like a little nursery, where the infant plant of grace might for a while be fostered, before I was thrust out into a rude world. It seemed to be a little spot, where the Lord might not merely begin His work of grace, but strengthen it in some measure, that when I was thrown back

amongst my old companions, I might have power sufficient to resist their wiles, and that I might be separated, as indeed I most effectually was, from them. And thus looking at the Lord's dealing with my own soul, and at His way of working with others, I have sometimes seen what a concurrence there has been of providential circumstances, which, though they were not grace, yet were so necessary in the chain of divine appointments, that could one link have been broken, the whole chain must have fallen to the ground.

But we pass on to look at the first beginning of the work of grace upon that man's soul whose case we are attempting to describe. "There are many devices in that man's heart" when the Lord first begins with him—and one of his first devices is to please God, and to work out a righteousness which shall be acceptable in His holy and pure eyes. Not knowing in its full extent the breadth and spirituality of God's law, not being deeply and powerfully acquainted with the corruptions of fallen nature, not being led into "the chambers of imagery," so as to see all the idolatrous tracings upon the wall, he seeks for the most part to establish his own righteousness, and thus, in some manner, to conciliate the favour of God.

Well here is a device in a man's heart; but the "counsel of the Lord" is that he shall not establish that righteousness, that he shall not "find his hands," that his attempt shall not prosper; and therefore by bringing powerful convictions into his conscience, by thrusting "the sword of the Spirit" into his "joints and marrow," by laying open the requisitions and spirituality of His holy law to his soul, He frustrates those devices, He roots up those plans, He breaks down those airy castles; and this foolish creature, who was fostering a pleasing device, in some way to gain God's favour, He levels and prostrates as a ruined wretch before Him. Well then the devices of this man's heart have been frustrated.

He has been trying to gain the favour of God, and instead of gaining the favour of God by his righteousness, he only finds himself farther from the mark than ever. He has been trying some

method to conciliate God's favour, and to please Him, and to serve Him, love, honour and obey Him; and yet the more he labours in tugging and rowing his boat against the stream, the more violently does the current of sin come down, to bear him away from the point to which he is aiming, and carry him into a wide and vast sea, where he has neither chart, nor rudder, nor compass. Then, in this state "he knows not what to do;" he comes, as the Psalmist says, to "his wit's end" (Ps. 107:27). If he cannot please God by his own righteousness, he knows no other method of gaining his favour; for Christ, at this time, is not made known to him, he has no spiritual acquaintance with the sacrifice of the Son of God; his eyes have not been anointed, so as to discover any glimpse of that righteousness, which is unto all, and upon all them that believe. Therefore, in this bewildered state, he comes to "his wit's end," feeling that the only thing that he knows of to gain God's favour is effectually frustrated, that all his props are removed, and all his confidence clean taken away.

"The counsel of the Lord" then, is that Christ should be made known to this man. The Lord has two grand outlines of divine counsel in this matter, for though they in effect centre in one, yet, as far as our experience is concerned, there are two. The one, the humbling and breaking down of the creature into nothingness; the other, the exalting and setting up of Christ upon the wreck and ruin of the creature. Then "the counsel of the Lord" is, that Christ should be set up in this poor creature's heart, that the Lord of life and glory should be exalted in his broken spirit and contrite soul. And therefore He brings Christ near, He raises up faith in the soul, whereby Christ is apprehended, He drops in some sensations of Christ's preciousness, and bedews the conscience with some drops of the Saviour's atoning blood, whereby a measure of divine peace is experienced, a sense of heavenly love is enjoyed, an embracing of the Saviour in the arms of faith is experimentally known.

Now, as "the devices in a man's heart" are many, there is a new device that comes into the heart of the soul whom the Lord has

thus blessedly healed by atoning blood, which is, to maintain those sweet views which he has experienced, to keep firm and safe hold of these sensations which he has enjoyed, and not to lose out of his heart that taste of pleasure which he is experiencing. These are the "devices in the man's heart," but "the counsel of the Lord" shall stand in spite of all these devices. "The counsel of the Lord" is that Christ should be all in all, that He should stand exalted upon the wreck and ruin of the creature.

Now, when the soul is brought to know a little of Christ's atoning blood, and to have by faith a sight and an enjoyment of Christ's glorious righteousness, it does not see what a secret fund there is of creature strength in the heart, nor what inward pride and self-righteousness are working up from the bottom of the carnal mind. It does not see that self has not yet been thoroughly humbled and abased, nor yet Christ made known in that way in which He is to be made known hereafter. And therefore the creature not being at this time humbled, the devices in this man's heart are, to retain that which the Lord has given, to keep firm hold of that which the Lord has put into his hand; and by his spirituality of mind, earnestness in prayer, continually searching God's Word, abstaining from "all appearance of evil," and living to the best of his power to God's glory, to maintain firm possession of that which has been given him by God.

But "the counsel of the Lord" is, that the creature should learn its weakness, that helplessness should not be a mere doctrine received into the judgment, but that it should be a solemn truth which is experienced in a man's soul. This weakness a man can only learn by being placed in that position, where, when he would make use of his strength, he finds it is all gone, and is become perfect weakness. Little by little his sweet sensations evaporate; little by little he loses the light and life and consolation and peace, which has been enjoyed; little by little he is not so spiritual as he was, nor so earnest at "the throne of grace;" the Word of God does not seem so precious, the companionship of the people of God not

so eagerly sought after, and the ordinances of God's house lose their relish. And as these heavenly feelings disappear, and get dispersed out of a man's heart, there arises a succession of very different things which come to take their room. As spirituality diminishes, worldliness increases; as humility abates, pride resumes strength; as the sight of Christ's righteousness is diminished, his own righteousness rises to view; and as the Lord's favour is less sweetly and blessedly felt, there must be a kind of making up for it by some work of the creature.

Well then, here are "devices in this man's heart," but "the counsel of the Lord shall stand." And "the counsel of the Lord," is this, to exalt Christ upon the abasement of the creature, to make the strength of Christ perfect in our weakness, and the wisdom of Christ perfect in our folly, and to establish Christ's righteousness upon the ruin of the creature's righteousness. Now the man does not understand what the Lord is about, in frustrating his devices, and establishing His own counsel; nor does he see what the Lord is really doing, by leading him into this strange mysterious path; nor can he readily believe that the Lord is working at all, because His hand is concealed. But the Lord's work is to pull down as much as to build up, to root out as much as to plant, to bring the beggar to the dung-hill just as much as to raise him amongst princes, and exalt him to a throne of glory; it is just as much His work to kill as to make alive, to make poor as to make rich, to reduce to hunger as to "feed with the bread of life," and to cast the soul down into the dust of self-abasement, as to lift it up by a sweet manifestation of Christ.

"The counsel of the Lord," then must stand, whatever be the devices in this man's heart; and this counsel is to bring the creature low, that he may exalt Jesus high, to strip the creature of all its attainments, to pluck out the peacock-feathers, that it may be poor and needy and naked and empty and bare. Well now, when a man is in this state, he will begin to sigh and cry and to groan unto God "being burdened." And now, perhaps, a fresh device will work in

his heart, "Oh, now that I am groaning to the Lord, the blessing will soon come; now that I am humbled, and lying at the foot of the cross, surely the Lord cannot be very far from me. Am I not just the character that the Lord has described in His Word, 'poor and needy'? Do I not stand before Him an undone wretch? Surely the Lord will appear very shortly." Now these are some of the devices that are in this man's heart, but "the counsel of the Lord" is distinct from this man's devices, and "the counsel of the Lord shall stand."

Not deep enough yet; there must be another plunge down into the billows. The creature is not stripped enough yet; self-righteousness is not taken away enough yet; self-sufficiency is not broken down enough yet. Another stripping must yet take place, another crushing into the dust, another breaking up and breaking down, another bringing the soul lower than ever it was before. The delay then of this answer to his prayers, the Lord not appearing just when he wants Him to appear, slighting his requests, denying a listening ear to his cry, hiding Himself altogether, not giving him any glimpse of His countenance, and drawing back as he would fain draw near—all these things so puzzle, and seem to be so opposed to the "devices in a man's heart," that he is brought into a greater strait than ever he was before.

And now he seems brought to this point, that he never shall have the blessing at all; that as the manifestation has been so long delayed, as the Lord does not appear when he calls upon Him, as He hides His face so from him, and will not be prevailed upon by any of his petitions to give him one look of mercy, the Lord never will come; and he says, "Surely all my past experience must have been a delusion. It could not have been from God. My liberty must have been false liberty. My peace must have been false peace. My joy must have been the joy of the hypocrite. It never could have been from God, or else I should not be in that miserable state in which I am now." Well, the device in this man's heart now is that his experience is not of God.

The device in his heart before, was, that he was so humble,

that the Lord was going to appear immediately; but now when the Lord has given him another plunge, brought him deeper still, he says, "the Lord will not appear at all." But, however many be the devices in a man's heart, "the counsel of the Lord still shall stand;" and that counsel shall be to come with favour, to give him some sweet discovery of Christ, to bring a sense of reconciliation into his soul, to revive his spirit, and to make Christ ten thousand times more precious and ten thousand times more lovely than He was before. Well then, this "counsel of the Lord shall stand," whatever be the devices in a man's heart that stand in opposition to it. And we almost always find that all "the counsels of the Lord" stand in opposition to our devices, and that all our devices must be frustrated, in order that "the counsel of the Lord" should stand.

We will go a little farther. The devices of our heart are generally to find some easy, smooth, flowery path. Whatever benefits we have derived from affliction, whatever mercies we have experienced in tribulation, the flesh hates and shrinks from such a path with perfect abhorrence. And, therefore, there is always a secret devising in a man's heart, to escape the cross, to avoid affliction, and to walk in some flowery meadow, away from the rough road which cuts his feet, and wearies his limbs.

Now then, in the execution of this device, a man shall sometimes come to this point, "I have had a good experience, I have known the Lord, I have felt the power of the gospel, I have tasted the misery of sin, as well as the sweetness of Christ; the Lord has delivered me in many instances, He has blessed my soul in many difficult and dangerous straits, He has raised up in my heart confidence in Him. Well now, why should I not stand in this liberty? Why should I not rest in this experience? Why should I not take up my firm footing upon that ground, which the Lord seems to have set my feet upon?" Here then is a "device in a man's heart," and this device in his heart he will try to execute—that is, instead of being, day by day, a poor, needy, naked wretch who wants deliverance; instead of being, day by day, a helpless creature, who needs the help of

the Most High; instead of carrying the cross, suffering tribulation, and walking in a path of temptation and distress, he rests upon the old experience, and takes a natural and carnal footing upon that former work, without the Lord, from time to time, leading him into fresh experience of his mercy, by leading him into fresh experience of his own misery.

Now, I believe that there are some good men in that spot. We read of persons being "at ease in Zion;" well, they are "at ease in Zion," not at ease in Sinai, nor at ease in Egypt, but they are at ease in Zion. And there are sometimes gracious men who have had a good experience, and have been led by God Himself into an acquaintance with the truth, and yet the Lord for wise purposes ceasing to exercise them, and to plunge them into tribulation, they get into a carnal state, resting upon their former experience, without, having daily instruction from the Lord Himself, and being continually led into those paths in which, and in which alone, Christ is really precious and suitable.

It resembles the case of a man who has been wading through deep poverty. When he was struggling through this slough, if he was a child of God, he knew much of God's providence, and when wonderful help came to him in most trying straits, he would bless, thank, and praise God for succouring him in these difficulties. But the man has emerged from this miry path; he is now settled in some good measure of worldly prosperity. Does he want a God of providence any more? Does he want the postman to bring a letter to his door, containing the very sum which he needed to pay his rent, lest he be dragged to a prison? No. All he has to do is to open his strong box, or to go to his banker, in order to pay every man his own, and discharge every bill. Then a God of providence is no longer known to him as before.

Well, so it is, in an analogous way, with the man who has been deeply exercised and tried in grace. His very deep exercises, his very painful trials, have been a means of showing him what a God of grace is, because they have so emptied his heart, that nothing

but grace would do to come in, and fill that empty spot. Then when grace has come, it has so thoroughly filled up the void, the heavenly tenon has so sweetly fitted in with the cut mortise, that there was a sweet reception of "the truth as it is in Jesus," an embracing of it with all the strength of affection that he had. But when a man gets out of the trying path, when he gets into those circumstances spiritually, that I have been describing naturally, why then, just as there he lost sight of a God of providence, so, in a great measure, here he loses sight of a God of grace. Therefore, nothing but trials and exercises and temptations and distresses, can ever make a man know a God of grace, in the same way as nothing but temporal poverty can make a man acquainted with a God of providence.

But though some of God's people are suffered to walk in this easy path, yet there are those whom He will not suffer thus to be "at ease in Zion," and the devices of whose hearts He frustrates by causing His own counsel to stand; for He has "chosen Zion in the furnace of affliction," He has purposed that His people should pass through the fire, he has chosen "an afflicted and poor people, that they should trust in the Lord;" and there, fore, though the Lord does see fit, that some shall be like those described in Amos, who "stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock," yet He takes care that there shall be a remnant of His people that shall be sorely exercised and oppressed and troubled and distressed in their minds, so as to bring them, day by day, to a feeling necessity of a God of all grace, to bless, teach and comfort them.

Another "device in a man's heart" is, that he shall have worldly prosperity; that his children shall grow up around him, and when they grow up, he shall be able to provide for them in a way which shall be best suited to their station in life; that they shall enjoy health and strength and success; and that there shall not be any cutting affliction in his family, or fiery trial to pass through. Now these devices the Lord frustrates. What grief, what affliction, what trouble, is the Lord continually bringing into men's families!

Their dearest objects of affection removed from them, at the very moment when they seemed clasped nearest around their hearts! and those who are spared, perhaps, growing up in such a searedness of conscience and hardness of heart, and, perhaps, profligacy of life, that even their very presence is often a burden to their parents instead of a blessing; and the very children who should be their comfort, thorns and briars in their sides! Oh, how the Lord overturns and brings to nought the “devices of a man’s heart” to make a paradise here upon earth.

Again, a man in his fleshly mind is generally devising some method or other, whereby he may escape a practical subjection to the gospel—some way or other whereby he may escape walking in the path of self-denial and mortification of the flesh, and crucifixion of “the old man with the affections and lusts.” He is generally seeking some way or other to indulge the flesh, and yet, at the same time, to stand in gospel liberty, to have everything that can gratify his carnal mind, and, at the same time, have a well-grounded hope of eternal life. But the Lord says, “No, these two things are not compatible; he that shall live with Christ must die with Christ; he that shall reign with Christ must suffer with Christ; he that shall wear the crown must carry the cross.” So that whatever devices there be in a man’s heart, or whatever ways and plans he shall undertake to bring his devices to pass, “the counsel of the Lord that shall stand.”

When a man is brought to the right spot, and is in a right mind to trace out the Lord’s dealings with him from the first, he sees it was a kind hand which “blasted his gourds, and laid them low;” it was a kind hand that swept away his worldly prospects—which reduced him to natural as well as to spiritual poverty—which led him into exercises, trials, sorrows, griefs, and tribulations; because, in those trials he has found the Lord, more or less, experimentally precious.

“Many are the devices of a man’s heart.” Now you have all your devices; that busy workshop is continually putting out some new

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pattern; some new fashion is continually starting forth from the depths of that ingenious manufactory which you carry about with you, and you are wanting this, and expecting that, and building up airy castles, and looking for that which shall never come to pass: for “many are the devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord that shall stand;” and so far as you are children of God, that counsel is a counsel of wisdom and mercy. The purposes of God’s heart are purposes of love and affection toward you, and therefore you may bless and praise God, that whatever be the devices of your hearts against God’s counsel, they shall be frustrated, that He may do His will and fulfil all His good pleasure.

**17 OPENING THE MOUTH FOR THE DUMB** (*Proverbs 31:8, 9*)

Preached ,at Artillery Street Chapel, Bishopsgate.  
on Wednesday Evening,  
*June 23, 1841*

*“Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.”*

*Proverbs 31:8, 9*

There is, I believe, some difference of opinion, as to who this King Lemuel was, to whom the words I have just read were addressed by his mother, together with the remaining portion of the chapter; but the best-founded opinion seems to be, that he was King Solomon, and that he is here called Lemuel, either because it was an endearing appellation wherewith his mother was used to address him—a kind of fondling term, instead of Solomon, or else that it was a name of Solomon, in addition to that whereby he is generally known. For it was the practice amongst the Hebrews to give various names to the same individual. So Jehoiachin is called in Jeremiah, Coniah (Jer. 22:24), and in the same way Solomon himself is, in another part of Scripture, called Jedediah (2 Sam.

12:25); and, therefore, there is reason to believe, that Lemuel here is merely another name for King Solomon.

The meaning of the word Lemuel is literally, “unto God,” that is devoted unto God, belonging to God, as the apostle expresses himself when he speaks of Christ in one short word, “God’s;” “All things are yours, and ye are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1 Cor. 3:23), that is, belonging to God. His mother then addresses to her son King Lemuel that excellent advice which is contained in the last chapter of the book of Proverbs; and, no doubt, the advice which she laid before him admitted a literal, as well as a spiritual interpretation. There appear to be two errors which men fall into; one is setting aside the spiritual meaning of a passage altogether and adopting the literal, and the other is setting aside the literal altogether and adopting only the spiritual. There seems little doubt, that in Scripture there is a literal interpretation, as well as a spiritual one, and that there always is an analogy—a resemblance between the two interpretations; the spiritual interpretation being based upon the literal, and the literal standing as a foundation, on which the spiritual interpretation rests.

Therefore, in endeavouring to trace out the experimental interpretation of these words, which I shall endeavour to lay before you, I mean not to set aside that literal meaning which doubtless the words were intended to convey. The mother of Lemuel exhorted him strictly and literally, when, as a king he sat in judgment, to “open” his “mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as were appointed to destruction.” She inculcated upon him, as the judge of his people, as one that sat in the gates of the city to administer justice—that he should “open his mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.” But when we look at the spiritual and experimental meaning of the words, we see that “a greater than Solomon is here,” and that Lemuel points at a greater king than ever Solomon was in all his glory. The word signifies as I hinted before, devoted unto God—“God’s” in a word. Who can be then more emphatically pointed at than the Lord of life and

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glory, who is God's Son and God's servant—God's ambassador, who was devoted to Him, and who was consecrated to Him during His pilgrimage here below, and yet is one with Him in essence, and one with Him in glory?

But it may be asked, if Lemuel here signifies the Lord Jesus Christ, whom can we understand by "His mother," and who is she that she should give Him any advice? How is this to be explained consistently with the analogy of faith and the Scriptures of truth? What read we in Song. 3:11 "Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart." There we have a strictly parallel passage, where King Solomon, who doubtless is Jesus for the whole book of Canticles is taken up with a description of the loves of Jesus and His Church, is spoken of as having a mother, and being crowned by her. His mother, then, must represent the Church, seeing that the Lord Jesus Christ derived His human nature from a woman, was "made of a woman," as the Scripture speaks, and thus the Church may be said, in this sense, to be the mother of Christ. We have, then, in the text certain advice which was given to King Lemuel by his mother; and her counsel to him was, "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy."

It is, then, in this experimental and spiritual point of view, that I shall, with God's blessing, consider the passage and without making any formal divisions, I shall just speak of the leading points of the text, as they shall present themselves to my mind under the instruction of the blessed Spirit.

1. The first word that seems to strike our attention, is the expression "dumb;" for unless we have some idea who the character is, for whom King Lemuel is to open His mouth, we shall not be able to understand what reasons prompted Him to open His mouth on his behalf. There is a certain character, then, pointed out

in these words, and upon him the title "dumb" is written. Who is this character? He is one whom God has quickened into spiritual life, and in whose heart He has planted His fear. He is one whom God has brought to His judgment-seat, and arraigned at His bar. But why should he be dumb? Why, there are several circumstances that will render him dumb; and if he were not dumb, he would not need a Mediator to "open His mouth" in his behalf.

The first thing that makes him dumb, is, a deep conviction and sensation of guilt upon his conscience. We find this naturally amongst men. It is a common saying, "such a person was quite dumb-founded." When an accusation, which is true, is made against a man, and his conscience is not as yet "seared as with a hot iron," that charge will strike him dumb; as Hannah speaks in her song, "the wicked shall be silent in darkness" (1 Sam. 2:9). The very force of conscience, when conscience is obliged to fall under the accusation, renders a man utterly mute. When God, then, by the application of His holy law to a man's conscience, arraigns him at His righteous bar, He strikes him dumb, that is, he has not a word to say why judgment should not take place.

It is a common practice in criminal courts, after all the evidence has been heard, for the judge to say to the prisoner, "what have you to say in your defence that judgment should not pass?" The criminal sometimes endeavours to falter out some excuse, but in many cases he is dumb, he has no word to plead to stay judgment; he has no excuse to bring forward, why the sentence should not drop from the mouth of the judge against him. This is the case always in spiritual criminals, universally so with those who are arraigned by the Holy Ghost at the bar of God. They cannot plead one excuse why judgment should not pass, they cannot offer one pretext why the mouth of the Lord should not pronounce that righteous sentence which they have deserved at His hands. They stand dumb before the Judge of all. And this posture seems to be spoken of in Lam 3:29, where it says, "He putteth his mouth in the dust," as though he had not a word to say.

Not chattering or prattling with God, as a man can talk with his fellow; no, nor aping the posture of those who claim blessings at God's hands; no, nor rushing daringly and presumptuously "upon the thick bosses of God's buckler" (Job 15:26), without one atom of holy reverence or godly fear; no, nor like Baal's worshippers, of whom we have so many imitators howling and screeching, as if they would alter the mind of God, and wrest the blessing out of His hand, whether He means to bestow it or not. No spiritually-convinced, law-condemned criminal ever came before that God, who is made known in his conscience as "a consuming fire," with bold presumption and familiarity. He stands dumb before Him, as not having an excuse, or a pretext, or a word to say, why judgment should not pass.

But this criminal is not merely dumb before God, but he is also dumb before his fellow-men. You may reasonably suspect the religion of those persons, who have a word for everything and a word for everybody; whose tongue is tipped with the language of Scripture, and who seem to carry about with them a bag full of texts, and all they have to do is to dip their fingers in, and pull out the first that comes to hand. There seems little knowledge of the writing of God's hand upon the wall, or of the teaching of God's Spirit in the heart, when they are so ready with texts of Scripture, not one of which was ever applied with power to their souls.

But this poor criminal is dumb before his fellow-men—that is to say, he has little to speak about, little to tell of, because he cannot speak of God's goodness to his soul. He has little to boast of, for in himself he is nothing but "wounds and bruises and putrifying sores" (Isa. 1:6); he cannot yet chant the high praises of God, and all he can tell if he could speak at all would be a tale of wretchedness, misery, and woe. And, therefore, so far from going amid the busy haunts of men, or thrusting himself amongst every knot of talkative professors, "he sitteth alone, and keepeth silence, because he hath borne the yoke of God upon him" (Lam. 3:28.)

But there is another sense in which this poor guilty criminal

is “dumb,” and that is, he is not able to pour out the very feelings of his heart into the ears and the bosom of God, whatever be the workings of his soul, and whatever tumultuous thoughts and painful anxieties are passing within. His language is the language of groans and sighs; he has not an elegant assortment of phrases which he has learned from the mouth of others; he cannot go before God in borrowed language, or what he has stolen from the pulpit; he can only go before the Lord with groans and sighs and tears and breathings after the mercy which God may be pleased to extend to his guilty soul. He does not seem able, except very rarely, to tell out all the various feelings of his heart, and is often obliged, when he comes to the throne of grace, merely to groan and sigh forth the desires of his soul, because he cannot find access to God, nor language so as to tell freely that which is passing in the secret recesses of his bosom.

2. But we have another character for whom King Lemuel is to “open his mouth,” one that is “appointed to destruction.” Now, this expression does not mean any of those spoken of in the Epistle of Jude, “who were before of old ordained to this condemnation.” The character spoken of in these words, is not one of those whom God has “appointed unto wrath,” as a “vessel of wrath;” but it is one who is condemned in his own feelings, one who is “appointed to destruction” in the judgment that he passes upon himself. The Lord of life and glory never opens His mouth for the reprobate. The counsel to Him in the text is to “judge righteously;” and He can only “judge righteously” when justice has been satisfied, when all its imperious demands have been answered, when a payment has been rendered.

He could not plead righteously, if He pleaded the cause of those for whom no satisfaction has been made, and whose debts had not been discharged. Therefore, the term does not signify those whom God has fore-ordained unto wrath, but His elect people, who, by a work of grace upon their hearts, are brought into those feelings, whereby they stand “appointed to destruction”—that is,

a sentence of death is written in their conscience, as the apostle speaks, "we had the sentence of death in ourselves" (2 Cor. 1:9). They see no hope of escape "from the wrath to come," they cannot see how their sins can ever be forgiven, since they are so black and aggravated; they know not how God can, consistently with those attributes which He has made manifest in their consciences, ever save them from eternal death; and therefore mercy not having yet visited their souls, the blood of the atonement not having been sprinkled on their consciences, and they not having been brought to know the things of Christ by the Holy Ghost leading them by faith into the satisfaction of Christ, they stand condemned in their own feelings before God, and only a step between them and eternal death.

Now for these characters King Lemuel is to "open His mouth," that is, He is to plead and intercede for them; He is to open His mouth as their Advocate at the bar of God, to stand forth as their Mediator and Intercessor "from the wrath to come." The whole of Jesus' life upon earth, every branch of His active and passive obedience was an opening His mouth for the dumb, for those who are "appointed to destruction;" and never did He more powerfully and effectually plead, than when His gaping wounds were opened on the cross. And in the courts above, in the prevalence of His intercession, in that incense which He is continually offering by sitting there as the High Priest and Saviour of His chosen, He is opening His mouth, though not in actual words, yet by His presence there, He is opening His mouth to God for the dumb, He is pleading and interceding in the cause of all such as are "appointed to destruction."

But there is another sense of the words, which, I think, is very consistent with Scripture, and the meaning of the passage. The word Lemuel signifies one who is devoted to God; and may not this aptly represent an ambassador of the Most High, one who has been sanctified and set apart, that he should stand forth in His name, one who has been quickened by the Holy Ghost into a

knowledge of the “Three-one God,” and who has been brought by the Spirit’s leadings and operations to stand forth in the name, and give himself up to do the work of God?

In this sense the Church may speak to those among the “kings and priests unto God,” to those of her sons who are devoted to the Lord’s cause, and to the promotion of His glory upon earth; to them may she also address this language of exhortation, and say to each of them, “Open thy mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction.” Now the minister of the Spirit opens his mouth for the dumb when he traces out their experience, and thus enters into all the feelings of their troubled hearts; when he is enabled to describe to them the very sensations under which they are labouring, the very pangs of guilt and harassing convictions under which they are suffering, and the whole work of grace upon their souls, in such a way as they are not able to describe it themselves; he opens his mouth, when he unfolds, from some personal experience of it in his own soul, and from the light thrown upon it from the Scriptures, the very spot in which they stand, the very feelings which they are passing through, and the work of grace which the Holy Ghost is tracing out in their hearts.

And thus many of God’s poor “dumb” children, who feel themselves “appointed to destruction,” when they have come into a chapel where a minister of truth is speaking in the name of the Lord, have found to their surprise and consolation, that he has a tongue to explain the secret workings of their hearts, that he has an acquaintance with all that is passing in their bosoms, and that he can tell out the secret feelings of their minds, which they are not able to tell out themselves.

And again; this Lemuel, this anointed servant of the Most High, “opens his mouth for the dumb, and for such as are appointed to destruction,” when in public prayer, he is able to pour out the very feelings of their hearts to God; when he pleads for them and with them at the throne of grace, and bears them up in his solemn

petitions to the throne of the Most High, and thus in his prayers, by expressing the feelings, desires, and breathings of his own soul, is enabled, to their wonder and astonishment, to express the very feelings that they are exercised with, and to lay before God the very sensations and breathing desires of their hearts.

And again; God's Lemuels open their mouths for the dumb, and for such as are "appointed to destruction," when they vindicate their cause, when they stand up as sympathising with "the poor and needy," when they hold up their shield and buckler so far as they are enabled to catch the arrows that are shot against the poor, tempted, tried family of God. And thus, in every company and in every place, in every pulpit and on every occasion, are not ashamed when needful to open their mouths, and plead the cause of the dumb, who have not a word to say for themselves, and declare that these are the people of the living God, let presumptuous professors shoot out what arrows they may against them.

3. But we will go on a little further with our text, for we find there another character spoken of, and that is the "poor and needy." A man is not spiritually dumb all his life, nor is he all his days one of those who "are appointed to destruction." This seems to point at the beginning of the work of grace in his heart, as well as peculiar seasons of trial and temptation; but as we go on, we find a character that runs parallel with all the life of a Christian, we find a word that describes what a child of God is in every state and in every stage. In the eighty-sixth Psalm, David speaks "of God having delivered him from the lowest hell." He speaks of the sweet deliverance he had experienced, but he begins the Psalm with saying, "I am poor and needy." And, therefore, whatever deliverance a man may have experienced, let him have been delivered from the "lowest hell," all his life long he will have this experience wrought in him by the Holy Ghost, to be "poor and needy;" and only so far as he is "poor and needy" will he want to know anything experimentally of the riches of Christ, or to taste the consolations which the Spirit of God alone can communicate to his parched and thirsty soul.

How many we find in our day, who are “rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing,” and yet they are always speaking and boasting of the riches of Christ! But what can they know of Christ’s riches? His riches are for the “poor and needy,” His blood is for the guilty, His righteousness is for the naked, His perfect work and finished salvation for those who continually stand in need of His powerful arm to save them from the “lowest hell.” And therefore whatever notions men may have about Christ’s riches, Christ’s blood, Christ’s righteousness, and Christ’s glorious salvation, there are none that prize it, that really pant with unutterable longings after it, that really desire to live upon it as the very food of their hearts, that are calling to God for a sweet manifestation of it, that are restless, uneasy, and dissatisfied without the enjoyment of it—there are none that thus breathe and thus feel, except those who are spiritually “poor and needy,” who are stripped and emptied and despoiled of everything that the flesh can boast of, and everything that nature can exalt itself with.

But these “poor and needy” have “a cause.” We often find that the work of grace in a man’s soul, and the exercises in a man’s heart, are compared in Scripture to an action at law, to some trial which is to take place in a court of judgment. We find this in various parts of the Scripture. “Let my sentence,” says David, “come forth from Thy presence,” that is, the termination and adjudication of my cause. So we read in Micah, “I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He plead my cause,” implying that there is a decision to be made, that there is a trial to take place in the court of conscience, and that this trial must be settled by the mouth of the Most High. Now, he who has never had this cause tried in his heart, knows not whether he has been acquitted, or whether he has been condemned. He who has never had a court of trial set up in his bosom, he himself arraigned at that bar, found guilty without a word to say, and then to receive from the mouth of the judge an acquittal, knows nothing at all of what it is to have a manifest testimony from the Lord God Almighty that

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he is one of His chosen and pardoned ones.

The Church then calls upon King Lemuel, “the King of kings, and Lord of lords,” the great High Priest and Mediator of His dear people, to plead the cause of such—that is, when “the books are opened, and the judgment is set,” when the “poor and needy” have no counsellor, and have no spiritual coin to purchase the aid of an Advocate, and their own mouths are shut through the weight of guilt and condemnation, then to step forward, and advocate their cause. And how does He plead their cause? By unrolling the book, and showing that under their names the discharge has been written, that blood has been shed for their transgressions, and that their iniquities have been blotted out from the sight of God. He pleads their cause, when, so to speak, He stands forth in their name as having borne their sins “in His own body on the tree,” as having gone to the end of the law for righteousness, and brought in an everlasting justification of their persons “from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Thus He pleads their cause.

So, in an inferior sense, those also that stand forth in the name of the Most High, plead the cause of “the poor and needy,” when they open up unto them, under the Spirit’s teaching, the way of salvation through the satisfaction of the Mediator, when they show that there is a glorious righteousness, which is “unto all and upon all them that believe,” and when they declare that God hath put away the sins of His elect by the blood of His dear Son. When they are enabled so to trace out the experience of the soul, under the Spirit’s teaching, the Spirit Himself raises up a blessed evidence in the hearts of their poor and needy hearers, that they have passed through the same.

They plead the cause of “the poor and needy” then, by bringing forth those reasons why they should stand acquitted at God’s bar. The counsel that stands to plead for the imprisoned debtor, if he can bring forward any evidence that the debt has been paid by another, or the advocate for a criminal at the bar, if he can unroll

the king's proclamation of pardon and amnesty, and can prove that his trembling client is included therein, will plead so effectually, that judgment will be stayed, and the prisoner set at liberty. Now, what better cause of acquittal can there be for a poor debtor at God's bar, than to shew that a full satisfaction has been made for his debts, that the demands of justice have been complied with, that blood has been shed, and the sinner been reconciled to God by the perfect work of God's dear Son?

Thus God's servants plead the cause of "the poor and needy;" and when they are enabled to open the roll before the eyes of the prisoner, and show him his name there, and the blessed Spirit seals that testimony in the prisoner's heart and conscience the judge is satisfied, the prisoner is satisfied, and the spectators, that reverence the laws and yet have a spiritual sympathy with the prisoner, are satisfied, and all can unite in ascribing "honour and praise to the Lamb."

4. But we have a solemn hint given, both to Lemuel that intercedes above, though indeed He needs no such counsel, and to those Lemuels that stand forth in God's name to plead the cause of "the poor and needy" below, which is, to "judge righteously." Let no partiality bias or influence your judgment; let justice have its full sway, as well as mercy; let not the criminal be pardoned, if justice thereby suffer; but let judgment, in every sense, have all that justice claims.

King Lemuel, then, as Intercessor above, would not "judge righteously" if He opened His mouth for those who were fore-ordained to destruction; because justice was never satisfied for them, blood was never shed for them, their sins were never atoned for, righteousness was never brought in to justify them in the sight of God. Therefore, King Lemuel, the great Intercessor above, though He "opens His mouth for the dumb, and pleads the cause of the poor and needy," yet does it with the strictest observance of the laws of justice. If He included in His mediation and intercession any one whom God had not chosen, whose name was not in the

covenant, whose sins were not expiated on the cross, He would not “judge righteously;” or on the other hand, if He excluded from His petitions, if He shut out from His mediatorial intercession, at the right hand of God any who were included in the covenant of grace, any for whose sins He died upon the cross, any whose transgressions He had blotted out by His own blood-shedding, if He excluded any whom God had included, then He would not “judge righteously.”

But He “judges righteously” when He acts according to the strictest requisitions of justice; and it would be as inconsistent with righteousness to save any through His mediation, who had not been pardoned by His blood, as that any should be lost for want of His mediation, who had been pardoned by His atoning sacrifice. But He “judges righteously;” He weighs the real merits of the case; He acts upon the strictest demands of justice; not justice tempered by mercy, and yet justice kissing mercy—mercy in its fulness and justice in its fulness; mercy not adulterated by justice, nor justice adulterated by mercy; meeting, but not mingling; wedded, but each preserving its distinct identity; flowing in parallel channels, but not intermixing their streams; each pursuing its own course, and yet running side by side from eternity to eternity.

But we come to the Lemuels on earth—those that stand forth in the name of the Lord to do His work in the sanctuary, they too must “judge righteously,” as well as “open their mouths for the dumb.” How then are they to “judge righteously?” By weighing up and examining the cases that come before them; by drawing a straight and narrow line between false religion and true religion, between fleshly convictions and spiritual convictions, between the teachings of God and the workings of nature. A minister may have such a compassionate heart naturally, as to be continually binding up wounds, whether those wounds have been inflicted by the Holy Ghost or not; or he may have such misguided and mistaken views of what the real teachings of the Spirit are, that on the other hand, he may make the hearts of those sad whom God has not made

sad. We fall into errors on both sides. Some will wound God's dear afflicted ones, will lay grievous burdens upon those who are already sinking under the heavy load of guilt upon their consciences, and put stumbling-blocks in the path of those who are passing through deep exercises. They judge not righteously, they exercise no discernment nor discrimination, nor do they move according to the channel that God has tracked in His Word.

Then there are others who judge not righteously by going to the other extreme, who mistake every trickling tear that falls down the cheek of a hypocrite for the real pangs of godly sorrow, who believe every solemn-looking professor who hang his head like a bulrush, to be "a mourner in Zion," mistaking the mere soft feelings of the natural heart, worked up into something like tenderness under an affecting sermon, for the deep contrition of spirit, which is the work of the Holy Ghost, and of the Holy Ghost alone to produce. But the Church counsels her Lemuels to "judge righteously"—that is, to move in such strict accordance with the work of the Holy Ghost, and so run in the channel which God Himself has traced out in His Word, as not to be turned aside by natural compassion on the one hand, nor yet to err by harshness of spirit on the other.

Again; these Lemuels are apt to be biassed by very carnal motives. If there be any rich respectable persons in their congregation, they are apt to be drawn aside from judging righteously, that is, they are inclined to allow them to come into the Church with a shallower experience than those who are temporally poor. Or perhaps they will soften down their ministry, lest some wealthy deacon, or some rich supporter of the cause should take offence, and turn his back upon them; and thus they are turned aside from judging righteously, by the base workings of their carnal and covetous heart. Others are kept from judging righteously by the "fear of man that bringeth a snare." They cannot bear the cross which every faithful minister must carry; they cannot endure to be shot at with those bitter arrows which self-righteous and presumptuous professors are continually seeking to wound them with; and, therefore, they

so pare down truth, they so round the jutting edge of everything which seems to be offensive, that whilst they maintain the outlines of truth, every salient point, every jutting angle is rounded off like the corner of a street, lest the passer-by should strike his foot against it. And thus they clip and pare down truth to please professors, instead of standing forth fearlessly and faithfully in the naked simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Again; wherever there are family connections in the way, there is always a great temptation for the Lemuels not to “judge righteously.” If, for instance, his own children begin to be a little serious, he is tempted not to “judge righteously.” If he has relations in the flesh, who begin to make a profession of religion, he is tempted not to “judge righteously,” but to have his eyes, in some way, blinded by some favourable prejudices, and to seek to thrust those upon the Church, who, were they not akin to him in the flesh, he would never dream of bringing forward at all. And thus biassed by the warm feelings of his natural heart, he is drawn aside from judging righteously.

Again; it continually happens in a Church, that there are those who cannot hear the minister; or those who have taken up a prejudice against him, and who, from various motives, may side with a party most churches being split into parties that is unfavourable to him. Now it is very hard for a man thus circumstanced to “judge righteously.” He will be strongly tempted to detract from that which is really good in them, and perhaps ascribe to them motives of which they really are not guilty; and whilst he looks at the most favourable side in the case of his supporters, he will look at the most unfavourable side in the case of his opponents. And I do believe, from what I have seen, that many divisions in churches arise from the spirit of the minister; and where they do not spring from him, are much fostered by him in this, that he, instead of seeking to heal breaches, and bring the people of God together, would rather stand as a party-man, and be the head and leader of the strongest side. Now this is not “judging

righteously;” he does not stand as he should do, a pastor over the flock, when he would pay his chief attention to some sheep, and neglect or wound others. These are not personal reflections, as I am utterly unacquainted with you as a church. Think not, for a moment, that I am indulging in personalities, for I assure you I know not any individual belonging to this church, nor have I any such information from others. They are mere general observations as they have occurred to my mind, at this present moment, from the text.

Well, here then is the prescribed course, which those servants of God who would desire to walk in the footsteps of their great Master, are called upon to follow, “To open their mouth for the dumb,” to “plead the cause of the poor and needy,” and yet to “judge righteously;” to run in that narrow line, to walk in that difficult path, to steer in that intricate channel, surrounded on every side by rocks and shoals, and out of which they so easily glide to fall upon one sandbank or another.

### 18 SIGNS SEEN, AND NOT SEEN (*1 Ch. 22:8*)

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, on Lord’s Day morning,

*June 20, 1841*

*“We see not our signs.”*

*Psalm 74:9*

The Psalm, from which the text is taken, is clearly not one of those that were written by the pen of David. We gather this, not merely from the title of the Psalm, where it is called “Maschil” which means “giving instruction” “of Asaph,” but also from the strongest internal evidence. For instance, we read in the 6th and 7th verses (Ps. 74:6, 7), “But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers. They have cast fire into thy sanctuary; they have denied by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground.” We have no such event as this in the

days of David, for the temple at that time was not even built; that privilege being reserved for his son Solomon, because David “had shed much blood upon the earth” (1 Ch. 22:8).

It evidently points, then, to a period, when the carved work of this temple was broken down with axes and hammers; when fire was cast into the sanctuary; and God’s dwelling place, that is, his temple, was defiled by being cast down to the ground. Again, in the 8th verse (Ps. 74:8), we read, “They have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land.” Now, there were no synagogues in the days of David, nor were there any such assemblies till the time of the Babylonish captivity. Thus we have the strongest internal evidence, that this Psalm was written about that time, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple of God at Jerusalem; and it appears to have been penned by Asaph, a descendant of Asaph the singer, who remained at Jerusalem, and witnessed those desolations, that were committed by the hands of Nebuchadnezzar’s soldiers.

With respect, then, to the words from which I hope to speak this morning, we find Asaph pouring forth his soul in this bitter lamentation:—“We see not our signs.” Now, these signs, which he mourned that he did not see, were certain outward marks of God’s special favour, certain testimonies of his presence, certain memorials that he was with them to bless them. And it is said, that there were five things in Solomon’s temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, which were not in the second temple, which was erected after the Babylonish captivity. Five memorials or tokens of God’s special presence were there wanting. One was the ark of the covenant; another, the fire from heaven upon the brazen altar; the third, the Shechinah, or cloud that rested upon the mercy-seat; the fourth, the Urim and Thummim which were in the breast-plate of the high-priest; and the fifth, the spirit of prophecy. For though there were the prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, at the time of, and shortly after, the restoration; yet the spirit of prophecy ceased with Malachi, and did not reappear until John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus.

We see, then, that there is a ground-work from these words on which to build up a spiritual and experimental interpretation. We are not warranted to take any words that we find in the Scriptures of truth, and spiritualise them according to our own fancy. Unless there be some groundwork for a spiritual and experimental interpretation, founded upon the literal meaning of the passage, we seem rather to be trusting to our own fancy and imagination, than to “prophesy according to the analogy of faith,” and “rightly to divide the word of truth.” I never wish to build up an experimental signification upon a passage of Scripture, unless, first, I can find some solid groundwork whereon to build it; and unless, secondly, I can find some life and feeling out of it in my own heart. When we go by what the Spirit of God has recorded in the written word, and by what the same blessed Spirit has, in a measure, traced out in our hearts, we then move upon solid ground, and bear a testimony of which we need not be ashamed.

The lamentation of the church here then was, that she saw not her signs. So now the church of the living God, the regenerate family of Zion, have often reason to pour out the same melancholy complaint. Signs of God’s favour, marks, and testimonies of his work of grace upon their souls are often so out of sight, so buried in obscurity, so enveloped in clouds of darkness, that the living family are compelled, from soul-feeling, to take up the language of lamentation here expressed, and say, “we see not our signs.”

We gather, then, from these words, that there are such things as “signs,” that is, tokens and marks of God’s special favour to the soul; that there is also “a seeing” those signs, when God the Holy Ghost is pleased to shine upon them; and that there is a third state, where there is a “not seeing the signs,” those signs being enveloped in dimness, darkness, and obscurity.

I. “Signs,” then, are marks and testimonies of God’s favour, memorials and Ebenezers of the Lord’s special loving-kindness to us, as “chosen in Christ before all worlds”—as redeemed by the blood of the Son of God upon the cross at Calvary and as quickened

in due time by the Holy Ghost bringing us to a knowledge of ourselves, and to a knowledge of “the only true God, and of Jesus Christ Whom he has sent.” Now, where all signs of God’s favour, and all testimonies of his gracious dealings are absent, then we must pronounce the work of grace to be absent. But remember that it is one thing to have a complete absence of signs; it is another thing not to be able to see them. The absence of signs shows an absence of life; not seeing the signs merely shows that the living soul is in a state of gloom and darkness. There are, then, certain symptoms, marks, and tokens of life in the soul; and where these symptoms or signs are totally absent, then we must pronounce, that that soul is dead in sin, or dead in a profession.

If we look at “signs” generally, there seem to be two classes of them. There are some signs which, were they removed, would not remove the existence of the thing itself. And there are other signs of such a nature, that if they were removed the existence of the thing which they signify would be removed with them. For instance, the crown upon a monarch’s head, and the throne on which a monarch sits are signs of royalty. But take away that crown, put it into the Jewel Office in the Tower; or remove that throne on which the sovereign sits; the absence of the crown, and the removal of the throne do not take away royalty; the monarch is still a king, though the insignia of his dignity are out of sight. So, to use a more familiar comparison, the milestones upon a road are certain marks of distance and when we come to them, we know how far we have travelled. But these milestones might be all defaced, to as to become illegible, or they might be taken clean away; yet the road and the distance would remain the same. So a bank note is a sign of value; it has no value in itself, it is merely a representative of property, let the bank note be destroyed, still the property, of which it is the sign, remains the same to the company that issued it. Well, these are certain signs or marks of the existence of a thing, and yet, if these signs were taken away, the thing would still exist as it was before. But there are other signs which are so constituent parts of

the thing itself, that if the signs were taken away the thing would, in its measure cease to exist. For instance, at a certain period of the year, the days begin to lengthen—the sun rises higher in the sky, and sets later—the trees put forth their leaves—the flowers appear in the earth—the singing of the turtle is heard in the land,—and we say, these are signs of spring. But, suppose that these signs were removed; that the days did not become longer, that the sun did not rise higher, nor continue for a greater space in the firmament, that the trees did not put forth their leaves, nor the earth put forth its flowers; why, the very removal of these things would remove spring itself.

There are signs, then, which may be removed, and the thing still exist—and there are signs, the removal of which takes away the thing itself. Now with respect to signs of Divine favour, marks and testimonies of God's special blessing, these signs are chiefly of the latter class, that is, could you take away the signs you would take away that life which is there signified; because the life of God consists in certain feelings, certain manifestations, certain workings, certain breathings which could they be removed out of that man's heart, the life would be removed with them. But though the chief parts of signs, spiritually considered, are of the second class, I must observe, there are some signs of the first class, for instance, external fruits—the fruits that are visible in a man's life, conduct, and conversation. If these signs are absent, we say that the man is not possessed of spiritual life; but still they might be present and not prove the existence of spiritual life, but might spring from self-righteousness. But the greater part of signs of God's favor, are signs of the second class, that is, their removal implies the removal of that which they point out. We will then, with God's blessing, look a little at some of these signs; and may he assist us to find out, that these signs have been stamped by the Holy Ghost upon our consciences.

1. Now, the first sign, according to the Scripture testimony, is "the fear of God;" for the word of the Lord says, that "the fear of

God is the beginning of wisdom,” and that it is “a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death.” And therefore, “if the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” it must be the first sign of spiritual life, because it is the beginning of spiritual life. He then whose religion began without the fear of the Lord being implanted from above in his heart and conscience began with God before God began with him; he took up his religion before the Holy Ghost gave him that which constitutes vital godliness. And he that took it up, can lay it down; he that began in his own strength will probably finish in his own weakness. He that lays hold of the things of eternity before the things of eternity lay hold on him, will be able to, and, no doubt, will leave go of that which he has thus in the flesh laid hold of. “The fear of the Lord,” then, “is the beginning of wisdom,” and operates as a fountain of life. But connected with “the fear of the Lord” in the soul, there are different workings toward that source and fountain, whence this life comes down. In this “fear of the Lord,” we feel what sin is. By this “fear of the Lord” we depart from outward evil. By the working of this “fear of the Lord” we are brought into the presence of a heart-searching God. Through the springings up of this “fear of the Lord,” as the fountain of life in our souls, we call unto the Lord that he would pardon our sins, manifest himself to our souls, make Jesus known, keep us from evil, and lead us into all truth. Then, “the fear of the Lord” is a living principle in a man’s conscience; no dead stagnant pool, no rain-water tank, but it is a living stream of living water, which is continually gushing up from the bottom of his heart, springing up like the well spoken of in the Scriptures, “Spring up, O well” — springing up in the soul, as the Spirit of the Lord, from time to time, works upon it, and draws it forth into blessed exercise.

2. Another sign of the Lord having chosen us in Christ before all worlds, and redeemed us by the blood of his only begotten Son, is his having poured out upon us “the Spirit of grace and of supplications.” This is the testimony which the Lord himself has given us in Zachariah: “I will pour out upon the house of

David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications.” Now, when “the Spirit of grace and of supplication” is poured out upon the soul, it enables the soul to pour itself out before God; as Hannah said to Eli, when he thought that she was drunken,—”No, my Lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit, I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord,” that is, she poured out all her feelings, all her wants, all her desires into the bosom of that God, who had brought her to his footstool. And there is no real prayer, in whatever stage or state of experience of the divine life we may be—there is no real prayer, where there is not a pouring out of the soul into the bosom of God, that is, there is, as it were, a casting forth, and a casting down, at the feet of the Lord those burdens, griefs, trials, and difficulties, wherewith the soul is beset. Now, this pouring out of the soul does not necessarily imply any great fluency; it does not carry with it the idea of what are called gifts, but it carries with it this idea, that the man unbosoms himself, unburdens himself, earnestly tells out the wants of his heart; and therefore it corresponds with the work of the Holy Ghost spoken of in (Rom. 8:20): “The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered,” or rather, that are not to be expressed. So that these groanings are poured out into the bosom of God, pressed out of us by the heavy burden of guilt, condemnation, temptation, exercise, and sorrow. And he that has never known what it is to feel the Spirit, as a “Spirit of grace and of supplications,” enabling him to pour out his soul before the Lord, and he who has never felt the Spirit within him, interceding with “groanings which cannot be uttered,” has a mark upon him that he is destitute of that gift, which the Holy Ghost gives to the people of God.

3. Another “sign” of God’s special favour is repentance, and this, not “the repentance of the world that worketh death,” not the remorse of the carnal mind, not fleshy sorrow, nor the mere workings of natural conscience, but, as the Scriptures speak,

“repentance unto life.” “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life;” or, as it is spoken of in another passage, “repentance not to be repented of.” Then this repentance will not consist merely in conviction of guilt, nor pangs of remorse, for this a man may have, who has no grace in his heart at all, as a criminal upon the gallows may have remorse of conscience, and as murderers have, at times, been so haunted by the remembrance of their crimes, that they have yielded themselves up into the hands of justice, being unable to bear any longer that intolerable load. So in a reprobate, or in a man devoid of the grace of God, there may be, and doubtless there often are, strong pangs of remorse, convictions of guilt, and sensations of the tremendous wrath of God against sin; and yet this is not “repentance unto life,” but “the sorrow of the world that worketh death,” the beginning and foretaste of an endless eternity of misery. But wherever there is “repentance unto life” given by the Holy Ghost, there will not be merely pangs of guilt and convictions of sin, but there will also be implanted a solemn hatred, abhorrence, and detestation of those sins, which lie heavy upon our consciences, and of our own selves, as being so involved in transgression.

4. Another “sign” of God’s special favour and mark of his quickening grace, is faith in the Lord Jesus. The message which the apostle preached, was “repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ.” The Lord himself went about preaching these words, “Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.” There is, sooner or later, in the heart of every quickened child of God, some measure given to him of faith in the Lord Jesus. Not that this comes at first. In the living family there are different states and stages of experience. There shall be some whom God has quickened into spiritual life, who have the “fear of the Lord” in them, as “the beginning of wisdom,” who have had “the spirit of grace and of supplications” poured out upon them, who have repented and are repenting of their transgressions against God, and hate themselves before him; and yet the Lord the Spirit has not yet fulfilled his covenant office, in

taking of the things, of Christ, and showing them to their souls. For faith in the Lord Jesus Christ arises out of some discovery of Christ to the soul by the Holy Ghost, some bringing of Christ near, some anointing the eyes with eye-salve, whereby a glimpse of Christ's blood and righteousness is received, and his glorious salvation in some measure made known. Now, till a man gets there, if the Lord has quickened him by his blessed Spirit, he can never find solid rest nor peace; you may doubt a man's religion who can rest satisfied, short of a manifestation of Christ to his soul. Guilt, conviction, the workings of godly sorrow, a deep feeling of self-abhorence and self-loathing, will so press a man down into the dust, will so strip him of all creature-righteousness, and so empty him of all fleshly religion, that nothing short of application, manifestation, discovery, and gracious revelation, can ever satisfy his soul, or bind up the wounds of his bleeding conscience. Therefore, write yourselves down as dead in a profession, if you can do without some manifestation and discovery of Christ in your souls.

5. Love to God's people is a sign that God has chosen us in Christ before all worlds; and the Apostle John gives us this as an express mark. He says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life" not merely that we have passed, but "we know that we have passed from death unto life" "because we love the brethren." Now, there are many mistakes made here. Hypocrites, and rotten professors, and other presumptuous characters—those tares among the wheat, those goats among the sheep, are glad to catch at any evidence to buoy them up—are fain to lay hold of any sign or testimony whereby they can ease the pangs of an accusing conscience. Many, therefore, lay hold of this testimony in the word, who have never received this testimony inwardly from God. But whom do they love. Those that will flatter them, that will think highly of them, that will back their religion, who run in the same channel of doctrine, or who are in any way kind, and pleasing, and amiable; and this they call loving the people of God. "They are sure," they say, "that they have passed from death unto life, because

they love the brethren.” But do they feel any love to the tried, the exercised, the sin-burdened, the distressed, the Satan-harassed? Do they love the faithful, bold, fearless soldiers of the great Captain of our salvation? Do they love those who will deal honestly with them, and strip off the false coverings that are spread over their hearts, and cannot be bought, by favour nor by gold, to say that which they do not feel. Do they love them? No, they are the last persons that they love. The smooth, the amiable, those who never say a word to ruffle them, nor to inflict a wound upon them, they can love; but the upright, the sincere, the straightforward, simple-hearted, living family, who dare not disguise their real sentiments when they are called to express them, these they hate with a perfect hatred, and account them their enemies. Then, before you can write yourselves down to be living souls by the love that you feel to God’s people, examine and try who the people are whom you really do love. Are they the broken-hearted, contrite, mourning, sighing, afflicted family? Do you feel soul-union with them, so as to be united to them with bonds of affection and love, feel a sympathy with them in their sorrows and trials, and not merely feel it, but manifest it by your words and conduct? not acting like those hypocrites spoken of by James, who says, “Be ye warmed and filled, and give them not those things which are needful to the body,” but acting upon that which you profess, and manifesting by your words and actions the deep sympathy of your heart.

6. Love to Christ—that is another “sign” of God’s special favour. “Whosoever loveth not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema; Maranatha,” that is, let him be accursed; the Lord cometh. And what solemn words are these spoken by the mouth of an inspired apostle! He must evidently mean, that he who lives and dies without this love to Christ shed abroad in his heart—for he cannot wish for the curse of God to rest upon the living family, who are not yet brought into the enjoyment of the love of Christ, but he who lives and dies without love to Christ—let him be “Anathema;” and this seems to be confirmed by what follows,

“Maranatha,” that is, “the Lord cometh,” to avenge himself on that man. Now, wherever there is a measure of faith toward Jesus, there will be a measure of love toward him. Faith and love are just proportionate. Just so much faith, just so much love; so that he that believes on the Lord Jesus, by the sweet testimony of Jesus to his soul will, just in the proportion of his faith, have a measure of love to that Redeemer who has enshrined himself in his warmest and tenderest affections.

7. Again, another “sign” of God’s special favour—indeed, I may say, the grand sign of all—is, the witness of the Spirit to our spirits, that we are born of God. Some signs are immediate, other signs are but mediate, that is, they are seen through a medium. Some signs are like the sun shining upon a man’s countenance, or into a man’s eyes; he believes that which he sees. Other signs are like the same rays shining upon a mirror. They do not shine directly upon him, but he sees them reflected in that bright mirror which catches those beams. So some “signs” are reflected signs, mediate signs, that is, a man has certain feelings in his heart; he looks at the word of God, the glass and mirror of truth Jas 1:23, and he seest in it the very experience that he is passing through; and thus heavenly light is reflected from the mirror into his soul. When the Lord the Spirit then shines upon his own truth in the word, and upon his own work in the soul, he stamps, more or less, a living testimony that the experience is genuine and divine. But, after all, nothing can really satisfy the living soul, but some immediate testimony from God himself. He must have the ray shining, not as reflected in a mirror, but streaming directly and immediately into his soul out of the glorious “Sun of righteousness,” the Spirit itself bearing his own blessed inward testimony to his spirit, that he is born again, that he is a child of the living God, that he was chosen in Christ before all worlds, has been pardoned by atoning blood, has been called by the quickening Spirit, and is sealed an heir of glory.

8. Another sign is, a life and conversation agreeable to the gospel. Uprightness, sincerity, simplicity, humility, a walk which

is manifest to others, though not so to ourselves, as becoming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, are signs of the grace of God. And though this evidence is often no evidence to us, because we find so much sin mixed up with all that we say or do, that the evidence seems obscure and dim, and at times utterly lost, yet the family of God, whose eyes are opened to see what truth is, can read this evidence, and more than that, where they cannot read this evidence, they are bound, by the word of God, and by conscience, to stand in doubt of a man's religion. Where, then, there is a decided want of moral honesty, sincerity, simplicity, uprightness, and straight-forwardness, or where there is a manifest absence of the fruits of love to the people of God, or of those plain marks and grand outlines of a Christian walk which the Scripture has traced out, in that case, we are bound, unless a man be in a great state of backsliding, we are bound to say, the life of God is absent. Not but that there are wintry seasons, as I shall presently show, where the tree remains the same, and the fruits are fallen off; but still we expect the tree to bear fruit at some season of the year. If there are no leaves, no flowers, and no fruit at any one period, or at any one season, we are warranted in pronouncing that tree dead.

II. But we pass on to consider, What is the seeing of these signs? There is, then, such a thing as "seeing a sign;" for, if there were not, why should the complaint have been poured forth? Why should the prophet have so piteously complained, "We see not our signs," unless they were, at times, to be seen! His complaints would be unfounded, were they never visible; and, therefore, the very lamentation shows, that there are times and seasons when the signs can be seen, as well as times and seasons when the signs cannot be seen.

Now, to revert a little to one of our previous illustrations, the way of life is called in the Scriptures a highway, a path, and similar expressions, indicative of a road. Those, then, that travel along this road will have at different intervals certain landmarks, what the Scripture calls "tokens for good"—Ebenezers—"stones of help."

Now, what is requisite to see them? Why, surely the main requisite is light. The landmarks might still be there, the milestones might be every one in their place, their inscriptions might be perfectly legible, and yet, if it were dark, none of these landmarks could be traced out—none of these milestones could be seen. Light, then, is necessary in the soul, in order to “see our signs;” and this light—such a light as is spoken of in the Psalms—“With thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light;” corresponding with the Lord’s expression, “The light of life.” Then the light wherein we “see our signs,” is not the moonlight of speculation, nor the frozen northern light of doctrine, nor the meteor light—the ignis fatuus of delusion—nor the phosphoric light, which faintly glimmers from rotten evidences, nor “the sparks of their own kindling,” which are elicited by the striking together of flinty hearts and steeled consciences. All this kind of light would be very insufficient to show us the road, stretched out over mountain and valley. We want some clearer, some brighter, some more powerful light, to show the whole extent of the road, that shall run for miles through a country, than a lantern can afford, or any dim light that we ourselves can create. Nothing less than the light of the sun can show us the whole road stretched out into a far distance, and thus, nothing but the light of God, streaming into our hearts, can ever illumine the road, so that we shall “see our signs.”

There are times, then, when the Lord is pleased to revive his work in our souls, to draw forth those graces which he himself has implanted, and to shine upon that which he himself has produced. Sometimes, for instance, the fear of the Lord is acted upon by the blessed Spirit, and it rises up as a fountain of life. Some evidence is then afforded us, and we derive some comfort from the testimony that we have in us—not a dead profession, not a seared conscience, not a hard heart; that we are not abandoned to the power of sin, not given up to utter recklessness; but that we have a fountain of life springing up in contrition, in godly sorrow, in aspirations and breathings after the Lord, to manifest his special blessings.

So again, with respect to the sign of “the spirit of grace and of supplications.” When this “spirit of grace and of supplications” is drawn forth into blessed exercise, a man has an inward testimony, that he is “praying in the Spirit,” he feels that he is worshipping God “in spirit and in truth”—that he is drawing near to the throne of the Most High; that there is a power—a supernatural power, which is working in his soul, and enabling him to pour out his petitions and desires at God’s feet. A man who has received “the spirit of grace and supplications” knows when his soul is favoured therewith. If not, there is every reason to believe that he has never received it at all. So, when a man is brought to loathe himself in “dust and ashes,” and mourns, and sighs, and “groans, being burdened” with the sins in which he is entangled, with the gins and traps in which his feet have been caught and to abhor himself as a beast before God—so far as his soul is humbled and broken within him, he has some evidence, some “sign,” that he is not “given over to a reprobate mind”—he has some inward testimony, that he is not one of those, who roll sin as a sweet morsel under their tongues, and have no sorrow for their baseness and vileness before a heart-searching Jehovah; and though it can bring him no ease, nor give him peace of conscience, nor remove the guilt, yet he is, in some measure, brought to a brokenness of heart and tenderness of spirit; and he would a million times sooner be in the dust of humiliation and the posture of confession, than hardened in recklessness, or confident in presumption.

So again, when he has some measure of faith in Christ—when he is able to realise, more or less, according to the Spirit’s operation, the blood, the righteousness, and the grace of Immanuel—when faith is drawn forth into exercise, and, spreading her arms, embraces Christ, as he is spiritually made known, there is some evidence, mark, symptom, or “sign,” that he is interested in this great redemption; and he has that in his soul, which, more or less, satisfies him and persuades him—not very deeply, perhaps, not very powerfully, not very abidingly—but while it lasts, while the

heavenly sensations continue, before the vision is removed, gently and yet sweetly testifies to him of his eternal interest in the blood of the Lamb. So, when he loves the people of God, and feels his heart burns with affection towards them, experiences a knitting of soul to the poor and tempted and exercised and tried and harassed family, and feels that there is no insincerity in his affection, but that there is a real communion of spirit, and a tender sympathy of soul—when these sensations are experienced, as long as the blessed feeling is in exercise, there is some sweet testimony that he has “passed from death unto life,” because he loves God’s living family. But above all, when “the Sun of righteousness” is pleased to shine, and the Spirit itself bears its immediate testimony—then, above all things—then, above all times and seasons, will he have the testimony, will he see his signs, and be able to see his name written amongst the living; in Jerusalem.

III. But we must turn to the other side of the picture. Most ministers are all for the bright side—all for speaking of consolation—of the Spirit’s blessed testimony in the soul, and how the children of God walk in light and life and liberty and love. What is the consequence? They build up hypocrites, and they plaster with “untempered mortar” those that are dead in a profession; whilst they distress and trouble the living family who have tender consciences, and know that matters are usually very different with them. We must have, then, both sides of the question. We read in this Psalm 74:16, 17, and it is a sweet testimony of the Lord, “The day is thine;” “Yes,” says the dead Calvinist, “that is plain enough”—“the night also is thine.” What think you of that? “Thou hast made summer;” “Yes,” says the dry doctrinal professor, “God makes summer—it is always summer with me.” But listen to what the Lord goes on to say, “and winter;” then the Lord “makes winter.” Now, if you only know the Lord that made the day, and never knew the Lord that made the night,—if you only know the Lord that made the summer, and do not know the Lord that made the winter, you do not know the God of the Bible, you do not know

him as he has revealed himself in the Scriptures; then do not think that you know the “only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent,” unless you know him as he has discovered himself in the Scriptures, as making day and night, summer and winter. There is, then, the night and the winter of the soul. When it is brought into this state, “we see not our signs,” and the sweet testimonies are lost, not really, but experimentally; not lost out of the heart by the removal of their existence, but lost out of the feelings by a beclouding of them.

But to pursue the figure which I was just employing. What was requisite to see the signs? Day, bright day, the glorious sun in the sky, casting his blessed beams over mountain and dale, and flood and field, was necessary to see the broad landscape. The absence, then, of this, the withdrawal of this glorious orb of day, will produce just the contrary result to us; and when the soul is brought into this state, “we see not our signs.” Now, these shades of darkness may be various. For instance, there may rise up from some deep mine a cloud of pitchy smoke, which, as it rolls forth, shall cover the hemisphere, and so obscure all the path that is stretched out before the eyes. Such is infidelity, that black cloud, that column of murky, pitchy darkness, which rises out of the bottomless pit. When infidelity comes, with its clouds of pitchy darkness, into a man’s soul, it obscures, buries, hides all his signs, because it spreads itself over the very foundations of truth; as the Psalmist says, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” Bunyan has a striking expression on this point. Alluding to these feelings of infidelity, he says, “It is as though my girdle were taken from me,” that is, his garments were no longer in a fit state for him, “to run with patience the race set before him,” but all his joints were unloosed, and he was in a state of absolute weakness. So, when this black, murky cloud of infidelity comes from the depths of the bottomless pit, it so darkens and obscures the word of God, and our experience, every outward as well as every inward testimony, that we are utterly unable to see any one sign, either the being of a

God, or the existence of Christ, or the teaching of the Holy Ghost, or anything of a divine work upon our hearts and consciences.

But this road of which I was speaking, might be obscured by a fog coming over the face of the sky. Suppose you and I were standing on some lofty mountain, Mount Snowdon, we will say, and we were gazing upon the outstretched prospect, and admiring the beautiful valleys, and the fruitful fields, and the flowing rivers, and the mountain lakes, and not only saw these, but saw also the road which we had been travelling, the different elevations over which we had come, the valleys in which we had been hid, the village spires which we had marked upon our road, and the towns through which we had passed. Well, suppose whilst we stood looking upon the prospect, clouds gathered round about us, and mists and fogs came down from the upper regions of the sky. Would they not envelope not only the top of the mountain, but envelope us also who were standing there? Where is the road? or rather, where is our sight of the road? Are not all the landmarks gone? Is not the whole landscape obscured and dimmed, and with it the road we have travelled completely lost from our view? Well, thus it is with the mists and fogs of unbelief that rise in a man's carnal mind, and spread themselves over the whole work of God in his soul. These mists and fogs hide all our evidences, obscure all our testimonies, envelope in deep obscurity the workmanship of God, and thus "we see not our signs." No fear of God in the soul, no godly sorrow for sin, no love to Christ, no love to the people of Christ, no sweet testimony of our interest in the blood of the Lamb can be seen; all are dimmed, obscured, and darkened by these mists and fogs that have spread themselves over our souls.

But there may be a third cause, why we cannot see our signs. A man shall have travelled over many miles of country, and after he has journeyed over this long and waste tract, he shall come into a valley, into some deep depression between rising mountains. Can he see his road? Why, no. There are mountains behind and mountains before; and these mountains shut out the road, so

that he cannot look back upon the path that he has passed, and can only see just the spot where he is at the present moment. So, when the living soul gets into the valley of trouble, "the valley of Achor," as the Scripture speaks, into the valley of confusion, the valley of darkness, the valley of soul-temptation, the valley of self-abhorrence and self-loathing; why, these mountains behind, and these mountains before, block out his prospect. When he would fain look behind him to see the road he has travelled, there is a huge, black, desolate, rocky mountain, so that he cannot see the road that he has passed over; it is blocked up, and he only wonders how he got where he is. But he is there, and he cannot get out. And then the road before him, he cannot see it, for there are mountains before him as well as mountains behind him. Bozez in front, and Seneh in the rear (1 Sam. 14:4). Well then, these mountains of trial, of difficulty, and of temptation, these rough and rugged mountains which stretch forth their lofty peaks into the sky, seem impassable for his galled and aching feet, and not merely impassable, but they block out all view of that heavenly country to which he is tending, and whither he is dragging his weary and toiling steps. He cannot "see his signs;" the Ebenezers are hidden, the milestones which have tracked his path are altogether out of sight by the obstacles that intervene between him and them.

But we read also that "the sun knoweth his going down," and that "the Lord maketh darkness, and it is night" (Ps. 104:19, 20). So the child of God sometimes shall lose all sight of his signs by the sun going down upon them. There are different ways of not seeing the landmarks; there is the going down of the sun and the night coming on, as well as the murky clouds of infidelity, the mists and fogs of unbelief, and the high rocky mountains which block in the valley of humiliation. So the child of God sometimes shall come into a state of darkness, and cannot tell how he came there. But he is in darkness because the sun has set, though he has never moved from the spot; for the sun goes down just as much upon one who stands still, as upon one who is travelling. Thus a man might stand

upon this mountain that I have been describing, but when the sun went down, the landscape would be lost; it would be all dimmed and obscured from his view. So when the “Sun of Righteousness” goes down, when the Lord “makes it dark,” and all the beams and rays out of that glorious fountain of light are removed by the withdrawal of the orb itself; then darkness covers the man’s heart, he gropes for the wall like the blind, and he gropes as if he had no eyes, he stumbles in desolate places like dead men. All is dark around him and he is dark to it. He can neither see his signs, nor see the sun which makes these signs visible. And he sits mourning in darkness, until the Lord is pleased, once more, to cause the sun to rise upon his soul.

Such then is, more or less, the chequered path of the Christian—such is a feeble sketch of the way in which the Lord leads his people through this waste wilderness. But God’s people cannot be satisfied with “not seeing their signs.” It is a subject of mournful complaint with them. The hypocrites in Zion catch up the language of the saints, for there is nothing more easily picked up, than a few of the expressions which are in the mouth of God’s tried family. You will find professors, whom God has never quickened into spiritual life, when they are in the company of God’s people, hanging down their heads like bulrushes, and imitating and apeing the gestures and language of the living family of Zion. “I am so dark, so dead, so carnal, so unbelieving.” You are quite right, you are so because you always were so—you never were otherwise. No doubt you are dead, because you are dead in sin; no doubt you are carnal, because you never were spiritual; no doubt you are unbelieving, for God never gave you living faith; no doubt you are cold, for you have never had a ray of warmth out of the Sun of righteousness. It is not, then, being dead and cold and carnal, but it is what we feel in these seasons. A traveller, who was journeying over and exploring the rocky Alps, if the sun were to go down or fogs were to arise, would not say, “How dark it is here! I am in darkness; surely I am right now. Oh! the sun is gone down, it is an evidence that I am in the

right road;” and feel a kind of pleasure at the very darkness which surrounds him, and hides the landscape from his view. Were he thus to congratulate himself; should we not say he was a fool or a madman? So for one professing to stand upon the very brink of eternity to say, “I am dark, I am dead, I am carnal, I am worldly, I am covetous”—to pick up these feelings as so many evidences, gather up this counterfeit money, which ought to be nailed to the till, and spread it abroad as solid gold, go with this base coin in his hand amongst the family of God, to pass it off as from heaven’s mint—why, every living soul should snatch it out of his hand, and strike a nail through it, that it may stand as an evidence on the counter that the money is forged. The living soul may be, and continually is, barren, dark, stupid carnal and dead, but he cannot congratulate himself upon his deadness, nor rejoice in his darkness, nor take an evidence from his barrenness. It will be, as the Lord the Spirit works in him, a subject of complaint with him, it will be his grief, his trouble, his plague, his burden; he can no more take comfort from his disease, that a man in a consumption can take comfort from his cough, or a man in a fever from his burning sensations of heat, or a man who has fallen from a building can take pleasure in his broken limb. He will want a cure, a blessed remedy; he will want life instead of death, light instead of darkness, spirituality instead of carnality, heavenly-mindedness instead of worldliness, a heart enlarged to run the way of God’s commandments, instead of sluggishness, slothfulness, and carelessness.

“We see not our signs,” it is the language of lamentation. Now where are you? Are you there? You never have been there, if you have not had signs. And if there were not any signs to see, why does the prophet who penned this Psalm say, mourning, “we see not our signs!” For the same reason that some of the Jews wept, when they saw the second temple erected upon the ruins of the first. Why did they weep? It was not because the temple was not so large a temple as the preceding; that did not grieve them, for the second temple was, in some respects, a nobler and more beautiful

building than the first, but the glory of the Lord had departed—that made them weep. “Ichabod” was written upon the walls. The ark of the covenant, the Shechinah, the Urim and the Thummim, the fire upon the brazen altar, and the Spirit of prophecy had all departed. The Lord had left the house, and that was the reason why the elders wept, while the younger, who had never seen the presence of the Lord, rejoiced. Aft emblem, striking illustration, of the difference between the living soul and the dead professor! The temple shorn of its glory, and the departure of that which was all its ornament and all its beauty, made the elders mourn and weep. But the younger rejoiced in the external beauty of the temple, for they knew nothing of that inward glory which had departed when the Lord was justly provoked with their iniquities, and gave up the building which he had consecrated by his presence, to be spoiled by the Chaldeans. So the living soul will be mourning and complaining that he sees not his signs, whilst the mere empty professor of religion will be looking at the external beauty of the building, admiring the harmony of the doctrines, the grand scheme of salvation, the glorious plan of the covenant, and the fair proportions traced out in God’s word, whilst he knows nothing of the inward glory of the temple in the manifested presence of God. But what avails admiration of the columns and architecture of the building without, if he knows nothing of the ark of the covenant within the temple sprinkled with blood; nor of the fire from heaven on the brazen altar; nor of the Shechinah the divine presence as a cloud on the mercy seat; nor of the Urim and Thummim, those oracles of God to teach him, and warn him when he turns to the right hand, or to the left; nor of the Spirit of prophecy, whereby he is enabled to pour out his soul in inspired language, and offer up to God those feelings with which the Holy Ghost, “the Spirit of grace and of supplication,” indites in his heart.

**19 UNION WITH CHRIST IN DEATH AND LIFE** (2 *Tim.* 2:11-13)

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A Sermon Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street on Lord's  
Day Morning,

June 27, 1841

*"It is a faithful saying: for it we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us: if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."*

2 Tim. 2:11-13

We live in a peculiar day, one in which there is a widely spread profession of religion; but it seems that in proportion to the width of the surface is the shallowness of the water. In the days of our forefathers the profession of vital godliness was like a river hemmed in by banks; persecution, and opposition on each side restrained to a narrow channel the river of profession. But these banks have been in a measure broken down; or at least considerable breaches have been made in them. The spirit of the age in which we live has taken what is called a liberal cast, and the removal of the banks has suffered the water, which was once penned in a narrow channel, to extend itself widely over the level fields. And what has been the consequence? Instead of flowing on, the river has now become stagnant; instead of being deep, it has now become shallow; instead of being scarcely visible, as being hidden by high banks, it has now so widely spread, as to arrest the eye in every direction. But vitality and depth are wanting in this wide-spread sea of water. However men may take up a profession of religion, the real work of God upon the soul will be confined to a few. The strait gate and narrow way are not to be widened by men endeavouring to force down the bars and door-posts. The words of the Lord will still stand, that "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." The real family of God are therefore in this day exposed to temptations that our ancestors knew but little of. We are so apt to learn the "way of the Gentiles;" "evil communications" so easily "corrupt good

manners;” the coldness of the churches when brought into near contact is so apt to communicate the same chillness and torpor to the living family of God. And thus one temptation of God’s children in these days in which we live, is, to be satisfied with the superficial, thin, flimsy religion which is so current, instead of the deep, massive, solid, weighty religion which we find traced out in the Scriptures of truth, and which the Holy Ghost works in the hearts of God’s living family.

The beginning and the end of all vital godliness consists in a union with Christ. It is the beginning, because if a man has no eternal union with Christ, he never will be brought into communion with him. And it is the end if end it can be called, for eternity knows neither end nor beginning of all religion, because this union will be consummated in eternal bliss. The Scriptures of the New Testament are continually setting forth the nature of the union betwixt Christ and his church. Every act of Christ upon earth—that is, every marked act, is set forth in the Scriptures of truth as being, in some way, connected with his union with the church. When he was circumcised, it is said, “we are circumcised in him” Col 2:11; when he was crucified, we are said to be “crucified with him” Ga 2:20; when he died, we are still said to have died with him Ro 6:8; when he was interred in the sepulchre, we are said to be “buried with him” Ro 6:4; when he was raised up from the tomb, we are said to have “risen with him” Col 2:12; and when he ascended to sit in glory, it is said still, “God has made us sit together in heavenly places in him” Eph 2:6. The Scriptures of truth then trace out this union of Christ and his members, in well nigh every action and suffering during his transitory abode upon earth; and thus they set forth in the most prominent light, that in all that he did and suffered, there was a union, an eternal union with his beloved people.

In the words, from which I hope, with God’s blessing, to speak this morning, we have this union with Christ very experimentally and sweetly set forth. And depend upon it, friends, unless we

know something in our souls of the solemn realities that are set forth in these words of Scripture, there is no evidence that the God of all grace has begun his work upon our hearts. We will then, with God's blessing, endeavour, so far as the Lord shall enable us, to trace out, how this union with Christ is manifested in the way of experience, that the Lord may encourage us to believe, that we have felt and known something of the fruits of an eternal union with the Lord of life and glory.

"It is a faithful saying." This expression occurs more than once in the epistles of Paul; and the meaning of the words seems to be this, it is a saying in every way to be depended upon; it is a truth demanding implicit credence; it is a solemn verity which every believer is called upon to receive; it is no "cunningly devised fable;" no forged lie; but a matter pregnant with importance, a subject of deep and vital import, one which deserves to be enshrined in the conscience of every living soul, and one to which we are called to pay the utmost heed. Thus the apostle says, 1Ti 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Whenever, then, you find a passage thus prefaced, "it is a faithful saying," it seems as though special attention was intended to be called to it.

What then is this "faithful saying" that now lies before us? It includes several branches, and yet all these branches connected with a vital union with Christ.

I. The first branch of this "faithful saying" is, "if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him." Then there is such a thing as being dead with Christ; and this death with Christ is made, so to say, a condition, or, to speak more correctly, an evidence of our being alive with Christ. The way in which God works, is one that contradicts all the reason of man; one that baffles all the plans and ideas of the creature. The way of God is to bring life out of death, faith out of unbelief, hope out of despondency. Not that the one is the parent of the other; but the Lord the Spirit, by his internal operations, brings the soul into certain states; and then, when he

has brought the soul into those states, he communicates a grace which is in perfect contrast with those states, and is precisely adapted to them. Before, then, we can have a manifestation of “living with Christ,” we must have some experience in our souls what it is to be “dead with Christ;” because the apostle makes the one an evidence of the other, and not merely an evidence, but a precursor or forerunner of the other. “If we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with him.”

There seem to be two ways chiefly in which the soul is “dead with Christ.” If we look at the operation of the law as a manifestation of the justice of God, the law was the cause of the death of Christ—that is to say, the law being broken by the church in whose place Christ stood, he, as a substitute and a surety, stood under its curse, and that curse was death. The original penalty was, “In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die;” and therefore, Jesus, when he stood forth as the surety and substitute of his people, had to endure that penalty, and die under that broken law. “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts.” “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” If, then, we are to die with Christ and if we die not with Christ, we shall not live with Christ, if we are to die with Christ, then we must die under the law just as Jesus died under the law, or else there is no union with Christ in his death. There is no dying with Christ, unless we die in the same manner that Christ died; for unless we die experimentally as Christ died actually, we cannot be said, according to the Scriptures Of truth, to be “dead with Christ.” Every one, then, that shall live with Christ, must die under the sentence of God’s holy law; he must have the sentence of death in his soul, and be as effectually slain experimentally in his conscience, as ever Christ died under the weight of the law upon the cross of Calvary.

But if we look at what it is to die under the law, we are not to set up one rigorous standard of experience, and to say, that the death inflicted by the law must be a death of a uniform kind, or that the

stroke of death must be inflicted in the same manner. All that are assembled here will die naturally; but perhaps there are not two persons in this chapel who shall die precisely the same death, or shall be brought by the same road into that dark valley. Some of us may die of lingering diseases; some of us may be cut down by a fever in a few days; some may gradually drop through old age into the tomb; and some, like one of your number who has been taken away since I have been among you, some may die after an illness of a few hours. And yet all die. And were the corpses to be laid out in the same gloomy chamber, we should see no distinction between him whose death had been after the lingering illness of years, or him who had died of a rapid disease in a few days. Each would lie cold, rigid, and motionless; each would wear the same pallid features of death in his countenance. So, spiritually, all the quickened family of God must die under the law—that is, they must, by a sentence of condemnation in their souls, be reduced to that state, that the law cannot save them from “the wrath to come,” that righteousness is not to be obtained from it to please God, that they are utterly lost unless Christ steps forward in their behalf, and comes into their souls as their Saviour. If a man, then, has not experienced in his conscience a sense of this inward death, he is not “dead with Christ;” and if he is not “dead with Christ,” he has at present no evidence that he will live with Christ.

But further, Christ died under the weight of sin and transgression. “The Lord made to meet upon him the iniquities of us all;” “he made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” He died, therefore, under the weight of sin. The iniquities of his chosen people met upon his head, and sunk him first into death, and then into the tomb. Every living soul, then, that shall die with Christ spiritually and experimentally, must die too under the weight of sin—that is, he must know what it is so to experience the power and presence of sin in his carnal mind, so to feel the burden of his iniquities upon his guilty head, and to be so overcome and

overpowered by inward transgression, as to be utterly helpless, and thoroughly unable to deliver himself from the dominion and rule of it in his heart. Now, there are some children of God, who seem, in a measure, unable to trace clearly in themselves that death under the law which I have been just speaking of. They have never been brought so powerfully under the law as others of God's children. And it is often a matter of questioning with them, and anxious questioning, too, whether they have ever had the sentence of death in their consciences, because they have not been plunged so deep into convictions as others, whose experience they have heard and read of. But, I believe, there is a spot to which every living child of God can come, however he may question whether he has experienced the curse of the law in his conscience because he has not felt such pangs of distress as others of God's children have undergone—and that is, that he feels the power of sin in his carnal mind, bringing guilt and distress upon his conscience; that he experiences a burden upon his shoulders, which, unless removed, will sink him down into eternal perdition; and that he is deeply convinced that he has no power to subdue that sin which is continually striving and working in his carnal mind to bring him into guilt and bondage. Now, if you have never been brought to know the power of sin in your carnal mind, and to grieve and groan and sigh under the burden of it, you have no evidence that you are "dead with Christ."

But there is another way in which the soul dies with Christ. Christ not only died under the law and died under sin, but he died unto the law, and he died unto sin. As Paul speaks, "death" which is the penalty of the law "hath no more dominion over him;" for "in that he died, he died unto sin once,"—that is, Christ by fulfilling the requisitions of the law, died to the law, and when he was thus dead, the law was dead to him, and he was dead to it. When the law had killed him, it had done its utmost; when it had spent its curses upon his head, the law became a dead letter; it could do no more. It is the same with human laws: when the murderer has died upon

the gallows, all the fury and vengeance of the law has been spent upon his head; the law is a dead letter to him, and he is dead to the law. So in a child of God there is not merely a dying under the law, but there is a dying to the law—that is, he being brought to a state, where he is slaughtered by the sentence of condemnation in his soul, and being utterly dead as to any expectation of righteousness from that source, he becomes dead to the law, as much dead to it, as though the law was not in existence, as much dead to it as the criminal that is taken down from the gallows and laid in his coffin, is dead to the statute against murder. Then if the Lord has killed you by his law, and brought you to a state of absolute death, so that the law cannot bring to you one atom of righteousness in which you can stand before God accepted, by dying under the law, you are dead to the law; it is become a dead letter to you, and has no longer any power. Now, this is a point of experience, which it is one of the hardest things in the world to believe. And, in fact, no man can believe it until the Lord gives him faith to receive it, and until he can feelingly enter into the meaning of those words, “ye also are dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” “But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held,” Ro 7:4,6. We dead to it; it dead to us.

In the same way, there is a dying; unto sin. When a man is brought to this spot, that he cannot restrain the power of sin, that he is a poor, guilty, burdened wretch, in whose carnal mind sin will work and will reign, whether he will or not, and he then falls beneath the burden of sin in his soul, and prostrates himself at the foot of the cross without any help or without any hope in himself, then when there is some divine apprehension in his soul, through vital faith, of the substitution of Christ in his place; when there is some spiritual realisation of the death of Jesus upon the cross, and some drops of atoning blood fall from Christ’s bleeding body into his heart, so as to “sprinkle it from an evil conscience,” then

that kindles, or rather manifests, that secret life which is received out of Christ; and having first died with Christ, then he begins manifestly to "live with Christ." But it was all along life in the soul, which really was the cause of the man's death; it was through life he felt the curses of the law; it was through life he groaned under the weight of sin; it was through life that he was enabled, in some measure, to apprehend and lay hold of the satisfaction and death of Jesus, so as to raise him up to a hope in God's mercy, and to kindle some degree of affection toward his dying Lord. He begins now to live with Christ, and to derive supplies of strength out of Christ, of which he never knew anything before, and to receive life out of Jesus, whereby he is enabled to grapple with that death which is continually working in his carnal mind. When a man is led into any believing apprehension of a crucified Jesus, he then becomes delivered from and dead to the law. The union between the soul and the law, her first husband, is utterly broken, and Jesus, the Lord of life and glory, becomes enthroned in her affections; the second husband takes his bride, and manifests to her the riches of his dying love; and then the bride begins to live with Christ.

But in living with Christ, there will be, if I may use the expression, a dying life, or a living death, running parallel with all the experience of a child of God, who is brought to some acquaintance with the Lord Jesus. For instance, the apostle says, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And again, he says, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Again, "I die daily." There is, then, in the life of a child of God a dying with Christ, as a matter of personal and continual experience; and just so far as we are continually dying with Christ, are we continually living with Christ. A daily death in life, and a daily life in death; and death being, as it were, that out of which life comes. For instance, there is the world, with all its charms, its attractions, its habits, and its temptations. We feel it to be a continual snare to us. Our eyes are caught with

every passing vanity. The glare and blaze of the things of time and sense attract our eyes. And as the moth flits round the candle till it burns its wings, so are we continually flitting round the glare and blaze of the world, and get often sadly singed thereby. We ask the Lord, then, that he would separate us from the world, deliver us from these snares, lead us up into some sweet communion with himself, bring us out of this carnal frame, that he would frame and favour us with some blessed enlargement of soul; enabling us to look to him, embrace him in our affections, and love him with a pure heart fervently. The Lord condescends to answer the prayer, but in a way that we little dream of. Instead of answering it by bringing in some sweet manifestation of Christ, he lays guilt upon our consciences; instead of coming to us in some easy, gentle way, so as to fill our hearts with love and praise, he withdraws himself to a greater distance than before. Fresh temptations bring us into a state of conflict, until we are forced to cast ourselves at the foot of the cross, as guilty, filthy rebels. Now, when the Lord has brought the soul there, and enables it by faith to get sight of a crucified Saviour, and by the Spirit's operation, it realises in some measure his substitution and sacrifice, there is a power communicated which separates the heart from this world and all its vanities; and getting separated in affection from the world, there is a new and inexpressible pleasure, sweetness, and blessedness felt, in pouring out the heart before him, which the world with all its vain charms never can produce within.

So with respect to sin, and the temptations to which we are continually exposed from the workings of our base heart. We may strive and struggle and resist and endeavour to overcome these temptations; but our own attempts are all ineffectual. A child might as well try to stop with his hands the coming up tide of the Thames, as a man to restrain sin by his own strength. He must be carried away by the flood of his sins, if he has no better standing; than the creature can give him. But when he is, in any measure, indulged with a sight of a dying Lord, when he gets, by faith a

view of Christ's cross, and faith, hope, and love, with tenderness, sorrow, and contrition begin to rise up in his bosom, sin becomes hated, temptation is weakened, and spirituality of mind produced; and the carnal mind for a while is deadened to those base desires which before were uppermost. In this way only does the soul get withdrawn from the power of sin, and led out of the temptations that sin is continually presenting.

Thus, too, with all those worldly plans that spring from the pride of our hearts the vain ambition whereby we would seek to raise ourselves in the scale of life, and sill that hankering after respectability which so carnalises many of the family of God; when there is some entrance, by faith, into the humility of Christ, of what he was on earth, and the soul is enabled in some measure to apprehend him and his lowly image is, in some degree, stamped on the soul—what a poor, vain, wretched thing does all worldly ambition and respectability appear! We are, then, ready to say, "Lord, if thou wilt but give me thy smile, and indulge me with the light of thy countenance, if thou wilt but drop thy lovingkindness into my heart let me be anything. Oh! let me not be seeking after great things, but let me be seeking after the light of thy countenance, and the life of thy favour, and the sweet visitation of thy dying love." These spiritual feelings deaden the pride of life; and when the soul is really brought here, it says: "Oh! let me have Christ in my heart, and I am willing to part with all that the world esteems great and fair; and all that my carnal heart is continually craving." I do not say that these feelings last long; but in this way, and in this way only, does the soul ever get really separated from the pride of life, the ambition of rising in the scale of society, and the going out after vain things, which we are continually hankering after, and yet which never have profited us, but have always issued in disappointment, if not in wounds and guilt.

II. But we go on to consider another branch of this vital union with Christ. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." There can be no suffering with Christ, until there is a vital union with

Christ; and no realization of it, until the Holy Ghost manifests this vital union by making Christ known, and raising up faith in our hearts, whereby he is embraced and laid hold of. And there is no “reigning with Christ,” except there first be a “suffering with Christ.” I believe that reigning, not only signifies a reigning with him in glory hereafter, but also a measure of reigning with him now, by his enthroning himself in our hearts. Christ reigns now in glory. “The Father has given all things into his hands;” “he must reign until he has put all enemies under his footstool.” He has now “the keys of hell and of death.” This “reigning” therefore, not merely sets forth his glorious reign in the realms of bliss above, but also the manifestation of the kingdom of Christ to the soul, whereby he reigns as Lord in the heart, enthrones himself in the affections, and “brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” 2Co 10:5. “Suffering then with Christ” is the evidence and forerunner of “reigning with him.”

But whence arose Christ’s sufferings? One cause of them was the temptations with which he was exercised. For though he was not circumstanced as we are, in having a nature that could fall in with the temptation, he was exercised by having his holy soul tortured, grieved, and pained by those temptations which were presented to him. It is not our carnal mind that is grieved by temptation; it loves it, it is closely allied to it, it has a sensual communion with it; but it is the new nature that is tormented and grieved and pained by temptation. So, when Satan presented his temptations to the Lord of life and glory though there was no corrupt nature in Jesus as in us, so as to fall in with temptation, for he was perfectly holy in body and soul, nor was there any speck or spot or slightest taint of impurity in him, yet these temptations presented to his spotless soul, created torture and grief and anguish. If the children of God, then, are “to suffer with Christ,” they must suffer under temptation as Christ suffered. If we are the Lord’s, we never can escape temptation—for if we are not in the path of temptation, we are out of the path that leadeth to glory. If we are not suffering,

or have never suffered temptation with Christ, we shall not reign with Christ here or hereafter. Every living soul, then, must suffer temptation, for “blessed is the man that endureth temptations” Jas 1:12. Temptation in a living soul will produce suffering. When a child of God is tempted to infidelity, to inward blasphemy, or even to curse that which he most reverences and loves, to deny the Lord that bought him, or to commit sins which grieve the Spirit of God; these temptations must produce suffering in a tender conscience, they must be the cause of trouble in every quickened soul. We want, then, to escape these temptations, we cannot bear to have those dreadful thoughts work in our minds, those awful imaginations that are pent up and struggling to burst forth, so as to plunge us into perdition or despair. We should like to walk in some shady, quiet, secluded path, where the hot sun of temptation would never look upon and blacken us So 1:6; but if so, we should not suffer with Christ. The proof of our suffering with Christ is to suffer as he suffered, and therefore, as he “himself suffered, being tempted,” so we must suffer being tempted too; as he had things of every kind brought before him, which would have been snares to him, had he had a nature that could have fallen in with them for “he was in all points tempted like as we are”, so must we have the same snares presented to us, and suffer as he suffered, by the temptations paining our new nature, and “vexing our righteous soul” 2Pe 2:8.

Christ also suffered from the persecutions of men. How hated, despised, and reproached he was! So no living soul can escape a measure of persecution. Though now protected by law and the usages of society from open persecution, “the scourge of the tongue” will fall upon every living child of God. They can never long escape the enmity of the world, the opposition of professors, the malicious shafts of slander, and the envenomed arrows of calumny. A living soul can never escape having his fair name and idolised character tarnished by reproach, for he is a follower of Him who was said “to have a devil and to be mad;” and “if they

called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household!"

But the Lord himself upon earth, though never free from suffering, seems to have had an occasional respite from the temptations which Satan brought against him; for we read, that "when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season." His temptation, then, only ceased "for a season." So, we have perhaps had a similar experience; we have had temptations, and, through God's mercy, these temptations have not prevailed, but "when the enemy came in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifted up a standard against him." These attacks, then, have perhaps ceased for a while—we are not exposed now, it may be, to the same powerful and violent temptations that once assaulted us, and we think, that as the cannons cease to roar, we are got out of the reach of gunshot; and because this malicious enemy has not for some little season hurled his blasphemous darts into our carnal minds, we think he has exhausted the arrows of his quiver; we are inclined to hope that the Lord will ever effectually repel him, and build up a permanent hedge, as Job thought Job 1:10, that Satan cannot shoot through. But the archer bides his time; he awaits the opportunity, and lurks amid the thickets in "the places of drawing water," and will perhaps come with tenfold more malice, and shoot again his fiery darts into our souls. Again, then, we must suffer, and it is the mark of a tender conscience, that it does suffer. If these fiery darts kindled no sorrow, brought no grief, produced no anguish, it would show, that there was no spiritual conscience, no new nature, no holy and living principle within that recoiled from these horrible temptations. So that the very suffering of the soul under them, is an evidence that there is life; the very recoiling and shrinking with horror from the powerful temptations of this enemy, is an evidence that we have in us a nature which is foreign to them, which sides with God against them, and therefore, being on God's side is born of God, and abhors them, because God's image is stamped upon it.

In proportion, then, as we suffer with Christ in these things, shall we reign with him, that is, his powerful reign and government and authority are made manifest by means of, and amidst the suffering. It is impossible to know anything of the reign of Christ in the soul, as Lord of all might and power, unless we are placed in circumstances where that reign is needed. What a flimsy, scanty, superficial thing is modern Calvinistic religion! I do not mean what is called "moderate Calvinism," but what is often called "high Calvinism," such as most of my hearers here profess. What a flimsy, superficial thing this for the most part is! Men take certain truths out of the word of God, and they hammer this pure gold upon the anvil of hard hearts and seared consciences, until it becomes as thin and as light as gold leaf. This gold leaf they spread over their hearers, and they go forth in all the gilded glare of gospel truth; But how different is this outside gilding, these plates from Uphaz, from the massive, weighty gold which the Spirit inwardly communicates! But those that preach and those that profess this flimsy, superficial religion, if they are of God's family, will be thrown into the furnace with their book of gold-leaf in their hands, that the fire may burn up the ochred pages, and melt the gold-leaf down into one solid ingot. If any of you have a work of grace in your hearts, and yet are gilded over by doctrinal truth beyond your experience, you will be thrown into the furnace of affliction and of fiery temptation; and this furnace will burn away everything but the gold that is within you, though it may melt into the gilding that is without you. But depend upon it that the furnace will bring your religion into a very small compass, as the gold-leaf, which covers such an extent of surface, would make but a very small piece when reduced to a solid shape.

But I pass on to show how those that suffer with Christ reign with him. Perhaps, then, we have been suffering some persecution from the world. In the season of this persecution the Lord may pay us a visit. It was so when the man whom Jesus restored to sight was cast out of the synagogue; the Lord found him, and said unto

him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Joh 9:35 So, when we are cast out in the world, cut off by professing churches, and begin to feel the weight of persecution, the Lord will sometimes come and drop a word into our souls, so as to bring us into his blessed presence. In times past, when I knew more of open persecution from the world, I have found the Lord in those seasons make himself precious to me, and to give me some visitation of his presence, so that I could rejoice in being counted worthy to suffer shame for his name's sake. So also when Satan has been shooting his fiery darts of temptation into the mind, and the soul has been grieving and groaning under the weight of temptations, the Lord will sometimes come and comfort it. Just as when Satan departed, angels came and ministered unto the Lord Jesus, and as in his garden of agony an angel strengthened him, so will he himself come and strengthen the soul that has been passing through this conflict, and drop some word of sweet consolation into the heart that has been grappling with all the powers of hell. As the soul, then, has been suffering with Christ, it reigns with him, or, rather, he reigns in it, by communicating his power, and shedding abroad and manifesting the strength of his grace and love in it. So, after a long conflict with sin, when a child of God has been utterly unable to overcome the raging passions of his carnal mind, when it seems as though all hope were gone, and there was no longer any strength left to fight against the power of sin within, then the Lord will sometimes begin "to reign;" he will keep back, as it were, the temptation from coming with its former power; he will soften the conscience and melt it down, so as to hate sin; he will bring a feeling of self-loathing into the soul, so that it shall abhor itself for being so carried away, and will afford some sweet relief by dropping some testimony of his favour into the heart. This, then, is a reigning with Christ; but there can be no such reigning, unless there has been previous suffering. If the inward power of sin had never been felt, nor the weight of Satan's temptations been experienced; if the world had never shot its malicious arrows against us, there would be no

desiring to be taken up into the sanctuary to enjoy communion with Christ; there would be no retiring from this persecuting world, so as to be desirous to be embraced by the arms of Jesus; there would be no separation from the professors of religion who have slandered our names, no simple desire to be satisfied with the Lord's own testimony alone, unless we had felt pained and grieved with their accusations. So that just in proportion as the soul suffers with Christ, and walks in his footsteps, is as he was, and is led into some conformity to his image—just so, and in that measure only, does it reign with Christ. And he that reigns with Christ, by having the kingdom of God set up in his heart here, will reign with Christ hereafter in the realms of never-ending day. See, then, what an empty, vain, unscriptural doctrine that is, that we are always to stand in what they call the liberty of the Gospel, always to be posted upon some lofty mountain, away from sin, away from the world, away from temptation, and away from the devil. Why, the word of God stamps the lie upon such a religion; God the Holy Ghost never revealed such a religion as that. The religion of the Bible has two sides to it. But the profession that I am speaking against is like a portrait that you may see in a picture-shop. There is one side pretty enough; it seems almost like life; but look behind the picture, there is nothing there but some dirty canvas; there is no body—no substance. So it is with that pretty looking religion which a man may take from one text and another. He puts the colours upon his palette, and sketches out a portrait, which at first sight seems a living man. But turn it, and look at the back; why, it is nothing but a piece of canvas; there is no life, no body, no form, no reality—it is an imitation, a picture, and that is all. The religion of the Holy Ghost has a life in it, a substance for the saints “inherit substance”; a power, for it has two sides to it. It has not a half religion, but a whole religion, one which comes down from the Father of lights, all whose works are stamped with perfection and unity. But this one-sided religion talks of living with Christ, without any dying with him, of reigning with Christ, without

suffering with him; soaring I know not where above doubts and fears, temptations and soul trouble. Why, the Scriptures of truth testify in every page against such a religion. The word of God stamps it as the religion of a hypocrite, that "his excellency mounts up to the heavens, and his head reaches unto the clouds" Job 20:6. The highest attainment here below is suffering with Christ; and therefore the apostle prays that "he might know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings." It was the cry of his soul to know, feel, and enter into Christ's sufferings, and have communion with Christ in them, that he, by knowing what it was to walk in the footsteps of the tempted, tried, distressed, and suffering Jesus, might enter into the glory of Christ, which glory is only made known by walking in this path.

If we would reign, then, with Christ here and hereafter, we must first suffer with him. I appeal to your consciences, whether you ever had a single drop of enjoyment in your soul, a single look of love from Jesus, or a single testimony from God that you were his, except by walking in this path. A tender conscience will give an honest verdict, for it is an unbribable jury; and conscience will say, that when you are unexercised, untried, untempted, there is no sweet visit from the Lord, no melting of heart, no inward testimony; your judgment may remain firm in the doctrines, but as to a feeling realization of truth in the soul, and blessed communion with the Lord of life and glory, you know, and conscience will bear its testimony to my words, you know that you have no vital apprehension of divine realities but in the path of trial, temptation, and difficulty. In this path alone is there any vital enjoyment of the Lord Jesus Christ. And all knowledge of Christ that is not a living realisation of his grace in the soul, is but a name, a profession, a theory, a standing in the letter not in the Spirit, in the form not in the power.

III. "If we deny him, he also will deny us," that is the next branch. As I have already occupied so much time, I must not detain you long, and therefore I shall but briefly allude to it. The apostle

here seems partly to speak, as the Scriptures do sometimes, upon the broad basis of profession. The words have a twofold meaning; they apply to professors and they apply to possessors. "If we deny him"—he speaks as a member of the visible church, in which there are always wheat and tares, sheep and goats. As he speaks in the Epistle to the Hebrews Heb 4:11; "Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest." "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Heb 2:3 Not that there was any doubt whether he had entered into rest, or that there was any risk of his neglecting Christ's salvation; but he expresses himself as one of a number, some of whom would neglect it. Thus, the expression, "if we deny him, he will deny us," seems to have a twofold meaning. There were those in the Church who would deny him, for there were those who never knew him experimentally, and when the trial came, they would act as Judas acted. And then there were those who were real followers of him, but when put to the test, might act as Peter acted. Judas denied him; but Judas was a reprobate. Peter denied him; but Peter was a chosen vessel. Those that deny him, as Judas denied him, he will deny before the angels of God.

But then there is a denying him in our experience; and as we deny him in experience, he will deny us in manifestation. Sometimes we deny him our affections. The world gets hold of us; those whom we love in the flesh twine themselves round our hearts; the things of time and sense begin to be pleasant and sweet to us; we gradually get carnal; cold, and dead. This is a denying of Christ inwardly. Then he will deny us; that is, he will not drop his love into a soul that is pre-occupied by an idol. If we are cold to him, he will be shy with us; and if we are negligent of his favour and his grace, he will requite us by withholding them.

Again, if we deny him by refusing to confess him before men, he will deny his testimony to our souls that we are his. If we turn aside through the fear of man, and deny Christ, we go home with a guilty conscience, and he denies us every token for good. Thus, as we deny Christ in the various branches of inward experience

or outward conduct, he denies us—denies us his love, denies us the sweet visitations of his favour, denies us the testimony of his grace, denies us every thing which we want to have given to us, and denies us access when we desire to come near him.

But then comes the saving clause, “If we believe not, he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself.” If a child of God goes on so, and he is cold to Christ, and Christ is shy with him and denies his manifestations, how will the matter end? Shall they go on like two friends who have formerly been united? one gets cold, and the other becomes shy, separation comes on and alienates the one from the other, till they become altogether enemies. No. Here is the saving clause, “If we believe not, he abideth faithful.” “We believe not;” we get shut up in unbelief, become so carnalised as altogether to doubt whether anything we have felt was from him; unable to realise, unable to feel any power, or any faith. “But he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself”—he will deny us, but “he cannot deny himself”—he will deny us, but “he cannot deny” that love which is in his bosom; he will deny the manifestation, but “he cannot deny” the reality; he will deny the taste of love, but “he cannot deny” the existence of love in his own bosom; he will deny the favours, but “he cannot deny” his own tender heart from which all those favours come. He is like a tender parent: when the child offends him, the parent denies him those things which he would otherwise give him, those little testimonies of affection which otherwise he would grant; but he cannot deny himself—he is still a father, he has still the love of a father, he has still the feelings of a father. So the Lord of life and glory “abideth faithful;” “he cannot deny himself.” He will not deny his own perfections; he will not deny his own work upon the cross; he will not deny his own glory, nor that blessed satisfaction which he feels in bringing his people to the enjoyment of himself. “He abideth faithful,” however unbelieving their hearts may be. And why? because his elect have an eternal union with him.

Then, friends, so far as we have a union with Christ, we shall

know these things in our experience. If, then, you know nothing of these things, if you have never realized these things, I ask you, I appeal to conscience, where is your evidence that you are partakers of the life of God in your soul? And if not partakers of divine life, let honest conscience testify in what spot you stand, and what you are before the eyes of a heart-searching God.

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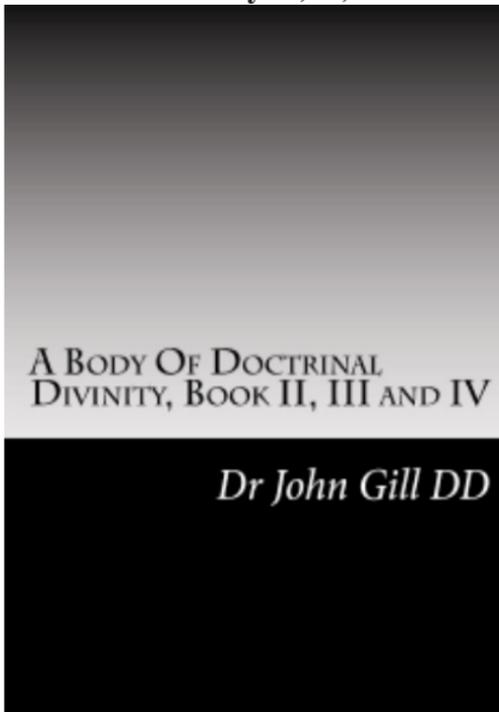
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Of The Part Which The Father Takes In The Covenant.

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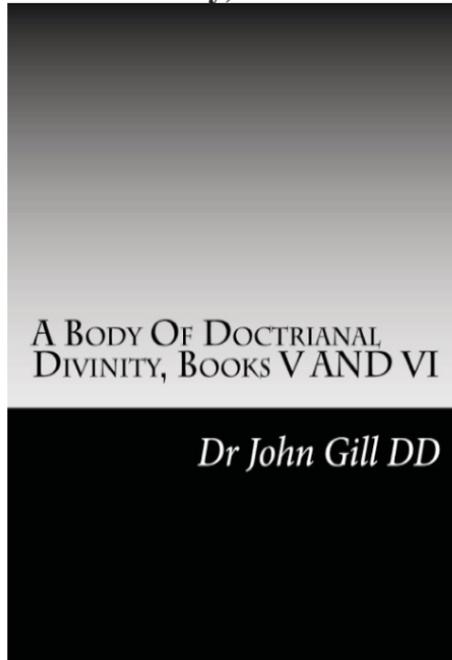
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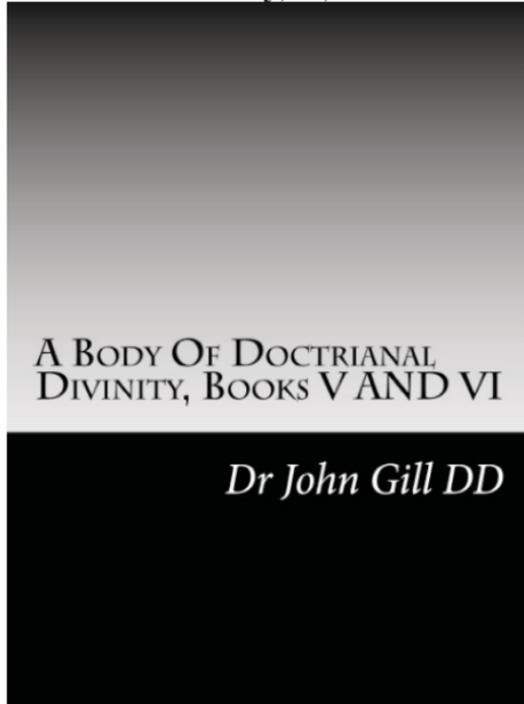
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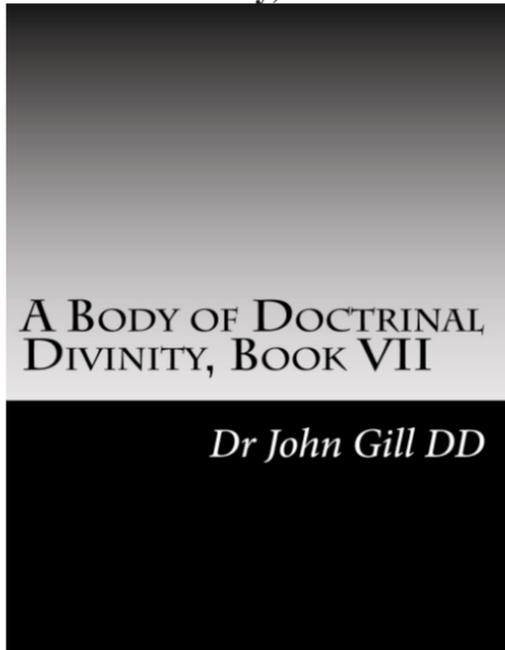
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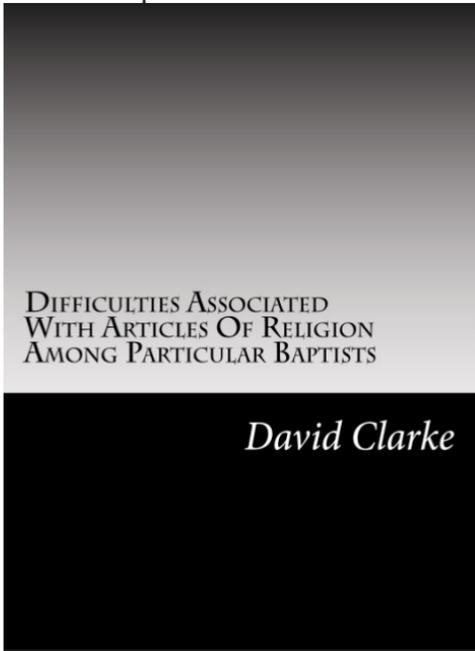
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fail to recognize there is a growth in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in any believer. When a person first believes in the Lord Jesus Christ they cannot possibly have a comprehensive knowledge of a churches constitution or its articles of religion, before solemnly subscribing to them. The author David Clarke has introduced the Doctrines of Grace to Bierton Particular Baptists Pakistan, situated in Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan and bearing in mind his own experience with articles of religion he has compiled Bierton Particular Baptists Pakistan articles of religion from the first Bierton Particular Baptists of 1831, of which he is the sole surviving member, the First London Baptist Confession, 2nd edition 1646, and those of Dr John Gill, in order to avoid some of the difficulties encounter by Particular Baptist during the later part of the 19 century and since. This booklet highlights the problem and suggests the Bierton Particular Baptists Pakistan is as step in the right direction.

**Isaiah 52:8 Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.**

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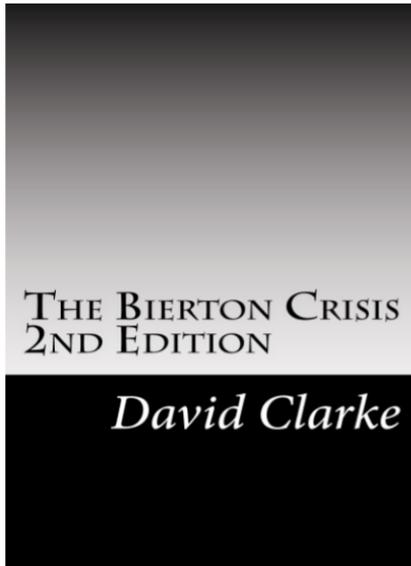
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**The Bierton Crisis**



**A Testimony of David Clarke**

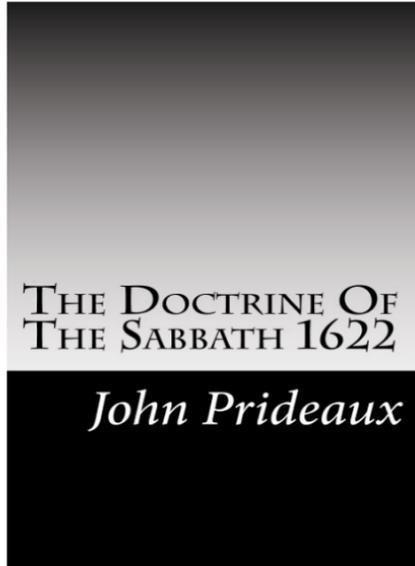
The Bierton Crisis is the personal story of David Clarke a

member of the Bierton Strict and Particular Baptist church. He was also the church secretary and minister sent by the church to preach the gospel in 1982. The Bierton Church was formed in 1831 and was a Gospel Standard cause whose rules of membership are such that only the church can terminate one's membership. This tells of a crisis that took place in the church in 1984, which led to some members withdrawing support. David, the author, was one of the members who withdrew but the church did not terminate his membership as they wished him to return. This story tells in detail about those errors in doctrine and practices that had crept into the Bierton church and of the lengths taken to put matters right. David maintained and taught Particular Redemption and that the gospel was the rule of life for the believer and not the law of Moses as some church members maintained. This story tells of the closure of the Bierton chapel when David was on mission work in the Philippines in December 2002 and when the remaining church members died. It tells how David was encouraged by the church overseer to return to Bierton and re-open the chapel. On David's return to the UK he learned a newly unelected set of trustees had taken over the responsibility for the chapel and were seeking to sell it. The story tells how he was refused permission to re-open or use the chapel and they sold it as a domestic dwelling, in 2006. These trustees held doctrinal views that opposed the Bierton church and they denied David's continued membership of the church in order to lay claim to and sell the chapel, using the money from the sale of the chapel for their own purposes. David hopes that his testimony will promote the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, as set out in the doctrines of grace, especially Particular Redemption and the rule of life for the believer being the gospel of Christ, the royal law of liberty, and not the law of Moses as some reformed Calvinists teach, will be realized by the reader. His desire is that any who are called to preach the gospel should examine their own standing and ensure that they can derive from scripture the doctrines and practices they teach and advance and that they can

derived the truths they teach from scripture alone and not from the traditions of men or their opinions however well they may be thought of.

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**The Doctrine Of The Sabbath 1622**



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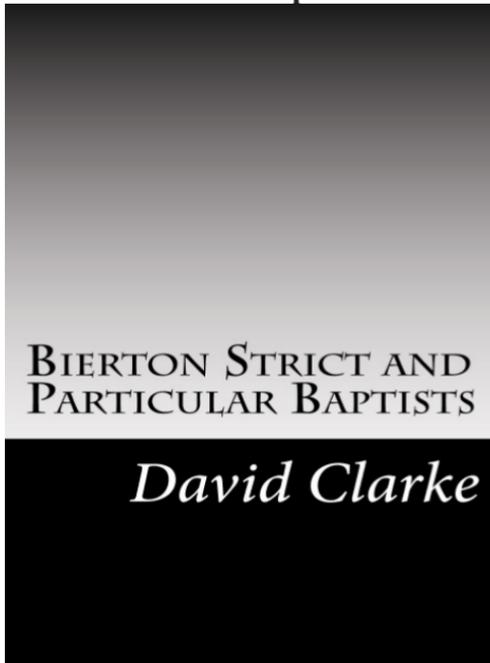
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BISAC: Religion / Christian Theology / Soteriology

Of all the controverts which have exercised the Church of Christ, there is none more ancient than that of the Sabbath: So ancient that it took beginning even in the infancy of the Church, and grew up with it. For as we read in the Acts There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees, which believed, saying, that it was needful to circumcise the people, and to command them to keep the law of Moses; whereof the Sabbath was apart: Which in the general,

as the apostles labours to suppress in their first General Council, held in Jerusalem: So did S. Paul, upon occasion of whose ministry this controversy first began, endeavor what he could against the particular, shapely reproving those which hallowed yet the Jewish Sabbath and observed days, and months, and times, as if he had bestowed his labor in vain upon them. But more particularly in his epistle to the Colossians, Let no man judge you in respect of a holy day or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which were a shadow of things to come but the body is of Christ. Both which expressions of Paul are in this following discourse produced to this very purpose. Yet notwithstanding all this care both generally of the Apostles and more especially of Paul to suppress this error; it grew up still and had its patrons and abettors.

This reproduction of, 'The doctrine of the Sabbath', by Dr. John Prideaux has been presented for those who have been troubled by the insistence of those religious people who insist that the first day of the week is the Sabbath day and to be kept holy, as dictated by the law of Moses. It is not. We include also Dr. John Gill on the subject of the circumstances of public worship as to place and time. It is the view of this publisher that the time and place of Christian worship it is a matter for the Christian community to decide and is not legislated in the scriptures.

**Bierton Strict and Particular Baptists**

My Testimony and Confession

Authored by Mr David Clarke Cert.E

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BISAC: Biography & Autobiography / Religious

This book tells the story and life of David Clarke in the form of an autobiography. It is no ordinary book in that David and his brother were both notorious criminals in the 60's, living in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, where they were MODs. They were both sent to prison for carrying a fire arm without a license and malicious wounding. They were however both converted from crime to Christ after which they turned their lives around and from

crime to Christ. This story tells of David's Conversion in 1970 and that of Michael, 1999 some 30 years later.

It tells of their time in HMP Canterbury Prison and David's time in HMP Wormwood Scrubs and then Dover Borstal. It also tells of David's criminal activity and the crimes he committed before his miraculous conversion from crime to Christ, during a bad experience on LSD, in 1970.

It tells how he became a Christian over night, how he learned to read in order to come to a fuller knowledge of the gospel. He learned to read through reading the bible and classical Christian literature.

He tells of the event that led to him making a confession to the police about 24 crimes he had committed since leaving Dover Borstal in 1968 and of the court case where he was not sentenced.

It tells of his life as a member of the Bierton Strict and Particular Baptist Church, which was a Gospel Standard cause, and how he was called by the Lord and sent by the church to preach the gospel.

David tells of the various difficulties that he faced once he discovered the many doctrinal errors amongst the various Christian groups he met and of the opposition that he experience when he sought to correct them. David recorded his experience and finding in his book "The Bierton Crisis" 1984 written to help others.

David's tells how his brother Michael was untouched by his conversion and how he continued his flamboyant lifestyle ending up doing a 16 year prison sentence, in the Philippines, in 1996, where he died in 2005.

It tells how David's educated himself and went on to Higher education, and graduated with a Certificate in Education and how he went on to teach Electronics, for over 20 years, in colleges of Higher and Further Education.

It tells how David felt compelled to write this story under the title, "Converted On LSD Trip". once he got news of his brothers arrest, in the Philippines, via ITN Television news broadcast, in

1995. This book was published when he got news of his brothers conversion from crime to Christ in 1999, which was after serving 5 years of his 16 year sentence.

David tells how Michael too was converted through him reading C.S. Lewis's book, "Mere Christianity", and him being convinced that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God, after this it tells of David's mission to the Philippines to bring help and assistance to Michael, in 2001 and of their joint venture in helping in the rehabilitation of many former convicted criminals, not only in New Bilibid Prison but other Jails in the Philippines.

This story is told in there book, "Trojan Warriors", that contains the testimonies of 66 notorious criminals who too had turned there lives around, from crime to Christ, 22 of which testimonies are men on Death Row.

David say he believes his story could be of great help to any one seeking to follow the Lord Jesus

