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OUR GOD

By Octavius Winslow, 1870

"For this God is OUR GOD for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end." Psalm 48:14

PREFACE.

It was a characteristic remark of Luther that, he loved the *personal pronouns* of Scripture. This may be termed *the holy egotism of the Bible*; and it recognizes and teaches an important truth—the believer's personal appropriation to himself of the doctrines, precepts, and promises of God's Word. If "all things are ours," then, it is the province of faith to lay its hand upon the great charter—the sufficiency of Jehovah, the fullness of Christ, the provisions of the covenant, the blessings of the Gospel, and the promises of God—claiming and appropriating all as its own. The Bible is replete with these personal pronouns. "*My beloved is mine, and I am His.*" "*Christ loved me, and gave Himself for me.*" "*I am Yours.*" "*I live.*" "*I am not behind the very chief apostle.*" "*By the grace of God, I am what I am.*"

To endeavor to raise the believer to this elevated and proper standard, in his personal religion is the design of these pages. Losing sight of all non-essentially religious differences and ecclesiastical distinctions, and recognizing all who possess like precious faith, as constituting 'One Body in Christ,' essentially and individually *one*, it aims to cluster all around the Mercy Seat, sealing upon the lips of all the declaration of the sacred Brotherhood—"This God is OUR GOD forever and ever." Should this object, in a single case, be promoted, these pages will not have been written in vain. To neutralize the

doubts, dissipate the fears, and confirm the faith of a single believer in Christ, thus aiding him to place his foot upon another and higher round in heaven's ladder, is a work worthy of a life.

We but imperfectly realize the greatness of God's love to His people, their preciousness to the heart of Jesus, and how incessantly they are the objects of the Spirit's care and comfort. Viewed in this threefold light, may not the writer hope that his cup of cold water, offered to the saints in name of, and because dear to, Christ, will be acceptable to the disciple, be approved of by the Master, and be abundant also of many thanksgivings unto God? To the triune God shall be the praise!

THE GOD OF LOVE.

"God is love." John 4:16

In commencing a series of studies designed to unfold some of the perfections of "Our God," as they are revealed in the Bible and are embodied in Christ, we begin with what may be regarded the central one of all—the perfection of LOVE—around which, in the salvation of men, all the others cluster, and with which they harmoniously and resplendently blend. If one perfection of God shines out in redemption with greater effulgence than any other, it is this. Love is the focus of all the rest, the golden thread which draws and binds them all together in holy and beautiful cohesion. Love was the moving, controlling attribute in God's great expedient of saving sinners. *Justice* may have demanded it, *holiness* may have required it, *wisdom* may have planned it, and *power* may have executed it, but love originated the whole, and was the moving cause in the heart of God; so that the salvation of the sinner is not so much a manifestation of the justice, or holiness, or wisdom, or power of God, as it is a display of His love.

Had not God's love resolved to save man, all His other perfections must have been employed and displayed in destroying man. Love set its heart upon man, yearned to save man, and resolved to embark in the expedient of his salvation; and this it did by conceiving a plan which should harmonize all the other attributes of His nature, and engage them in the divine and wondrous work of redeeming mercy. It is not, therefore, without reason and design that we make the love of God the concentric truth from which we start.

The character of God, as the God of love, is but imperfectly apprehended, even by those who are the especial objects of His regard. There are but few saints of God who study His character, and read His dispensations, in the light of this wondrous perfection of His nature. They are awed by His greatness, impressed with His holiness, tremble at His power; but how few are subdued and drawn to Him by His love! They do not, for the most part, conceive that loving view of His character, and cherish those kindly thoughts of His mercy, as would disarm their minds of the terror of the slave, and fill their hearts with the affection of the child. And yet a believing apprehension of God's loving and lovable character, of the great love with which He loves His saints, lies at the root of all holy, filial, and unreserved obedience.

As there is no such commanding, controlling, all-constraining power as that of love, so, in proportion to the deep view we have of the love of God to us in Christ Jesus, will be the quickened response it awakens of confiding love in our hearts, and of obedient love in our lives. May the present unfolding of God, as the "God of love," dissipate those cold, distrustful, and dishonoring views and feelings of His character and government which we have too deeply cherished; enabling us to read and understand, in a new and clearer light, the divine and wondrous declaration upon which our meditation is founded—
"God is love."

You have thought of Him, perhaps, as the God of holiness, as the God of justice, as the God of power, as the God of judgment; come now and meditate upon Him as the God of love; and while you thus muse on this marvelous and soul-subduing truth, may the fire of a responsive affection kindle in your heart, and your tongue break forth into thanksgiving and praise.

God is essentially the God of love. The words which suggest our present meditation emphatically declare this: "God is love." This is, perhaps, the most sublime sentence of the Bible. It is a sentence which only could arise from a divine mind. It is at once simple and grand, intelligible and affecting. It involves a truth in which an angel's mind might expatiate, and which a child's can grasp. It reaches to the highest, and descends to the lowest intellect. That the abstract term love, and not the concrete term *loving*, should be employed, expresses something beyond the ordinary meaning of the word. And what is the truth thus embodied? Just the one we are now attempting to vindicate—that God is essential love. Love is not so much an attribute of God as it is His very essence. It is not so much a moral perfection of His being as it is His being itself. He would not be God were He not love. To deny that He is love

would be to deny that He is God. To unrobe Him of this essential quality of His nature would be tantamount to the unrobing Him of His essential Godhead. He would not be God were He not love!

As I have remarked, this is the central perfection, around which, as satellites, all the others revolve, and from which, as harmonized in the salvation of man, they derive their position and luster. Thus, for example omnipotence is the power of love; omniscience is the eye of love; omnipresence is the atmosphere of love; holiness is the purity of love; justice is the fire of love; and thus might we travel the circle of the Divine perfections, and each one would be found to be but another form of the essential perfection of love.

In the words, "God is love," we have a perfect portrait of the eternal and incomprehensible Jehovah, drawn by His own unerring hand. "The mode of expression here adopted differs materially from that usually employed by the inspired writers in speaking of the Divine perfections. They say, God is merciful, God is just, God is holy; but never do they say, God is mercy, God is justice, God is holiness. In this instance, on the contrary, the apostle, instead of saying, God is loving, or good, or kind, says 'God is love,' love itself. By this expression, we must understand that God is all pure, unmixed love, and that the other moral perfections are so many modifications of this love. Thus, His justice, His mercy, His truth, His faithfulness, are but so many different names of His love or goodness. As the light which proceeds from the sun may easily be separated into many different colors, so the holy love of God, which is the light and glory of His nature, may be separated into a variety of moral attributes and perfections. But, though separated, they are still love. His whole nature and essence is love. His will, His works, His words, are love; He is nothing, and can do nothing but love." (Payson)

Love is so completely the essence of God, that it shines out in every perfection of His nature, and is exhibited in every act of His administration. He is nothing, and can do nothing foreign to Himself; consequently He is nothing, and can do nothing in which His love is not an essential quality. All the streams of a fountain must partake essentially of the source from where they rise. All the rays of light, whatever their prismatic hues, must partake essentially, of the sun from where they flow. And were not God's perfections thus modified and softened by love—were they not led on by this commanding perfection of His nature, each one, and all combined, would be terribly against us. His wisdom would baffle, His power would crush us, His holiness would terrify us, His justice would condemn us, and His truth would stand by,

pledged to the stern and utmost fulfilment of their terrible and righteous display.

Now, God is essential love. He is not only loving, but He is love; is not only good, but goodness. All others are loving and good, not *of themselves*, but *by derivation*. The essence of all creatures is good, because God made them so, and so pronounced everything which He made; but they are not *essentially* good, else they could not change their nature and become bad. God is love, from Himself, and not from another; He is absolutely, independently love. His love is not a quality or accident of His being, imported into His essence—something foreign to Himself; it is His essence itself. If we admit His eternity—and we cannot rationally deny it; we must admit, that love is the eternal, necessary, and independent essence of His being. *Creatures are lovable and loving, but God is love*. Every creature must necessarily derive its love, and its capacity of loving, from God. But God derives His love, and His power of loving, from no other being but Himself.

Here let us pause, in deep adoration of a truth so vast yet so intelligible, so glorious yet so precious. In coming to a God of absolute love—that love flowing to us through the cross of Christ—we feel we are coming to One whose love can cover over all our sin, misery, and unworthiness, meeting our utmost need, without diminishing a hair's breadth of its boundless sufficiency. It is a great comfort to faith thus to deal with Him who is essential love, no *fear* haunting the mind as to the sufficiency of the supply. I may fear that the *river* may dry out, but not the *ocean* that feeds it; that the *beam* may vanish, but not the *sun* that emits it—because their resources are within themselves, independent, and inexhaustible. And thus, when we come to God through Christ, as to a Father whose nature and whose name is "love," we are assured that, whatever other sources of power and sympathy fail, God will never disappoint us, but, accepting our draft upon His all-sufficiency, will honor it to its utmost demand.

This suggests another and a kindred view of God as the God of love. His love is INFINITE in its degree. We have just seen that God and love are sacred synonyms, divinely and essentially the same. His love, therefore, must partake of the infinitude of His being. It is a serious defect in the religion of many that their faith deals too faintly with the infinity of God. This leads to a limiting of the Holy One of Israel. Finite beings ourselves, all our ideas and conceptions of God's greatness are bounded by the finite. This 'restricting of Jehovah' dwarfs our personal Christianity, and robs Him of His divine glory. But God

is infinite, and therefore His love to us is boundless and fathomless. This view of His infinite greatness is not to paralyze, but to strengthen our faith; not to repel, but attract us. The very IMMENSITY of God is one of our greatest encouragements to approach Him. If David made the greatness of his sin a plea with God for its pardon—"For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great"—surely we may plead the greatness of God's love when we ask anything at His hand.

And although in thus coming to His infinity, we may appear like a child dipping its tiny shell into the depth of the ocean thinking to exhaust it, nevertheless, small though may be the vessel with which we draw, we must feel that nothing less than infinite love can meet the deep need and satiate the intense yearnings of our soul. *In proportion as the Holy Spirit leads us to see the depths of our sinfulness, poverty, and nothingness, we shall learn that nothing less than a God of infinite love, grace, and sufficiency could meet our case.*

Approach, then, this love, my reader, with the full persuasion of its infinite measurement. It can fill the large vessel as well as the small, and the small vessel as well as the large, to its utmost capacity. It can flood over all the ruggedness and barrenness of your nature, its sweetly flowing waves filling the shallows and veiling the chafings of life's daily conflict with sin and sorrow. Let not the greatness of your transgressions appall you; let not the deep needs of your soul discourage you; let not the turpitude of your guilt dismay you; let not the intensity of your grief overwhelm you. You deal with a God whose love is infinite, and can infinitely more than reach the farthest extent of your need. Come with your great and your minor sins; come with your deep and your shallow needs; come to His infinite ocean of love, in which the elephant may swim, and which the lamb may wade.

Before we reach the different illustrations of God's character as the God of love, we may remark that, **LOVE IS THE CENTRAL ELEMENT OF HIS GOVERNMENT**. In human governments it is not so, and in this exists a marked difference between God's government and man's. God's government begins where man's government ends—in mercy. Man works from the central attribute of *justice*; God from the central attribute of love. Before He draws His hand from His bosom, and whets His glittering sword of justice to punish, that bosom would seem to devise all schemes of mercy, and to employ all means of kindness, that, if possible, mercy might rejoice over judgment.

Sinner! thus has the God of love been dealing with you! Long has He dealt

with you in the way of mercy and forbearance. Judgment has *lingered*. There has been the "hiding of His power." His mercy has restrained His wrath. And but for this, hell must have been your present abode. And still you sin, still you fight against God. Still you despise His Son, reject His grace, scorn His salvation, and rush heedlessly, madly upon the thick bosses of His buckler. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

But there is a *limit* even to Divine forbearance and infinite mercy. When God, so to speak, has *exhausted* all means of kindness and love, justice steps in and executes His righteous vengeance and wrath. Mercy gives place to judgment, and the sinner is righteously and eternally condemned. What do you say then, sinner, to this love? Has it interested, instructed, *won* you? Presume not upon its patience and continuance. Throw down the weapons of your rebellion, and submit to the government of God. Repent and believe. Cast yourself in contrition at His feet, and embrace in faith the scepter of His grace, extended in the Person and work of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. That scepter will not always be outstretched, neither will it always be the scepter of grace. God is a God of *justice* as well as of love; a God that takes vengeance; as well as a God that shows mercy. Listen to His awful words: "When I sharpen my flashing sword and begin to carry out justice, I will bring vengeance on my enemies and repay those who hate me." Oh! "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" "Our God is a consuming fire."

Do not make light of eternal punishment. Do not think it a small thing to fall under the vengeance of a holy, just, and gracious God. Mercy is fearful when it turns to wrath! love is consuming when it turns to anger! There is no wrath like "the wrath of the Lamb!" With hell flashing in your face—with the "wrath to come,"—wrath, forever and ever to come—preparing for its dread and endless outpouring—with the certain prospect before you of the undying worm of conscience, and the unquenchable flame of bodily and soul suffering—why, oh! *why will you die?* Is *sin* so sweet, the *world* so attractive, the *creature* so satisfying, that for it you are willing to imperil your everlasting happiness, to barter your soul? Conceive, oh! conceive, if possible, what it is to dwell in everlasting burning, to lie down in eternal fire! Spirit of the living God! awaken the sleeping sinner, quicken the dead soul! Cause men everywhere to realize, in some degree, what a fearful, what an appalling, indescribable thing it is to be lost forever!

Oh, what a mercy that you are not already in hell, and that there is a door

open to you into heaven! That door is Christ. "I Am the Door." Cease striving to enter heaven by *the door of your good works and religious duties*; by the merits and intercessions of men, of saints, or angels. There is but one door into heaven—faith in the Savior, who died for sinners on the cross, and whose blood and righteousness supply all the merit God requires, or man can bring. Jesus came to save sinners—saves them now, saves them to the uttermost, saves there freely and forever. Why not you?

The remaining pages of this chapter will be devoted to **THE DIFFERENT MODES BY WHICH GOD HAS MANIFESTED AND REVEALED HIS LOVE TO MAN.**

All NATURE is a tracing of the God of love; dim, it is true, marred by the fall, and tainted by sin, yet sufficiently vivid and palpable to indicate, if not that God *is* love, yet that God *does* love. He must be an atheist of the deepest dye who can gaze upon the worlds above and the earth beneath, and see no trace of Divine goodness, no evidence of the fact that God loves man. If creation demonstrates the *being* of God—if the things that are made clearly evidence *His eternal power and Godhead*, so that men are left without excuse who deny His being—then every star that glows, and every flower that blooms, and every gem that sparkles, and every spring that murmurs, is an evidence that He who made all for man, loves man with the love of infinite benevolence.

It is true, nature reveals not the *moral* character of God, nor answers the great question, "What must I do to be saved?" Yet it testifies that God *is*, and that God is *good*; and from the hyssop on the wall, to the lofty cedar in Lebanon; from the atom dancing in the sunbeam, to the Alp piercing the clouds; it summons man to fall down and worship Him whose goodness is reflected in all His works.

PROVIDENCE, too, is an unfolding of the God of love. What is providence but the Divine goodness molding and tinting, shaping and directing, all the affairs of the children of men? And that man's life must needs be a blank in which no trace of God's love is found—nothing in his creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life—nothing in the changes through which he has past, of prosperity and adversity, of sunshine and shade—nothing in the hand which so strangely guided his steps, mapped his path, overruling and directing all the events and affairs of daily life, educing good from evil, transmuting misfortunes into blessings, extracting sweet from the bitter, which tells that God is good, that God is love.

Truly in all this the goodness of God is visible. My reader, look only into the book of providence—that providence as it is seen in your personal and daily history—and see if there exists no trace of the God of love in it all. Thus all nature, and all providence, whether it is the sunbeam that smiles, or the tempest which darkens, testifies that God is, and that God is love.

"There's nothing *bright* above; below,
From flowers that bloom, to stars that glow,
But in its light my soul can see
Some feature of Your Deity.

"There's nothing *dark* below, above,
But in its gloom I trace Your love;
And meekly wait the moment when
Your touch shall turn all bright again,"

But not in creation nor in providence do we find so clear and emphatic a manifestation of the God of love, as in the "GLORIOUS GOSPEL of the blessed God." The Gospel is all that man, *as a sinner on his way to eternity*, needs. It meets all the inquiries and yearnings of His soul. It supplies an answer to the most momentous inquiry that human lips ever asked—"How shall man be just with God?" And it supplies a solution to the most solemn and profound problem of God's moral government—"How shall God be just, and yet justify the ungodly?"

Where, then, but in the "Gospel of the grace of God " can the sin-burdened soul find an answer to its earnest, anxious inquiry—"What must I do to be saved?" Oh! what a marvelous unfolding of the love of God to man is the proclamation which the Gospel makes of the *pardon of sin*—of the *justification of the sinner*—of the *adoption into God's family* of him who was an enemy—all founded upon the one atonement, the perfect sacrifice, the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ!

In *the great catalogue of blessings* a God of love has given you, place at the very beginning His glorious Gospel. Truly, it is a joyful sound, good news, glad tidings. Not with a melody so entrancing, nor with announcements so thrilling did the trump of jubilee in the fiftieth year echo through the camp of Israel, proclaiming its glorious amnesty, as does the good news which the Gospel brings of sin forgiven, of the great debt paid, of deliverance from the

captivity of sin and Satan, of an inheritance lost but regained, of peace with God through Christ that passes all understanding, and all by free grace and through simply believing. Oh! thank God for the Gospel! Prize it above your choicest blessing.

Pitch your earthly tent close by its ever-flowing, life-giving, life-sustaining streams. Devote your substance, consecrate your powers, and employ your time and influence in maintaining and propagating this joyful sound of a full, free, and present salvation to poor, lost, self destroyed souls. "Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound." Seek to be enrolled among their number. Whatever else you seek to know, seek, above all, to know and understand the Gospel of the grace of God. Become its lowly student, its earnest inquirer, its humble believer, its devout and holy liver. Count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. In the solemn, the tremendous hour of death—that hour of hours when all other knowledge will prove of no avail—the Gospel of Christ will stand by you, and with the salvation which it will then unfold, the consolation it will then impart, the love of God it will then reveal, and the hopes it will then inspire, will invest the closing scene of life with dignity and repose; and light up the valley down which you pass with a radiance that shall deepen in its effulgence until *lost amid the splendor and the purity of eternal day!*

But the great manifestation of the love of God yet remains to be considered—Gods love as embodied and expressed in **THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. How emphatic are the terms in which this great truth is recorded. Listen to Jesus Himself—"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Listen to His apostle; "God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."**

How corrective these declarations are of an erroneous view of God's love which some have entertained—that is, that the coming of Jesus as the Savior was to *procure*, rather than to *manifest*; to *inspire*, rather than to *reveal*; God's love to man. In other words, that Christ died to redeem us, and therefore God loves us—that He *originated* rather than *expressed* the love that filled the bosom of Jehovah. What a dishonoring misapprehension is this! What a libel on the character of God as the God of love!

But take the converse of this idea and you have the correct interpretation of God's love—that is, *Christ died for us, because God loved us*; in other words, the atonement of Christ was not the *cause*, but the *consequence*; not the *origin*, but the *manifestation*; of the great love with which God loved us.

Who can ever fully spell *that marvelous monosyllable*, "so"? "God so loved us." Who can fathom the immensity of the love compressed within its wondrous, boundless meaning? Our ennobled and perfected faculties will be the only suitable instrument—heaven the scene—and eternity the limit of its study.

Behold how great and resplendent the love of God appears AS MANIFESTED IN JESUS! It would have been impossible—reverently we speak it—to have transcended this manifestation of love. He then must have eclipsed Himself. It is no ideal and exaggerated expression. His love was so divine, He alone could know it; so hidden, He alone could reveal it; so vast, He alone could express it; and so precious, no costlier gift could embody it than His own co-equal, co-eternal, and beloved Son. Herein is love, and *only* here! In all other things, as we have remarked, we infer that God *does* love, here, in the person and work of Jesus, we learn that God *is* love. All other manifestations of His love are shadows. Christ is the full-orbed Sun, pouring down in subdued and softened rays an infinite tide of light, life, and beauty around a sinful and rebellious empire.

"God so loved the world"—with a love of *benevolence*, and so loved the Church with a love of *redemption*, that He gave His only—begotten Son. By the love of benevolence, the world is kept from instant destruction; and by the love of redemption, His elect Church is taken out of the world, saved, and glorified.

Now, it is just in this light God would have His people *study His character and read His heart* as the God of love. This is the only mirror which truly and perfectly reflects, as with focal and resplendent power, the marvelous truth that, "God is love." It is only in Christ we read *His sin-forgiving love*. "Where is another God like you, who pardons the sins of the survivors among his people? You cannot stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing mercy."

It is love, O believer! that has forgiven you all your great debt, has blotted out your transgressions as a thick cloud, that has cast all your sins behind His

back, and will remember them no more forever, because He is love. My soul! measure this great love by the greatness, the number, and the enormity of your sins, and then exclaim, "Oh! the depth and immensity of that love, that could flood over and bury forever sins red as crimson, transgressions countless as the sands!"

God's love is a SOUL JUSTIFYING love. It throws a robe of righteousness around the believing soul, which presents it before Him, the holy Lord God, unblemished, and unreprouvable in His sight. Oh! wondrous love, that provides, imputes, and invests the soul with a righteousness so divine, as discharges it from the court of divine justice, the indictment quashed, the conviction reversed, the sinner fully and forever delivered from condemnation, and all through the "righteousness of God, which is by faith in Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all those who believe." "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ, Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

The love of God is ADOPTING love. It makes us His children, who once were rebels; His friends, who once were foes. By an imminent act of His electing and sovereign grace, it has taken us into His family, makes us heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, teaching us to approach Him in prayer, crying, Abba, Father! "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." What more shall we say? It is a love that will not cease—nor ceasing then—until it has brought its home to Himself in heaven, having enabled us to glorify Him here, permitting us to enjoy Him fully, and forever, hereafter.

We have yet to trace the love of God IN HIS DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE. The path along which our heavenly Father is conducting us homeward, is a *chequered* and a *varied* path. It is paved with stones—precious stones—of many shapes and hues. But faith reads it all, and gratitude accepts it all, as resolved into God's eternal and unchangeable love. There can be nothing but love in the conduct of Him—mysterious and painful though that conduct may be—who laid our sins, and curse, and condemnation on His beloved Son, wounding, bruising, and putting Him to grief and to death for us. In this light, then, we are to read all His dealings with us, whether they be of judgment or of mercy. Is it judgment? Is the discipline of God with you a discipline of trial, of sorrow, of suffering? Still is He the God of love, and from His love all this discipline of trial springs; and love will control the furnace, and temper the flames, and conduct the whole to so salutary and holy a result

as will cause the desert to ring, and heaven to resound with the music of your thanksgiving and praise. "Those whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."

In the holy light, then, of His love, read and interpret every cloud that shades you, every dispensation that afflicts you, every sorrow that wrings your heart with anguish. Is your song of mercy? Then love has dropped the veil it wore, and stands before you in its own undisguised and unmingled tenderness and power, challenging your warmest acknowledgment and your loftiest praise. Thus God's love shapes and guides the whole scene. It traces all, and blends with all His doings. It sweetens the bitter dispensation, and makes the sweet one sweeter. It brightens the dark cloud, and makes the bright one brighter. It may be a hard lesson for faith to learn, a bold acknowledgment for grace to make, a startling inference for love to draw that, all God's trying, wounding, disappointing dispensations towards His people, is the result of His everlasting love; nevertheless, it is so.

He is the God of love, and *He cannot change*. He who smiles today, and who frowns tomorrow—who kisses now, and smites us then—is the same tender, faithful Father, whose love knows no change, and whose faithfulness never fails. And when the sorrow is past, and the storm subsides, and in calmer moments we review all the way that He has led us, to what conclusion can we come but that, through it all, true to His nature and faithful to His promises, He was the God of love?

And now we see that love planted that thorn-hedge; that love crushed that fond hope; that love stirred up that soft nest; that love blighted that sweet flower; and that love alone permitted you to take that step which involved you in such perplexity, and plunged you into such grief. Thus, out of the ravenous eater comes food, and from the fiery furnace, silver so pure and gold so refined.

"My soul, your gold is true, but full of dross;
Your Savior's breath refines you with some loss;
His gentle furnace makes you pure as true;
You must be melted before you are cast anew."

One more view of this subject; and this shall be a practical and sanctifying one. God so loves us, as to make love the great controlling motive power of our

religious life. "love is the fulfillment of the law." "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Such is the teaching of His Word. The religion we receive from Christ is the religion of love, and the religious life to which it is to give birth in us is to be *a life of love to God*, securing our obedience, enlisting our service, and constraining us, by the mercies of God, to yield our bodies living sacrifices; thus teaching and strengthening us to "deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live godly, righteously, and soberly in this present evil world."

In proportion to our EXPERIENCE of the love of God in our souls, it will become a motive power in our lives. The outward holy life of a believer is the result of an inward principle of love to God. "The love of Christ constrains us." For this cause the apostle breathed that precious prayer in behalf of the Thessalonian saints: "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God." Standing as upon the shore of this boundless, fathomless ocean, he prays that the Lord, the Spirit, might lead their hearts into its infinite depths. What a needed and holy prayer! What a vast and precious blessing! Their hearts were sinful, and sad, and weary; guilt tainted them, bereavement shaded them, conflict and service exhausted them; and now, just as their heart was, the apostle prays that it might be led into the sanctifying, soothing, life-refreshing love of God.

Into this ocean of divine love, my reader, let your heart, just as it is, plunge. Repair, with all its sin, and sorrow, and weariness, to no other purifying, comforting source, but to *the shoreless, soundless sea of the love of God in Christ Jesus*. Oh descend, in simple, child-like faith, into its depths, and lose yourself amid its boundless infinitude! The love of God thus filling and overflowing your heart, all will be well. Winter will bloom into spring, and spring will blush into summer, and summer will ripen into the golden fruit of autumn. Oh, how the love of God changes the aspect of everything! Afflictions are then seen to be 'disguised blessings'; trials, proofs of Divine faithfulness; clouds, chariots paved with love, and penciled with light, in which the Savior comes to us.

God, revealing His glory and His grace in Christ Jesus to your soul, will bring you into the sweetest acquiescence with all His will, and cause you to go forth, and by the sacred, all-powerful influence of a holy life—silent, luminous, and penetrating as light—proclaim to every object, rational and irrational, that "God is love," that God loves You, and that you love God! Blessed Savior!

**"I'd carve Your passion on the bark;
And every wounded tree
Shall droop, and bear some mystic mark
That Jesus died for me."**

**"The suitors shall wonder when they read,
Inscribed on all the grove,
That Heaven itself came down and bled,
To win a mortal's love."**

Go forth and BE LOVING, even as your Father in heaven is loving. Let your heart be as large in its creature capacity as God's heart is in its divine. If He has a large heart for you, beware of a small heart for your fellows. If His heart is open, see that your heart is not closed. And since He departs at no sinfulness or ingratitude, at no injury or unworthiness on the part of the recipient of His goodness, be an imitator of God. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." God has so dealt with you, overcoming and winning your evil heart with the goodness and love of His own. Go and do likewise towards all who have injured you, wounded you, and spitefully used you, and so shall you be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. Live for God, and act towards others as one who, in a little while, will flee from a world of sin, infirmity, and strife—from all its taintings, woundings, and misunderstandings, and find yourself playing upon the surface, and plunging into the depths of the ocean of love which flows and sparkles beneath and around the throne of God and the Lamb.

O Lord Jesus Christ, if a little taste of Your love here below, as it flows through the channels of Your sacred word and ordinances, is so sweet, what will the full draught be above!

**When shall this happy day of rescue be!
When I shall make a near approach to Thee,
Be lost in love, and wrapped in ecstasy?
Oh, when shall I behold You, all serene,
Without this envious, cloudy veil between?
'Tis true, the sacred elements impart
Your virtual presence to my faithful heart,
But to my sense still unrevealed You art.
This, though a great, is an imperfect bliss;
To see a shadow for the God I wish.
My soul a more exalted pitch would fly,**

And view You in the heights of majesty."

"But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." Romans 5:8

THE GOD OF HOPE.

"May THE GOD OF HOPE fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13

From a meditation upon God as the God of love, we pass, by an easy transition of thought, to a meditation upon God as the God of Hope. These two titles are beautifully harmonious. Where there is divine love *to* man, there is divine hope *for* man. God's love assures me that I may hope in Him for everything that love can give, for all that belongs to Him is mine. Once assured that I have a home in His heart, I feel that I may repose in every perfection of His nature. What good may we not expect from Him who is love, and who has demonstrated that love in the transcendently great and precious gift of his son? If He has so loved us, what else will not such love bestow of present blessing, and of future good? We have but to know, by the witness of the Spirit, our present standing in Christ, thus to be brought into the experience of present peace, joy, and hope; and to be equally assured that, *far away beyond the region of sin and sorrow, there awaits us a heaven where faith is turned into sight, hope is lost in fruition, and love bathes the soul in its boundless sea of bliss.*

The present title of God, the "God of hope," is peculiarly expressive and endearing to the believing mind. His title as the God of love, has especially to do with our present. His title, as the "God of hope," has to do with our future life. The first, assures us of a salvation *now*—a present pardon, a present acceptance, a present adoption; the other, leads our thoughts onward and upward, and paints its rainbow-tints upon our solemn and eternal future, assuring us of a certain and full salvation to come. As the God of love, I dwell forever in His heart; as the God of hope, I shall dwell forever in His heaven. Let us proceed to examine the import of this remarkable title of God, and then the blessings flowing therefrom, as invoked by the prayer of the apostle; "May THE GOD OF HOPE fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

God is the God of essential hope—that is, hope in Him is an inherent element, a part of His essence. He is Hope itself. Of no other being can this be affirmed. The hope that springs up in the soul of all other intelligences, human or angelic, is a communicated thing, a passion extraneous from themselves. It is a beam flowing from God, as a ray of light from the sun, as a jet of water from the fountain. But hope in God, is as part of His nature-it is God Himself; He would not be God were He not the "God of hope." Hope, in Him, is a duality which no vicissitude can change, no cloud shade, no object eclipse. Thus, from God all intelligent beings receive the inspiration of their hope. A few particulars will illustrate this.

God is the Author of NATURAL hope. He has mercifully constituted man the creature of hope. What a wise provision, what a beneficent bestowment is this! What sustains man amid the toils, the troubles, and disappointments of the present life? It is hope. What quickens his intellectual powers, makes in him the spirit of enterprise, impels him onward in the accomplishment of great purposes, sustaining him amid toils the most exhausting, soothing him in trials the most severe, and bearing him up beneath reverses and disappointments the most crushing and bitter?

It is hope. The pole-star of hope fixing his eye, what labor will he not undergo, what sufferings will he not endure, to what privations will he not submit? Extinguish hope in the human heart, and you have enthroned grim despair, like a demon of darkness, upon the soul. Life has lost its sweetness, the creature its attraction, the world its charm, and all the future of the soul is shrouded in midnight gloom.

Hope, in man has been variously defined. Divines have discoursed of its nature, orators have declaimed of its influence, poets have chanted its pleasures, and even artists have symbolized its beauty. It has been described as the oxygen of the soul, as the last ray the cloud obscures, as the lighthouse pouring its golden beams over life's ocean, as the firstborn offspring of reason. It is at once man's kindest friend and his greatest foe. It keeps him from sinking in the bosom of the waves, and yet often allures him on to depths in which there is no standing, and to rocks from which there is no rescue; and so, by its promises and its flattery, plunges its too confiding victim into irremediable ruin and despair.

And yet, natural hope is God's kind and beneficent gift to man. It sits perched on the warrior's crest, it illumines the captive's cell, it lightens the slave's chain, it sustains the spirit of the exile, it strengthens the couch of languor, soothes the bed of suffering, and lulls to balmy repose the subject of mental disquietude and bodily disease. The hope of success in toil, of deliverance in difficulty, of return from exile, of recovery from sickness; in a word, the hope of realizing some future good, imparts its inspiration to man, feeds the lamp that cheers him onward, tints with prophetic ray the clouds and shadows that drape life's tomorrow.

**"What is hope? The beauteous sun
Which colors all it shines upon.
The beacon of life's dreary sea,
The star of immortality.
Fountain of feeling, young and warm;
A day-beam bursting through the storm.
A tone of melody, whose lute
Is, oh! too sweet for earth!
A blossom of that radiant tree,
Whose fruit the angels only see.
A beauty and a charm, whose power
Is seen, enjoyed, confessed each hour.
A portion of the world to come,
When earth and ocean meet—
the last overwhelming doom."**

And yet how insensible is the unrenewed man of his obligation to God, even for the natural hope with which He has inspired him! In the folly of his atheistic outcry, "there is no God," he pauses not to reflect upon the misery into which he would instantly plunge were God to extinguish this merciful inspiration within his heart. "Oh that man would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men."

My reader, are your circumstances trying? are your resources lessening? are clouds gathering? and do you find yourself tempted to succumb to despondency and despair? There is hope for you in God! All other sources and gleams of hope may have expired, but God is the "God of hope," and in His power and love, in His word and faithfulness, you may hope, even against hope. Take heart, then, and look up. Never yield to despair while there is hope in God. If things look discouraging, and prospects are gloomy, there is one

Being to whose providence you may always turn with the full assurance of hope, that in His divine love and infinite resources, you will find compassion, support, and help.

Job reminds us that, "men see not the bright light that is in the cloud;" seeing it not, they succumb to despair. There is no pure, unmixed evil in our history. God's judgments are tempered with mercy. There is always, through His goodness and love, a precious pearl in sorrow's cup; and when that cup has been drank, and its bitterness is past, we shall find it undissolved, all the purer and more precious by the sanctified dealings of Him who, as a refiner and purifier of silver, purifies His people as gold and silver are purified, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

Thus there are always some softening, mitigating circumstances in our deepest, sorest trials, something that tells of God's love and speaks of future hope. Oh, it is not *all night* with those who love God, nor even with those who do not love Him. When the sun sets, the moon rises; and when the moon is hidden, the stars shine out; so that, if earth is dark, heaven is light, and the night is all the more glorious for the very splendor which the darkness reveals.

Thus far we have spoken chiefly of natural hope in man, for which he is indebted to the power and goodness of God. But God is the Author of a higher, more spiritual, and immortal hope than this—the good hope, through grace, of eternal life, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, and made known to us by His gospel. It is in this sense the apostle, in the passage upon which this chapter is based, speaks of God as the God of hope. We can know nothing of God as the God of hope but as He is made known to us in Christ. Out of Christ, there is no hope of salvation for man in God. Man lost all hope in himself when he sinned, and all hope in God when, for that sin, he was driven out of paradise, to be henceforth a fugitive and wanderer on the face of the earth, dark despair enthroned upon his brow. But, even before his expulsion from Eden, hope—the hope of salvation—trembled upon the dark cloud which shrouded that paradise of purity and bliss, in gloom. "From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her offspring will be enemies. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Here the first promise of a Savior, the first dawn of hope for sinners. This promise Goal fulfilled, and this hope mall realized when "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

When the Lord Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, made His advent into our world, the sun of hope rose with Him. The hope of salvation which faintly dawned in paradise, which shone brighter and brighter through the Mosaic, Patriarchal, and Prophetic dispensations, now burst upon mankind in meridian splendor. Christ had come, the long-promised Savior, and now, upon those who had sat in the region and shadow of death, a great light had risen—the light of life, the hope of salvation, the glory of God's forgiving love, in the face of Jesus Christ. Thus, there is not one ray of hope in God for a lost sinner outside of Christ.

He is, indeed, the God of hope, an infinite ocean of hope, boundless, fathomless, but it flows to the sinner only through one channel, it darts its beams only through one medium—Jesus the Savior, Christ the crucified One. Not a ray of hope emanates from His mercy, or from His goodness, or from His love, or from His power, but as it shines through the darkness and the suffering of the cross, in upon the soul prostrate in penitence and faith at its foot. With what fullness and glory does the atoning work of Christ appear, when seen in this light, as revealing the God of hope to sinners, who, tremblingly expected, and justly deserved, nothing but eternal despair. Let us now show more explicitly in what sense God is the God of hope to those who truly and humbly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is the hope of JUSTIFICATION in God through Christ. The Scriptures of truth set forth the obedience of Christ to the law, as constituting the righteousness of God unto all and upon all those who believe. Thus, "by the obedience of One many were made righteous." "Christ is the *end* of the law for righteousness to every one that believes" -mark, the *end* of the law." He traveled in His obedience to the end of all its precepts, to the end of all its commands, and to the end of all its curse. As a condemning law, as a justifying law, as a life-giving law, Christ, by His personal and full obedience, traveling to its utmost limit of requirement, made an end of it; as such, He abolished it; and he who believes in Christ; accepting in faith, Christ's righteousness as his justification before God, fully answers the end for which the law was given.

Thus, the meaning of the apostle evidently is, that Christ was the termination of the law, its scope, its fulfilling and accomplishment, "for righteousness to every one that believes." And now there is the hope of justification with God through Christ the Lord, our righteousness. Christ's obedience to the law has made it righteous on the part of God to justify the ungodly. It is now His supreme delight, as it is His sole prerogative, legally and justly, without any violence to His government, or shadow upon His character, to acquit, no, to

justify the sinner who believes in Jesus.

Christ has made it so honorable, yes, righteous, on the part of God to reveal Himself as the God of hope to the guilty and condemned, that it is written, as with a sunbeam, upon the inspired page, "It is God who justifies!" What a glorious hope then, is this! The hope of a righteous and full acquittal from present and eternal condemnation, through the imputed righteousness of Christ. This hope have all the saints; for all who believe in Him are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.

My reader, this hope may be yours. If, seeing you renounce the worthlessness of your own righteousness, you are led to enfold yourself by faith in the all-justifying righteousness of the Savior, then you pass from the dreary region of condemnation into the sunshine of a present, free, and changeless justification before God. With the advent of this hope of acceptance in your soul; will be a "peace passing all understanding," and a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Rest not until you attain it. One believing look at Christ, and the shadows of guilt and condemnation which drape your soul, will dissolve into the bright dawn of a hope that Christ has espoused your cause, has become your Surety, has paid your debt, and that you pass out of the court of God's justice not only acquitted, but justified; not merely without blame, but "unblameable and unprovable in His sight." Oh, how divine, perfect, and glorious must be the righteousness of Christ, which can thus so fully and freely justify such vile, guilty sinners, as we! "Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us."

There is also the FORGIVENESS OF SIN in God through Christ. The forgiveness of sin is one of the divinest and most kingly prerogatives of God. To pardon with perfect satisfaction to divine justice; to forgive sins of the greatest number, and guilt of the grossest turpitude, without a stain upon the holiness of His character, or a shadow upon the glory of His name, was a problem in the administration of His moral government, the solution of which He alone was able to supply.

The gift of His co-equal and co-eternal Son, to die an atoning death, to offer Himself as a sacrificial victim to divine justice, fully met the otherwise insurmountable difficulties of the case. What in this matter was impossible with man, was possible with God. The entire scheme of human redemption is, in every part, impressed with the finger of God. If any expedient ever bore the

visible and exclusive stamp of God's mind, it is this. Who but Jehovah could have devised a plan of salvation that would involve not the slightest compromise of the Divine glory? The more a spiritual, reflecting mind studies the whole economy of redemption, the more profound will be the conviction that a Divine heart alone could have conceived, and a Divine mind alone could have planned, and a Divine power alone could have executed, the scheme that saves fallen man. But how precious is the hope of pardon of which God in Christ is the Author and the Giver! No truth illumines the pages of inspiration with greater brightness than this—"There is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." "Who is a God like You, that *pardons* iniquity, and passes by the transgressions of the remnant of His heritage?" "You are a God ready to pardon."

Since Jesus has shed His most precious blood, it is now glorious on the part of God to dart a ray of the hope of pardoned sin into the darkest, vilest heart that ever wept, and sobbed, and confessed at His feet. Approach, O sin-distressed, guilt-burdened one! there is the hope of forgiveness for you in God. He delights in mercy. And since He can forgive all your transgressions for Christ's sake, and be glorious in the eyes of angels and of saints in so doing, do you think that he will spurn you from His throne of grace, if you but acknowledge your transgressions, with the hand of faith resting upon the head of Christ, the sin-atonement lamb of God?

How *real and effectual*, then, must be the sacrificial work of Jesus, thus to have unsealed a spring of Hope in God for guilty men! Who will question the vicarious nature of His sufferings, the atoning design of His death, contemplating it in this convincing light? In no other way can the holy Lord God, consistently with His righteousness, reveal Himself to sinners as the God of hope. All other hope is a fallacy. All hope in the abstract mercy of God, or in the fancied meritoriousness of man, is a false and vain hope, which must inevitably and irretrievably plunge its subject into shame and everlasting contempt. Your hope, then, my reader, lies in your taking hold of Christ the eternal life of your soul. Not a ray gleams forth from any other source but the cross of Christ. Here there is hope for the vilest wretch, the chief of sinners, but only here! The dark shadow of despair is lost amid the effulgence of hope which bathes in unclouded sunshine the cross of Calvary. All who stand beneath the divine bow which spans this sacred hill, may uplift their eyes to God as their reconciled Father, and to heaven as their future and eternal home, with a full-orbed and unclouded hope. This suggests another thought.

God is the divine author of THE HOPE THAT IS IN THE SAINTS, and thus emphatically He is the "God of hope." We are told by the apostle, in that magnificent and precious schedule of spiritual blessings, the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, to be "saved by hope." Each believer has "Christ in him, the hope of glory." And the indwelling of the Spirit is the pledge and earnest of its certain and full realization. Oh, what a mercy to have within us, "a good hope through grace" of eternal life! A hope well grounded, firmly fixed, immovably anchored on Christ. It is the hope of a *penitent* sinner, who sees nothing to hope in *within himself* but a fallen nature, a soul smitten with the leprosy of sin, a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. But more than this.

It is the hope of a believing sinner that sees in the person of Christ a Divine, gracious, all-sufficient Savior, and in the work of Christ a salvation finished, full, and free; having come to Christ in child-like belief, nothing questioning, nothing demurring, by a personal act of faith in a personal Savior. How real and precious is now the hope of glory in the soul, which, like the sun in its orbit, is fixed there, the center and the fount of life, light, and joy.

Beloved reader, if you are the possessor of this hope; if your soul rejoices in its purifying, elevating, heart-soothing influence; render all praise, thanksgiving, and obedience to Him who, as the God of hope, has planted this blessed hope within your soul as a sun that will never set.

Now the apostle breathes a prayer on behalf of those who have Christ in them, the hope of glory; "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit."

The first blessing is "all joy"—that is, all true joy. There is a species of religious joy that is spurious; and there are carnal joys which are but the prelude and the preface to endless sorrow. "The joy of the hypocrite shall perish;" "The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment." Solemn words, heart-searching declaration! The joy that springs from the mere excitement of a stirring appeal, or a glowing picture of heaven, or impassioned description of religious experience, the flights of fancy, or the delusions of a morbidly-distempered mind, is but as the crackling of thorns under a pot—blazing noisily for a moment, and then expiring in midnight darkness. But the apostle prays that the saints may be filled with the "joy of the Lord, which is their strength." The joy of pardoned sin, the joy that springs from Christ, the joy of

reconciliation with God, the joy the Holy Spirit imparts, and which, like living water, springs up in the soul into eternal life. "All joy,"—that is, all filial, believing, sanctifying, hopeful joy—joy even in tribulation and sorrow, in suffering and loss, for Christ's sake.

"Peace in believing," is another blessing which flows from the God of hope, and for which the apostle prays. Peace, divine peace, assured peace, peace which passes all understanding, is a Christian attainment of the highest order, and within the experience of all believers. It flows from friendship with God, is the fruit of acceptance in Christ, is the result of the application to the conscience of the peace-procuring, peace-speaking blood of Christ. This peace flows not through the channel of *doing*, or *enduring*, or *meriting*, but is emphatically "peace in believing." These two features belong to it; it comes *from Christ*, and *through faith*. "He is our peace." And as faith, pure, simple faith, travels empty-handed to Christ's blood for pardon, to Christ's righteousness for acceptance, to Christ's Spirit for sanctification, to Christ's heart for sympathy, to Christ's fullness for supplies of grace, strength, and comfort; peace, in silvery streams and flowing like a river, will diffuse a divine serenity and repose throughout the whole soul.

The last blessing flowing from the God of hope is, our "ABOUNDING IN HOPE through the power of the Holy Spirit." The infinite fullness of hope in God, and manifested through Christ Jesus, justifies and encourages the believer's enlarged measure of this faith. The hope of too many Christians is but limited, beclouded, and uncertain. They hope in God through Christ, it is true; but they have not the full assurance of hope. Now, it is our precious privilege to live in the constant and free exercise of this grace and although there may be much in us to question and becloud it, though our iniquities prevail, and our backslidings abound, and our infirmities and trials are many. Yet, trusting in the all-sufficiency of our God, and in the infinite fullness of Christ, our hope of present good and of future bliss may much more abound, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

So divine and holy a grace is the grace of hope—by no human power kindled, and by no human power kept alive—there is no limit to its experience. A thousand times over it had perished, had *man* inspired and *man* guarded it. Hope, in the Christian, is a *divine* grace, and divinity keeps it; it is *heavenly*, and its nourishment comes from heaven, And that self-same Spirit who quickened us into spiritual life, who enkindled in the saint the first spark of hope, now enables us to abound in this grace to our own comfort and peace,

and to the praise and glory of His divine name. Oh, then, let us not be satisfied with a little measure of this grace, content with a bare hope that we are saved; but let us beseech the Holy Spirit to cause this grace of hope to abound in us, and that our souls may abound in it, to the "full assurance of hope to the end," unshaded by a doubt, unruffled by a fear.

God is an infinite sea of hope; the finished work of Jesus lays the basis of the strongest hope; and the Holy Spirit dwelling in the heart, is the pledge and first-fruits of a hope that shall grow large and shine brighter as it nears its full and eternal consummation. If we desire to "abound in *hope*," we must abound in *faith*. Just in the same proportion to our believing, looking to Christ, our growing in a knowledge of Christ, living upon the fullness of Christ, will be the measure and luster of our hope in Him. If, for example, we look down into a dark well, we see the image of the sun but dimly reflected from its shaded surface; but uplifting our eyes to the blue heavens, we see the sun as it is, in its full-orbed glory, and we exclaim, "Surely the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun."

Thus, if we look down into the deep, dark recesses of our own hearts, we see the image of Christ but imperfectly reflected, if reflected at all, from our partially renewed and sanctified nature, and doubts and fears assail us; but if we look out of, and off from, our sinful selves, directly to Christ, we shall have such an unclouded view of His glory and fullness, His sufficiency and love to receive and save us just as we are, as will fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and thus our souls will abound in hope, through the Holy Spirit taking of the things of Christ and showing them unto us.

So important is this view of our subject, I venture to repeat the thought that, the measure of our simple, direct faith in Christ, will be the measure of our abounding in hope of eternal life. Not a ray of hope springs from within or from without ourselves, in anything that we *are*, or in anything that we do, or *endure*. The toil of a slave, the obedience of a serf, or the death of a martyr, would avail us nothing as to the reality of the hope that we were saved. But, one believing direct look at Jesus will neutralize every doubt, dissipate every cloud, and quell every fear concerning the fact of our salvation; and the blessed hope of being forever with the Lord will shed its sunshine through our whole being. Oh, then, earnestly, importunately pray for this abounding in hope, and rest not until you have attained to its richest experience.

To this I would add, for the encouragement and comfort of any of my readers, be thankful to God for *the least measure* of hope in your soul. It is not the *degree*, but the *reality*, not the *vividness*, but the *existence* of hope within you, that constitutes your assurance and comfort. One grain of real gold, is of more worth than thousands of the counterfeit and the false. One ray of a good hope through grace, beaming down from the cross of Christ into your heart, is worth more than world on world, and infinitely outweighs the value, and outshines the splendor, of the most costly religion and the most gorgeous ritual man ever devised. Despise not, then, your humble hope in Christ. Has your heart caught a beam? Hold it fast, cherish it, nourish it, guard it, by living constantly upon the Savior, from where that sunbeam came. "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear Him, upon those who hope in His mercy." "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you that hope in the Lord."

Abandon not, then, your feeble, humble hope in Christ, for millions of worlds. Hold it fast, though, like the tide, it may ebb and flow, and, like the sun, be sometimes hidden behind a passing cloud. That hope in Christ, faint and fluctuating though it may be, will never expire. The sun shall cease to shine, and the moon shall withdraw her light; the heavens shall pass away, and all things created shall be dissolved, but the hope enkindled in your regenerate soul by the "God of hope," and resting upon Christ, who is our hope, and kept alive by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, though it be like a spark, tossed amid the ocean, shall never die; but, guarded by the power of God, the intercession of Christ, the grace of the indwelling Spirit, and bound up with the immutable promise of Jehovah, it will be lost only in the full fruition of eternal glory.

The hope of the believer in Christ is a SANCTIFYING hope. It must necessarily be so. The fountain of it is the holy *God* of hope, the foundation of it is a holy *Savior*, and the author of it is the Holy *Spirit*. Thus the apostle argues—"Every man that has this hope purifies himself, even as He is pure." Just as the beams of the sun travel to a stagnant stream, not to partake of its exhalations, but to cleanse its impurities, so the hope that shines from God in Christ into the soul, blends not with its moral corruptions, but exerts a purifying, sanctifying influence, molding the heart into its own divine beauty and holy nature. Oh, then, if we have this hope in us, however humble and faint it may be, let us aim after purity of heart and holiness of life, that before long we may "see God" in glory!

Strong is the consolation in circumstances of difficulty, trial, and hopelessness which flows from faith in God as the God of hope. Our condition, at times and under some circumstances, may appear entirely hopeless to our view. Not one ray of hope may illumine the darkness, or cheer the desolateness of our position. Nevertheless, there is hope in God. When all other hope, and hope in all other sources fails us—we may turn to God in prayer, and faith, and hope, and find in Him all that we need. "Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disquieted within me?—hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

Never give up hope in God! Everything may look dark, and threatening, and hopeless; needs may press, and difficulties may interpose, and impossibilities may present themselves in your case; nevertheless, cling in prayer, and faith, and hope, to the "God of hope," and your hope in Him, through Christ, however slender and dim, shall not make you ashamed. Hope on, like Abraham, "who against hope believed in hope," and who "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God," and you shall be brought, like him, safely and triumphantly through all your trials, difficulties, and needs. Oh for more faith in God as the God of hope! With Him nothing is too hard; with Him all things are possible. In Him all resources of wisdom and power, of riches and love, dwell.

And in order to bring you into a closer and more experimental acquaintance and communion with His character as the "God of hope," He may write the sentence of death and despair upon everything, and upon every being but Himself. How solemn the exhortation bearing upon this; "Don't put your confidence in powerful people; there is no help for you there. When their breathing stops, they return to the earth, and in a moment all their plans come to an end. But happy are those who have the God of Israel as their helper, whose hope is in the Lord their God."

The subject is a heart-searching one. It supplies a motive to close self-examination. There is nothing in which self-deception is more involved, no grace which may be more easily or is more universally counterfeited, than hope. No marvel that David so fervently prayed, "Let me not be ashamed of my hope." No wonder that many religious professors, when they approach the hour of death, are led to exclaim, in all the terrors of despair, "Where is now my hope?" Let us, then, look well to the foundation and character of our hope. If it is only the hope of the worldling, or the hope of the formalist, or the hope of the hypocrite, or the hope of the professor, it is a vain and spurious

hope, and the sooner we abandon it and fly to Christ, and take hold of Him, the Hope of eternal life, the better will it prove for our everlasting well-being.

Oh, let your hope be only in God, revealed to you in the Son of His love; and built on nothing else but Christ crucified. Accept no authentication of its genuineness, save the witness of the Spirit with your spirit. If you feel the plague of sin in your heart, and see the worthlessness of your own righteousness, and run unto Christ, hide in Him as in a cleft of the Rock, then lift up your head with joy, and "hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

We must not forget the HOPE OF THE COVENANT, which our God of hope has graciously given us. This hope has, in all ages of the Church and experiences of the Christian, been as a sheet-anchor to the soul. When times have been trying, and providences have been dark, and the truth has been assailed, and men of God have trembled for the ark tossing amid the waves, what a cable of strength, what an anchor of hope, has the covenant of grace been to the believing mind! David found it so. "It is my family God has chosen! Yes, he has made *an everlasting covenant* with me. His agreement is eternal, final, sealed. He will constantly look after my safety and success. This covenant of grace stands by us amid the vicissitudes and changes of this ever-changing scene. When creature props break, on which we too confidently leaned; when human hopes fade, which we too warmly cherished; when earthly friends depart, to whom we too fondly clung; when the sky is lowering, and the morn is dark, and the shadow of death, and the damps of the grave drape our poor, smitten, lonely hearts, oh then, this well-ordered and most sure covenant throws its bright rainbow upon the clouds, smiling down upon us in its many-tinted hues of peace, joy, and hope, bidding us trust in the faithfulness and love of our covenant God.

There are times when the most matured saint of God may pass through A MOMENTARY OBSCURATION OF HIS HOPE. Bodily disease may induce mental despondency, this, in its turn, may cause spiritual darkness, and this, again, give rise to soul-conflict; and thus the "good hope through grace," which "God, who cannot lie," has given to all His children, may for the moment be obscured. Be it so. Does this imply that your hope is forever lost? By no means. Is the anchor of the vessel lost, or the sun in the heavens extinguished, because it is invisible? Neither is the hope of the believer lost when some intervening object, such as guilt on the conscience, unbelief in the heart, or despondency of mind, throws it, for a moment, in partial, or even

total, eclipse. Desponding saint of God, your interest in Christ, and your hope of heaven, are not lost because the sensible realization, and the happy enjoyment of it, are for a while suspended! The anchor may not be visible, but it still holds the vessel, and she will ride peacefully and safely through the storm, fastened to that anchor. You have nothing to fear; your soul is in Christ's keeping, not yours; your hope is not fastened on things below, but on things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

How calculated is this subject to soothe the grief, and to mitigate the bitterness, of parting in death with those for whom we "sorrow not as others who have no hope!" Oh yes! we have hope in their death. They lived in hope—they departed in hope—their flesh rests in hope of a glorious resurrection; and we sorrow not over a hopeless grave. They are with Christ. Absent from the body, they are present with the Lord. Their faith may have been feeble, their joy, limited, their hope humble—nevertheless, looking only to Jesus, resting solely on Christ, it is our comfort to know that it was not the strength of their faith, nor the depth of their joy, nor the vividness of their hope, that saved them—but, "Jesus only." And now they are with Him. Oh, how holy, how blissful, how glorious! They conflict no more with sin, are assailed no more by temptations, are beclouded no more with doubt and fear—they sorrow, mourn, and weep no more! And soon we shall be with them, and all of us forever with the Lord.

THE GOD OF PATIENCE.

"The God of Patience." Romans 15:5.

There is no study of "our God" which more impressively presents to our view the Infinity of His nature than the study of His perfections; and among those perfections there is not one which, perhaps, more strikingly illustrates that Infinity than *His patience*. It is impossible to contemplate the fact of God's patience with this fallen world, from the moment of man's transgression until the present, and not be profoundly inspired with the truth—what but an Infinite Being could have borne with this revolted, ungodly race until now? The patience of all the created beings in heaven combined would long since have been exhausted had it been left to deal with sinful man. Such is the subject of these pages. Whether we view it in relation to the divine glory, or in its bearings upon the Church and the world, it is impossible, under the guidance of the Spirit of truth, to study the patience of God without deep

instruction. Let us, in the further consideration of this subject, speak of the nature of God's patience, its objects, and the holy lessons it teaches.

THE NATURE OF GOD'S PATIENCE

The wide difference between the grace of patience in the Christian and the perfection of Patience in God will at once appear to the spiritual and reflective mind. In the Christian, patience is an *implanted* grace, wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, trained and exercised in the school of suffering and sorrow. But in God, patience is *an essential attribute* of His being, a part of His nature, yes, a part of Himself, so perfect that it needs no discipline for its culture. As with the divine perfection of love and of Hope, unfolded in the preceding chapters of this work, God could not be and cease to be the God of patience. If He could disrobe Himself of one perfection of His nature, He could of all; and what were this but to suppose it possible that he could undeify Himself? We are again reminded that, in all our dealings with God we deal with *Infinity*. The Lord's people too frequently forget this. Would there be the limiting of God, the circumscribing of His power, patience, and love, did we more continually remember that, in coming to God in prayer, in looking to God for help, our faith has to deal with the Infinite, and therefore with the illimitable and the fathomless?

The sin of limiting the Holy One of Israel is one of the most God-dishonoring chargeable upon the believer. And yet, alas! How constant its commission! Is there a difficulty, a trial, or a need, in dealing with which we detect not the working of this evil within us—the tendency to compress the infinite within the finite, to circumscribe the boundless, to limit the Illimitable One?

But *what* is the Patience of God? It is the power of God over Himself. God's patience with man is only surpassed by His patience with Himself. "The Lord is slow to anger," and then it follows, "and great in power." What is the inference we draw from these sublime words of the prophet but that, God's patience towards His creatures is His power over Himself? It is, in the strong language of inspiration, "the hiding of His power." *But for the infinite restraint God puts upon Himself, this fallen world could not exist a moment. Mercy withholds judgment, goodness restrains justice, patience curbs power,* and thus the patience of God is the salvation of man. "He that rules his spirit is better than he that takes a city." God's slowness of anger, His patience towards man, is the ruling of himself. That prince of Puritan writers, Charnock, thus puts it—"He that can restrain his anger is stronger than the Caesars and Alexanders of the world, that have filled the earth with their

slain carcasses and ruined cities. By the same reason God's slowness to anger is a greater argument of His power than the creating a world or the power of dissolving it by a word; in this He has a dominion over creatures, in the other over Himself. This is the reason he will not return to destroy; because 'I am God, and not man.' 'I am not so weak and impotent as man, who cannot restrain his anger.'

This is a strength possessed only by a God, wherein a creature is no more able to parallel Him than in any other; so that He may be said to be the Lord of Himself, as it is in the verse, that He is 'the Lord of anger.' The end why God is patient is to show His power. "What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endures with much patience the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" to show His wrath upon sinners, and His power over Himself, in bearing such indignities and forbearing punishment so long upon men, mere vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, of whom there was no hope of amendment? Had He immediately broken in pieces these vessels, His power had not so eminently appeared as it has done in tolerating them so long, that had provoked Him to take them off so often.

There is, indeed, the power of His anger and the power of His patience; and this power is more seen in His patience than in His wrath. It is no wonder that He who is above all is able to crush all; but it is a wonder that He that is provoked by all does not upon the first provocation rid His hands of all. This is the reason why He did bear such a weight of provocation from vessels of wrath, prepared for Him, that He might show what He was able to do, the lordship and royalty He had over Himself. The power of God is more manifest in His patience to a multitude of sinners than it could be in creating millions of worlds out of nothing; this was a power over Himself."

Let it not, however, be inferred that, by thus representing the other divine perfections as yielding to that of patience, we are in any measure superseding their place or even compromising their dignity. For instance, there is no negation of His truthfulness in the exercise of His patience. In the threatenings of God there may be a delay in execution—patience restraining—and yet sooner or later God will vindicate His truthfulness by executing the threatening. God very rarely appoints the time when His judgments shall be displayed. He is therefore left free to send them when He chooses, without in the slightest degree compromising His veracity. In due time the judgment comes, though long delayed—patience intercepting it with its gentle and merciful restraint, and thus delaying its immediate and dire execution. When

God, as in the case of Adam, said, "In the day you eat thereof you shall surely die," and in the case of Nineveh, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed," seems to fix a time for the outpouring of His judgment, it is generally accompanied with a condition upon the performance of which the execution of the sentence depends. Adam did not actually die the very day that he ate the forbidden fruit; nor was Nineveh destroyed at the end of the forty days fixed by God, because in both cases the patience of God waited for the accomplishment of the great ends He had in view in arresting the immediate execution of the threat.

Neither is the *equity* of God impeached by the exercise of His patience. The justice of God shall never know a cloud. He must cease to be God, if he cease to be just. The exercise, therefore, of His patience in no degree lessens His righteousness. He may "pass sentence against an evil work," and yet not "execute it speedily" the infliction of punishment thus giving place to the restraint of patience, and yet remain a holy and a righteous Lord God. Would it argue the condoning of a fault on the part of a parent because, in the exercise of parental leniency, he did not immediately administer the punishment? Or, would it involve an impeachment of the justice of the sovereign if, in the exercise of the mercy of the crown, the criminal were not immediately hurried from the bar to the gibbet? And shall God be regarded as less holy or less just, if, in the exercise of His marvelous patience, he spares the guilty sinner, giving space for repentance? Oh, no! To a superficial eye He may seem to overlook wickedness because the sentence against it is not speedily executed; and the wicked man, presuming upon the arrest of judgment, may harden himself in his wickedness; nevertheless, God hates the sin though He bears long with the sinner, and sooner or later the wrath that has been thus long 'treasuring up against the day of wrath' will overtake and overwhelm the ungodly.

God's character should be seen and admired and revered by men as a whole. Were God's judgment instantly to follow a crime, were punishment immediately to light upon a sin, there would be the hiding of His patience, which is an emanation of His goodness, and nothing would be seen but *holiness in the awful display of justice*. No, more. We believe that the exercise of divine patience is a wonderful balance to the greater luster of all the other divine perfections. When divine patience is, as it were, exhausted, and when holiness is vindicated and justice is displayed in the righteous and fearful doom of the sinner, the spotless purity of the one and the perfect equity of the other will shine forth with augmented luster in the eyes of all intelligent

beings. The holiness of God will appear more holy, and the justice of God more just, when the flood-gates of His wrath, long closed, are opened, and His fiery justice, long pent up, is let loose, and the wicked are 'driven away in their wickedness.' Then from every lip will ascend the exclamation, "You are righteous, O Lord, in that you have judged thus!"

We have thus shown that the patience of God is not a blind, unintelligent perfection, displayed at the expense of the related attributes of Jehovah; that, although it precede, it does not supersede, still less destroy them, but rather renders their manifestation the more palpable and their glory the more resplendent.

Such is the character of God as reflected by the single perfection of *patience*. And oh! how gracious and glorious does it appear! What a bright beam of mercy is patience! What a pure, sweet, and engaging emanation of goodness is patience! It is purely a truth of *His own revelation*. Had He not so revealed it, man, in the blindness which the fall has created, would have never discovered it. Listen to His declaration! "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, patient, and abundant in goodness and truth" The patience of God seems like a *central link in this golden chain of attributes*. Mercy could have no room to act if patience did not prepare the way, and His truth and goodness in the promise of the Redeemer would not have been made manifest to the world if He had shot His arrows as soon as men committed these sins and deserved His punishment.

This perfection is expressed by other phrases; as, keeping silence; "These things have you done, and I kept silence." This signifies to behave one's self as a deaf and dumb man. "I did not fly in your face, as some do, with a great voice or for a light provocation, as if their life, honor, and estates were at stake. I did not presently call you to the bar, and pronounce judicial sentence upon you according to the law, but demeaned myself as if had been ignorant of your crimes, and had not been invested with the power of judging you for them. In the Chaldee, 'I waited for your conversion.' God's patience is the silence of His justice, and the first whisper of His mercy." (Charnock)

Here let us consider, admire, and love! What a God is our God! When we remember how *holy* He is, "of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity;" when we remember how *powerful* He is, "He looks upon the hills and they tremble;" and when we remember how *just* He is, "a God without iniquity, just and right is He," "and will by no means clear the guilty;" and then contemplate

His infinite patience with sinners and with sin, bearing long with the one and keeping silence as to the other, oh! what a God is our God! Sinner! this is the God whose great patience you are trying to the utmost by your persistent sinfulness and impenitence, your determined unbelief and rebellion. Truly is this patience His dominion over Himself.

What an unfolding have we here of the goodness and mercy of God! of His character as a God delighting in mercy, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance! Sinner! "Do you despise the riches of His goodness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" Oh that this truth might dissolve your heart, disarm your rebellion, and lay you at His feet subdued, conquered, won; henceforth to throw down your weapons and array beneath the all-constraining, all-victorious banner of His love—His disciple, His follower forever!

But we have yet to contemplate the patience of God in its clearest, its truest light. I refer to the Lord Jesus Christ as the *foundation* on which it rests, and the *channel* through which it flows. There could be no manifestation of the divine goodness, mercy, or patience, but for the work and death of Christ. All God's perfections, outside of Christ, are united in their hatred of sin, and are pledged to punish the sinner. This must necessarily be so. If not harmonized in the administration of love, they must be united in the administration of justice. Had a Savior been provided for *angels*, then the great patience of God had been extended to them who "kept not their first estate;" but seeing that no such merciful provision was made for them, the moment they sinned they were hurled from the heights of glory into the abyss of woe, and are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

But the moment *man* sinned, Christ saved man. When Adam fell, divine patience was instantly extended to the fallen sinner, and an arrest of judgment put in, Christ throwing Himself in the breach, exclaiming, "To my account let the sin be charged; upon me let the penalty fall; from me let the payment be exacted. I am the sinner's Substitute; and if I must be arrested, and bound, and slain, let these elect souls on whose behalf I have from eternity covenanted to die, and have pledged myself to save, go their way." Thus Christ, our Days-man, interposed for our relief, "giving Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet—smelling savor." On no other ground than that of the Son of God engaging, in the eternal purposes of Jehovah, and actually in the fullness of time taking our nature, could God's infinite patience and

pardoning grace be extended to man.

In the everlasting covenant, He bound Himself to honor the law by His obedience, and to satisfy justice by His death, and so make it righteous and honorable in God to hold out His hand of patience all the day long to a sinful and gainsaying race. Finding in the person of Christ a divine dignity equal to the claims of His moral government, in His obedience a full honoring of the law, and in His sufferings and death a full satisfaction to justice, God could stand upon the Mount, and, while the thunder of His power rolled, and the lightning of His justice flashed, exclaim, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,"—and thus it became righteous and honorable in God, to hold out His hand all the day long to a sinful and gainsaying race. It was on the ground of this covenant engagement that God could appear upon Mount Sinai, and amid those awful emblems of His majesty, declare Himself "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgressions, and sins."

Let those who reject the idea of God's everlasting love, and who ignore the covenant of grace, reflect upon these words. Let them pause and inquire, Had not Christ from eternity interposed as the Mediator and Redeemer of men, upon what other grounds could God, amid these solemn displays of His holiness and power, have proclaimed Himself to sinners as a God "patient and abundant in goodness and truth?" If, under the law, God could so reveal Himself, how much is His patience heightened under the Gospel? Glorious as thus was Mount Sinai, it had no glory by reason of the glory that excelled on Mount Calvary, where the patience of God to sinful man culminated to its highest pitch of grandeur and glory.

Thus reasons the Apostle when arguing the superiority of the Gospel to the Legal dispensation—"That old system of law etched in stone led to death, yet it began with such glory that the people of Israel could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God, even though the brightness was already fading away. Shouldn't we expect far greater glory when the Holy Spirit is giving life? If the old covenant, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new covenant, which makes us right with God! In fact, that first glory was not glorious at all compared with the overwhelming glory of the new covenant. So if the old covenant, which has been set aside, was full of glory, then the new covenant, which remains forever, has far greater glory."

If, then, the patience of our God was so manifest and glorious amid the dim shadows of the Legal dispensation, how much more real and glorious does it appear in the full blaze of the Gospel dispensation, and as exercised amid the sublime and impressive scenes of Calvary! In a word, if for the sake of the sacrifice of a lamb, or a goat, or a heifer, God would bear, in much patience, with men's sin and rebellion, how much more honorable and fitting on His part to extend to sinners His patience on the ground of Christ's only and complete sacrifice!

This explains the world-wide indirect influence of Christ's Atonement. That Atonement has a particular reference to the elect Church of God; but, since it was necessary that the world should be kept in existence—a wicked, ungodly, mutinous world though it is—in order that God might take out of it His chosen people, the indirect effect of the sacrifice of Christ is, as to enable God to "bear with much patience the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction!"

Oh, the marvelous blessings that flow from the death of Christ! *Oh, the variety of precious fruit that grows upon the cross of Calvary!* So marvelous, so strange and unheard of a thing was it that, the incarnate God, the Maker of all worlds, the Creator of all beings, should die, it would seem impossible that there should be a spot in the universe, or a being on the globe, to whom the far-reaching influence of Christ's death should not extend in some of its countless effects, direct or indirect, either of saving mercy, or of restraining and sparing power. In this sense the Divine Merchantman "purchased the field"—the world—for the sake of the "pearl"—the Church—"hidden in that field." And so, the patience of God in sparing the world, for the sake of the Church He intended to take out of it, is an indirect result of the Savior's suffering and death upon the cross. Thus, in the strong language of the Apostle, He is described as "the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."

For this reason God spared the old world while the ark was preparing. Long and patiently He bore with it, its wickedness crying mightily to heaven for judgment. But the framework of the ark cast a benign and restraining shadow upon the ungodly race. And so long as the vessel was building, the wicked ante-diluvians dwelt peacefully and securely beneath its shade. *It was the indirect merciful influence of the ark that spared them so long from instant and utter destruction.* But when the ark was complete, and the family for whom it was built were safe beneath its roof, and God had shut them in, the fountains

of the great deep were broken up, and the flood came and swept them all away.

So God bears with much patience a wicked world now. The *shallow of the cross preserves it!* but, when the purposes of mercy according to the election of grace, are accomplished, and the mystery of God shall be finished, divine patience will give place to divine wrath, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into His garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. The ark afloat—the church saved—the purposes of God accomplished—the divine patience, that for so many centuries bore with our ungodly world, will cease; and divine justice, long restrained, will blot it from the universe, superseding it by "a new heaven and a new earth, in which will dwell righteousness."

But if such are the *indirect* blessings from the death of Christ—the chief of which is God's unwearied patience with the wicked; what must be the greatness and preciousness of the blessings *directly* and immediately resulting to the Church of God! As a believer in the Lord Jesus, you have a personal and inalienable interest in a present salvation and in a future glory, all flowing from His atoning death. The death of Christ places you, if a believer, in the position of a sinner *saved now*. Yours is a *present* salvation, a present pardon, a present justification, a present adoption. But how few realize this to be their standing! How few walk in the happy enjoyment of it as those whose sins are forgiven, whose souls are accepted, whose persons are adopted!

How few, in the language of the prophet, "*possess these possessions.*" But the word of God fully justifies this view of a present salvation. Listen to its language. "I write unto you, little children, because our sins are forgiven for His name's sake " Observe, it is a present forgiveness! " To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted in the Beloved." Observe, it is a present acceptance! "Beloved, now are we the sons of God" Mark, it is a present adoption! "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus " Notice, it is a present acquittal! Such is the authority upon which we earnestly urge you to realize your present standing in Christ.

Let it not be with you a future question. If you are a slave emancipated, a criminal acquitted, a sinner pardoned, an alien adopted, a wanderer reclaimed, then realize it, and let your whole life, amid all its trials and sorrows and battles, be as a sweet and pleasant psalm of praise and

thanksgiving to the God of patience who bore with you so long, to the Savior of sinners whose grace called you at last, and to the Spirit of holiness who, by His work of progressive sanctification, is gradually fitting you for the inheritance of the saints in light.

But who are the OBJECTS of God's patience? They include both the sinner and the saint. First, there is God's patience with the UNGODLY. This He shows in various ways. By the *warnings* which precede His judgments. God never acts impulsively, His justice is never hasty in its execution. The threat is issued, the warning is given, the rod is shaken, but the smiting tarries. Patience waits, mercy pleads, power restrains, and the sentence against the evil work is not executed speedily. As there is space between the lightning's flash and the thunder's roll, so space is afforded the sinner between the warning and the judgment, the threatening and the execution. God speaks twice in His mercy; and once in judgment. He gives the sinner space for repentance. Sinner! all this is verified in you! The warning is gone forth, but the executions lingers. God is speaking once in warning, twice in mercy. Judgment slumbers, but forbearance is awake. The indictment is laid, but the trial is postponed; the verdict is given, but the sentence is delayed. And why? That God's infinite patience might induce you to turn from your wickedness and live; to renounce your sins and flee from the wrath to come. Delay no longer! Think of all the past illustrations of God's patience; recall the many instances in which His goodness has interposed between your sin and its consequences, your aggravated provocation and His tremendous wrath.

Another example of God's forbearance with the sinner is seen in the many ways He employs to persuade him to repentance, before He administers the chastisement. He is intent upon affording both the time and the means for repentance. One of the fathers, in illustrating this idea, remarks that, God took six days to create the world, but was seven days in destroying Jericho. He was quick to build up, but slow to pull down. To the sinner going on in his rebellion, He says, "How shall I give you up? how shall I deliver you, Israel?" As of old, so it is now; "But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yes, many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath." The original is more expressive; "Many a time He recalled, or ordered His anger to return again," as if He hesitated to punish, was irresolute what to do.

What God did aforetime for Jezebel, He does now; "I gave her *space to repent*." Impenitent sinner! God is giving you space, or time, to repent; and

except you do repent, like the wicked prophetess, you must perish. Do you ask, "How can I repent?" Fall at the mercy-seat, and seek the grace from Heaven. "Christ is exalted a Prince and Savior, to give repentance." Precious gift! a princely gift, not a purchase; a divine principle wrought in the heart by the power of the Spirit. One stroke of the rod of His grace, and, like the rock which Moses smote, your heart will be broken, and the waters of godly penitence for sin will gush forth, and flow in a hallowed stream beneath the cross. Remember, the two distinctive elements of conversion are, "*repentance* towards God, and *faith* in our Lord Jesus Christ" Oh! seek truly, earnestly, perseveringly, these two royal gifts of God. Apart from their possession, there can be no real conversion now, and, consequently, after death, no heaven.

We will only further remark that, God shows His patience with sinners in lessening and softening the judgment when it comes. He does not deal with the sinner after his sins, nor reward him according to his iniquities. The stroke is lighter than the crime. God does not, in His punishment, exhaust the vials of His displeasure. The judgment is less heavy than the threat, and the punishment less severe than the provocation. The sword is bathed in heaven—so gentle, so slight the wound. Oh! what a God is our God, even to His enemies! Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God; His goodness tempering, softening severity; His severity upholding and vindicating the holiness of goodness.

Will not this view of God's dealings dissolve you into penitence, gratitude, and love? Will you continue sinning against such a Being? Will you persist in your rebellion against such a God? "Don't you realize how kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Or don't you care? Can't you see how kind he has been in giving you time to turn from your sin? But no, you won't listen. So you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself because of your stubbornness in refusing to turn from your sin. For there is going to come a day of judgment when God, the just judge of all the world, will judge all people according to what they have done."

Equally great is the patience of God WITH HIS OWN PEOPLE. In one point of light it is even greater than in the case of the ungodly. God has to put up with greater provocation in the saint than in the sinner, and, consequently, His patience and patience towards His people is greater. The sin of the unconverted is the natural growth of their fallen and unrenewed nature; the sin of the converted is *against grace, and pardon, and love*. The rebellion against God of the converted is that of a *child*. The sin of the one is that of all

unforgiven soul; the sin of the other is that of one all whose sin is blotted out. When, therefore, we consider what God has done for us, what Jesus has endured for us, what the Holy Spirit has wrought in us, and then contrast this with our deep ingratitude, our base murmurings, our countless backslidings, our cruel unbelief and secret rebellion, with the little we do for God and suffer for Christ, and with the sin and infirmities with which that little is mixed and defiled, truly we must feel that the patience of our God towards the saint is greater than His patience towards the sinner.

Oh! the tenderness, the graciousness of the Lord's patience with His people! How patiently he hears with their ungrateful repinings, with their secret rebellion, with their cold love, with their cruel unbelief, with their continuous and aggravated backslidings! Truly, the patience of God, after grace, is greater than His patience before grace. How should this thought humble us in the dust! How should it subdue our rebellious spirit, break our hard heart, and lead us, in every fresh remembrance, to the blood of Christ, to wash in the fountain open for sin and uncleanness!

It is only as we keep fast by this cleansing Fountain, wash in it daily, that we shall leave spiritual discernment to see when we sin against God's patience, and how we provoke the just chastisement of His fatherly displeasure. Oh for more simple coming to the blood of sprinkling! Oh for more constant bathing in the open fountain! This alone will keep the heart clean, the conscience tender, the mind quickly susceptible of the slightest oscillation of its thoughts, imaginations, and desires towards sin. Never should a single day pass in the experience of a child of God without washing in the blood. The blood should be upon all his *religious* duties and engagements and services. Everything should be purged, and purified, and perfumed with the blood of Jesus. This will cleanse, sanctify, and beautify all we are and all we do, and render the smallest offering of faith, and the lowliest service of love, a sacrifice and an offering to God of a sweet-smelling savor. Such is our God, the God of patience! Many are the LESSONS we may learn, and the BLESSINGS we may glean, from this instructive and fruitful subject.

Does God exercise patience towards us? Then let us learn to bear, with Christian patience, all His disciplinary dealings with us. If God is patient with our sins and misdoings against Him, we may well receive with uncomplaining meekness and submission all the trials and corrections, the rebukes and sufferings, His wisdom and love righteously lays upon us. And yet how uneasy are we beneath the yoke! how we kick against the goads! and allow our poor,

puny will, to rise in opposition to His will, supremely wise and infinitely holy!

Are you a child of sorrow or of suffering? Is our God leading you, so blind and helpless, in a way you know not, and in paths you had not known? Is He pressing to your lips a cup of woe before untasted; and tasting which, you turn away, and exclaim, "Let this cup pass from me?" Think of the God of patience, and be still. Know that He who is wise is counseling you, He who is strong is leading you, He who is love is directing, and shaping, and tinting the whole scene through which, with a skillful hand and in the integrity of His heart, He is conducting you home to glory. His is a school where the grace of patience receives its highest culture, its purest, and most beautiful development.

"Tribulation works patience," and patience, in its turn, works our experience. Afflicted saint, "you have need of patience;" and He who sends the affliction knows your need, and knowing, will supply it, by giving you abundantly of this soul-sanctifying, God-glorifying grace of holy patience. Thus, by meeting your calamities with calamities, by waiting humbly the issue of events, the mystery of which you cannot penetrate, and the direction of which you cannot control, and by waiting in the patience of hope for that eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised to all who believe in Christ, and for the enjoyment of which present suffering is perfecting you, "patience will have its perfect work, lacking nothing," and "in patience you shall possess your soul."

Is your path dark and lonely? are your prayers still unanswered? is the promise still unfulfilled and the blessing still withheld? Now is the time to "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him," and by so doing glorify your Father who is in heaven. Thus will your experience and your testimony be that of David, "I waited patiently for the Lord to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along. He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God."

Let us learn from the God of patience a patient spirit and carriage TOWARDS OTHERS. In this grace we may truly be "Imitators of God." The Apostle's exhortation is one you have need to bear in mind, "Be patient toward all men." There is much sin in the *ungodly*; and what is yet harder to bear, of infirmity in the *saints*, which calls for the constant exercise of this grace of the Spirit. But, what a divine and illustrious example of this grace have we in Jesus! "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep

before her shearer is dumb, so opened He not His mouth." "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, He threatened not." Learn, then, to bear with uncomplaining patience the weaknesses and infirmities, the slights and woundings of your fellows—the hatred of the world and the smitings of the Church—looking to the God of patience for strength and grace silently and patiently to bear it. And, whether you are buffeted for your faults, or are misinterpreted and censured for your well-doing, you take it patiently, this is acceptable to God.

"Lord, and am I yet alive,
Not in torment, not in hell?
Still does Your good Spirit strive
With the chief of sinners dwell?
Tell it unto sinners, tell,
I am, I am out of hell!

Yes, I still lift up my eyes,
Will not of Your love despair,
Still in spite of sin I rise,
Still I bow to You in prayer.
Tell it unto sinners, tell,
I am, I am out of hell!

Oh, the length and breadth of love!
Jesus, Savior, can it be?
All Your mercy's height I prove,
All the depth is seen in me.
Tell it unto sinners, tell,
I am, I am out of hell!

See a bush that burns with fire,
Unconsumed amid the flame!
Turn aside the sight admire,
I the living wonder am.
Tell it unto sinners, tell, I am,
I am out of hell!

See a stone that hangs in air,
See a spark in ocean live!
Kept alive with death so near,

**I to God the glory give.
Ever tell—to sinners tell,
I am, I am out of hell!"**

THE GOD OF COMFORT

"THE GOD WHO COMFORTS US. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us." 2 Cor. 1:3-4

How soothingly fall these words upon the ear of the sorrowful, sweeter and more powerful than angel-chimes floating from the celestial hills! What grief-smitten heart, bending in tears over them, is not conscious of a power and a charm, at once the evidence of their divinity and the pledge of their truth. The religion of Jesus possesses in the experience of its disciples this remarkable characteristic; there is more true holiness in the heart's thirst for sanctification, and more solid happiness in a passing thought of God, and more real life in one believing look at the Savior, and more perfect repose in one single promise of God's Word, and more of the reality of heaven in a glance within the veil, than this world could ever give, or its religion inspire. Empty, were it possible, the whole world into the soul, and still the worldling's inquiry would be, "Who will show me any good?" Thus confirming the truth of God's Word, "In the midst of plenty, he will run into trouble, and disasters will destroy him." But let one devout, holy, loving thought of God in Christ enter that soul, and its satisfaction is full, its happiness complete.

Such, in a measure, we believe will be the effect of these words of the apostle placed at the head of this chapter. What child of affliction and of sadness scanning them will not feel that, desperate as is his case, and profound as is his grief, hope springs in his breast that yet there may be comfort even for him! You have, perhaps, given yourself to inconsolable grief, "refusing to be comforted." You have thought that even the consolation of God could not fathom your sorrow, and that your wound must bleed unstaunched, and your sore must run unhealed. But these wondrous words have met your eye—"The God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation," and lo! a gleam of hope suddenly falls upon your spirit, and for the first time since your calamity you begin to think that, God has not entirely forsaken you; that, though He kills, yet He makes alive; that, though He wounds, yet He heals; and that, though He brings low, yet He raises up again. If, then, these words, dimly read

with tears, prove so soothing and assuring, may we not hope that, as the Spirit, the Divine Paraclete, unfolds them in these pages, they may prove to your sad spirit as the breaking forth of waters in the parched desert, "satiating the weary and replenishing the sorrowful soul."

The first thought that suggests itself to the reflecting mind will be the necessity that existed for this revelation of God as the "God of all comfort." There is nothing unmeaning or superfluous in the relations which God sustains to His Church. Each unfolding of His character, and each perfection of His being, points to some relation or need of His people. When, therefore, God is revealed as the "God of all comfort," as "God who comforts those that are cast down," and when also we find Him commanding His servants the prophets to comfort His people, to what conclusion can we come but that His Church is an *afflicted* Church, His people a *tried* and *sorrowful* people, standing in need of that comfort which He only could impart?—in a word, that there exists a peculiar condition of His Church answering to this special relation of God to them as the "God of all comfort " To this thought let us briefly address ourselves.

There is no fact in the history of God's people more strongly confirmed by their individual experience than that, He has "*chosen them in the furnace of affliction.*" Like the burning bush which Moses saw, God's Church has ever been in the furnace, and yet, like that bush, it has never been consumed. Many and great are the blessings which accrue to the Church of God from this divine arrangement. Not the least one is, the more perfect interpretation of the Bible which this school of God imparts. Affliction places the believer in a position for understanding the Scriptures which no other divine dispensation does. Luther remarks that he did not understand the Psalms until God afflicted him. How many will find in the volume of their Christian experience a page corresponding with this! How apocryphal—sealed, shut up, and mystical—is much of God's Word until read in the ashen glow of the furnace! Until then the sunshine of prosperity shone brightly upon them, and parts only of God's Word were read and studied. But *adversity* has come! The light on your path has faded into the shadow of sorrow, and sorrow has deepened into the darkness of despondency, and gloom envelops the entire scene of your life. And now how new and precious has God's Word become! *Affliction has driven you to the Scriptures, and the Scriptures have revealed to you Christ, and Christ has brought you near to God, and the God of all consolation has soothed your mind, "through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures."*

God will have His saints experimentally acquainted with His truth, and with Christ, who is the truth. A mere theoretical Christian, a notional religionist, is of little worth. We need a religion upon which we can live holily, and upon which we can die happily. This can only be attained in a personal acquaintance with Christ and His Gospel. All God's children are taught of God, all in the same school, the same truths, and by the same Divine Teacher, and thus "He fashions their hearts alike." Oh, count the faith that touches with its experimental hand but the fringe of the Savior's robe more precious than "the faith which moves mountains," but is nothing more than an intellectual acquaintance with the truth. If, then, this experimental acquaintance with the Bible is the result of affliction, welcome the discipline whose rod of correction blossoms into such golden fruit as this. What an evidence have we here of the divinity of the Bible, in its adaptation to all the trials and afflictions of God's saints, as to all the shades of Christian character and experience! Of what other book could this be said! Accept with gratitude every evidence that confirms your faith in the divinity of God's Word.

But we return to the truth that *God's people are an afflicted people, and need comfort, and hence the revelation of God as the "God of all comfort."* We too much forget that there is a *moral fitness* for heaven as well as a *legal title* to its possession; the one, the internal holiness wrought in our hearts by the Spirit; the other, the outward justification of our persons through the imputed righteousness of Christ. An heir to an estate may possess the right, but not the fitness for its possession. There may be no flaw in his title, but there may exist a mental or a physical incapacity in his person for its enjoyment. Now, with regard to the heirs of the heavenly inheritance, the title—the obedience and death of Christ—is perfect; no possible flaw in the deed invalidating the legality of their claim. But, in their present partially renewed and imperfectly sanctified state, they are not in a fit condition to enter upon its immediate and full possession.

There must be a *moral fitness* for heaven. Heaven is a holy place, and is the dwelling of the holy. Where Jehovah dwells, must be holy, and all who dwell with Him are holy for "without holiness no man can see the Lord." Viewed in this light, how indispensable appears the afflictive dispensation of God's people. It is sometimes difficult at the moment to see how any possible good can ever result from such an evil, or how sweet can ever distill from such a bitter, or how "God's bow made quite naked" can ever bear upon its arrows—feathered, it may be, from our nest of down—blessings so costly and precious; yet, though the "chastening for the present seems not joyous, but

grievous, nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto those who are exercised thereby."

And thus, clearer than the noontide sun, we see the wisdom and rectitude, the faithfulness and love, of our Heavenly Father in all the way He leads us through the thorn-bush, across the desert, home to Himself. Oh, to be as a weaned child—quiet and silent! or, if we speak, only to exclaim, "It is the Lord; let Him do as seems Him good."

There is a passage of God's Word bearing so directly on this subject, we may venture to offer upon it a passing comment. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." We have in this passage the character of those trials to which God's people are sometimes subjected. It is a "fiery trial." The same word, in the original is rendered, in the 8th chapter of Revelation, "burning;" and the emblem is suggestive of the following ideas—

First, *intense severity*. God, addressing His Church of old, says, "When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon you." And the apostle Peter, employing the same emblem, thus speaks of the severity of faith's trial—"The trial of your faith being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire." Oh, how *severe* may our trials be! Think of David, tried by the treason of Absalom; of Eli, by the iniquity of his sons; of Abraham, in the surrender of the heir of promise; of Job, involving, as in one conflagration, children, possessions, health. And thus might we travel down through the different ages of the Church, and we shall find that the history of one believer, of one dispensation, and of one age, has been more or less that of all—"The fiery trial which is to try you."

Beloved, there is one modification of this severity of trial; *there is not one spark of hell in it*. There may be *fire*, but it is not the fire of the bottomless pit. There may be displeasure, but there is no wrath; discipline, but no condemnation. Oh, blessed thought! You pass through the fire, but you are not burned. Like the three children of Israel cast into the burning fiery furnace, you emerge from the sheets of flame with not even the smell of fire upon your garments. He who walked through the fire side by side with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, has been with you in the afflictive dispensation, has trod side by side the fiery trial through which God was conducting you home to Himself, and you have emerged from it unhurt.

Our trials are not only often *severe*, but like fire, they are always *searching*.

The Lord sends them for this end. They search our hearts through and through. They analyze, separate, and sift. They bring out the innate evil of our nature; reveal and expose to our view the hidden and unknown corruptions and subtlety of our hearts. Oh, how much sin, concealed and unsuspected, they bring to light! What evil mixed with good in our principles, motives, and aims, they expose, separate, and destroy! They lead us, too, to an honest turning-over the page of conscience, to a deep probing of heart, and examination of our state as to our real conversion, our true standing before God, and the holiness, uprightness, and integrity of our walk and conversation in the world.

One fiery trial, sanctified by the grace of the Holy Spirit, has done more to break up the crusted ground of the heart, to penetrate beneath the surface, to dissect, and winnow, and separate, than a life-time of reading and hearing could have done. Oh, what secret sins have been detected, what carelessness of walk has been revealed, what spiritual and unsuspected declension of soul has been discovered, all leading to deep self-loathing, and to the laying the mouth in the dust before God! Then has the prayer gone up with an agony and sincerity never experienced before, "Search me, O God, and try me, and know any heart, and see if there be any evil way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." And all this the fruit of one hallowed trial!

We may refer to the PURIFYING power of a fiery trial as not the least blessed result of the discipline. It is the nature of fire to purify. God so employs the image. "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried." "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and He shall purify the sins of Levi, and purify them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." Blessed and holy fruit of trial! Who now will shrink from the process? who would wish exemption from the fire that but consumes the dross and the tin and the earth of the soul, making the silver so bright and the gold so pure, both reflecting, as they never reflected before, the nature and image of the Divine and lovely Refiner? And when we see the man of God thus emerge from the furnace of affliction, we lift our hearts in thanksgiving and praise to our Heavenly Father for providing in the covenant of grace *a discipline so effectual in the accomplishment of results so blessed.* "By this, therefore, shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged: and this is all the fruit to take away sins."

Blessed Lord, if this be the result of Your fiery trial; if it be to burn up and

consume the *self* and *carnality*, the *worldliness* and *unbelief* of my heart, if it be to destroy the *alloy* and to scatter the *chaff*, then let the fire burn, let the furnace glow. May I, by this burning discipline, but be made more thoroughly a partaker of Your holiness.

"Often the clouds of deepest woe
So sweet a message bear,
Dark though they seem, 'twere hard to find
A frown of anger there.

It needs our hearts be weaned from earth,
It needs that we be driven,
By loss of every earthly tie,
To seek our joys in heaven.

And what is sorrow, what is pain,
To that parental care,
That breaks the conscious heart from sin,
When sin is hated there?

Kind, loving is the hand that strikes,
However keen the smart,
If sorrow's discipline can chase
One evil from the heart."

The apostle then proceeds in this passage to remind us that trial is no strange thing in the experience of the saints. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." Yes, trial is not a strange thing. Common to all, it is yet more common in the history of God's people. There are many reasons why trial should not be considered by us as a strange thing. One is given in the passage under consideration—"The trial that is *to try you*." Trial is necessary to promote fruitfulness, to test our hope, and to eliminate in the kingdom of God within us the precious from the vile, the purity of Divine grace from the corruption of fallen nature.

Nor should we regard trial and affliction as a strange thing, since it is the *appointed and beaten path of all the saints* who have either safely arrived, or are wending their pilgrim way home to God. "If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children after all." And again, the apostle Peter says, "Knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."

No, more. Trial is not a strange thing, since *our blessed Lord Himself* was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Significant and instructive words! None were ever so intimate with sorrow, or so closely acquainted with grief as Jesus. He was acquainted with it in its every form, met it in its every aggravation, and tasted it in its every bitter. Standing between the wrath of God and the hatred of man, and enduring both to its utmost strength and extremity, truly never was one so acquainted with grief as Jesus was. Think it not, then, beloved, strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, since the members must be conformed to the Head, and the flock, even "the flock of the slaughter," must follow the Shepherd wherever He goes.

In such illustrious company as this, and identified in suffering with a Savior so precious, shall we not drink the cup our Father has given us with sweet submission to His righteous and sovereign will? Shall we shrink from the knife that but *prunes*, and from the fire that but *refines*, increasing our holiness, and so promoting our happiness and usefulness here, and by the same discipline advancing our fitness to take our place before the throne with those who have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb?

But God has fully and graciously met this condition of His Church. If He has faithfully and clearly revealed the fact that He has chosen His people in the furnace of affliction, He has, with equal fidelity and distinctness, revealed the truth that He stands to them in the relation of the "God of all comfort," who comforts them in all their tribulations. To an unfolding of this truth, let us devote the remainder of this chapter.

The true comfort of God's Church demands all the resources of Deity. *Sin* is the cause of all sorrow, and *sorrow* is "legion" in its name, and protean in its shape. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; and the varied forms which those afflictions assume, are limited only by their countless number. It is not, then, without thought we assert, that *the resources of God's nature alone could meet, mitigate, and remove the many afflictions, trials, and temptations to whose wholesome discipline His saints are subject, in their education for heaven, in their preparation for eternity.*

And, oh, how sweet is the thought that, in all trials, and afflictions, and sorrows, we have to deal with God, even the "God of all comfort!" *From Him comes the discipline!* While sorrow springs not from the ground, even in the

history of a fallen world, the Lord's people are taught, not only to trace His hand in *the evil that is in the city*, but especially their *personal affliction*, to His arrangement, faithfulness, and love. How submissive the language of the afflicted saint! "But what could I say? For he himself had sent this sickness." "Now I will walk humbly throughout my years because of this anguish I have felt. I am silent before you; I won't say a word. For my punishment is from you." "It is the Lord's will. Let him do what he thinks best."

Thus, in all our fiery trials, we are at once brought to God. We recognize, in the Hand that is to heal, the Hand that has wounded. In the very Being to whose bosom we fly in our grief, we see the Sender of our sorrow. Thus, the Author of our affliction and the Comforter of our grief is one, even our own God, the "God of all comfort." Naturalists tell us that by the side of every poisonous plant grows its antidote. Yet more certain is the truth recorded by the inspired penman, and revealed by Jehovah Himself: "Look now; I myself am he! There is no god other than me! I am the one who kills and gives life; I am the one who wounds and heals; no one delivers from my power!"

In looking more closely at this truth, let us remark, in the first place, that **IT IS IN THE HEART OF GOD TO COMFORT HIS PEOPLE**. We need to begin with this central truth. All real comfort for any sorrow flows from sympathy; and true sympathy is the reflection of the heart. All our divine comfort is the pure reflection of the heart of God. Oh, how imperfectly we deal with this truth! God's heart is our heart; in it we dwell, as in a home, and within it we are enclosed as in a pavilion. Can we for a moment doubt the heart of God, when within His bosom He found the Lamb for our sin-offering? If, then, He spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, shall the shadow of a doubt be allowed to rest upon our minds, shading the ray of hope that rests there of comfort from God in the depth of our deepest grief and woe? In the very heart that gave us Jesus, is welled the divine spring of all the true consolation, which flows at our side through this valley of tears. Daughter of affliction, child of sorrow! God loves you from His heart. Its every pulse of life, its every throb of love, its every spring of compassion, its every drop of sympathy is yours.

God's heart speaks to your heart. Its deep love chimes with your deep grief. Do you doubt this? Listen to His command to His servant, the prophet; "Comfort, comfort my people," says your God. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and that her sins are pardoned. Yes, the Lord has punished her in full for all her sins." And mark the tenderness of

God's comfort. Still it is the heart, and the heart of a *mother!* Whose heart so full of love, and tenderness, and sympathy, and yearning, as hers? Listen to the touching words; "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you." "As one whom his mother comforts." From what source of love so pure, what fountain of sensibility so deep, what spring of tenderness so sweet, does sympathy and comfort flow, in seasons of adversity and sorrow, as *hers?* A mother's heart is the first home which love enters, and the last it leaves. Born with our birth, it grows with our growth, clings to us through all life's vicissitudes, smiles when time smile, weeps when we weep, and, when hoary hairs have silvered the brow, and age has dimmed the eye, and the snows of many winters bow down the womanly form, the mother's love is as deep, and fresh, and warm, as when first it clasped its new-born treasure to its bosom. Such is the comfort with which God comforts His people. "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you."

Add to this beautiful and expressive image, the thought that, God's comforts are *infinite and divine*, while the tenderest yearnings of a parent's heart are but finite and human, and you have the most perfect idea of the comfort with which God, your Father, is prepared to comfort you, His sad and sorrowful child.

We anticipate, in the foregoing remarks, the idea that God's comforts are *parental*. He comforts us as a *father*. All God's corrections are fatherly; so is His comfort. The hand that slays, and the hand that makes alive, the hand that wounds, and the hand that binds up, are both *a Father's hand*. "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chastens not." "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him." Such is the image which finds an echo in every parental heart. *How soothing thus to trace the discipline of trial to a Father's hand!* And truly God rebukes, and chides, and corrects us, even as a father the children that he loves. How this view softens, subdues, and heals! "If this cup is from my Father," exclaims the afflicted child, "then will I drink it without a murmur. He has pierced my heart through and through; He has smitten my sheltering gourd, and He has blighted my lovely flower, and He has shaded my pleasant picture; but He is my Father still, and I will yield Him reverence, bowing silently and submissively to the rod which only love has sent, and which already is bursting into bud so promising, and is maturing into fruit so precious, making me a partaker of His holiness."

Accept, then, the comfort with which your Heavenly Father seeks to support

and soothe you in your present calamity. Refuse not to be comforted. To refuse divine comfort because God's hand has smitten, is to cherish a murmuring and rebellious spirit against God. Your persistent rejection of all the promises, and assurances, and consolations of your Heavenly Father, is as much as to say, "God has deeply, sorely wounded me, and I will not forgive, and cannot forget." Do you do well to be angry? Who caused the sheltering vine to grow? who reared the oak, around which the tendrils of your heart so long and so closely entwined? Who revealed that spring, that refreshed you so often from its clear and sparkling stream? Your Heavenly Father! Then *He has but recalled what was His own*; and shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Refuse not, then, the comfort which His own hand offers.

In love He sent this temporal reverse; in love He shaded your home with death; in love He transferred earth's flower to bloom in heaven's paradise; and will you now reject the consolation He would sincerely pour into your heart, exclaiming, in the spirit of contumacy and rebellion, "My soul refuses to be comforted"? God forbid! Yield your drooping heart to that comfort, as the fainting flower to the dew, as the sickly plant to the sun, and, in the depth of your gratitude, exclaim, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulations!"

He is the "God of all comfort"—"all comfort," and for "all our tribulations." It is a delightful thought, that in His own infinite heart, in the covenant of grace, in the Gospel of His love, and in our Lord Jesus Christ, He has made provision for all the afflictions, trials, and sorrows of His people. So that no new trial springs up in your path, no new grief shades your spirit, no new calamity crushes you to the earth, but the God of all comfort has anticipated that very need in the comfort He has provided for His Church. "Oh, how great is Your goodness which You have laid up for those who fear You; which You have wrought for those who trust in You before the sons of men!"

And what a comfort is THE LORD JESUS CHRIST to His people! There could be no revelation of God, as the God of all comfort, but in and through Christ. He is *the great Depository of our consolation*. Yes, He is called the "Consolation of Israel." *Christ is our comfort, and the Holy Spirit is our Comforter*. Who can listen to these words of tenderness and love which distilled from His lips into the sorrowing hearts of His disciples on the eve of their separation from Him, and not feel that Christ is truly the Consolation of His people; "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also

in me. In my Father's house are many mansions!" Does your sorrow spring from a sense of sin? Jesus' blood pardons. Is it from a conviction of condemnation? Jesus' righteousness justifies. Is it from the power of indwelling sin? Jesus' grace subdues. Is it from some pressing temporal need? All resources are in Jesus, and He has promised to supply all your need, and that your bread and your water shall be sure.

Is bereavement—sore, crushing bereavement—your grief? Where will you find such tender sympathy with your sorrow as dwells in His heart, of whom it is recorded, "Jesus wept"? Who can comfort that sorrow, but Christ?—and He can, and He will comfort it. Does some foe menace you, or does some insurmountable difficulty lie in your way? All power is Christ's, and He will defend you from your enemy, and will roll your stone of difficulty from before your feet. Does suffering, and languor, and waning health affect your spirits? He who "bore our sicknesses" is your Consolation now, and will not leave you to suffer and pine alone, but can either heal your malady with a word, or so make all your bed in sickness, by the supports of His grace, and the discoveries of His love, as shall make you willing to lie there patiently so long as it pleases Him.

A few practical deductions shall conclude this chapter. Learn from the subject to take all your troubles at once to God. God wants you—speaking after the manner of men—to make use of Him as the God of comfort. Why has He revealed Himself as such, if not that you should repair to Him immediately and without hesitation in every tribulation? They are sent for this purpose that you might "acquaint yourself with Him." Many a poor soul has made his first acquaintance with God in some deep, sore trial. It was not until God tore up all his earthly comforts by the root that he was led to see that all his life he had been living "without God in the world."

But it is in after-stages of our religious life that we know more of the character of God, learn more of His loving heart and of His revealed word as we fly to Him in our tribulations for the comfort He alone can give. And oh, the blessedness of nearness to Him into which our trouble has brought us! How have we kissed the rod and blessed the hand whose smittings have made known and unsealed to us a source of such comfort and a fountain of such blessing!

And let us not overlook the VARIOUS CHANNELS through which God comforts us. He comforts us by HIS WORD, its doctrines, promises, and precepts. He comforts us through the channel of PRAYER, drawing us to His

mercy-seat, and bringing us into communion with Himself through Christ. Oh, what comfort flows through this channel! The moment we arise and give ourselves to prayer, we are conscious of a mental quietness, of a soothing of heart indescribable. Prayer has unloosed the burden—prayer has dissolved the cloud—prayer has proved an inlet of peace, joy, and hope, passing understanding and full of glory.

God comforts us by the **MINISTRY** of His Word. For this purpose He furnishes His servants with gift and grace, and while some are as John the Baptist, "crying in the wilderness," others are like Barnabas, "sons of consolation," able to speak a word in season to those who are weary. How expressive the words of the apostle, "God, who comforts those who are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." Nor must we forget to remind you that God often comforts His people by writing the sentence of death upon all comfort out of Himself. Thus He spoke to His Church, "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her"—margin, "speak to her heart." Is He thus bringing you, beloved, into the wilderness of separation, of entanglement, of solitude? Be sure it is but to comfort you, to speak to your heart, and to reveal Himself to you as the "God of all comfort who comforts us in all our tribulation."

Thus, then, we learn that if we would have true comfort and consolation we must in faith run to heaven for it. It is a treasure found in no earthly climate. It is a jewel of heaven, a flower of paradise, found in no mine or growing in no garden below. We can carve our own crosses, we cannot make our own comfort. Seeking it from creatures, and amid creature good, we, alas! but seek the living among the dead. "When I said, my bed shall comfort me, You scared me with dreams."

Has Jesus given you an excess of comfort? Go and pour its overflowings in some stricken heart. Remember one end of God's comforts—it is "that we might be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God." Oh, high and holy privilege—godlike and divine—of repairing to some house of mourning, to some chamber of sickness, to some bed of suffering, to some believer in Jesus passing through adversity, and of some child of the light walking through darkness, and of strengthening and comforting them in God. Be this our mission, and then shall we be imitators of God, the "God of all comfort."

Let me remind you what a fountain of comfort you have in the truth that this

God of all comfort is *your* God. Thus while you possess the streams, the streams lead you to their source, and all that is in God is yours. I will suppose your case one of extreme woe. I will imagine you tried in your families, straitened in your circumstances, afflicted in your person, friendless, and homeless; and yet, against all this, I will weigh the truth that the God of all comfort is your God, and knowing how infinitely this blessing outweighs all your destitution and sorrow, I would call upon you to make the solitude through which you are traveling echo and reverberate with your shouts of joy and your songs of praise.

What if your home is desolate and your provisions are scanty; what if your heart is lonely and your body is diseased; if God is your God, and Christ is your Savior, and heaven is your home? In the midst of all your trials, sorrows, and discomforts, you have more cause to be happy and to sing than the brightest angel or the sweetest seraph before the throne. They stand in their own righteousness, you in the righteousness of God; they worship at a humble distance from God, you are brought near by the blood of Christ, enter into the holiest, and call Him Father!

And is it no comfort to be assured that Christ is yours, and that you are Christ's? With such a Savior and Friend, with such a Patron and Intercessor in heaven as Jesus, how comforted should you be in all your tribulations! Jesus knows you; others may not. The world assails, the saints judge; friends misinterpret and foes condemn, just because they neither know nor cannot understand you. Jesus knows you! Let this suffice. What a comfort that you can admit Him to every cloister of your soul, to every secret of your heart, with the feeling that He sees all, knows all, and understands all; and, what is more, sympathizes with, and approves all, which must, from the nature of the case, be profoundly veiled and inexplicable to human eye.

Oh to live independently of the saints, and above the world, upon Jesus!—this is true comfort. The moment you are brought fully to realize—"Christ knows me altogether: my personal infirmities, my secret sorrows, my domestic trials, my professional anxieties, all the workings of my inner life," you are comforted as no friend on earth or angel in heaven could comfort you. Oh, what a Christ is ours! How should we love Him, trust Him, serve Him, and if need be, suffer and die for Him.

Poor worldling! what is your comfort?—the creature that soon must die? the world that you soon must leave? a life that is but as a shadow? the prospect of

a death without a Savior? and an eternity without a heaven? Is this all? Yes, this is all the real comfort which you possess. Oh, fly to Christ without a moment's hesitation or delay! Secure an interest in Jesus, make Him your Friend, trust in Him as your Savior, accept Him as your Portion, and you shall be comforted in this life, and be happy forever in the life that is to come.

"May our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father, who loved us and in his special favor gave us everlasting comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and give you strength in every good thing you do and say." 2 Thes. 2:16-17

THE GOD OF BETHEL

"I am the God of Bethel." Genesis 31:13.

God is now His own Artist. Hitherto, the divine portraits upon which we have gazed with such sacred delight, were drawn by *human* hands, "holy men of God, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit," presenting such views of the character of God as met the varied conditions of His people; thus confirming our previous observation, that each title and perfection of God harmonized with some particular need of His Church. But, in the present chapter of our work, the Great I AM shall present His own Divine likeness, drawn with a vividness and fidelity such as He only could command. "I am the God of Bethel."

Who can mistake the Artist, or question the identity of the picture? The language of the one is too stately and commanding, and the likeness of the other too divine and life-like, to admit of a moment's doubt. It is Jehovah who speaks, and speaking of Himself, says "I am the God of Bethel." The word "Bethel" means, "the House of God," and the occasion on which it was thus used marked a memorable event in the history of Jacob, suggesting some spiritual reflections appropriate and profitable to the Christian and devout mind.

The patriarch was now an exile and a wanderer, fleeing from the vengeance of Esau. He had, on this occasion, been journeying more than four hundred miles through wild and inhospitable deserts; and at night, weary and footsore, he took a stone for a pillow, and laid himself down on the cold, dewy earth to sleep. That was a memorable night in his history. While he slept, a vision of singular character and glory appeared to him. It was a 'ladder,' its foot

resting on the earth, and its top in heaven. Ascending and descending this mystic communication between the two worlds, innumerable angels were seen, 'ministering spirits,' doubtless, sent from heaven to 'minister' to this tried servant of God. But the most significant and glorious part of this vision was the appearance of *Jehovah* at the top of the 'ladder,' addressing the lonely and desolate patriarch slumbering at its foot. The words which He uttered, and the tones in which He spoke, were well calculated to quell the fears, to comfort and assure the mind of God's servant, now passing under the corrective hand of a righteous yet loving Father—a fugitive from man's rage, yet 'beloved of God,'—a lonely exile, yet waited on by angels—a stranger and destitute, yet the heir of the very land upon which he lay—single and alone, yet destined to be the head of a race countless as the dust of the earth, and through whom, as concerning the Messiah, "all the families of the earth should be blest."

Not less consolatory and assuring was the gracious promise of the Divine presence and care which God spoke to him on that memorable night: "Behold I am with you, and will keep you in all places where you go, and will bring you again into this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken to you of." What a vision of glory, and what a night of repose must that have been to the desolate mind, lonely spirit, and weary body of the patriarch! How he must have desired to prolong it, and how have regretted its close! And when he awoke, we marvel not at the wondering exclamation of his awe-stricken mind, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not"—that is, I did not expect such a vision of God in such a place.

"He was afraid and said, What an awesome place this is! It is none other than the house of God—the gateway to heaven!" The next morning he got up very early. He took the stone he had used as a pillow and set it upright as a memorial pillar. Then he poured olive oil over it. He named the place Bethel—*house of God.*"

God, in a subsequent period of his history, reminded him of this memorable incident, doubtless with a view of strengthening his faith and comforting him under a new and severe trial through which he was then passing—the grinding avarice and base treachery of Laban, his father-in-law. Speaking to him again in a dream, God said, "I have seen all that Laban does unto you." Mark, *God notes all the unkindness and injustice done to His saints*, and will vindicate their wrong, and avenge the wrong-doer.

"I am *the God of Bethel*, where you anointed the pillar, and where you made a

vow unto me." What an unfolding of the character of God is here! What tender love, what covenant faithfulness, what Almighty power! Surely, if ever God gave Jacob a song in the night season of woe, it was now! Angels must have bent an ear to that song, and have learned new strains from its melody. God's dealings with men, His dealings especially with His Church, must form a subject of profound study and of rich instruction to these celestial students. The Church is their Bible, in the marvelous history of which its election and redemption, its calling and keeping, its grace and glory—they see the will, and study the mind, and fathom the heart, of Jehovah—"Which things the angels desire to look into."

Here we may for a moment pause, and in faith appropriate to ourselves the promise which God made to His servant Jacob, "Behold I am with you." That promise was not his alone, but is ours also, on whom the ends of the world are come. We are taught that, "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation"—that is, that no individual believer has a personal and sole right to any part of God's Word, exclusive of other believers; but that, as there is "one God and Father of all," "of whom the whole family on earth and in heaven is named," so the promises of God, from Adam downward, are the property alike of all the children of that one family, not a solitary member, the obscurest and the weakest, being exempt.

Oh, what a *uniting* truth is this! How should it constrain us to recognize and love as brethren all the members of the one and indivisible family of God, even though they may occupy different apartments, and feed at different tables, in the one Great House, than ourselves. God loves them all; Christ died for all, and recognizes in all His own divine image; and the Holy Spirit dwells alike in all, and seals on the lips of all, "Abba, Father!"

We repeat, what an exceeding great and precious promise of our covenant God is here—intended for all saints, intended, my beloved, *for you!* "Behold I am with you, and will keep you in all places where you go." What is the New Testament but the echo of the Old? Hear we not the echo of this promise in the words of Jesus spoken to His disciples on the eve of His departure from them, when, like the patriarch, they were to be left as orphans in the world, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Take hold of this divine promise of your Lord, repeated with yet more earnest emphasis, and given under yet more affecting circumstances than it was to Jacob, and *Jehovah Jesus* will make it good in your individual and daily experience. God in Christ is with you, His child, and will keep you in all places where His

providence leads you. No time or circumstance shall interpose to prevent its fulfilment.

How soon did God fulfil His promise in Jacob's experience! Listen to his touching admonition with Laban, "In fact, except for the grace of God—the God of my grandfather Abraham, the awe-inspiring God of my father, Isaac—you would have sent me off without a penny to my name. But God has seen your cruelty and my hard work. That is why he appeared to you last night and vindicated me." Our God is *unchangeable*. The same divine faithfulness and love are pledged to make good the same divine promise in your history. Like Jacob, you may be an exile and a wanderer from the land of your birth, and from the home of your parents. But Jacob's God is your God, and the promises made to Isaac and to Jacob, were equally made to all their spiritual seed, were made, beloved, *to you*.

Oh! then, embrace in faith, and clasp to your lonely heart, this precious promise that God in Christ is with you in all places, and will never leave nor forsake you. You are not alone. You are not Fatherless, nor homeless; you are neither a fugitive nor an orphan. Oh, no! Christ, your Friend and Brother, is with you. His heart is your dwelling-place, and His Father is your Father, and His God is your God. "Happy is he that has the God of Jacob (the God of Bethel) for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God."

We have remarked upon the word "Bethel," as signifying *the House of God*. This naturally suggests the subject of our present chapter—PRAYER, or, communion with God, as "the God of Bethel." The believer has *a Bethel everywhere*, since there is no place where God is not. The pious home, the secret closet, the public sanctuary, and even the fields where he walks at eventide to meditate, is a Bethel—the place where God in Christ meets him and communes with him from above the mercy-seat.

Next to the revelation of God as the God of atonement, the God that pardons sin, the most needed and precious revelation of Him is, as *the God that hears and answers prayer*. Prayer is everything to the believer. It is his vital element, the right hand of his power, his invincible armor, the feet with which he runs in the way of obedience, the wings which uplift his soul to God, and which waft him within the veil of glory. But let us, on so interesting and important a subject, exchange these general observations for a few particulars illustrative of the nature, privilege, and influence of *prayer*.

Our first and most natural inquiry relates to the OBJECT of prayer. *To whom* is prayer properly to be addressed? Reason would answer, *God*; but revelation goes further, and explains *who God is*, and the Triune relation He sustains to us as the Being that it answers prayer, and to whom all flesh should come. We are at once brought in contact with the revealed truth, that prayer is addressed to the Triune-Jehovah, and yet separately and equally, to each distinct Person in the Godhead. There may be a mystery in this statement to some minds, even as there is a mystery in the doctrine of the Trinity itself. But, let it be observed that, if the human mind could fully comprehend this truth, either God must cease to be divine, or man must cease to be human.

But we may possibly simplify this statement by presenting it in a kind of syllogistic form, thus—There are Three distinct Persons in the one God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is the Divine Object of Prayer; therefore, each distinct Person in the Godhead is a Being to whom it is proper that prayer should be separately, divinely, yet unitedly addressed. We get this truth in the Epistle to the Ephesians (2:18), a passage which affords one of the most remarkable and conclusive evidences of the doctrine of the Trinity found in the Bible, "Through *Him* (Christ), we both (Jew and Gentile) have access by one *Spirit* unto the *Father*." Apart from the clear light in which this text places the doctrine of the Trinity—a doctrine upon which the entire superstructure of Christianity rests—its relation to the article of prayer is as conclusive as it is beautiful. We have here God the *Father* as the Object of prayer—God the *Son*, as the Medium of prayer—and God the *Spirit*, as the Author of prayer. Each as a Divine Person is thus essentially engaged in the divine act of receiving prayer, as each one is embraced in the believer's act of offering prayer. There exists no inferiority of *nature*, as there is nothing subordinate in *office*—the Father receiving, the Son presenting, the Spirit inspiring, the prayers of all saints, and these Three essentially and indivisibly One.

Let us address our thoughts, in the first place, to the FATHER. What a warrant and encouragement have we in prayer to approach the "God of Bethel" as a Father! Such is His divinely paternal relation to us. It is the highest relation He sustains. To pardon our sins is a great act of His grace; but to *adopt us into His family*, a yet greater. It were a great act of the sovereign's clemency to pardon the criminal at the bar; it were a yet more transcendent act of the royal favor to *adopt that criminal as his son, and share with him the dignity and privileges of his throne*. But all this our God has done,

"having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

Concerning this view of prayer, how explicit is the teaching of God's Word in reference to the paternal relation of God! "You shall call Me FATHER, and shall not turn away from Me" These are wonderful words of God Himself. With such a warrant, what child of God will hesitate, through unbelief or unworthiness, to approach God in prayer as his Father? When we have God's warrant, we have the strongest ground to believe. He cannot go higher than His own word, confirmed by an oath, and sworn by Himself: "for when He could swear by nothing greater, he swore by Himself." Here, then, is His own word of invitation, bidding you draw near to Him as a Father, yes, as *our* Father. Hesitate not to recognize His paternal relation, and, though it may be with the lisping accents of a babe, draw near, and cry, "My Father."

The apostle inculcates the same truth, illustrated by his own example. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the FATHER of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in earth and in heaven is named." Here you have the example of one who esteemed himself the "chief of sinners," and "less than the least of all saints," bowing his knees in prayer to God as his FATHER, yes, as the Father of the one family of God. Why, then, should we hesitate? Why stand afar off, trembling in the bonds of a slave, when we may draw near in the free spirit of a child?

But, more illustrious and mightier than all, is the precept and the example of Christ himself. Listen to the holy precept; "When you pray, say, our FATHER who is in heaven." One great design of Christ's conning was to dissipate the clouds of ignorance and guilt which gathered around the human mind concerning the Fatherhood of God. Until He dissolved and scattered those clouds, no man, by his own ingenuity or research, could discern this wondrous truth. Here are our Lord's emphatic words; "My Father has given me authority over everything. No one really knows the Son except the Father, and no one really knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

And how touching and forcible His own filial example! How frequently the endearing name of Father breathed from His lips, in language like this—"O Father, Lord of heaven and earth," "Righteous Father," "My Father." Behold, then, beloved, the God of Bethel as *your Father*, and approach Him in prayer as such, with a heart dissolved and poured out in filial love and

communion at His feet. Your highest attainment in the divine life is to arrive at the assurance of your adoption, and *your highest privilege as a believer is to commune with God as your Father.* This His Spirit can give you.

Many, alas! are satisfied with knowing no more of the parental relation of God than what they learn in a continuous and parrot-like repetition of "Our Father who is in heaven." But this will not bring us to the Father's house. This will furnish no title or fitness for the many-mansioned home of heaven. And yet thousands of poor formalists, it is feared, have descended into the shades of eternal despair with these very words upon their lips!

But we hope better things of you, O humble and sincere believer in Jesus! You have not in the school of Christian experience, and in the region of your own heart's plague and nothingness, so learned Christ. Approach Him, then, in prayer as a child, beloved of God, as one standing in, and accepted through, Christ, and pour out your heart before Him, emptied of all its sorrow, sin, and need, as into the listening ear and loving heart of your Father in heaven.

Come as a child! Are you in need? "Your Father knows that you have need of these things." Are you in sorrow? "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him." Have you sinned, and are you returning as a humble penitent to His feet? "And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Is the cloud of adversity darkening, is the wave of sorrow swelling, is trouble near? "The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" Has the stroke fallen? Has the flower faded? Is the strong and beautiful staff broken? "My Father, not my will, but Yours be done." These, my beloved reader, are but the several parts of the magnificent Litany, breathing from the heart and uttered by the lips of a humble child of God bowing the knee before Him in the filial, loving, obedient spirit of a child.

Equally with the Father is *the SON an object of prayer.* Who can doubt it, at all intelligently acquainted with the Bible, and taught experimentally the truth as it is in Jesus? And yet that some have mooted this point, whom we might suppose to have been better instructed, and from whom we should have expected an enlightened and spiritual acquaintance with the truth, shows how important it is that we should "prove all things," while we "hold fast that which is good." *If Christ is God, as essentially and most truly He is, then it equally follows that He is a Being to whom prayer is rationally, properly, and scripturally to be addressed.* Who can reasonably doubt the Scripture warrant

and propriety of addressing prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is acquainted with the history of the early Church, and is conversant with the numerous examples illustrating the fact? The informed reader will not fail to recall to mind the famous letter of Pliny addressed to the Emperor Trajan, furnishing an explicit and unbiased testimony to the practice and purity of the early Christians, especially as it bears upon the point in question—divine worship addressed to Christ. "When they were assembled together," says Pliny, "they *sang a hymn to Christ as God.*"

Such is the testimony of an enemy. Could anything be more explicit bearing upon the fact that the first disciples offered divine worship to their God and Savior Jesus Christ? But we have their own testimony. For instance, we find the apostle Paul dedicating his Epistle to the Corinthians, "We are writing to the church of God in Corinth, you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did all Christians everywhere—whoever calls upon the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and theirs."

This would appear to set the question at rest, as it embraces the whole body of the early Christian Church. Added to this, we have the memorable and touching instance of the thief on the cross praying to Christ with his last breath, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Superadded to this is the equally conclusive and not less affecting instance of Stephen, the first martyr to the Christian faith, thus addressing his dying prayer to Jesus the Savior: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." What further testimony do we need? Imitate these illustrious examples of prayer addressed to Christ, and hesitate not to add to your sincere faith in Jesus your Savior the humble tribute of your worship of Him as your God.

What a severe deprivation would it be were we debarred from approaching Christ as our *Savior, Friend, and High Priest*, presenting our needs, unveiling our sorrows, and confessing our sins? "Lord, to whom shall we go but unto You? Into whose ear should we breathe our sins—upon whose breast should we weep our sorrows—upon whose shoulder should we cast our burdens—and upon whose arm should we lean, as, in weakness and weariness, we come up out of the wilderness, but Yours? Oh, the precious privilege of going, as the bereaved disciples of John did, and *telling Jesus all and everything!*

Unscriptural is that creed, lifeless that religion, and cruel that teaching, that would rob me of the precious and comforting privilege of offering my sacrifice

of prayer and praise to my Savior. The glorified saints worship Him, praise Him, and adore Him *in heaven*, casting, their crowns at His feet, and exclaiming, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing,"—and who shall debar us this privilege *on earth*?

The same argument applies to prayer as addressed to the HOLY SPIRIT. A distinct Person in the Godhead—of the same nature and substance with the Father and the Son—He is equally an Object of divine worship, and on this ground we are authorised and justified in praying to Him as GOD. One or two Scripture examples will suffice. That of Ezekiel is remarkable, in which the prophet thus invokes the power and presence of the Holy Spirit: "Then he said to me, "Speak to the winds and say: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so that they may live again. So I spoke as he commanded me, and the wind entered the bodies, and they began to breathe. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army of them."

We have another example in the case of the apostles; "Who, when they were come together, prayed for them (Peter and John), that they might receive the Holy Spirit. . . . Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." Here was an invocation of the Holy Spirit scarcely made before it was manifestly granted. And what was the effusion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, but an answer to the prayer addressed to Him by the little company of praying disciples, who, assembled in an upper room, "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication"? And while thus "they were all with one accord in one place," their invocation of the Spirit was answered; "And they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Need we multiply, as we might, these Scripture proofs of prayer addressed to God the Eternal Spirit? Hesitate not then, with these examples before you, to honor the Spirit, even as you honor the Father and the Son, by addressing to Him, as a Divine Person in the Godhead, your prayers, and supplications, and praises. Are you in affliction?—pray to the Spirit for comfort. Are you sensible of your spiritual ignorance?—pray to Him for His teaching. Are you discovering more of the hidden evil of your heart?—pray to Him for His sanctifying grace. Are you thirsting for a clearer sense of your salvation?—pray to Him for His assuring, sealing power. Do you long to know more fully your adoption?—pray to Him to breathe "Abba, Father," in your heart. Does

your soul travail in prayer for the conversion of those dear to you?—cry earnestly to the Spirit. Do you desire the vineyard of your own soul to be fruitful and fragrant with His grace?—pray to the Spirit; "Awake, north wind! Come, south wind! Blow on my garden and waft its lovely perfume to my lover."

"Eternal Spirit! we confess
And sing the wonders of Your grace;
Your power conveys our blessings down
From God the Father and the Son.

Enlightened by Your heavenly ray,
Our shades and darkness turn to day;
Your inward teachings make us know
Our danger and our refuge too.

The troubled conscience knows Your voice,
Your cheering words awake our joys;
Your words allay the stormy wind,
And calm the surges of the mind."

"I am the God of Bethel." What encouragement does this title of our God hold out to draw near to Him, and "by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make known our requests"! *All that He was to Jacob, He is to us.* Like him, are we passing through a night of loneliness and sorrow? Are we flying from a foe, or do we dread some impending trouble? Behold *the mystic "ladder"*—to Jacob but a vision, to us a divine and glorious reality, on whose rounds we may ascend near, nearer, and still nearer, to heaven, until we find ourselves in wrapped communion with the God that hears and answers prayer. That ladder is Christ Jesus, the "one Mediator between God and man," whose invitation to ascend is contained in His own gracious and assuring words: "Whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." "If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it."

With such a "new and living way" to God, with such steps raising you above trial, above sorrow, above need, above your enemies round about you, uplifting your soul to Him whose *ear* hears you, whose *hand* is outstretched to support you, all whose boundless resources are at your command, will you not draw near by the blood of Christ, enter into the holiest, and take hold of the "God of Bethel," nor relax your hold until He bless you?

Oh, the mighty power of prayer with the God of Bethel! "Let him take hold of

my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me," says God. Take hold of "Christ, the power of God," and you have taken hold of God's strength; and the "worm Jacob" though you are, you shall prevail with the God of Jacob, even with the God of Bethel. "Do not be afraid, O *worm* Jacob, O *little* Israel, for I myself will help you," declares the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. You will be a new threshing instrument with many sharp teeth. You will tear all your enemies apart, making chaff of mountains. You will toss them in the air, and the wind will blow them all away; a whirlwind will scatter them. And the joy of the Lord will fill you to overflowing. You will glory in the Holy One of Israel."

The *night of your woe* maybe dark and long; and you may "wait for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning," but that night, dark and long though it is, shall not be without its blessed vision of faith. You shall see Jesus! Through Him shall see God your Father, all whose thoughts are thoughts of peace, ordaining and shaping your every step with a *wisdom* that can make no mistake, with a *power* that nothing can baffle, with a *faithfulness* that cannot falter, and with a *love* that knows no variableness,, neither the shadow of a turning, and your *night of weeping* shall brighten into a morning of joy!

You are perhaps puzzled as to the *scope* of prayer. You wonder if its range is so wide as to embrace the needs of the present, as the hope of the life that is to come. But why debate this question for a moment? Has not Christ told you that, whatever you ask in His name He will grant you? Has He not instructed you to ask of your Heavenly Father your "daily bread"? Does He not bid you look down upon the lily of the field, robed with a beauty which Solomon might have envied, and then bid you learn that He who so clothed that lily will clothe you? Does He not bid you, on some lovely morning of spring, upraise your eyes to the bird floating above you in the richest plumage and with the sweetest song, and then learn that He who provides for the sparrow will not allow His children to need.

The scope of prayer, then, clearly embraces supplication for all *temporal* good. Look at that flower! It toils not, it spins not; and why? because your Heavenly Father clothes it. Look at that bird, leaping from bow to bow, springing from hill to valley, sparkling with beauty, gushing with song, and wild with ecstatic delight! It has not a thought or care of its own; and why? because God thinks and cares for it. Oh, you of little faith! Why do you hesitate to trust all your personal interests, to confide all your worldly affairs, to disclose all your temporal needs and sorrows in prayer to God? He is not too high for your

lowest need, nor too great for your smallest care. "If the buzzing of a fly troubles me," says John Newton, "I may take it to God." This is not mere sentiment. It is the practical embodiment of a principle of experimental religion most honoring to God and sanctifying to us—the principle of faith, which acknowledges God in all our ways, sees God in everything, and takes everything, the smallest, to God.

But if prayer in its scope takes in things temporal, much more does it embrace our *spiritual* and higher interests. Where can we repair with our varied soul-exercises but to Christ? Even His ministers may either not understand, or understanding, may yet grow weary of them. Our spiritual exercises may be beyond their own personal experience, our soul-perplexities may baffle their acutest skill, our spirit's sorrow distance their deepest sympathy. An eminent minister of Christ was on one occasion observed to betray deep emotion while a member of his flock was unfolding to him her spiritual case. "Have I said anything to wound your feelings?" she earnestly inquired. "No," was the humble reply of the man of God, "but I am affected with the thought that you are unfolding a stage of Christian experience to which I have not yet myself attained." This is a possible case.

We may in our ministries overstep the boundary of our own personal experience, or we may not be able to reach the more advanced experience of our hearers. But, prayer brings us to the feet of Him who can understand all our religious exercises, can harmonize all our doctrinal difficulties, can guide all our soul-perplexities, and bring us safely through all our spiritual temptations, doubts, and fears. Jesus leads us along no path untraveled by Himself. The flock shall not walk where the Shepherd's footprint is not seen, for in everything "He has left us an example that we should follow His steps." Then give yourself to prayer, and the "God of Bethel," who is a prayer-hearing, a prayer-answering, and a prayer-exceeding God—for He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we are able to ask or think"—will withhold from you no blessing that will be for your good to receive and for His glory to bestow.

Are you living a prayerless life, knowing nothing of communion with the "God of Bethel?" Then, dying so, you die a hopeless death. A prayerless life involves a Christless death. What! never pray? Never pray from a broken heart, never pray with a humble, contrite spirit? Sinner! the time is coming when you will pray, but too late! So prayed the rich man, lifting up his eyes in torment, "Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and

cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." But it was too late to pray then. *Hell is the only place where God turns a deaf ear to prayer.* Rise, then, and pray, though it be but in the publican's words, "God be merciful to me a sinner." That prayer, breathed from the heart, and offered in the name of Jesus, will enter the ear of the "God of Bethel," and bring down the saving mercy for which it pleads.

"The time will come, when, humbled low
In sorrow's evil day,
Your voice of anguish shall be taugt,
But taugt too late, to pray.

When, like the whirlwind over the deep,
Comes desolation's blast,
Prayers then extorted shall be vain,
The hour of mercy past.

The choice you made has fixed your doom,
For this is Heaven's decree
That, with the fruits of what he sowed,
The sinner filled shall be."

In concluding this chapter, let the truth remain deeply and permanently fixed upon the reader's mind that, without prayer we are necessarily without life in, or from, Christ; and in God's eye are dead in sin. It is most true that *prayer does not save us*. Salvation is only in Christ. By His merits and intercession alone are we saved. Nothing meritoriously and vitally enters into our salvation, but His blood and righteousness. The one cleanses us from our sins; the other justifies us. But the necessity of prayer arises from the fact, that there is no other divinely-appointed channel by which we make known our needs to God, and by which God meets them. True, He knows our needs before we make them known; but He has said: "For this cause will I be inquired of to do it for them." We may, indeed, reach heaven without books, or learning, or talents; but we can never reach heaven without prayer.

"Behold, he prays!" is Heaven's first recognition of the sinner's conversion on earth. A soul without prayer is like a house exposed to the pelting storm without a covering. How can the temptations of Satan be repelled? How can the corruptions of the flesh be resisted? How can the seductions of the world be overcome, but by prayer? Then, above all things, cultivate prayer—closet prayer, family prayer, sanctuary prayer, social prayer. Pray, pray, pray; above all things, PRAY.

Seek the aid of the Holy Spirit, promised to "make intercession for us, according to the will of God." He will teach you how to pray, and what to pray for. And when He has laid a burden on your heart, you may be well assured it is according to the Divine will, and that the God of Bethel will answer your prayer in that particular thing for which you have besought Him. And when your heart is led out to pray, not for worldly wealth and distinction, as did the mother of Zebedee's children, but for an increase of faith, that you may crucify the world, live as a stranger and pilgrim here, love Jesus more, have more zeal for God, more resemblance to Christ, more of the spirit of adoption, a clearer sense of your present acceptance in the Beloved, more love to, and union with, "all saints," you may be assured that you are asking those things which are in accordance with His will; and you may with boldness enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and draw near to the God of Bethel with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith that your penance shall, like Queen Esther's, find acceptance, and your petition, like hers, be granted, not merely to the half, but to the whole of Christ's kingdom; for, not as the world gives does Jesus give His royal favors to His people.

Let our *homes* be Bethels, where the "God of Bethel" loves to dwell. Oh, that our children, our servants, ourselves, may be molded into Christian families, pious households, whose altars, domestic and private, are reared in the Name and consecrated to the worship of the God of Bethel, even the God of Jacob, "in whom, and in whose seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

"O God of Bethel! by whose hand
Your people still are fed;
Who through this weary pilgrimage
Have all our fathers led.

"Our fervent prayers we now present
Before Your Throne of grace
God of our fathers! be the God
Of their succeeding race.

"Through each perplexing path of life
Our wandering footsteps guide;
Give us each day our daily bread,
And clothing fit provide.

"Oh, spread Your covering wings around,
Until all our wanderings cease,
And at our Father's loved abode

Our souls arrive in peace."

"Call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

THE GOD OF GRACE

"The God of all grace." 1 Peter 5:10

There is not, perhaps, in the Bible a word more expressive, or, to the believing ear, one more sweet, than the word **GRACE**. It at once discloses the secret of salvation, defines the underlying principle of redeeming mercy, and indicates the golden thread which runs throughout and knits together all the great doctrines of the gospel, emphatically designated the "gospel of the grace of God." The definition of the word is simple as it is precious. It means, God's good-will and *free favor* to man, in and through Christ Jesus. Thus is it employed, "By grace you are saved;" "The grace of God that brings salvation;" "It is of faith, that it might be by grace;" "By the grace of God I am what I am;" "We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."

This principle of God's favor, or free grace, as we have just remarked, underlies and binds together all the great truths indicated by the previous titles of God. The whole plan of salvation is based upon *free grace*, or, in other words, God's good-will and *unpurchased favor* to sinners. This idea, of course, repudiates and ignores all worth and worthiness whatever on the part of the creature, constituting man God's debtor, instead of—as the scheme of salvation by *human merit* does—God being a debtor to man. Let this not be lost sight of, that *salvation by works lays God under obligation to the creature, whereas salvation by grace lays the creature under eternal obligation to God*. Human merit, therefore, is entirely excluded as an element entering into our salvation; the whole scheme, from first to last, being by grace. "And if by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it be of works, then it is no more grace."

All the religions of men—and their name is "legion"—are based upon the principle of human merit—all are founded upon some fancied good and power in the creature, the effect of which is totally to set aside the Atonement of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul. In fact, the doctrine of

creature merit is the fatal element of man's religion, the moral poison of his soul, the remedy for which is only found in a believing reception and heart-felt experience of the free grace salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet how much even the Lord's people have yet to learn of this great truth! How dim their views, how faint their realization, how little their enjoyment of it! How much forgetfulness of the truth that Christ died, not for saints, but for sinners; that He receives, not the worthy, but the unworthy; that He came to heal, not the whole, but the sick; to call, not the righteous, but sinners, to repentance! Always looking for some good thing in themselves, instead of looking only to Christ for that worthiness which never can be found out of Him; ever dealing with their sins, in the place of sin's Great Sacrifice, substituting sanctification for justification; thus making a saving merit of their holiness, putting *faith* in the place of Christ, the Object of faith, and so making a Savior of their religious experience, it is no marvel that they realize so faintly their completeness in Christ, and the peace and joy, the hope and holiness springing therefrom. For this reason, "many are weak and sickly among them," and many travel in doubt, and fear, and tears to the brink of the river of death, though, blessed be God, none ever go doubting, and fearing, and weeping over it; for, at the last, *grace triumphs*, and the weakest faith gets the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In considering this divine title of our God, the first and most obvious idea it suggests is that *God is the eternal and essential Source of all grace to man*. This opens up to us a great and precious truth. As the "God of all grace," He must be the first and originating Cause of this, as of every other blessing. But for the existence of this fact, there had been no Savior; and no Savior, there had been no salvation; and no salvation, there had been no heaven for sinners. This divine Fountain of grace, mercy, and love unsealed, fallen man would have righteously shared the doom of fallen angels, there being no difference between the darkest spirit in the world of woe and the brightest spirit in the world of bliss, *but what the sovereign grace of God makes*.

The Lord's people seriously and frequently err in sinking below this truth. Satisfied with the sweetness of the *stream* of grace, they ascend not to the *source* from where it flows. Not thus indifferent are the scientific men of this world, who in their generation are wiser than the children of light. How much valuable life has been sacrificed, and what vast wealth expended, in attempting to trace the source of the Nile! And still the problem remains unsolved. Content with having "tasted that the Lord is gracious," having

"drunk of the brook in the way," how few of the recipients of divine grace explore *the divine and eternal source* from where their salvation has come! "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God," and of this River God Himself is the Eternal Head. With Him originated the great plan of redemption. Who can study it—its character and history, its philosophy and results—who can contemplate its fitness for God, its adaptation to man—without a profound conviction that the Mind that conceived, and planned, and executed the Redemption of fallen man must be Divine, and that that Mind was God the Father's?

He must be insensible to what is great, blind to what is grand, stupid to what is convincing; who can rise from the study of Redemption without the overwhelming conviction that *such an expedient could have originated only with God*; that His heart conceived it, His mind planned it, His power executed it, and that *the whole resolves itself in an eternal monument of His free and sovereign grace to sinners!* Truly, "Salvation is of the Lord."

A few particulars will illustrate this precious truth. As "the God of all grace," the grace He has so graciously revealed to sinners, is in Him AN ESSENTIAL PROPERTY. It is not grace inspired by our sinfulness, or moved to its display by anything on our part. No condition of ours, however abject and miserable, originated or elicits it. It dwells in Him as essentially as His own essence. He would not be God, if He were not the God of all grace. He must cease to be God were He to cease to be gracious. Listen to His own words thus portraying Himself: "The Lord God merciful and gracious." Not so independently, and spontaneously, and freely do light and heat flow from the sun, as does saving grace from the nature of God to poor sinners. God cannot act but His grace displays itself in some one of its endless forms.

What is *forgiveness*, but God's grace remitting our sins? What is *justification*, but God's grace accepting our persons? What is *sanctification*, but God's grace purifying our hearts? What is *adoption*, but God's grace making us sons? What is our *final salvation*, but God's grace keeping us from falling, and preserving us into His eternal kingdom? Thus, each round of the ladder that lifts us from the mouth of hell to the gate of heaven, is an unfolding of the boundless grace of God to lost sinners, vile, graceless, and hell-deserving.

Do you think, then, that coming to God by Jesus Christ, and casting yourself upon His grace as a poor, lost, worthless sinner, He will cast you off? Never! God may cast down a poor soul—and this He often does in love, to lay it low,

even to the dust, that he may learn that *salvation, from first to last, is of His free grace*—but He will never cast off a poor soul that has fled to the asylum of His mercy, that has cast himself upon His boundless grace to sinners. He is too gracious, too divinely, essentially gracious for this. He must cease to be God if He cease to be gracious, and He must cease to be gracious if He refuse to receive and save a poor, broken-hearted sinner who casts himself on that grace.

Thus we have endeavored to lead your mind up, my reader, to the Fountain-Head of all grace. Rest not below it. Precious as is the *channel*, as we shall presently see—Holy as is the *object*, as will ultimately appear, and sweet as are the *streams*, as all who have only tasted that the Lord is gracious will testify—it must be acknowledged that all this is infinitely increased when we rise to the Divine, Essential, and *Eternal Source* from where it all flowed down to us—even the God and Father of all grace.

That is a word of rich consolation spoken by the apostle—it has been as a sunbeam in many a cloudy day—to God's dear, tried, needy ones—"My Lord shall supply all your needs *according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*" Who can measure the depth and height, the length and breadth of meaning which this assurance contains? How many a tear it has dried, how many a fear it has removed, how many a need it has met! Our great sin is in *limiting God*, the Holy One of Israel. We measure His infinity by a finite scale. We too much resemble the insect traversing the tree leaf, and imagining that that leaf bounds the utmost limit of creation; or, like the child that dips its tiny shell into the sea, and fancies the ocean is lessened by its draught. We forget that our God is divine, and therefore all-sufficient; that He is infinite, and therefore illimitable; that, while the universe receives its life and existence from Him each moment, and all the Church has been living upon His all-sufficiency ever since its being, His infinite sufficiency and grace have not sunk one hair's breadth. Oh, we need to deal more simply and closely with the all-sufficiency of God! He condescends to ask this at our hands. "I am God Almighty." "I am the Lord God that brought you up out of the land of Egypt." "Is anything too hard for me? says the Lord God."

Now, it is from this infinite Ocean of grace that "God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That must be an eternal, essential, fathomless, boundless Ocean of grace that could, from its all-sufficiency and freeness, provide such a *Savior*, and such a *salvation*, and such a *heaven*, for poor, lost

sinner! Truly is He the "God of all grace." He that gave His only Son, well beloved and precious, to suffer and die for His people, surely, from that same infinite sea of grace, he is prepared, as freely and as fully, to give us all other things, from a crust of bread, to the banquet of heaven; from a cup of cold water, to the ocean fullness of joy that is in His presence; and to the rivers of pleasures for evermore that are at His right hand.

Away, then, to God, even the "God of all grace", with your every need, temporal and spiritual. Ask not, "Can He provide a table in the wilderness? He has brought me through six trials, will He deliver me out of the seventh? He has pardoned me ninety-nine times, will He pardon the hundredth? He has rolled many a stone from off my buried mercy, and out of my path of difficulty, *will He, can He*, remove this great mountain that covers me with its deep, dark shadow, and make my way a plain?" Oh you of little faith! is not our God the God of all grace? Wherefore, then, do you thus reason, and doubt, and fear?

Bring your *perplexities* to God, and He will guide them. Bring your *needs* to God, and He will supply them. Bring your *mountains* to God, and He will level them. Bring your sins to God, and He will forgive them. Bring your *sorrows, trials, and temptations* to God, and He will sustain you under, and will bring you through them, to the praise and glory of His great Name, as the "God of all grace." Your supplies may be exhausted, but not His fullness. Your need may press, but there is no pressure on His sufficiency. Your power may be limited, but His is illimitable. Your grace may be shallow, but His is fathomless. And you may ask, "From where will my next supply come?" while, at the moment that the anxious question is trembling upon your lip, the supply that is to silence it is laid up in the inexhaustible treasures of His grace, and will be sent just at the moment that will awaken in you the sweetest song, and yield to Him the richest glory.

An important and interesting part of our subject now invites our attention. We refer to THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AS THE OFFICIAL AND RESPONSIBLE HEAD IN THE COVENANT OF GRACE, OF ALL HIS GRACE TO SINNERS. Every reservoir has its conduits, every fountain its channels, every spring its rivulets. The infinite and eternal fullness of grace in God would have availed us nothing, had not a suitable *channel* been provided for its conveyance. The Father would, in the impressive language of the sacred song, have existed as "a Fountain sealed," secluded, eternally sealed, but for Jesus. There would have been no channel of grace from God to the sinner, no possible avenue of the sinner's approach to God, but for the "One Mediator

between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."

This channel through which His grace was to flow, this medium by which the sinner was to approach, was of the Father's own providing. It must, in all respects, be worthy of the Being with whom it originated, whose honor it was to vindicate, whose glory it was to secure; and it must be in all respects suitable to the sinner, whose grace and glory, whose salvation and heaven it was to accomplish. All this Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, was. Our Arbitrator, laying His right hand on the Father, and His left hand upon us—the right hand of His Godhead upon God, and the left hand of His manhood upon man—so making peace by the blood of His cross; so opening a medium through which God, consistent with His holiness, and man, despite our sinfulness, could meet in a state of at-one-ment. This matter of reconciliation on the part of God has been one of some perplexity to many pious minds, giving rise to much obscurity, if not unsoundness of idea on the subject.

The chief difficulty has been the harmony of the two ideas of everlasting love and reconciliation. If God's love to the Church were, as He affirms it to be, "from everlasting," the question arises, where exists the necessity of mediatorship and reconciliation? Perhaps the following remarks, not before published, of an eminent and deeply-taught saint of God (Mary Winslow), may in some degree elucidate this important and interesting point—"If the holiness of God were never incensed against the Church fallen in Adam, then there had been no need of the death of Christ. Christ died to reconcile God to us and us to God. From where sprung the wrath of God which Christ endured? The proper answer to this question will give us a loving view of God as a reconciled Father in Christ Jesus. A mediator supposes the parties between whole he mediates at variance the one with the other, else there had been no necessity of mediatorship. The reconciliation which Christ effected was *not to the love of God* towards His people—for that was never lost—but to *the justice of God* offended by sin. Christ is the Peacemaker—'He is our peace.' Justice, Holiness, and Truth are all reconciled and harmonized towards His people in Jesus, so that it is proper, as it is sweet, unspeakably sweet, to speak to and of Him as a reconciled God in Christ Jesus." 'All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Christ Jesus.'

We think the point is fully met in these few observations by the remark that, Christ died, not to reconcile the *love*, but the *Justice* of God towards His people. *The love of God never was alienated or affected by Adam's fall, but His Justice and His Holiness were.* Christ's atoning death met their every

requirement, and now both are on the side of the sinner, so that we are as much saved on the footing of justice as of love, of holiness as of grace. How sure is the Foundation God has laid for the salvation of a poor sinner! How tried the Corner-stone upon which this hope reposes! To be saved on the basis of justice would seem to place the salvation of the soul upon a higher, and surer footing, than even of love, since God can now be just to Himself in saving us; and not to save the sinner believing in Christ were to be unjust to us. If saved thus, you stand on the broad foundation of justice, and you can justly claim, through Christ, a mansion in the house of your Father in heaven. God is therefore bound, on the principle of righteousness, to save your soul, cast in simple faith upon Jesus. Thus, "Grace reigns unto righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

But we return to the truth, that the Lord Jesus is the *Covenant Head*, the official and responsible Administrator of this grace. It was once entrusted to Adam, the *federal head* of the human race. But the responsibility was too great, the treasure too costly, for a mere creature to sustain and hold. We know how soon the vessel of clay which the Divine Potter had made, and in which the grace of our salvation was deposited, was marred and destroyed by the Fall. Foreknowing this catastrophe, and bent on the salvation of His Church, God amply provided for the case, by placing the grace that was to bring it to glory in the hands of His beloved Son. And so He, the divine Artist, seeing the destruction of the first vessel of grace, "made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the Potter to make it."

If the first vessel—Adam, in his sinlessness reflecting the pure and perfect image of God, was beautiful, it yet had no beauty by reason of the beauty that excelled and eclipsed it in the mysteriously and wondrously constituted Person of the Son of God. *The incarnation of God is the greatest wonder in the countless wonders which crowd the universe.* It will be the study of angels, the theme of saints, the song of heaven, the marvel of eternity. It is the central truth of Christianity, the divine sun of the system, around which all other truths of our gospel circle. It gives to all their character, glory, and place. It gives to atoning blood its all-sovereign virtue; to imputed righteousness its all-justifying efficacy; to the cross of Calvary its power, attraction, and glory. In a word, "God manifest in the flesh," is the key that unlocks the pavilion of every other mystery of the gospel, while it remains itself, and will forever remain, *the greatest and most sublime mystery of all.*

Such is the Head in which it pleased the Father that all fullness of grace

should dwell. For what purpose could this delegated fullness of grace thus deposited in Jesus be, but to furnish Him, as the Head over all things to His Church, with *supplies of "all grace" for His people*. There are two fullnesses described as being in Christ—the "fullness of the Godhead," which is His Deity, or His essential fullness; and then the "fullness" which it pleased the Father should dwell in Him, which describes the *fullness of grace treasured up in Him for all the needs of a most needy Church*.

Let us, then, look at some of the particulars of this grace dwelling thus essentially in the Father, the administration of which was placed in the hands of the Lord Jesus. The title of our God under consideration is as comprehensive as it is precious. "The God of ALL grace." "ALL grace." Marvelous declaration this! Precious announcement! It chimes with every circumstance; it meets every trial; it confronts every temptation; it supplies every need; it is so worthy of God, so like Jesus, so suitable in all respects to the saints. "ALL grace."

In the first place, there dwells in the Lord Jesus, as the Father's Depository, all SIN-FORGIVING GRACE. Pardon is the highest prerogative of sovereignty, as it is the richest boon of the subject. So *great* is this exercise of divine favor, so *rich* and *free* a blessing of His grace, God not only has not, but could not, delegate the power to any created being. He reserves, and justly so, the right of forgiveness in His own hands. Imagine, then, what an insult to His divine Majesty, what an invasion of His sovereign prerogative, the daring and blasphemous assumption of the court of Rome—call it not Church, for Church it is not—in claiming and professing to exercise a right which God has never entrusted to any authority of man, still less to a sinful mortal! O sinner! bound to the judgment, there is forgiveness with God, and with God only, and to Him hesitate not to repair, in the spirit of a humble penitent, with the petition breathing from your heart, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

But this sin-pardoning grace is lodged in the hands of Jesus. The grace that remits the greatest sin, that pardons the vilest sinner, is with Christ. How often did the wondrous words breathe from His lips, "Your sins are forgiven you!" The Scribes and Pharisees charged Him with blasphemy because He assumed a divine function, and exclaimed, "Who can forgive sins, but God only?"—thus, indirectly and undesignedly, blending with the indictment an acknowledgment of the fact that Christ was God.

Oh, yes! child of God, there is in Christ the grace of forgiveness—grace that

can remit every transgression, pardon every crime, blot out every sin; grace that, where sin has abounded, much more, yes, infinitely more, abounds. "Through Him," says the apostle, "is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sin, according to the riches of His grace." What encouragement for you who feel yourself to be a sinner, your sins so great, even the greatest, that the "remembrance of them is an intolerable burden," to repair to Jesus for the grace that will entirely pardon and cancel all!

Bear in mind that the forgiveness of sin, for which God has provided at a cost so immense to Himself, is His *free gift* to sinners. It is entirely an act of grace. We read, "And when they had nothing to pay, He frankly forgave them both." The pardon of sin, while it is not too, great a blessing for God to *give*, is too great a blessing for man to *purchase*. And were it not free, entirely free, not the least worthiness on the part of the sinner claiming, and not his greatest unworthiness disclaiming it, it never could personally be ours. Approach, then, the sin-cleansing Fountain of Christ's own atoning blood—blood possessing all the sovereign efficacy of His Deity, wash, and be clean. And thus washing by faith in this precious, sin-atoning, guilt-effacing blood, God declares, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

All JUSTIFYING GRACE is in Christ Jesus. The two conditions of the saved soul—the forgiveness of sin and the justification of the sinner—though inseparable in its salvation, are yet to be kept distinct as defining the two essential parts of Christ's mediatorial work—His obedience and suffering—and as describing the two essential conditions of the believer. The sinner is pardoned through the blood of Christ, and he is justified by the righteousness of Christ. By the disobedience of the first Adam, we are plunged into condemnation; by the obedience of the Second Adam, the Lord from heaven, we are delivered from condemnation; by the one we are made sinners, and by the other we are made righteous. (See Romans 5:17-19.)

Study these passages, my reader, in prayer for the illumination of the Spirit on a matter of such vital moment, especially important in the present day, when the doctrine of imputed righteousness, as taught by Paul, as held by the Reformers, as bled for by Ridley and Wycliff and Huss, and others of the "noble army of martyrs," and so distinctly embodied in the doctrinal articles of the English Church, has come to be disputed and denied by many. But this grace of justification the "God of all grace," by whom the believing sinner is

justified—for "it is God who justifies"—is deposited in Christ Jesus, who is emphatically the "Lord our Righteousness." Believing in Him, we are now freely and forever justified. His righteousness becomes, by the imputation of the Spirit, and through the receiving faith of the believing soul, our righteousness; so that, in the strong language of Scripture, "we are made the righteousness of God in Him."

Oh, what a glorious and precious truth is this! How it exalts and ennobles the soul! "In Your righteousness shall they be exalted." Equally free with the grace of pardon is the grace of justification. Both are the gratuitous blessings of God. Thus the apostle proves it. "Being justified by faith (and "faith is the gift of God"), we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Again, "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

What joyful news, what glad tidings are here for you who, after laboring and striving, have happily come to the end of all your own doings, and can do no more! You have traveled to the "end of the law," and find you have, if not in the letter, yet in the spirit, broken its every commandment, and so are conscious of being guilty of all. And now your cry is, "Wretched one that I am! who will deliver me from this condemnation?" Lo! Jesus appears! He has seen you 'toiling in rowing,' He has watched all your well-meant strivings and sincere attempts to keep the law, and has marked all your inability and failure. And now He presents Himself before you wearing that splendid and significant title, 'The Lord our Righteousness,' and He says to you, "I am the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes; I am your righteousness without a work of your own; I have kept the law, have obeyed every command, and have honored every precept; believe only in me and you shall be justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses, or by the most perfect obedience of your own."

And now methinks I see the poor toiling soul cast overboard its oars, and ceasing any longer to stem the tide of its sins, infirmities, and failures, spread its sails to the gale of God's free grace, wafting its long tempest-tossed bark into the calm waters of perfect peace through Jesus Christ our Lord.

"The God of all grace" has also deposited in Christ Jesus the fullness of **ADOPTING GRACE**. "You are all," says the apostle, "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." And in another place he says, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba,

Father." Into what a dignified position does this adoption of grace place the believing soul! A rebel made a son, a foe made a child, an alien made an heir, "an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ Jesus." What divine, what marvelous, what *free grace* is this! Believer in Jesus, know your adoption. Child of God, realize your sonship. Son of God, claim your heirship, and live in anticipation of your inheritance.

So divine, so loving, so free is the grace flowing from the "God of all grace," and welled in the humanity of Christ, as the Head of all grace to His Church, that "now are we the sons of God; and it does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." Go to this God of grace, then, through Jesus, in the filial spirit of a loved child, and disclose to Him your every need, unveil to Him your every grief; acknowledge to Him your every sin; make known to Him your every temptation, and assault, and difficulty, keeping back nothing which a loving, dutiful child, should pour into the heart of a fond, faithful, and all-powerful Father. Oh that the grace of adoption might so fill our souls as to dislodge all servile fear, dissolve all legal bonds, and enable us to walk in the holy, happy liberty of the children of God!

The God of all grace has equally deposited all fullness of SANCTIFYING GRACE in Christ Jesus. Here is another kindred yet distinct condition of the believing soul. It may be regarded, perhaps, as the effect and fruit of all the other related doctrines of grace. If, for example, I am a, pardoned sinner, I am justified; and if I am a justified sinner, I am an adopted child; and if I am all these, then I am holy, sanctified, separated, and set apart wholly for God. "Holiness to God" is inscribed on my brow.

Similar to this was the apocalyptic vision which John beheld, and thus graphically describes: "Then I saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him were 144,000 who had his name and *his Father's name* written on their foreheads." Do we thus personally possess the seal, and are we thus visibly wearing the sign, of our adoption? Do the saints, (for "the *world* knows us not") see our Father's image, and read the Father's name, in *our holy walk, in our filial devotion, in our loving spirit?* That this may be so, do not forget that all grace is treasured up in Christ to promote our personal holiness. *We are as much to live upon Christ for sanctification as for pardon and justification.* The grace that delivers us from hell fits us for heaven; that grace which cancels our guilt, subdues also our corruption; that grace which emancipates us from our servitude, equally dethrones the tyrant. O wondrous, precious

grace that, by its divine sanctity and power, brings first one, and then another indwelling corrupt principle, passion, and desire of our hearts into subjection to itself, and all in obedience to Christ; that moulds and fashions us into the image of Jesus!

Nor must we overlook the part *the Holy Spirit* takes in the *conveyance* of this grace from the Father, the God of all grace, "through Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth," to the happy recipients of this grace—poor, needy, graceless souls. While the Father decrees this grace and provides it; and while the Son holds the key of all this treasure and metes it out "grace for grace"—or, as it is in the original, "wave upon wave"—*the Holy Spirit makes us to know and feel our deep need, and then conveys the blessing into the soul*. Is not this the meaning of the words of Jesus—"He shall glorify me, for He shall take of mine and show it unto you." And how appropriate is thus the office of the Spirit. Having implanted His own graces in the soul, does He leave them to their self growth, does He abandon them to the unkind, uncongenial soil in which they were implanted? Oh, no! Having begun a good work, He carries it on to completion. *He watches over, waters, and nourishes by fresh supplies the graces He has implanted*. He it is who waters the roots, He it is who strengthens the stem, He it is who forms the blossom, He it is who expands the bud, He it is who ripens the fruit and conducts it to perfection.

Honor the Spirit in this work, glorify Him in His person, guard against wounding and grieving Him, and daily acknowledge your indebtedness to Him for conveying down from God the Father, through Christ the Son, the streams of grace which keep in bloom, fragrance, and beauty His own graces of faith, and love, and joy, and peace, and hope in your soul.

Is He the God of all grace? Then in Christ He has made provision for all COMFORTING GRACE. What a blank would exist in this provision—a need which nothing ever could meet—were there no consolation, no comfort, no sympathy, in Christ Jesus for poor, sorrowing, suffering saints! Alas! how large the number! How many a tried, afflicted believer, will bend over this chapter, and perhaps find nothing that meets his case until he reaches the close, and is reminded of what he has often been told before, but which, now that he is passing through the deep, dark waters of grief, seems like a newborn truth to his soul, that Jesus is the "*Consolation of Israel*."

Yes, afflicted and sorrowing one, the God of all grace is the God of all comfort, and has deposited in Christ all comfort for you. He knows the nature

of your sorrow—for He sent it. He marks the pressure of your cross—for He imposed it. He is acquainted with the bitterness of your cup—for He mixed it. All His promises of succour and support are Yes, and Amen in Christ Jesus. All the tenderness, the compassion, the sympathy, the grace that it pleased the Father should dwell in Christ, is designed for your personal and present sorrow. Listen to the words of Jesus; "Let not your heart be troubled." Oh, who knows your heart's deeply veiled anguish, its doubts and sorrows—who can reach, fathom, and control it; who can soothe, chasten, and sanctify it, but Jesus? His grace will support, strengthen, and calm you now, enabling you to glorify God in the fires. Oh, it were worth all the sorrow that ever brimmed our cup, to know what the Lord Jesus Christ is a Brother born for adversity!

Live, then, upon this God of all grace. Remember, there is no limit to its extent—it is "ALL grace." Take your heart to God through Christ, and He will fill it with every blessing you ask, with every grace you need. Your sins, your needs, your trials, your temptations, your sorrows, can never exceed the "ALL grace" that dwells in God, and which Jesus waits to communicate. Go with an empty hand—go with the exhausted vessel—go with the often-told tale of grief—go with the old, old story of backsliding, and unworthiness, and need; only go to Jesus, and sink your vessel, be it large or small, in His fathomless ocean of grace, and you shall "find grace to help you in every time of need."

Listen to His cheering words; "My grace is sufficient for you." You are, perhaps, anticipating with fear the hour of *death*. It is, indeed, a solemn thing, even for a Christian, to die. But do not forget that our God is the God of all *dying*, as of all *living* grace. And that, when the hour is come for your departure out of this world to go unto the Father, the grace that was all-sufficient for the trials, and sorrows, and sins of life, will be all-sufficient for the demands and solemnities of death. Do not forget that Christ does not give us grace in hand for future difficulties, but reserves it for the time of its requirement, and that, when death comes to you, Jesus will come with it, and you shall not see death, but *Jesus* only. And then will be experienced the last and most solemn and precious fulfillment of His promise, "my grace is sufficient for you."

"Humble sinner, mourning soul,
Over whose bosom sorrows roll,
Tis for you the Savior says,
Mine is all-sufficient grace.

**"Do you mourn an evil heart?
Or some cursed fiery dart?
Do not yield to slavish fear—
All-sufficient grace is near.
"Are you full of needs and woes?
Or does unbelief oppose?
Does Your Jesus hide His face?
Trust His all—sufficient grace.
"Can no care with your compare?
Do not yield to black despair
For the worst of Adam's race
Christ has all-sufficient grace."**

THE GOD OF HOLINESS

"You only are holy." Rev.15:4

No perfection of "our God," thus far considered, presents Him to our view so like Himself as the perfection of *holiness*. We can form no proper idea of God apart from this. Even the unrenewed mind is conscious that it has to deal with God who cannot connive at sin. It is true, its conceptions must be obscure, its views defective; for, what proper notion of Divine holiness can a sinful being form? His views must necessarily be just what those of an untutored peasant would be of the sun beheld through a misted and distorted medium. There would be in that peasant's mind the conviction that there was a sun, and that it was light; but the mental conception of the nature and splendor of the orb would, from the necessity of the case, be obscure and defective.

There is in the human conscience the conviction that God is a God of holiness—for conscience, left to its natural bias, is ever in the interests of truth and righteousness, and, as the viceregent of the soul, faithfully whispers in the ear what is right and what is wrong. But the highest and clearest views of the Divine holiness cherished by *the unrenewed mind*, in consequence of the sinfulness and darkness of the mind, fall infinitely short of what God is as the God of holiness.

Such is the Divine perfection to which we now bend our devout contemplation. We are profoundly sensible of the awesomeness and solemnity of our theme. The ground upon which we stand is, indeed, most holy, and we have need to put off the shoes from our feet, for "Who can stand before this holy Lord

God?" Only as we keep our eye upon atoning blood, can we for a moment gaze upon the unsufferable brightness of the God of holiness. Only can we deal with the Divine purity as we deal with the Divine Savior. The Great Atonement must come between us and the Divine Sun of infinite purity, or the effulgence of its beams would overpower and the holiness of its glory would consume us. Let us, standing beneath the shadow of the cross of Jesus, meditate upon this lofty theme; and thus, with our believing eye reposing upon the blood, which cleanses from all sin, we may pass within the veil, and sinful though we are, hold sweet fellowship with Him who "only is holy."

The passage upon which the present subject is based suggests the first thought we offer—that is, the ESSENTIAL HOLINESS of God. God is essentially holy. This must be the meaning of the remarkable words addressed to Him in the anthem of the glorified saints, "You only are holy," not holy merely as others are holy, but as positively and essentially holy, in comparison of whom none are holy. "You ONLY are holy." "You only are divinely holy, You only are holy, from the necessity of Your nature; You only are infinitely, absolutely holy." Such is the key-note, and such the substance of the triumphant song of Moses and the Lamb.

As there is none good but God, so there is none holy but God. His creatures are *derivatively holy*; He is holy from Himself—absolutely, independently holy. "No one is holy like the Lord! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God." 1 Samuel 2:2. In comparison of God, none are holy, so essentially pure and spotless is He. The heavens are not clean in His sight, and He charges His angels with folly. These are remarkable words! Just as the stars pale before the sun, creature holiness grows dim and is eclipsed by the divine and essential holiness of God. In comparison of His holiness, the holiest creatures and things are not clean in His sight.

It is said of God that, "He only has immortality." All created beings are immortal, but God is *absolutely* so. He only has immortality as an essential perfection of His nature. All others *derive their immortality* from Him; He from Himself. What a great and glorious being, then, is God! He is "*glorious in holiness.*" He could possess no glory were He destitute of perfect holiness. Divine in His nature, endowed with infinite perfections, and possessing resources vast and boundless as His infinity, imagine what a being He would be—how powerful for evil, how potent for destruction—were not every perfection of His nature imbued with, and under the control of, infinite and perfect holiness!

We measure the extent of a fallen creature's capacity for good or for evil by the amount of his intellectual and moral resources. In proportion to his ability to control the minds, shape the opinions and influence the actions of others, we regard the extent of evil or of good he is capable of accomplishing.

Imagine, then, measured by this rule, *what a being God would be were He destitute of perfect holiness while yet armed with infinite power!* It is the fallen intellect of Satan that gives him the almost omnipotent power and unlimited range which He possesses. All the perfections of God would arm Him with tremendous forces for evil, bounded and restrained only by the universe He had formed and the creatures He had made, were He not a being infinite in holiness, spotless in purity. Compared with His, the intellect of Satan would be a dwarf's, his wisdom idiotic, his strength an infant's. But we need not attempt to imagine what God would be destitute of infinite purity; rather let us think what a being He is "glorious in holiness."

Who that has seen anything of the beauty, and has felt anything of the power, and has tasted anything of the happiness of holiness, would for a moment cherish the wish that God were less holy than He is? Rather, is it not the intense desire and fervent prayer and ardent struggle of the renewed soul to be holy as God is holy? Sinful though we are, conscious of innumerable infirmities, failures, and backslidings, is not our highest bliss to commune with, and to be in some degree assimilated to, the spotless purity of God? When are we so happy as when breathing after divine purity, overcoming sin, "yielding our members servants to righteousness," "perfecting holiness in the fear of God"? Not for thousands of worlds would we that He were less holy.

The deeper our views of His holiness grow, the deeper grows our love. We love the truth, because it is on the side of holiness; we love the saints, because they are the reflection of holiness; we love the discipline of our heavenly Father, because it makes us partakers of His holiness; how much more intense, then, our affection for God, as the holiness of His being, the purity of His character, unveils to our admiring eye!

A question, often asked, may possibly here arise in the mind of the reader. *If God is essentially holy, and could have prevented sin, why, then, did He permit it?* The entrance of sin into the world is one of those mysterious problems in its marvelous history, the solution of which awaits us in the world to come. The brief space at present at our command, will only allow us to meet this question by a single and simple reply. Sin entered into the world, not by God's

approving, but by His *permissive* will. He was under no obligation either to prevent its origin or to hinder its advent. Where an obligation exists, ceasing to act when that action would prevent a crime were unquestionably to sin. An individual receiving from another the confession that he was about to commit a deadly crime, and yet, under the professed seal of secrecy, takes no steps to prevent its commission, is but one remove from the actual guilt of the crime itself; the concealer of the murder is well-near as criminal as the perpetrator of the deed. He is under a moral obligation to disclose the intended crime and denounce the criminal. He is bound by the tie of a common humanity, equally by the law of a common charity, to avert the deed and save the victim.

But God stands in a totally different relation to His creatures. He was under no such obligation to prevent the entrance of sin into the world. If He was, to whom? and what was the nature of the obligation? Let the speculatist reply. To him we must leave the solution of *the problem of sin's introduction*, satisfied with the only rational conclusion at which the Bible warrants our arrival, that God permitted it, and permitted it for His own glory. Let not your mind, my reader, be perplexed with what must be regarded—without insinuating anything of a skeptical character to those who raise these questions—but as *speculative discussions*. "There are secret things that belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and our descendants forever, so that we may obey these words of the law."

Let us be satisfied with, and be profoundly grateful for, the clearness with which God has revealed to us the way by which, as sinners, we may be saved. That Jesus Christ died for the ungodly, and by the love He has displayed, and the mission He has undertaken, and the work He has finished, and the invitation He has issued, is pledged to cast out none who believe in Him, saving to the uttermost, and without a work of their own, all who come unto God by Him.

Let this, too, be a matter of joy and thanksgiving to us, that the most appalling event which the history of this universe records—the fall of man—has, through infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, *resulted in such a manifestation of God's glory, and in such a great and endless blessing to man, as could not possibly have been the case even had sin never entered into the world*. Assured of this, let us refer all that is obscure and mysterious and speculative in the history of the world, and in the revelation and government of God, to that day when we shall know even as we are known, when the mystery of God shall be finished, and God be all in all.

God is also **DECLARATIVELY HOLY**—His word is a revelation of His holiness. *He is styled*—"the Holy One;" "The Holy One of Israel, whose name is Holy;" "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity;" "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;" "The four living creatures rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." God selects this perfection of His nature *to swear by*—"Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David;" "The Lord will swear by His holiness." *The saints are called to praise His holiness*—"Sing unto the Lord, O you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness."

Need we multiply these Scripture declarations of God's holiness? We might increase the proofs, but could scarcely strengthen the revealed fact that *God is holy*. And yet, in these days of low views of Inspiration, of lax principles concerning the truth of the Bible, we should be jealous of every word of that sacred volume, especially as it bears upon what is the crown of Jehovah—His essential and perfect holiness.

Beware, my reader, of indulging in doubts concerning the divine veracity or the correct rendering of any part of God's word. The most profound human judgment is after all, but fallible, and human learning often contradictory. The safest path is to accept the Bible as it is, and not to allow your confidence in its Divine integrity to be disturbed by this rendering or by that, by one manuscript or by another; but to hold fast the memorable and precious declaration of the Savior—a declaration which may be fearlessly asserted in the face of every doubt cast upon the Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures—"Your Word is Truth."

God is **JUDICIALLY HOLY**. *His judgments are manifestations of His holiness—His holiness in dreadful exercise*. "The Lord is known by the judgments which He executes. What was the *flood* which destroyed the Antediluvians—the *fire* which consumed Sodom and Gomorrah—the *armies* which besieged Jerusalem, and leveled her to the ground, but the *dreadful exhibitions* of the holiness of God, solemn demonstrations of His hatred and punishment of sin? In this light we must ever read and interpret the Divine judgments that befall an ungodly world, whether in its natural, social, or individual character. And yet, blinded by sin and ignorance, the men of this world see not this solemn fact.

Never rising above the second causes of the judiciary dealings of God—the

pestilence and the famine, the earthquake, the whirlwind and the fire, the commercial panic, and the blighted harvest—they recognize not the fact that, far above the immediate and proximate causes leading to these natural and social convulsions, there is One of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity, whether it be in an individual, a family, or a nation, and who, when His patience has long waited, but in vain, and will wait no longer, unseals the vials of His wrath, and writes His name *holy* in letters of tremendous and impressive significance.

It is in this light we read the expressive declaration of the prophet, "When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness." Isaiah 26:9. That is, God's judgments are such unmistakable and tremendous demonstrations of His holiness, that the ungodly world shall recognize the fact, and from these terrible visitations of His providence learn to loathe themselves in His sight, to repent of their sins, and renounce their iniquities, and turn to the Lord.

My reader! is the Lord dealing with you individually in the way of judgment? Has He "Uncovered his bow, and called for many arrows?" Do His arrows fall thick and piercing? Is there the loss of health, or the destruction of property, or the visitation of bereavement? Is your song of judgment as well as of mercy? Oh! interpret these dispensations of God in the light of a holy and righteous, yet loving discipline, designed to correct an evil, to arrest a declension, and to bestow upon you the highest honor God could confer—the making you a partaker of His holiness. "This," says the prophet, "is all the fruit, to take away sin."

God is also **MEDIATORIALY HOLY**. This illustration of our subject presents a more solemn and impressive view of the Divine holiness than any we have yet considered—the view exhibited in *the cross of Jesus*. Not hell itself, awful and eternal as is its suffering—the undying worm, the unquenchable fire, the smoke of the torment that goes up forever and ever—affords such a solemn and impressive spectacle of the holiness and justice of God in the punishment of sin, as is presented in the death of God's beloved Son.

An eminent Puritan writer thus strikingly puts it—"Not all the vials of judgment that have or shall be poured out upon this wicked world, nor the flaming furnace of a sinner's conscience, nor the irrevocable sentence pronounced against the rebellious devils, nor the groans of the damned

creatures, give such a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, as *the wrath of God let loose upon His Son!*"

Never did Divine holiness appear more beautiful and lovely than at the time our Savior's countenance was most marred in the midst of His dying groans. This Himself acknowledges in that penitential psalm (Ps. 22:12), when God turned His smiling face from Him, and thrust His sharp knife into His heart, which forced that terrible cry from Him, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me? But, You are holy." Such an impressive view of God's holiness the angels in heaven never before beheld, not even when they saw the non-elect spirits hurled from the heights of glory down to the bottomless pit, to be reserved in chains of darkness and woe forever.

But it will be asked, Wherein did lay the great proof that God was holy in the soul-sorrow, bodily suffering, and ignominious death of Jesus? We answer—It is found in the fact that He was *the innocent One dying for the guilty*, the holy One dying for the sinful. Divine justice, in its mission of judgment, as it swept by the cross, found the Son of God impaled upon its wood, beneath the sins and the curse of His people. Upon Him its judgment fell, on His soul the wrath was poured, in His heart the flaming sword was plunged; and thus, from Him, justice exacted the full penalty of man's transgression—the last farthing of the great debt.

Go to the cross, then, my reader, and learn the holiness of God.

Contemplate the dignity of Christ's person, the preciousness of the Son of God to His Father's heart, the sinlessness of His nature; and then behold the sorrow of His soul, the torture of His body, the tragedy of His death, the abasement, the ignominy, the humiliation, into the fathomless depths of which the whole transaction plunged our incarnate God; and let me ask, standing, as you are, before *this unparalleled spectacle*, Can you cherish low views of God's holiness, or light views of your own sinfulness?

But look at this mediatorial representation of the Divine holiness in two or three particulars. The PARDON OF SIN exhibits the holiness of God. How is sin pardoned? By the atoning blood of Jesus alone. "In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sin." There is no remission of any sin but by the atoning blood of Christ; while, by that blood-shedding, there is the remission of all sin in those that believe. That which cleanses us from all sin, must itself be free from all sin. The slightest taint of

sin in Christ would have invalidated His whole sacrifice, and have rendered His atoning blood totally inefficacious in the cancelling of our guilt. But we are "redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb *without blemish and without spot.*"

And herein God's holiness appears so conspicuous, in that He provided a spotless victim, a sinless sacrifice, a holy Savior; thus, while securing the rights of holiness on the one hand, on the other cleansing and effacing, fully and forever, the deepest stain of man's transgression. And now, because God is so holy, and because He has vindicated, to the utmost, the righteousness of His moral government, behold Him "waiting to be gracious," "ready to pardon" the vilest, the guiltiest, the very chief of sinners, casting himself, in penitence and faith, at His feet. And in thus extending to that penitent sinner a full and free forgiveness, He receives and magnifies His own holiness in the eyes of angels and of men. Thus the apostle puts it; "For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us. God was being entirely fair and just when he did not punish those who sinned in former times."

Hesitate not, then, to cast yourself upon God's pardoning mercy in Christ Jesus, since, in the very act of conferring upon you the forgiveness of all sin, His holiness will appear all the more illustrious. Oh, the marvelous love of our God in providing such an expedient as can efface *every*, and the *darkest* spot, and the *foulest* stain, and the *deepest* dishonor of sin, presenting the sin-cleansed soul to Himself "whiter than snow," and yet the sinner's sins appear all the more sinful, and His holiness all the more holy. "But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared."

JUSTIFICATION equally secures and illustrates the holiness of God. Our justification—in other words, our *acquittal from all blame and consequent condemnation*—could only be secured on the footing of the perfect holiness of God's government. But the obedience of the Lord Jesus to the law on behalf of the sinner was so complete, yes, so magnifying of the holiness of that law, and so honorable to the character of the Lawgiver, that now it becomes proper, on the part of God, to "justify the ungodly." He can do this without the slightest compromise of His divine and essential purity.

The righteousness in which the believing sinner stands, is emphatically denominated the "righteousness of God." Consequently, it must be a holy

righteousness, since not only is it a righteousness of God's *appointing*, and of God's *accepting*, but it is the righteousness of Him who was God, and who is God. In contrast with this, how impure appears *our own obedience*, how *filthy* the rags of our own righteousness! And, if we accept this righteousness of God, how entirely must we cast away from us *the imperfect, sullied, worthless garment of our own righteousness*, and enfold ourselves within that divine robe of the "righteousness of God, which is unto all and upon all those who believe."

REGENERATION, or *the spiritual renewal of the soul*, is a not less, in some respects, it is a more, striking illustration of the Divine holiness. It is so, in point of fact, since it is *the restoration of man to the image of God*, and, consequently, the manifestation of God's holiness in man. How clearly the apostle states this: "And that you put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him." The writer already quoted thus pointedly puts this; "As *election* is the effect of God's sovereignty, our *pardon* the fruit of His mercy, our *knowledge* a stream from His wisdom, our *strength* an impression of His power, so our *purity* is a beam from His holiness."

The great, the grand end, the accomplishment of which is the design of God in our spiritual regeneration, is our *restoration to holiness*. Thus, *God designs more than our happiness*, since, in making us holy, He makes us happy; in restoring us to holiness, He restores us to happiness—the one including the other, as the effect involves its cause, the shadow its substance. God might have assimilated us to His *love*, or to His *mercy*, or to His *power*, or to His *wisdom*, and yet, leaving our nature to the uncontrolled power and dominion of its innate depravity, we still would have been miserable. But, in assimilating us to His *holiness*, He assimilates us, in a measure, to His *happiness*—the highest happiness of heaven being its highest degree of holiness. The perfection of glory is the perfection of grace, and the perfection of grace is its perfect assimilation of the soul to the holy image of God.

It will, I think, be obvious to the mind of the spiritual and intelligent reader, that in this view of the Divine holiness we include the Godhead in its Triune personality—the holiness of the Father, the holiness of the Son, the holiness of the Spirit—the Three Persons constituting the One Holy Lord God. Christ was *essentially holy* concerning His Deity, and He was *perfectly holy* concerning His humanity. How remarkable the words of the angel announcing

Christ's birth to Mary! "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby born to you will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God." Yes, Christ, who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," and because He was thus without sin, and "knew no sin", His atoning, precious blood, "cleanses us from all sin."

Equally holy is the Spirit. Therefore He is emphatically designated "The HOLY Spirit," "the Spirit of holiness." The Spirit is the Sanctifier of the church, the Divine Author, Sustainer, and Finisher of all that is holy in the regenerate, to whom belongs the work of fitting their souls for the inheritance of the saints in light. Hold fast with unswerving faith this essential doctrine of salvation—the doctrine of the Trinity. Its belief is essential to our being saved, its *experimental acquaintance* is indispensable to our being holy. And may "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit," be with all those who believe this doctrine simply, who live it holily, and who earnestly contend for its truth as for the faith once delivered unto the saints!

But we must *conclude* this subject, thus briefly and imperfectly discussed, with some deductions drawn therefrom.

It supplies us with THE REASON OF MAN'S NATURAL OPPOSITION TO GOD. *The sinner hates God because He is holy!* "For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will." Sin can never be enamored with holiness, nor can holiness ever hold fellowship with sin. There must therefore ever be—until divine and sovereign grace interpose—a *wide and impassable gulf between God and the sinner*, God's holiness loathing the sinner, because of his sin; man's sinfulness hating God, because of His holiness.

Can anything present a more just and melancholy view of the awful condition of the natural man than this—*hating God because He is holy!* Unconverted man, this is your state! Your carnal mind is hostile against God, and will continue its hatred and rebellion, unless converting grace changes you; *or* until your spirit stands before Him in judgment. And then you will wake up to the awful discovery that all your life long you have been fighting against God; but that it proved an unequal, as it was an unholy, contest; and that at last God proved stronger than you, and has gotten the victory; consigning you to a righteous and an endless condemnation.

In view of this statement *what is your proper and immediate course?* In one word would I state it—throw down your weapons of rebellion, submit and be reconciled to God. To hate this holy Lord God, whose name is love, is the deepest crime! *To fight against Him who is infinite in power and omnipotent in strength, is the deepest madness.* Think of the appalling consequences! Think of Him who has power to cast both soul and body into hell. Think who it is you hate and against whom you rebel—the God who *made* you, who *preserves* you, who has *fed and clothed* you, who has lavished upon you every blessing, who has poured in ceaseless flow, the tide of His mercy around your every path, who has never wronged you, or injured you, or done you harm, but has always blessed you with nothing but good!

And yet, instead of love, you return Him *hate*; instead of obedience, you meet Him with *rebellion*; instead of submission, you offer Him *defiance*; instead of His heaven, you prefer His *hell*! For in your present state you are *utterly unfitted for heaven*! It is written with the pen of the Holy Spirit, "Without *holiness* no man can see the Lord." Heaven, therefore, would be too holy for your enjoyment. You would have no moral fitness for the place, no sympathy with its enjoyments, no love for its inhabitants, and would long to escape as from an atmosphere too pure in which to breathe, from employments in which you would have no taste, and from the fellowship of beings with whom you had nothing in sympathy.

Oh, fall down before God in penitence and prayer. Throw down your weapons at His feet, submit to His scepter, and cast yourself upon His pardoning mercy in and through Christ Jesus. Lo, He waits to be gracious to you. Listen to His affecting language, "All day long have I stretched out my hands." And in His infinite patience, in His unwillingness that any should perish, that hand is stretched out still. "Why! will you die? " "Be reconciled unto God."

But others of another class may scan these pages. The weeping penitent, through his blinding tears, will search for one word of promise from which he may extract assurance and hope that such a sinful, guilty soul may find forgiveness, acceptance, and salvation with this holy Lord God. Yes, there is forgiveness, there is acceptance, there is salvation, oh, humble, penitent sinner, in Christ Jesus, the Savior of sinners, *for you*! His blood cleanses from all sin, His righteousness justifies from all things; so that, in default of any holiness and merit *in yourself*, Jesus supplies you with all that God demands and that you require, and thus, in the strong language of the apostle, "You are complete in Him."

One word of caution in this connection. Beware of putting *sanctification* in the place of *justification*. Many are so doing, and the consequent effect is, they are ever striving after that which they can never in this way attain—a clear sense of their acceptance in Christ. It is not for a holiness wrought *in us* that God accepts us, but for a righteousness wrought *outside of us*; not on the ground of the Holy Spirit's work of *sanctification*, but on the ground of Christ's work of *justification*. Thus, to look at *our* holiness for Divine acceptance, instead of at Christ's work, is to substitute sanctification for justification, the Spirit's regenerating work for the Savior's atoning work. This will never give you peace and joy and hope, since all your own strivings after holiness—on the ground of which you are in vain looking for salvation—will prove but sad and repeated failures; while one believing sight of Christ, as "made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," will bring a blissful tide of peace, joy, and assurance unto your soul. Cease, then, your *strivings after holiness* in order to win the favor of God; and set yourself upon the great yet simple, the mighty yet easy, work of *believing*—believing in Jesus—and thus, "being justified by faith, you will have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And still, *it must be our aim to be holy!* But how is this to be attained? *We cannot be holy and be of the world.* We cannot be holy—it were a contradiction of terms—and live in any *known sin*. We cannot be holy and pamper *the flesh*, and love the society of the ungodly, and so walk after the course of this world. What does the apostle say? "Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you, for when you love the world, you show that you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only the lust for physical pleasure, the lust for everything we see, and pride in our possessions. These are not from the Father. They are from this evil world."

How earnest and touching the language of the apostle, "And so, dear Christian friends, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is." And yet again how precious his prayer for the Thessalonian saints, "Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes

again."

And is this our *desire*, this our *aim*, and this, in some degree, our *real attainment*? Are we hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Do we long and pant after holiness, with a deepening conviction of the "exceeding sinfulness of sin," and a growing spirit of self-loathing and sin-renunciation? Oh, then, we have the truest, the strongest *evidence*, that we are God's true saints, His holy ones; that we are regenerate, have passed from death unto life, and are born again from above, our bodies the temples of God, through the Spirit.

There exists not a stronger evidence—and without it, our religion is vain—of our being partakers of the Divine nature than this one—*our desire and aim after sanctification of heart, leading, as it inevitably will, to holiness of life*. "Blessed are the *pure in heart*, for they shall see God."

But *in all our failures in our strivings after holiness*—and failures many and sad there will be—let us repair to the "Fountain open for sin and uncleanness," and wash, constantly, daily, ceaselessly wash, and be clean. It is only thus that we shall be kept from a spirit of bondage, yes, from a spirit of despair. A simple looking *off ourselves*—off both our successful and our unsuccessful attempts after holiness—to *Jesus*, must be our constant habit, if we would walk at peace and in fellowship with God. To His atoning blood let us bring all our *holy things*, that they may be cleansed and purified.

Sin taints, impurity mars, imperfection traces, all we do for God. Thus, the most holy service in which we engage, the most heavenly mind we cherish, the most spiritual and useful day we spend, needs the atoning blood of Jesus to cleanse, purify, and present it without fault, holy, and acceptable unto God, sweetly incensed with the fragrance of His own most precious merits. How expressive is the typical teaching of this truth—referring to the mitre on the head of Aaron the priest—"Aaron will wear it on his forehead, thus bearing the guilt connected with any errors regarding the sacred offerings of the people of Israel. He must always wear it so the Lord will accept the people." Exodus 28:38. Thus Christ, our true Aaron, puts away the iniquity of our holy things by the cleansing of His precious blood.

See that your holiness is evangelical. Not the holiness of *human merit*, not the holiness of *pious duties*, not the holiness of *ceremonial observance*, not the holiness of *ritual*, but the holiness of the *Gospel*, the holiness that flows from

faith in Christ alone, from love to God, and by the grace and power of the Spirit in the soul. In a word, the holiness that springs in *looking away from self in every shape*, from duties of every kind, believably, simply, unto Jesus, embodied and expressed in obedience to Christ, under the all-commanding constraint of His love.

In the light of your personal holiness, interpret all the disciplinary dealings of God. All your trials, afflictions, bereavements, adversities, are sent as *corrections* of your heavenly Father but to promote your profit, that you might be a partaker of His holiness. "For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always right and good for us because it means we will *share in his holiness*. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way." "Then, Lord," you are ready to exclaim, "if this is *the great end of Your discipline*—if it be but to conform me to Your will, to expel sin from my heart, to imbue it with Your Spirit, and to mold me to Your Divine image, kindle the flame, fuel the furnace, use the flail, refine Your gold from the dross, and winnow Your wheat from the chaff—and let Your will, and not mine be done."

Anticipate the coming of the Lord, for "we know that, when He shall appear, *we shall be like Him*; for we shall see Him as He really is." O blissful thought, perfect and eternal freedom from sin!

"And now, may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, all that is pleasing to him. Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep by an everlasting covenant, signed with his blood. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen." Hebrews 13:20

THE GOD OF PEACE

"Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again." 1 Thes. 5:23

It is a striking and suggestive fact, that the Divine Perfection associated by the angels with their Advent Song when announcing the birth of Christ was, *the*

attribute of Peace. They might have placed in the forefront of their proclamation of glad tidings, the Love of God in originating, or the Wisdom of God in planning, or the Power of God in executing the great expedient of saving man by the Incarnation of the Son of God. But no! they bore from heaven to the inhabitants of a sin-tainted world over which the dark waters of the curse fiercely surged, *the olive branch of Peace.* Their mission was a mission of peace, their commission was to proclaim a divine amnesty—peace from heaven, peace with God, peace between God and man. Listen to their song—*how entrancing its strains* which broke the silence of that stilly night, and which floated in such melody over the plains of Bethlehem—Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and *peace* on earth to all whom God favors."

Such is the Divine perfection we invite you to consider—God not only *proposing* peace with the subjects of a revolted empire, not only *devising* the scheme by which a peace honorable to Himself and available by man may be received, but *revealing* Himself divinely and essentially as "the God of peace." Our subject is a great and comprehensive one, fraught with blessed instruction and hope to those who, convinced of their natural enmity against, and revolt from, God, are anxiously and earnestly inquiring how they may return to God, and in what way propitiate His regard and be at peace with Him.

About to celebrate, as we are, the Advent to our world of earth's Great Visitant—the Incarnate God, the Divine Savior of men—it will not be an inappropriate subject of meditation, the attribute and character of God as—"The God of Peace." The passage from where our subject is selected is a prayer of the apostle on behalf of the Thessalonian saints. He had been addressing to their minds holy and earnest exhortations, urging sanctity of heart and holiness of life to the extent even of avoiding the "appearance of evil." Then, as if remembering the *impotence* of these saints, unaided by a higher power, to reach the lofty standard he places before them, he concludes his exhortation with one of the most expressive and touching prayers ever breathed from mortal lips—"Now may *the God of peace* make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again."

What a prayer! what a motive! what an attainment!—perfect holiness unto the coming of the Lord! Thus the subject now engrossing our thoughts unites

with our personal and complete holiness the two Advents of Jesus—*the First Advent to make peace, and the Second Advent to consummate and crown it*. The subject is of vital importance and of precious interest. The great event of human life is, to be at peace with God. So long as there is variance and alienation between God and the soul—holiness on the part of God separating Him from the sinner; enmity on the part of the sinner placing him in antagonism to God—there can be no peace, reconciliation, or fellowship. "How can two walk together except they be agreed?"

Oh, it is of the utmost moment that we know, and clearly understand, *God's way of peace*. And that thus knowing it, we are found walking in it in all the sweet consciousness of perfect reconciliation with God, holiness of body, soul, and spirit, the natural and the blessed consequent and fruit. Let us, then, briefly address ourselves to the opening up of this important subject, showing in the first place IN WHAT SENSE WE ARE TO REGARD GOD AS THE "GOD OF PEACE" and then, if our space permits, considering the prayer of the apostle founded thereupon.

Our first remark relates to God as, essentially the "God of peace." There could be no revelation of God in this particular apart from this fact. Peace with man originated with God. It was a divine *thought*, as its mode was a divine *conception*, and its execution a divine *power*. But this could only have been the case as it found its property essentially in God. If peace had not been a divine inherent, an essential perfection of God, no proposition of peace with men could have obtained a moment's hearing, and no expedient for its accomplishment the slightest shadow of success. Herein is seen the overflowing of God's mercy and grace to sinners!

With the injured, the outraged One—with Him against whom the appalling crime of revolt had been committed, against whose Being and government the sinner had uplifted his arm of treason and defiance, and poured out his deadly hate; originated the conception and the expedient, the offer and the proclamation of peace! Could this possibly have been the case had not peace been an essential perfection and quality of His nature? Oh, it is delightful, beloved, to trace the *springs*, the *rivulets*, the *rivers* of salvation up to the Divine and Infinite Ocean from where they flowed. To see GOD in our salvation, to refer it to His very essence, to know that, because He is what He is, there is salvation for the most lost of our race, pardon for the guiltiest sinner, peace for the greatest rebel that ever defied the power, trampled upon the authority, insulted the Majesty, and denied the very existence of God.

How earnestly and impressively has God Himself vindicated this perfection of His being, as if jealous of its existence and anxious to assure the mind of the rebel sinner that if he but return from the error of his ways, relinquishing his hostility, and grounding his weapons of rebellion, he shall find no hand outstretched towards him but *the divine hand of peace*. "Fury is not in me; who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. These enemies will be spared only if they surrender and beg for peace and protection." Thus God declares that He is not an angry God, but a God of peace, all day long stretching out His hand to a gainsaying and rebellious race, waiting to be gracious. Oh, what a God is our God!

As ORIGINATING AND DEVISING THE PLAN OF PEACE with sinners, He is the "God of peace." The negotiation of peace between God and man could only have its origin in God Himself. The thought of a reconciliation between the offended Creator and the offending creatures, no created mind, human or angelic, would ever have conceived; to a creature's eye, the breach appears too great ever to be repaired, the gulf too wide ever to be passed; the difficulties in the way of a reconciliation of too vast proportions ever to be overcome. *Divine justice must be perfectly satisfied, Divine holiness perfectly secured, the Divine government fully upheld, the Divine law honored and magnified.* What mere *created* mediator, what arbitrator less than Divine, could have met and answered this demand? Who shall reveal Jehovah as the God of peace? Who shall loosen the seals of His decrees, and make known His eternal thoughts of reconciliation and peace to man?

Ah! angels and men might have wept through eternity before the divine, the impenetrable secret had been discovered, if the "God of peace" had not assumed the initiative in the great matter; if He had not taken the first and only effectual step in declaring to the fallen world that He had looked within Himself, and there found, in the person of His beloved Son, dwelling in the bosom of the Father from all eternity, *the Peace-maker between God and man*, even the man Christ Jesus.

We cannot be too conversant with the truth that, "Salvation is of the Lord." While there is, essentially, the human element in our redemption, there is, and must as essentially be, the Divine element. All God's works are impressed with His divinity, all "declare His eternal power and Godhead"—from the atom dancing in the sunbeam, to the Alp piercing the clouds—from the hyssop that

springs out of the wall, to the cedar tree that is in Lebanon—all witness to the wisdom, power, and goodness of Him who made them. Is it to be supposed, then, that His greatest, His master-achievement—that work which reveals and illustrates, unites and harmonizes, every perfection—of His being and attribute of His character, every thought of His mind and feeling of His heart—the redemption of man by the Incarnation obedience and death of the Son of God—should not be so manifestly a Divine work as shall awaken the homage and praise of His own people, and as shall extort, even from His enemies, the tribute of their wonder and admiration?

It is no light thing, beloved, to have our faith well confirmed in the Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures of truth, and in *the Divine origin of the salvation of the Church*. In no other work of our God does He appear so full-orbed in every perfection as here. Here is no shading, no obscuration of our Divine Sun. In the work of creation God is, as it were, in partial eclipse. We see only parts of His ways, His "back parts." But in the salvation of the cross, in the great expedient by which peace, reconciliation, and love are restored between God and man, God is seen in His full meridian majesty, every perfection of His being exhibited, every attribute of His character revealed—His mind and heart fully unveiled.

What confidence does this give to the poor, trembling faith of the soul that ventures itself upon Christ, that humbly sues for pardon and peace at the cross of Jesus! Because salvation is of the Lord, and because the blood that cleanses is the "blood of God", and because the righteousness that justifies is the "righteousness of God", therefore Jesus is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. We are fully justified, yes, commanded, unhesitatingly to accept the peace God has provided, and Christ has made, and the Spirit imparts, on the ground that our God is the "God of peace." If He from whom we have so deeply revolted, and against whom we have so greatly sinned, is the first to make the overture of peace, the first to extend the olive branch of amity, who are we that we should disbelieve and hesitate, demur and refuse? Will not our very refusal fully to accept in humble faith and gratitude the reconciliation God has provided, increase our sin and augment our punishment? Away, then, with all vain excuses and puerile fears concerning your warrant in the Gospel to accept the overture of God's pardoning mercy in Christ Jesus, and, in the language of the apostle, "Be *reconciled* to God."

This conducts us to an essential part of our subject—GOD'S METHOD OF

PEACE, the plan of reconciliation by which He has written His name as the "God of peace," as He nowhere else has written it. Concerning the **NECESSITY** of a Divine plan of peace, we need not enlarge. We must rather, seeing our space is limited, and how important it is that we have scriptural and clear views of God's way of peace, *assume* the fact as proved, than *attempt its proof*. All that we can venture to state is, that the wide severance between God and man created by the fall, renders a Divine method of reconciliation necessary, if peace be at all restored.

Prior to the fall, all was love and fellowship between the Creator and the creature. Every faculty of man was in harmony and communion with every perfection of God. The reign of perfect holiness was the reign of perfect love. Oh, what a paradise of peace and beauty was Eden! Not an alienated affection, or a discordant feeling, or a dissonant thought, or a jarring note! The song of peace filled every grove with melody, and the aroma of love every bower with sweetness. Oh, what will the New, the renovated Earth and Heaven be when sin shall be extirpated, love restored, and peace enshroud with her balmy wings a world in which will dwell righteousness!

But we have now to deal with a *fallen* race, a *depraved* nature. God is at variance with man, on the ground of Holiness, Justice, and Truth, and until these perfections of His nature are honored, and harmonized with Love, Mercy, and Grace, there can be no reconciliation on His part with man. Such is the wide and terrible breach, such the two extremes of being—the *Infinitely holy* and the *totally sinful*—between whom a reconciliation is to be effected. And how shall this breach be healed? By what expedient shall beings so opposite in nature, so extreme in purity, be reconciled and brought into a state of at-one-ment, without compromising holiness on the one hand, or in the least degree condoning the offence on the other? Such was the great problem the solution of which Deity alone could supply.

An expression of the inspired apostle gives us a clue to the unravelment of the great and glorious mystery. "God was in Christ *reconciling* the world unto Himself." Here we are at once referred to Christ as embarking in the great work of the Peacemaker, undertaking and accomplishing His divine and pacific mission. Hence to Him belong, and most justly, the high and honorable titles of, "Our Peace," "The Prince of Peace," "The Arbitrator, laying His hands on both." It was the greatest work He ever embarked in, the adjustment of the claims of justice, holiness, and truth, with the yearnings of love, mercy, and grace, so as to maintain the dignity of God's moral

government intact, and yet effect a full and perfect reconciliation between God and man.

But our divine and gracious Peacemaker—blessings forever on His name!—was in all respects fitted for the undertaking. Absolutely divine, God could negotiate terms of peace, through His beloved Son, strictly honorable and glorifying to Himself. Perfectly human, He was fitted to undertake the work of making peace on the part of man, and He is denominated the "One (and there is only One) *Mediator* between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." Thus our beloved Lord partook of the nature of both the parties between whom He mediated. As God, He mediated for God; as man, He mediated for man.

The question arises, 'In what way does the Lord Jesus become our peace?' The answer to this question leads us at once to the great plan of atonement. He presented to God a full, honorable, and accepted Atonement for our transgression. The only thing that could separate between God and man was *sin*. This removed—removed in a way that would secure the interests of justice and holiness—peace was made. By the offering of Himself as a sacrifice for sin, by His obedience to the law, and by His death-penalty to justice, He presented a full *equivalent* to all the demands of the divine government, bearing our sins, suffering, bleeding, dying, and so making peace by the blood of His cross.

And now, by the great sacrifice of Christ once for all, we are one with God, one with Him in mind, one in affection, one in will, one in fellowship, God and the believing sinner brought into a state of at-one-ment by the Atonement of "Christ who is our peace." "But now you belong to Christ Jesus. Though you once were far away from God, now you have been brought near to him because of the blood of Christ. For Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us. By his death he ended the whole system of Jewish law that excluded the Gentiles. His purpose was to make peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new person from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. He has brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and to us Jews who were near."

The great practical question which arises at this stage of our subject is, does God stand TO US in the relation of the "God of peace?" Is He at peace with

us through Christ Jesus, and are we at peace with Him? It is of the utmost moment that we believe and are sure that our peace is made with God, and that we are in a state of friendship with Him. This peace is not a thing made by us—for no sinner can make his own peace with God—it is a peace made by Christ the Mediator for all those who believe, and is available to us as we accept the terms of God's reconciliation, which are that we believe in Him whom He has sent. "This is the commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ."

You earnestly desire to know that you are on terms of amity with God, and perhaps have long sought to possess the precious, priceless jewel of peace in your soul—its divine and richest treasure. Your heart is dissatisfied, your mind is anxious, your conscience far from repose. You regard God more in the light of an angry, offended God, than of a reconciled Father. You obey Him from slavish fear, rather than from filial love. His commands are as a heavy yoke to your neck, rather than wings to your soul, bearing it onward and upward in the path of filial obedience and heavenly joy. The great want and craving of your soul is—peace, peace with God.

Everywhere and earnestly have you in vain sought to meet this want, and have failed. You have sought it in the diligent and successful pursuit of *wealth*, and "your gold and your silver is cankered; and their rust is a witness against you." You have sought it in the *pleasures and gaieties* of the world, and you but "sowed to the wind and have reaped the whirlwind." You sought it in the love and fellowship of the *creature*, and God shattered the vase, and the beautiful flower faded. You sought it in the walks of *literature*, in the researches of *science*, and in the creations of *art*, but the shadow of peace fled your grasp, and left your heart colder and more desolate than ever. You have perhaps sought it in the less pure and refined enjoyments of lust, and the fruit you plucked from the upas tree of sin, fair and inviting as it was, has proved bitter as the apples of Sodom.

But, make one effort more in a new and an opposite direction—seek it in Christ, and seeking, you will find it. The moment that your penitent and believing heart accepts Jesus as your Savior, the Lord as your righteousness, Christ's sacrifice as your hope, you will then have found repose from the oppressive consciousness of guilt, release from the galling tyranny of sin, deliverance from the fear of death and the dread of judgment.

Again, that which more immediately brings peace into the sin-wounded and

guilt-troubled conscience is, **THE PEACE-SPEAKING BLOOD OF CHRIST**. The blood of Abel called for vengeance; the blood of Jesus pleads for pardon, and speaks peace. *There is no balm for the wounded conscience but the Atonement, no healer but Christ, and no healing but His blood.* All other remedies cry, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace"—it must be Christ, and Christ only. All your *legal endeavors*, all your *religious duties*, all your *pious alms* and *ceremonial observances*, will bring no real healing to your conscience, no true peace to your mind, no divine joy and comfort to your soul. *Your peace with God must be procured by the cross, and must flow from the wounds of Jesus*, in whom God is reconciled and pacified for all that we have done. And now, God's command is, "Let him take hold of my strength (Christ), and be at peace with me; and he shall be at peace."

The few remaining pages of the present chapter must be a reply to the question—to whom does the "God of peace," through Christ, speak peace? God speaks peace, through Christ, **TO THE SIN-TROUBLED SOUL**. If it were possible for God to regard one gracious soul with a deeper interest and more especial favor than another, it is the soul of whom He thus speaks "The high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, the Holy One, says this: "I live in that high and holy place with those whose spirits are contrite and humble. I refresh the humble and give new courage to those with repentant hearts." "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word."

Can you, my reader, discern in your soul any reflection, however faint, of this gracious character? Do you see in yourself some lineaments of resemblance, however faint, to this divinely-drawn, this gracious portrait? Are you humbled in the dust for sin, seeing and confessing at the cross your nothingness, emptiness and poverty? Then, God extends to you, in Christ Jesus, the scepter of peace, and bids you approach, touch it and be at peace with Him. There exists not in the heart of God in Christ Jesus an unappeased feeling or an angry thought towards a poor, broken-hearted sinner. His marvelous language towards you is, "I know the thoughts I think towards you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of anger." Cheer up, then, sin-distressed, guilt-burdened soul! God is at peace with you in Jesus, and it is your high and holy privilege to walk in a sense of pardoned sin, of Divine acceptance, and gracious adoption, your heart singing in the ways of the Lord, as you travel homeward, to be forever with Christ.

God in Christ speaks peace to the afflicted soul. What does He say to such?—

"O you afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted; I, even I, am He that comforts you. As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you." Beloved, it is worth all the tempest and billows through which we pass, to see Jesus coming to us in the dark night of our woe, walking upon the broken waves of our sorrow, and saying, "It is I; do not be afraid. Peace, be still."

Yes, even the winds and the waves of soul-distress, of heart-sorrow, of life's adversities, obey Him! The voice of Jesus quells the storm of sin's conviction, stills the tempest of life's adversity, calms the troubled mind, and peace, like a river, flows into the soul. If, then, God is leading you through deep and dark billows, if He is feeding you with the "bread and the water of affliction," and His discipline is such as to drape the serene and sunny picture of life with cloud-veil and storm, believe, only believe, that, when the "floods have lifted up their voice, the floods lift up their waves," the voice of Jesus "on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yes, than the mighty waves of the sea," and that, in the greatest perplexity, in the most overwhelming calamity, in the profoundest grief, He will speak peace to your soul; and "when He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?"

And, amid the corroding cares of domestic life, the anxieties of business, the pressure of need, the forebodings of evil, the foreshadowing of calamity, the distant mutterings of some gathering storm, how peacefully God in Christ can keep you! And when the "strife of tongues," the envenomed tooth of malice, the whisperings of envy, the spirit of jealousy and all uncharitableness would wound your heart, destroy your peace, and rob you of comfort—assailing character, reputation, usefulness—God, your reconciled Father, will put you within the curtained pavilion of His love, in the secret place of His perfections, and keep you there, safe, calm, and even cheerful, until the calamity be passed. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You; because he trusts in You."

This page may meet the eye of some who are postponing the great matter of their peace and reconciliation with God to a dying hour, or, perhaps, to a period beyond it, when they vainly suppose that their good works will already have preceded them to eternity, as pleas and arguments with God. False and fatal delusion! My reader, your peace, if ever made with the holy Lord God, must be made in this world. If death cites you to God's bar with the weapons of rebellion against Him in your grasp, with all the signs of hatred and treason against God staring and thick upon you, your doom of woe is irrevocably fixed "where the worm never dies, and the fire is unquenched."

If you are not at peace with God through Christ Jesus here, you will be at war with Him, and He with you forever hereafter. The kingdom of heaven is entered in this world, and as we grow in grace, we have a more abundant entrance into it now, until the white-robed angel of death comes, and opens the door of our imprisoned soul, and we ascend fully and triumphantly to enter into it in glory. Hasten, then, to be at peace with God by accepting Christ in faith. The blood of Christ applied to your soul alone can bring you to a state of peace with God. *No doings of your own, no human merit, no religious rites and ceremonial, will bring peace to your soul.* You may travel from Church to Church, from minister to minister, from duty to duty, from ordinance to ordinance, and each and all will exclaim, "Peace is not in us."

But go just as you are to Jesus; wash by faith in His peace-speaking, conscience-healing blood, and "the peace of God, which passes all understanding," will flow in gentle waves into your soul. "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny." Oh, then, accept without a moment's delay God's way of peace, and lay not your head upon your pillow until you have thrown down your weapons of rebellion and have become reconciled to Him through Christ Jesus. Oh, to die an enemy of God! Oh, to meet Him with hate in the heart, and with the weapons of defiance in the hand! What will He say? "And now about these enemies of mine who didn't want me to be their king—bring them in and execute them right here in my presence."

HAVE YOU LOST YOUR PEACE? Rest not until it is restored by a renewed application of the peace-restoring blood of Christ to your conscience. You may have broken your covenant of peace with God, but He has not broken His covenant of peace made with you in the Son of His love, and never will. "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the Lord that has mercy on you."

Avail yourself of the rich and precious legacy of peace Jesus your Mediator and Surety has bequeathed you in His last Will and Testament. The terms of this covenant are—"peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it

be afraid." Christ's last thoughts and words and deeds were those of peace. Present your claim and ask your share of this precious, priceless bequest, for if you believe in and love Him, you may be assured that He remembered you in His Will, and left you this legacy. And as He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven for the express purpose of being His own Administrator, He is prepared, in answer to your prayer, as "the God of peace Himself, to give you peace always, by all means."

Is God pacified towards you for all that you have done for Christ's sake? Then seek to cultivate **PEACE WITH YOUR FELLOW-CREATURES**. You cannot walk in the sweet enjoyment of God's peace, and harbor at the same moment in your heart hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness towards a fellow-being, especially a fellow-saint. Impossible! Go and be reconciled to your brother. Make your peace with your sister. Confess your own fault, and forgive his or hers. Think of the infinite patience of God towards you; think of the ten thousand talents which you owed, but which He has cancelled; of the "seventy times seven" which He has forgiven you; of the peace and joy of His pardoning love, so often shed abroad in your heart; and think of a dying hour, and of the final and eternal meeting in heaven with your brother, and go and extend to him the olive branch of peace, and forgive him, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.

Strive to promote **FAMILY PEACE**. Be a peacemaker there! It is one of the saddest pictures of domestic life, and one of the most painful and humiliating evidences of fallen humanity—the strifes and feuds, the enmity, alienation, and division, which too often are seen marring and shading the domestic circle. The smallest trifles will be allowed to engender differences of judgment and alienation of affections and unholy jealousies of heart, where there should exist the most perfect confidence, the freest communion, and the warmest and holiest love. A picture, a jewel, a piece of plate, a slight misunderstanding, after death has removed the family head and broken up the domestic circle, has often been allowed to sever and separate those who, as the ties of family lessened one by one, should but have drawn all the closer together in affection, union, and sympathy. Do all, then, that is in your power to cultivate in yourself, and to promote in others, family peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."

CHRISTIAN UNION among the members of different branches of Christ's one Church is a sweet fruit of our peace with God through Christ. "The God of peace" has but one Family, and but one Church; and it is His will that members of this one Family and of this one Church should "lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit, and bind yourselves together with peace. We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future."

Thus walking in Christian love and union with Christ's members of other communions than our own, we shall walk worthy of, and glorify Christ, bring peace into our own souls, and impart extension and strength to the bond of peace which should knit and unite in one mystical body the whole Church of the elect. Oh, were the peace of God more in our own souls, our aim would ever be to "live peaceably with all men," especially with the "household of faith." We should not think that we are coming down from some high altitude of ecclesiastical eminence, and are conferring a distinction and an obligation on a Christian Church, or on a Christian brother, by the extension of our right hand of fellowship and love; but that we were honoring ourselves, and, above all, were honoring Christ, by cultivating the "communion of saints" with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

And what a PRAYER does the apostle blend with this expressive title of our God! He prays for the *entire sanctification* of the Thessalonian saints: "Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again." Who that has felt the peace of God flowing through Christ into his soul longs not to experience the answer to this prayer for holiness in his own soul? The believer, standing between the two Advents of Christ, finds in both the most powerful persuasives to universal holiness. From the cross of Jesus, where the Prince of Peace died, and from the throne of Jesus, where the Prince of Peace lives, he draws the most, powerful motives to yield himself up unto God, body, soul, and spirit. The *cross*, in its dying love, and the *throne* in its living, glory, constrain him to "deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live godly, righteously, and soberly in this present world."

Thus, while our God is the "God of peace," He is the God of holiness; and all in whose hearts the peace of God, which passes all understanding, reigns;

hunger and thirst after righteousness, and are made, through trial, suffering, and sorrow, "partakers of His holiness." Thus the peace which God gives, which Jesus procured, and which the Holy Spirit speaks, is a holy, sanctifying peace; and he who *lives in sin*, and yet affirms that he is walking in peace with God through Christ, is deceiving and deceived. "And now, may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, all that is pleasing to him. Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep by an everlasting covenant, signed with his blood. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen."

Let us remember that God's way of peace is our way of holiness. "You meet him that rejoices and works righteousness, those who remember You in Your ways." The path of *peace* is ever found parallel with the path of evangelical *purity* and *obedience*. And walking in this path, God, as the "God of peace," meets His children, and says to them, "Peace be with you!" Oh, walk closely with God, keep the conscience beneath the blood, live above the world and the creature, and your peace will flow like a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea.

"Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God, who calls you, is faithful; he will do this." 1 Thes. 5:23-24

**"Let us hail the blissful morning—
Dawn of peace to sinful earth!
Which the promised Savior gives us,
By a new and wondrous birth;
And, with angels,
join in hymns of holy mirth.
'Twas for us the King of Glory,
For a manger left His throne
Bore the curse—then went to heaven,
In a nature like our own
Blessed compassion!
To a world of rebels shown!
Lord, we praise You for Your mercy,
And would spread Your name abroad,
Until each tongue, and tribe, and nation,**

Know You as their Savior God
And rejoicing,
Feel the virtue of Your blood."

THE GOD OF LIGHT

"God is light." 1 John 1:5

"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun." In what believing heart will not these words awaken a quick and grateful response? The renewed man is the only being who knows what true light is, because he only, really knows Jesus. All others are like miners dwelling from their birth beneath the surface of the earth, having never seen the sun, through whose eternal gloom not one vivifying ray has ever pierced. "Darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people." When man sinned, God went out of the temple, luminous and glorious with His presence, and the sun of the soul set in guilt, darkness, and death. Henceforth the natural man walks in darkness, not knowing where he goes, until the time of electing love and sovereign grace draws on, when He who at creation's dawn said, "Let there be light, and light was," causes the light of life to shine, and the soul is immediately "translated out of darkness into His marvelous light," henceforth and forever to be a child of the light and of the day. "You were once darkness, but now are you light in the Lord walk as children of light." But the present pages have more especially to do with *God Himself* as the God of light. We are invited to consider, less the reflection and effects of God's light, than the Divine Fountain from which it flows.

The image is sublime and expressive. Creation, from her boundless variety, would be at a loss to suggest a material object more worthy of her Creator-God. There is nothing in nature more familiar to the sense, beautiful to the eye, or essential to growth than *light*. It possesses three distinct elements, perhaps, more appropriate to the illustration of our present subject than any others—*luminousness, velocity, and vitality*. Thus, in God's own light we see light upon His *character, dealings, and Word*.

More rapid than the travel of natural light is the entrance of *converting light into the soul of man*. And the life, thus darting in upon the soul, quickens it with spiritual life, and causes the heart to bloom and blossom with the graces and fruits of the Spirit. Such is the image of God, and such the blessings,

among countless others, which flow from Him concerning whom the sublime expression of the Psalmist is employed, "You cover Yourself with light as with a garment."

Let us, in the further contemplation of this title of our God, consider the different views which it presents for our study. In the first place, God is ESSENTIAL LIGHT. It will be observed, the concrete, and not the abstract form of the expression is employed by the Holy Spirit. It is not said that God is brightness, or, that God enlightens; but, that "God is light,"—that is, Essential, uncreated light. Light is His essence. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." All other light flows from Him, the "Fountain of Light," compared with which it is as darkness. Thus, *the light of day* has been termed the "*shadow of God*." And if such the shadow, what must God's essential light be! His abode is the dwelling-place of light. "He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No one has ever seen him, nor ever will. To him be honor and power forever. Amen." The Greek expresses it, "Inhabiting unapproachable light." So divine, pure, and dazzling is the light in which He dwells, no *mortal* eye could behold, or even endure it. Encircled by divine and unapproachable glory, He dwells in His own solitary grandeur, and from His own essential fullness, pours light on every other being and object in the universe.

What a sublime view does this give us of the greatness of the "God of light." We too imperfectly deal with God's essence. The natural and inevitable result of which is, we measure the Infinite by the finite, the Divine by the human, and think that God is such an one as ourselves! Hence the contracted views we cherish of His power, the false judgments we form of His designs, and the incorrect interpretations we arrive at of His word—the dishonor we cast upon Him, and the injury we inflict upon ourselves. *All this leads to unbelieving distrust and fleshly reasoning.* So when trouble is near we tremble, and when need is pressing we despair, and when temptation assails we yield, and when grief overshadows we sink, and when the rod corrects we rebel. And, when the guilt of sin and conscious backsliding weigh us down to the dust, and the chastening we so righteously evoked lands heavily upon us, we mournfully inquire, "Will the Lord cast us off forever, and will He be favorable no more? Is His mercy clean gone forever? Does His promise fail forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger closed up His tender mercies?"

Such is the fruit of unbelief, such the natural result of an imperfect knowledge of the perfections, character, and government of our God. We believe that

wrong views of God lie at the root of all that is erroneous in doctrine and low in practice. Imperfect acquaintance with His character, and inadequate views of His law, must necessarily result in loose thoughts of inspiration and lax views of holiness. And when God's truth is not regarded as His truth, it ceases to exert its proper influence as the instrument of sanctification, and a defect in personal holiness must necessarily be the result. But do even the saints really believe half they profess to believe, or fully possess what they do possess? Well did our blessed Lord exhort, "Have faith in God," since the lack of faith is the root of all our evil. Oh, to have higher views of God, more enlarged thoughts of His all-sufficiency! To believe that such is the extent of His power, and such the depth of His love, and such the infinitude of His resources, and such the tenderness of His compassion, we crave not a blessing, we have not a want, we feel not a sorrow, we dread not a trial, we prefer not a request which He is not prepared immediately and fully to meet.

God is the Author of NATURAL LIGHT. God is light, and streams of light broken into a thousand prismatic rays of beauty and power—now of strength and then of wisdom, here of love and there of grace—gleam along our homeward path, shining brighter and more beautiful unto the perfect day. And thus while the atheist's creed banishes the God of light from His own beautiful world—writing upon every tree and flower and star, "There is no God"—the believing heart gratefully acknowledges and devoutly contemplates the Creator in His creation; loves to trace up to Him the light which colors the world by day, and which silvers it by night; which paints the lily, and kindles the diamond. Such is our God, the God of natural light. "The day is Yours, the night also is Yours. You prepare the light and the sun."

The solar system, by virtue of which this vast globe is lit up with countless glories, pursues its trackless course through the starry heavens, bearing on its resistless course its magnificent furniture of animate and inanimate nature, exhibits traces of a Divine intelligence, an All-creative power, which, while it invites our profoundest contemplation, and challenges our unquestioning faith, infinitely transcends the loftiest flight of our reason. Oh, let us be true worshipers of this Divine Sun! And while the blinded Persian, in his idolatry, prostrates himself before the '*shadow* of God,' let us worship Him in spirit and in truth who gave the sun to rule by day and the moon by night, Himself the Divine Sun of our soul.

Passing from this view of God as the Author of natural light, let us contemplate Him in the LIGHT OF HIS PROVIDENCE. Here is presented a

yet brighter view of our God. Providence were but a dark mystery—a cloud-veil over God and His dealings, unpenetrated by a single ray—but for the light which flows from God. It is in His light we see light upon those events and circumstances of the Divine administration which else would be to us altogether inexplicable. How unsearchable the ways He often chooses to accomplish His purposes of mercy and His designs of goodness towards us! The event is, perhaps, enshrouded in the deepest obscurity. The handwriting upon the wall is entirely unintelligible.

Thus was it with dear old *Jacob*, and thus, too, with that eminent personal type of Jesus, *Joseph*. Who can study their histories and not learn that God's way with the people He loves is often in the pathless deep, and that His footsteps are not known? There is a "wheel within a wheel," and the whole machinery is so complex, complicated, and involved, as to baffle the most sagacious and confound the most intelligent.

Is your God, beloved, thus dealing with you now? His thoughts are, perhaps, a great deep, His ways with you past finding out. The event is mysterious, the calamity dark, the blow crushing. You are awe-struck and gazing in mute astonishment upon the scene, you marvel what He means and where the whole will end. But, "God is light." What to your mind is mysterious is to Him as a perfect whole. What to your eye is obscure, to His is all luminous. And like some rustic gazing with mute wonder upon a piece of machinery, lost in ignorant conjecture, we are confounded and silent, God stands by, and, smiling at our fruitless speculation, with a word says, "Let there be light," and in a moment the whole scene is radiant with brightness; and in this light we see with what skill and harmony, wisdom and love, He was working all things after the counsel of His own will, and all things for our good.

Such will be the course of His present dealings with you. Let your only aim be to glorify Him amid the dark and enigmatical events of His providence. "Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness." Be your one single aim to walk uprightly in this *dark event*, this *mysterious providence*, and the light which is sown for the righteous will spring out of darkness, and the whole will appear to you one beautiful and harmonious whole. Well does God remind us, "My thoughts are completely different from yours," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

All may be dark to you now—circumstances dark, Providence dark, your path draped with the deepest, gloomiest shadow. Be it so. God is light, and God is love, and God is unchangeable. And if, in this time of dark Providence, integrity and uprightness are restraining you from any false step, from the employment of any dubious, carnal means of relieving the gloom that enshrouds you, then shall be fulfilled the precious promise we have already quoted, "Unto the upright their arises light in the darkness."

Another not less beautiful and precious promise will God also make good in your present experience, "Light is sown for the godly, and joy on those who do right." Oh, blessed truth, oh, comforting thought that, dark and dreary though our way may be to us, it is all light to our God, for "in Him is no darkness at all." "He knows your walking through this great wilderness," knows the way that you take—the dreary way, the lonesome way, the intricate way, the perilous way, and the light that is sown for the righteous shall spring forth and shed its brightness and its bloom along all the way your God is leading you.

Oh, how beautiful and smiling the flowers that spring from God's light sown! How they gem and irradiate, soften and cheer the solitary and somber, the rough and winding paths we tread through the wilderness, across the desert, home to heaven. They are *God's smiles*. Sunbeams flowing from Him who is light, all light, and nothing but light to those who are light in the Lord, and whose path is that of the 'just,'—the justified in Christ, the accepted in the Beloved—'shining more and more unto the perfect day.' "Commit your way unto the Lord, and trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass; and He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noon-day."

Remember, that the darkest part of the night immediately precedes the dawn of day; and that, if your present position is ever so shaded or depressing, your circumstances ever so entangled, and your way ever so intricate and hedged up, the long, dreary night of weeping shall terminate in a morning of joy, brighter far, it may be, and more cloudless, than any that ever broke upon your spirit.

Your way, not mine, O Lord,
However dark it be,
Lead me by Your own hand—
Choose out the path for me.
"Smooth let it be, or rough,

It will be still the best;
Winding or straight, it leads
Right onward to Your rest.
"I dare not choose my lot—
I would not, if I might.
O choose for me, my God
So shall I walk aright."
"The kingdom that I seek
Is Yours; so let the *way*
That leads to it be Yours,
Else I must surely stray.
"O take my cup, and it
With joy or sorrow fill,
As best to You may seem—
You choose my good and ill.
"O choose for me my friends,
My sickness or my health
O choose my cares for me,
My poverty or wealth.
"Not mine, not mine the choice,
In things either great or small,
O be my Guide, my Strength,
My Jesus, and my all."

God is light IN HIS WORD OF TRUTH. Here we approach still nearer to the light. Beauteous and glorious as is God's light in creation, testifying, as it does, to His "eternal power and Godhead," it is but the *mere shadow* of God. Yet brighter as is God's light in providence, it is but as the *twilight* of God. But, in the revelation which He has given of Himself—in His Word of truth, His light beams out more gloriously than in the most brilliant and dazzling unfoldings of nature or providence. By the mere light of creation, fallen, sinful man, can never find his way to God. The most magnificent landscape, the loftiest mountain, the most stately tree, the most lovely flower, the brightest star, can supply no answer to the great question, "What must I do to be saved?" God has written the inscription of His power and Godhead across the sky, but not His redeeming, saving love.

Therefore it is written, "The world by wisdom knew not God." "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, and

four-footed beasts, and creeping things." Read the treatises of ancient philosophers who attempt to treat of God and of His works. Are they not but as the scintillations of the glowworm in the hedge compared with the light of the noontide sun, when contrasted with the revelations God has made of Himself in His Word? *God's Word is a divine and pure reflection of Himself*, and all is spiritual darkness until this light breaks in upon the soul. "The entrance of Your Word gives light." "Your Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

By no other light—the light of *creation*, the light of *reason*, the light of *science*, the light of *education*—can a poor, lost sinner, find his way to God. Through these media we see God but "through a glass darkly," "His back parts", or dark parts only. We can trace the nature and attributes of God—His wisdom, and power, and goodness; but His moral attributes—His justice, and holiness, and truth—which must all harmonize with mercy and love in the scheme that saves us—we do not even see in part. But, the entrance of God's revealed Word gives light. And one portion of divine truth brought home to the understanding and the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, scatters the clouds and shades of spiritual ignorance, and pours the light of God in upon the soul.

Oh, how divine, how unerring, how blessed is this light! One solitary beam from God, how good is it! *What are the writings of MEN, the most enlightened and spiritual, but as dim lanterns reflecting the light of God's truth, compared with God's truth itself, as it flows, pure and sparkling, from Him, the fountain of truth?* It is true that there are revelations which challenge our faith rather than our reason; which demand the humble reception of the heart rather than the full grasp of the intellect—truths which transcend, though they do not contradict, our reason. Such, for example, are the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation of the Son of God, the Atonement and Sacrifice of Christ, the Regenerating work of the Spirit in the soul; nevertheless, these doctrines, while they transcend, do not contradict our natural reason.

But if these are parts of God's Word which, through their 'excessive brightness,' are *dark* to our fallen understanding—that is, *secret things* in God's revelation which belong to God alone, the full understanding of which awaits us in the world of which it is said, " here is no night there"—there yet is sufficient light flowing from the inspired page to teach us how, as sinners, we may be saved and become fitted for endless glory. It pours a flood of divine and golden light upon the great questions of our pardon, our justification, our

adoption, our final safety, our fitness for the "inheritance of the saints in light." It tells of Jesus; how He became our Surety and Sin-bearer, how His obedience becomes our righteousness, His death our satisfaction, His blood our guilt-cleansing, His indwelling Spirit our sanctification and preservation to eternal glory.

Enlightened on these vital and precious truths, we can patiently wait the light above, when, no longer seeing through a glass darkly and knowing but in part, we shall know even as we are known, and love even as we are loved. Thus our God is light in the Scriptures of truth. And it is because the "wise and the prudent" of this world—the men of fleshly wisdom; will not walk by the light of God's Word, but in the light of the "*sparks* of their own kindling"—their natural and blinded reason—that they "err, not knowing the Scriptures." But we who hope that, through sovereign grace, we belong to the 'babes' to whom the Father has revealed the great things of His law, the precious things of His love, and who accept God's Word as our only rule of faith and of practice in this life, and as our only light and guide in our travel to the life that is to come.

Oh, let us in this day of lax views of Inspiration, a day in which everywhere, among professed friends and avowed foes, God's Word is so flagrantly tampered with, its truth so openly and defiantly assailed by Rationalistic and Ritualistic views, cling closer and warmer to His Divine Word; "whereunto we do well that we take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the day star arises in our hearts." Thus, we see enough in God's Word to satisfy us that the evidences of its divinity are many and conclusive—that, it contains a revelation of Himself, His mind and will, found nowhere else; that, it is an unveiling of His love to man seen in no part of His creation; that, it demands our universal holiness and teaches us the lessons of its attainment; and that, it contains a wisdom infinitely transcending the most exalted finite understanding, which will furnish the enlarged and perfectly sanctified mind with material for thought and study, widening, increasing, to all eternity.

But God, in the revelation of His light, has surpassed all His works of creation and wonders of providence, and even of His word, in **THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**. The Son of God is the *great revelation* of God's light. In Him God appears not in profile or in dim twilight, but in express image and in full-orbed light, softened, indeed, and toned to our visual organs, for no man can see God and live, seeing that He dwells in light which no man has seen or can see; yet so full, clear, and resplendent as to be

"the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Person." Herein our God is light. Christ is the "Sun of Righteousness," and every truth He revealed, and every promise He spoke, and every invitation He issued, was a radiant beam flowing from God through Christ His Incarnate Son.

How fully does this statement accord with the Old Testament Scriptures of truth. The prophet Isaiah calls the Savior a "Great Light," the "Light of Jehovah," the "Light of the Gentiles." With this perfectly agrees the teaching of the New Testament. John, Christ's forerunner, styles Him the "True Light." It is true, Christ testifies of John that he was a "burning and a shining light"—a *lamp*, a *candle*, as the original expresses it, but his light was kindled by Christ, the true Light. Our Lord's own declarations on this point are decisive. He speaks of Himself as the "Light of the world," and as the "Light of life." This He is, as He represents and reveals the Father. God is light, but because He is *essential light*, no created eye could look upon Him. But God, in the fullness of His benevolence, would so unveil and manifest Himself to the eyes of His own created intelligences, angels and men, as should permit them to gaze upon Him and live.

The mode was in all respects worthy of Himself; it was such a mode as could only find its conception in a Divine mind. And what was the mode thus conceived and adopted? "Let us go even to Bethlehem, and see this thing, which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us." What thing? The most marvelous, unheard of, and glorious the universe ever beheld—the Incarnation of the Son of God, "God manifest in the flesh."

Here is the mode by which God has manifested His light to man. We go to Bethlehem, and we behold in Christ "the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person." "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has "shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Thus, Christ is the light, or revelation, of God. Hence He said to the inquiring disciple, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." Behold how God has *subdued, and softened, and toned down* the splendor of His essential person to the gaze of mortal man! True, in gazing upon Christ, we gaze but upon the *rays* of the Divine Sun; nevertheless, we accept the invitation, "Look unto Me, all you ends of the earth, and be you saved; for I am God, and there is none else;" and in so looking in simple faith, we are saved. We look upon God, revealed to us in the Son of His love, reconciled, pacified towards us, and behold, we live!

We learn from this subject the **NECESSITY AND IMPORTANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ILLUMINATION**. If, as we have endeavored to show, we only really see God's light as it is revealed in Christ, it follows as a truth equally conclusive, that *we only truly know Christ as He is made known to us by the Spirit*. Veiled and subdued as the glory of Christ is, it is yet too pure and resplendent for the visual intellect of man, unilluminated by the Spirit. The natural man sees no glory or beauty in Christ. He is as a "root out of the dry ground, having no form nor loveliness." How truly is this confirmed by God's Word! "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Behold, then, the essential importance of praying to the Holy Spirit for His *Divine illumination*.

If it is the office of Jesus to lead us to the Father, it is equally the office of the Spirit to lead us to Jesus. We only spiritually and savingly know the Father through the Son, and the Son by the Spirit. And thus we learn the existence and necessity of the Trinity in the economy of grace. No system of theology is complete, and no hope of salvation is sure, that excludes this essential doctrine of the Christian faith. If its existence is essential to God's plan of mercy, and its belief is absolutely necessary to salvation, then, if it be ignored and rejected, we ask, By what other means can the rejecter possibly be saved? To illustrate this statement: if, *as a drowning man*, I thrust from me the plank that would have floated me in safety to the shore—or, if resolved to reach it by some expedient of my own, I persistently refuse to enter the life-boat launched for my rescue, it follows that I must inevitably perish, and most righteous and deserved will be my doom.

There is but one divinely-revealed way of salvation—faith in Jesus. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved." Jesus has said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." If, then, I walk not in Christ the Way, believe not in Christ the Truth, and accept not Christ the Life—in other words, if I deny His Person, ignore Atonement, reject His offered salvation—I must inevitably perish in my sins, and every perfection of God will approve and countersign my fearful yet most righteous, condemnation.

Betake yourself, then, in prayer to the Holy Spirit, earnestly imploring Him so to enlighten your understanding, and to convince your heart of sin, and to renew you in the spirit of your mind, that you may henceforth walk in the light of the Lord. Remember God's order: Christ leads you to the Father, and

the Holy Spirit leads you to Christ.

Another truth is taught us by this subject. Our Christian discipleship pledges us to **BE FAITHFUL AND CLEAR REFLECTORS OF GODS LIGHT**. Our blessed Lord recognized this Christian duty when He said, "You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." True believers are light in the Lord. This light is a *borrowed*, but it is solar light, kindled from no human shrine. It flows from Christ, the Sun of righteousness, beholding whose glory, as in a glass, they are transformed into the same image, as by the Spirit of the Lord; and thus, "in the midst of a wicked and perverse nation, they shine as lights in the world."

This gospel truth was beautifully typified by the Urim and the Thummin worn by Aaron on his breastplate—the literal meaning of which is, *light and perfection*. Such are all the true Israel of God. Christ, our great High Priest, bears them upon His breastplate within the veil; and thus borne upon His bosom, the blaze of ten million suns pales into darkness before the light and perfection of every believer, flowing from Christ Jesus, their Lord. Allow, then, the word of solemn exhortation. See to it that your religious light is not *borrowed* from a Church, or from a minister, or from a creed, but is derived directly and only from Christ. Let your knowledge of Christ, your faith in Christ, your love to Christ, your obedience to Christ, be the test and the measure of the light that is in you. God denounces those spurious prophets who *borrowed* their religion from others." I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me."

Is there not a great danger of stealing, or of borrowing, our religious thoughts, sentiments, and phraseology, from others? And was not this the case with the foolish virgins in the parable, when they exclaimed, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone (or, are going) out?" Oh, it is of the utmost importance that our religious light is not a *borrowed or false* light. See that your religion is your own—the personal, vital experience of your own heart. It is easy—nothing easier, more deceptive or fatal; than to make a religious profession, adopt a religious ceremonial, imitate the experience, and quote the language of others.

A borrowed or a counterfeit religion is of all religions the most ensnaring and dangerous. Do not go to the grave clad in the religious habiliments of others, but robed in Christ's true and joyous garments of salvation, "girded with the

golden girdle" of truth, holiness, and love. Bear not to death's gate the empty, oilless, flameless lamp of a mere religious profession, dark and hopeless as the valley down which you pass; but, see that you have Christ in you, the hope of glory—a living, burning light, shining brighter and brighter through the dark passage, until it ushers you into the meridian splendor of heaven's eternal light.

We learn, too, from this subject, how rapid may be the dawn of spiritual, converting light, in the soul of man. The Bible abounds with illustrations of this fact—the dying malefactor, is perhaps the most touching and conclusive. There is no necessity why conversion should be a process long and tedious. The kingdom of nature, which is but a type of the kingdom of grace, disproves this theory. He who said, "Let there be light," and the darkness of chaos vanished in a moment before His all-commanding voice, has but to speak the word, and the soul shall as quickly pass out of darkness into marvelous light, henceforth to shine a child of the light and of the day forever.

But the full unveiling of God's light awaits us above. HEAVEN is beautifully described as the "inheritance of the saints in light." Of the new Jerusalem it is said, "And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and *the Lamb is its light*. The nations of the earth will walk in its light, and the rulers of the world will come and bring their glory to it. Its gates never close at the end of day because there is no night there." Oh, who would not so live as to be an inhabitant of this glorious city, to walk in this light, and to dwell forever where there shall be 'no night' of ignorance, and 'no night' of sorrow, and 'no night' of sin!

Dwell much, my reader, on the sunlight slopes of heaven. There are bright gleams of glory here below, if we but seek and enjoy them. God is light; and God's light shall shine around our path if we seek first His kingdom and righteousness—that is, if we make real religion the first, paramount, and chief object of our desire and aim, the all-molding, all-controlling, all-commanding object of life. Oh, seek to walk in the light of the Lord! In this light let us live. To this light let us bring all our sins and follies, all our perplexities and trials, all our griefs and woes. "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eye to behold the sun." Why be content to walk in the shade when it is our high privilege, as the children of light, to walk in the sunshine of God's countenance?

Or, should it be the discipline of our Heavenly Father that we for a season

travel, as Jesus Himself did, in soul-darkness, nevertheless, faith is still to trust the faithfulness and unchangeable love of God, clinging all the closer to Christ, as the timid child clings in the night-season to the arms that embrace, and to the bosom that enfolds it. "Who among you fears the Lord and obeys his servant? If you are walking in darkness, without a ray of light, trust in the Lord and rely on your God."

Such is our God. All light His beauteous offspring—*natural* and *intellectual*, *spiritual* and *eternal* light; springing from Him, the "Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Clods of earth though we are—of the earth earthy—and returning to the earth from where we came; the Holy Spirit, by His regenerating power, can make us more radiant and luminous than a thousand suns, each in his own orbit reflecting the image of Christ, and giving glory to God.

Thus, there is no light, as there is no beauty, so transcendent as HOLINESS. Holiness assimilates us more closely to God's nature than any other endowment. We may be intellectual, and discerning, and loving, and not be God-like. Alas! vice of the greatest enormity, and sin of the deepest hue, has been found in the closest alliance with greatest intellectual powers, and with the deepest and strongest sensibilities. But *holiness* cannot deceive us. *He that is holy is like God*. His mental powers may be cramped, his range of thought limited, his attainments in literature and science measured; nevertheless, if his heart is regenerate, and the spirit of his mind is renewed, and his life is endowed and adorned with the gifts and the beauty of *holiness*, then is he one of whom it may be said, "Truly, this is a man of God."

Be your light, then, the light and luster of divine holiness. Welcome all the *discipline* of your Heavenly Father, as but designed to make you a more burning and a shining light. In the dark furnace of affliction, in the gloomy chamber of sickness and sorrow, the light of your graces—patience, submission, faith, and love; shall shine forth with a purer, richer luster; and so seeing it, the saints will rejoice in your light, and you shall glorify God in the fires.

And when the "candle of the wicked shall be put out," you shall burn stronger and brighter, until death quenches it in this world, but to rekindle in the world to come, where "they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them light." Then, "your sun shall no more go down; neither shall your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be your everlasting light,

and the days of your mourning shall be ended."

**"Walk in the light! so shall you know
That fellowship of love
His Spirit only can bestow,
Who reigns in light above
"Walk in the light! and sin abhorred
Shall never defile again;
The blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord,
Shall cleanse from every stain!
"Walk in the light! and you shall find
Your heart made truly His,
Who dwells in cloudless light enshrined,
In whom no darkness is.
"Walk in the light! and you shall own
Your darkness passed away,
Because that light has on you shone,
In which is perfect day.
"Walk in the light! and even the tomb
No fearful shade shall wear;
Glory shall chase away its gloom,
For Christ has conquered there.
"Walk in the light! and you shall see
A path, though thorny, bright;
For God by grace shall dwell in thee,
And God Himself is Light"**

THIS GOD IS OUR GOD

"For this God is OUR GOD for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end." Psalm 48:14

Strong language this! But not too strong for faith to employ. In some believing minds, of doubting, though not of doubtful faith; of fearful, yet not of despairing hearts; it may sound like a vain-glorious boast, and appear a claim almost too presumptuous for a sinful mortal to prefer. Nevertheless, it is truth, and, more or less profound, is the experience of every child of God, and may be the language without any exaggeration of the weakest believer that ever touched the fringe of the Savior's robe. We too much forget that what has been the spiritual attainment of the saints in a past dispensation, may be

equally the experience of the saints in every succeeding one. If, amid *the twilight shadows of the old economy*, believers could embody their faith in language as strong as this, why should believers, dwelling amid the full blaze of the present dispensation, upon which the Sun of Righteousness has risen in noontide splendor, speak in language more timid and doubtful?

Saving Faith and its Divine Object have been the same in every dispensation and age of the Church. The faith of Adam, the first and greatest sinner of his race, which looked to the Promised Seed, before, yet the gates of Eden were closed upon him, is essentially and objectively of "like precious faith," with which the penitent thief washed himself in the crimson fountain flowing at his side. Thus we must be careful of supposing that there is any *eminence in the divine life*, to which other saints have attained, unattainable by us. That there is any sacred height in grace, holiness, and assurance which they have reached to which we may not ascend—or, that there is any knowledge of Christ, any conformity to His likeness, any intimate relations with Him experienced by others, which may not be our experience too. Thus, strong and bold as is the language of David, there lives not a child of God who may not adopt it as his own, and exclaim, "For this God is OUR GOD for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end."

With an exposition of this truth, the present volume approaches its close. Let us consider some of the sacred ideas suggested by the remarkable expression—"THIS God." It is evident that the inspired speaker refers to some especial attributes of God upon which he had been expatiating, which designate Him as the covenant and redeeming God of His people. "This God—this very God—this great and glorious God, is our God." What, then, are some of these distinctive attributes which especially identify Jehovah as the "OUR God" of His people?

In the first place, 'This God' of REVELATION is 'our God.' This God, who has made such a divine and wonderful revelation of Himself—His Being and mind, His will and heart; in His word, is, 'our God.' In other words, the God of the Bible is ours. All that that inspired and precious volume declares concerning Him, all the thoughts of His mind it reveals, all the love of His nature it makes known, all the teaching of His Spirit it conveys, all the precious promises, all the gracious invitations, and the glorious hopes, and solemn warnings and faithful admonitions it contains, are *ours*, because the God of the Bible is ours. Accept the Bible as your own. Read it as the letters of your Heavenly Father addressed personally to you. Let no sophistry shake

your confidence in its divine inspiration. Beware of that false reasoning that teaches that God's Word is in the Bible, but that the Bible is not God's Word. The giant evil of the day is infidelity unblushingly assailing the truth, and impeaching the integrity of the Sacred Scriptures. Be vigilant and prayerful here. Lose your Bible, and you lose your all. If, then, the God of revelation is yours, the revelation of God is equally yours. All that this blessed volume contains belongs of a right to you. The Divine Redeemer, the glorious gospel, the free salvation, the precious promises, the gracious invitations, the rich consolations, the blissful hopes, the holy admonitions, all, all are ours, because the God who wrote the Bible, who gave the Bible, who has preserved the Bible, and who dwells in the Bible, is 'OUR God.'

May the hand of your faith upon this Divine Charter of blessings, and exclaim, "It is mine, all, all is mine, because the God who inspired it is my God. In giving me Himself He gave me all that was His and this is His most precious gift, next to His beloved Son, whom it reveals. Let me believe it firmly, deal with it reverently, read it devoutly, and walk in its divine precepts holily, and do all in my power to give to all who may not possess, as I do, this heavenly chart, this divine compass, this unerring light in the soul's solemn travel to eternity."

**"Holy Bible, book divine,
Precious treasure! you are mine!
Mine to tell me where I came;
Mine to teach me what I am;
"Mine to chide me when I rove;
Mine to share a Savior's love;
Mine are you to guide my feet;
Mine to judge, condemn, acquit.
"Mine to comfort in distress,
If the Holy Spirit bless;
Mine to show by living faith
Man can triumph over death;
"Mine to tell of joys to come,
And the rebel sinner's doom
Oh, you precious book divine,
Precious treasure! you are mine!"**

This INCARNATE GOD is 'our God.' The great truth of the Bible is—"God manifest in the flesh"—the Incarnation of the Son of God. And the belief of

this truth, an essential doctrine of salvation, is equally essential to our being saved. No soul can possibly have eternal life who disbelieves, and, disbelieving, rejects this great cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith. "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God."

From these words we infer that, apart from faith in the Divinity of Christ, and a believing and personal reliance upon His Atonement, no man living can be saved. But how assuring and comforting is the truth that this Incarnate God is 'our' God! This God who left the heavens and came down, not in the nature of angels, but of men, who was "made flesh," who was "made in the likeness of man," and as Man was encompassed with our sinless infirmities, hungered and thirsted, wearied and sorrowed as we, lived a life of toil and poverty, was sustained by charity, was assailed by persecution, moved in comparative obscurity and solitude, and then died a felon's death—this wondrous Being, this God in our veritable nature, this Incarnate God, this *Jesus* is our God.

Claim your relation to, and your possession of, this God-man, my reader. He is bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh. He is "very man of very man," as He is "very God of very God." You have not a human element that did not enter into His humanity. Nothing that was human—for sin is a Satanic and not a human element, an accident and not an original concomitant of our creation—was foreign to Him. It is, therefore, your privilege to claim Him as your Elder Brother, "in all things made like unto His brethren," and in all your afflictions of mind, body, and estate, to repair to Him as a "brother born for adversity."

Oh, what a distinguished blessing from among our precious and endless catalogue of blessings is this—the blessing of knowing that Jesus is ours! That all the fullness of the Godhead essentially dwelling in Him, and all the fullness of the manhood mediatorially His, belongs to us! That every perfection of His being, and every element of His nature, and every pulse of His life, and every fiber of His heart—His every thought and affection and feeling—is ours! "Behold the Lamb of God!" "Behold the man!" for this God, this very God-Man, this very Man-God, is ours!

Christ loves you to recognize your personal interest in Him. He is honored by

your claim of free grace to all that He personally and officially is. He is glorified by your continuous coming to the "unsearchable riches" of His grace, wisdom, and love, and from their inexhaustible fullness making large and unlimited draughts. "All things are yours, for you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Receive, then, this "great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh," which, in other words, is the great mystery of love, and prefer your personal claim to its untold wealth exclaiming, "This incarnate God, this God who stooped to my nature, who girded Himself with my sinless weaknesses and infirmities, my sickness and sorrows, is my God; all the sinlessness of His nature, all the sympathy of His manhood, all the tenderness of His love, all the filial oneness of His relation as the Elder Brother, all is mine!"

This REDEEMING God is our God. The Redemption of man is the achievement of God. Not so evident is creation a divine work—the sun, the moon, and the stars which He has made evidencing 'His eternal power and Godhead'—as is the work of man's salvation. Upon this, His last and greatest work, He has concentrated the boundless resources of Deity. Here His glory meets in its focal power and splendor. God *spoke* the universe out of nothing, and formed man from the dust of the earth, but in the Redemption of man, He became incarnate in the person of His beloved Son, *exhausting heaven of its richest treasure*, and conferring that treasure upon man in the person of Jesus the Savior, 'His unspeakable gift.'

Behold your divine possession! This Redeeming God is our God. This God who has redeemed us at a cost so dear and precious to Himself, as the gift, the sufferings, and sacrifice of His only-begotten and beloved Son, who charged all our sins to Him, laid all our curse upon Him, exacting from Him, as our Surety and Substitute, the utmost penalty of our transgressions and hell-deserving; this God of redemption, this redeeming God is our God. If, then; and this is the logical deduction of faith—if *the God of Redemption* is our God, it follows that *the Redemption of God* is ours. This is our warrant to believe in Christ, and to trust in God, and to commit our souls to Jesus, and to accept unhesitatingly, unreservedly, His complete and free salvation; this God, who provided so suitable and so great a redemption, is our God: therefore, we are justified in casting ourselves upon the infinite merit, the atoning work, the sacrificial death of Jesus; yes, upon Jesus, our personal Savior Himself, and believe and be saved.

Trembling, fearful saint, oh, possess this your possession! If the God who

redeemed you is yours, then avail yourself of all the precious blessings flowing from that great redemption—a present salvation, a full forgiveness of all sin, completeness in Christ, peace with God passing all understanding, and joy unspeakable and full of glory.

With your personal unworthiness, with your countless sins, with your deep poverty, you have nothing to do. The only object that is now to engage your thoughts, and fix your eye, and inspire your hopes, is *Jesus!* If you were under a great pecuniary liability, and an wealthy friend were to assume your responsibility, and cancel it to the utmost fraction, you would justly reason— "Why need I more be troubled about this matter? Why yield to fear and despondency? I am released from responsibility, my obligation is cancelled, my debt is paid, and I am legally discharged from all liability, arrest, and judgment. I will emerge from the shadows of my imprisonment into the bright sunshine of heaven, and will walk at liberty, bearing with me my legal protection and my full discharge, none daring to make me afraid."

Apply this simple reasoning to the salvation of your soul, and see to what a blessed conclusion and happy peace it will conduct you. Christ bound Himself in the covenant of grace to be our Surety. He became responsible to the moral government of God His Father for all its claims upon His people. He said, in terms virtually in accordance with that engagement, "Upon Me let their sins meet; with Me let their curse rest; upon Me let their punishment and condemnation fall. All that my Church owes I will pay; all for which My Bride is responsible I will discharge; all that My saints have most righteously incurred I will freely and fully endure. Let these go their way."

Oh, wondrous love! Oh, matchless grace! Oh, self-sacrificing mercy! Wonder, O heavens! be astonished, O earth! With such an all-sufficient Savior, with such a full, finished, and free discharge from the guilt of sin, the condemnation of the law, and the arrest of justice, will you any longer pursue your heavenly journey—your soul bowed down to the ground, like a bulrush, your harp of song silent upon the willow, your path bedewed with tears, and the desert vocal with nothing but your sighs, groans, and complaints? Rise! He calls you! Jesus bids you come and walk in the light and joy of His salvation. Uplift your head, take down your harp, retune and sweep its strings to the high praises of Emmanuel, for your great debt is paid, and "there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." With the Church of the Old Testament let the Church of the New sing, but with a louder and sweeter strain, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my

God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness."

This COVENANT GOD is our God. God has ever been a covenant God to His Church. Whether it be the Old Covenant or the New—the covenant of the law or the covenant of grace—the covenant with our father, the first Adam, or the covenant with Christ, the Second; He has always sustained the endearing relation of the covenant God of a covenant people. But it is especially by the nature, obligations, and promises of *the new covenant of grace* made in and by Christ, that God, even our own God, has bound Himself to us. The *old covenant of works* made with Adam, the federal head of his race, the terms of which were, "Do and live; sin and die," was broken by our first parents, and by its violation compromised the present and eternal happiness of their posterity. But the new covenant of grace entered into by the Sacred Three on behalf of elect sinners, on whom grace and glory were eternally and forever settled in Christ Jesus, their covenant Head, Surety, and Mediator, is absolute and new, filled with all spiritual blessings, signed and sealed by the blood of the New Covenant, accepted and ratified, on the part of God, by His raising up Christ from the dead. "I will," says God, "make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." "This is my blood of the new covenant" says Christ.

And similar to this is the prayer of the apostle—"Now the God of peace, through the blood of *the everlasting covenant*, make you perfect." Take hold, then, by faith, beloved, of this covenant; for the God of this covenant is your God. 'By two immutable things in which it is impossible for Him to lie,' He has engaged Himself to be your covenant God, to supply all your need, to guide your journeyings through the wilderness, to keep you by His power, and to conduct you safely from grace to glory, from earth to heaven.

Again, I say, *take hold of the covenant!* All your history is arranged, all your needs are provided for, all your trials, and afflictions, and sorrows are appointed in this covenant. Not more truly is it like a rainbow round about the throne of heaven, bright like an emerald, than it is round about your person and your path, as to that throne and to that heaven your covenant God is gently, skillfully, surely leading you.

This tried, this proved God is our God. The religion of the true believer is *experimental*; it is *the religion of the heart*. He has no dealings with an unknown, imaginary God. He does not know God from the hearing of the ear,

or from the reading of books, or from the religious conversation of others merely, but He knows Him from personal acquaintance, from heartfelt experience, from close and constant dealings. There has been a manifestation of God in Christ to his soul, and with Job he can say, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You." And with the converted Samaritans, "Now we believe, not because of your saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

Oh to be a true, an experimental Christian! The religion of the ear, or of the eye, or of the imagination, or of the intellect, will not, and cannot bring the soul to heaven. The abodes of endless woe are peopled with souls who went down to its regions of despair with no better religion than this! Oh, give me the humility of the publican, the trembling faith of the diseased woman, the flowing tears of the penitent Magdalene, the last petition of the dying thief, rather than the most intellectual religion or the most gorgeous ceremonial that ever the mind invented, or the eye beheld.

But our God is the *tried*, the *proved* God of His people. His *Word* has been tried, and proved divine. His *promises* have been tried, and proved true. His *veracity* has been tried, and proved faithful. His *love* has been tried, and proved unchangeable. His *compassion* has been tried, and proved real. In a word, His children can all testify, by personal, holy, and loving experience, that God is all that His revealed Word declares Him to be, and that the Lord Jesus is all that the prophet declares Him to be—the 'Tried Stone' for sinners to build upon, and for saints to trust in.

Oh, the blessedness of knowing that this prayer-hearing, prayer-answering, and prayer-exceeding God; this promise-making and promise-keeping God; this love-unchanging, and covenant-keeping God is 'our God!' What encouragement have we to deal personally, constantly, and closely with our God in all the circumstances and events of daily life! We repair to Him in need, in difficulty, and in trial, in the firm persuasion that in the history of His Church He has proved all that we now require Him to be; that all that He has been He is now; and that what other saints have found Him in their experience we shall find Him in ours.

"Come, all you that fear the Lord, and I will tell you what He has done for my soul." "And what He has done for my soul," every believer might have added, "He will also do for yours. I came to Jesus as a sinner, and He saved me. I

called upon God in trouble, and He heard me. I said unto Him, You are my God; and He said, you my people." Oh, repair, then, to the Lord as to one whom others have found to be all you want in your present circumstances, and have found faithful to His promises, all-sufficient in His aid, unchangeable in His love, a very present help in time of trouble.

And if you feel that you dare not venture with your sin and need and burden; upon a faith so feeble and slender as your own, go on the faith and testimony of others, believing that God is what He says He is, because they have found Him so; and He who has proved a Father and Friend and Helper to them will not turn away His mercy from you, nor your prayer from Himself, and send you away unblest. It is an instructive incident in the life of Jesus, that when the friends of the palsied cripple unroofed the house and let him down in the midst where Jesus was, it is recorded, "And when Jesus saw their faith (not the faith of the palsied man), He said unto the sick man with the palsy, Son, your sins be forgiven you."

Thus are we instructed by this remarkable incident, that a poor, miserable sinner may venture to come to Christ on the believing assurance of another—as many of the Samaritans went to see the Savior on the testimony of the woman who said, "Come, see a man that told me all that I ever did; is not this the Christ?" And when the believing soul has taken hold of Christ, it is henceforth then both its duty and privilege to become a true witness for Christ, exclaiming, "Now we believe, not because of your saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

"Now will I tell to sinners round
What a dear Savior I have found;
I'll point to Your redeeming blood,
And say, Behold the way to God."

The suggestive incident to which we have just referred, is equally encouraging to those who are anxious for the salvation of their unconverted relations and friends. The poor paralyzed man had no power to come to Christ himself; but his believing friends brought him to Jesus. Precious sympathy! Wondrous faith! No marvel that He in whose eye faith is so precious a thing, now crowned their faith by an immediate response, granting even more than was asked.

Our unconverted loved ones are spiritually impotent! The malady of sin has

paralyzed and deadened their whole being, and they "will not come to Christ that they might have life." Let us, in default of all spiritual power on their part, bring them in the arms of believing and importunate prayer to Him, and, despite every obstacle and discouragement, uncover the roof, if need be, and lay them down at Jesus' feet, whose Spirit alone can quicken, and whose touch alone can heal. Who can tell?

We only venture further to remark that, this PARENTAL, RECONCILED GOD is our God. This God, who has so clearly and so often revealed Himself in His Word as a *reconciled Father* to His people, and whom Christ has taught us so to approach Him, stands to us in the close and endearing relation of, "Our Father." Oh, costly and precious privilege of looking up to this great, this holy Lord God, and exclaiming, "My Father, God!" It is in this character He would have you recognize Him, in this relation He would have you come to Him, in this light He would have you view and interpret all His dealings both of mercy and of judgment. "And because you have become his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, and now you can call God your dear Father. Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, everything he has belongs to you."

Hesitate not, then, beloved, in all your needs and trials, in all your mental and spiritual depressions, in all your conscious waywardness and disobedience, and in all the corrections and rebukes of His discipline—hesitate not still to love Him, to trust in Him, to submit to Him as your Father. Are you in need? He is pledged to supply it. Are you bereaved? His hand has done it. Are you sick? His providence has sent it. Are you in the garden of sorrow, with the cup of adversity trembling in your hand? Take it, drink it, looking up to Him with a filial, loving, submissive spirit, and exclaiming, "The cup which MY FATHER has given me, shall I not drink it?"

We reach an impressive and precious part of our subject—the ETERNITY OF OUR DIVINE PORTION. "This God is our God forever and ever." Everything here in this present world is changing. "The world passes away." A rope of sand, a spider's web, a silken thread, a passing shadow, an ebbing wave, are the most fitting and expressive emblems of all things belonging to this present time's state. The homes that sheltered us in childhood we leave; the land which gave us birth we leave; the loved ones who encircled our hearths pass away; the friends of early years depart; and the world that was so sunny, and life that was so sweet, is all beclouded and embittered; the whole scenery of existence changed into wintry gloom.

Still more sad and depressing are the spiritual vicissitudes to which our soul is constantly exposed. The waning of love, the decays of grace, the fluctuations of faith, the languor of life; true symptoms of spiritual declension of soul; are among the most startling and affecting illustrations of the mutability of all temporal and spiritual things.

But in the midst of all, "This God is our God FOREVER AND EVER!" All beings change but God. All things change but heaven. The evolutions of time revolve, the events of earth go onward, but He upon whom all things hang, and by whom all events are shaped and controlled, moves not. "I, the Lord, do not change." "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever."

Is this God our God? Then He is ours forever! Our affairs may alter, our circumstances may change, our relations and friends may depart one by one, and our souls in a single day pass through many fluctuations of spiritual feeling; but He who chose us to be His own, and who has kept us to the present moment, is our covenant God and Father forever and ever, and will never throw us off and cast us away.

Such, too, is the immutability of Jesus. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever." "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end." We need the influence of this truth! Christ unchangeable—to soothe and solace us under the saddening, depressing effects of life's vicissitudes. We need it, too, and yet more deeply, amid the incessant fluctuations of our Christian experience through which we pass—the ebb and flow of the life of God in our soul. To know that no congealing of *our love to Him* can chill *His love to us*; to remember that, though we believe not, yet He is faithful, and cannot deny Himself—that our unbelief cannot make void His promises, nor our mutations affect the stability of His covenant—oh, this is strong consolation indeed, for which let our heartfelt praises ascend!

"Forever and ever!" Solemn words! Reader, what will YOUR forever and ever be? You die once, but to live and die no more! Your soul is immortal. Your being ceases not. Death, so far from being an annihilation, is not even a momentary suspension of your existence. Your present life, if life it may be called, for which you toil so incessantly, guard so assiduously, and love so intensely, is a transient, troubled dream; yet more, it is the tide that floats you rapidly upon its eddies onward to the solemn, endless future.

**"Life is like a painted dream,
Like the rapid summer stream,
Like the fleeting meteor's ray,
Like the shortest winter's day,
"Like the fitful breeze that sighs,
Like the waning flame that dies,
Darting, dazzling on the eye,
Fading in eternity."**

What will your eternity be? *Where, how, and with whom will you spend it?* Will it be forever and ever in heaven, or, forever and ever in hell? There is no middle state, no dream-land island between those two vast Continents. A deep and wide gulf divides them, and there is no passing from the one to the other. "These shall go away into *everlasting* punishment; but the righteous into life *eternal*." Of the first it is said, "And the smoke of their torment ascends up *forever and ever!*" and of the second, "Those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness as the stars, *forever and ever*." Decide this momentous question now; antedate your future condition by seeking an interest in a *present* salvation, by accepting at this moment a divine and personal Savior; in a word, by repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. "Behold, NOW is the accepted time, NOW is the day of salvation."

"He will be our guide, even unto death." The path to a future world is, in truth, difficult and perilous. Thousands of deathless souls undertake to travel it in the light of their own fire, in the *sparks* that they have kindled. Some, by the dim ray of *reason*; others, by the glowworm light of *nature*; yet others, by the treacherous light of *their own righteousness*. All these are false beacons; beacons which shine but to bewilder, and lead but to ensnare all those who trust to them.

"But watch out, you who live in your own light and warm yourselves by your own fires. This is the reward you will receive from me: You will soon lie down in great torment."

Isaiah 50:11. But God in Christ is the guide of the just. By His light they see light along all the dangerous way. Guided by that light, they walk through darkness, as at noon; their path to heaven, as the shining light which shines more and more unto the perfect day. Beloved, an unknown future is before you—a future of the present life; and a yet more real and solemn future of the

life that is to come. But, tremble not, nor be dismayed. God, even your own God Father, is Your Guide and Christ, Your Shepherd, goes before you, and with a skillful, faithful, and gentle hand, will guide you safely to the end—yes, even *unto death*.

"Unto death"—what a precious and solemn assurance is this! Death is that crisis of our being we all must meet, yet all so dread. Its sting, its terror, its wrench, its obscured and changeless consequences all enshrouded in a mystery so awful and profound; is just that one event of life, the anticipation of which throws a shadow so dark over all brightness of existence. But faith in the Divine assurance that, this great and glorious, this incarnate and redeeming, this covenant and faithful God is 'our God, even unto death,' dissolves our fetters, dispels our fears, and we can anticipate, and even at times long for, the blissful moment that confronts us with the foe, unclothes us of mortality, and invests us with the robes of immortality and eternal life, and we are "clothed with our heavenly dwelling."

Cast from you, then, all your bondage through the fear of death, seeing that, down to the last moment, your God in Christ will be with you, at the presence and sight of whom, Death itself will turn pale and die. Oh, if this God is your God in life, do you think that, having guided and guarded you so long and so far on your journey, He will, at that solemn moment, when heart and flesh are failing, leave your side, and abandon you to go down 'the valley' all solitary and alone? Never! "This God is Our God *Forever and Ever*; He will be our guide even unto death"—in death—through death—and beyond death—*Forever and Ever!*

Oh, that blissful word 'forever!' Forever in heaven—forever and ever associated with saints and angels—forever and ever gazing on the beauty of Jesus—forever and ever basking in the sunshine of His glory—forever and ever chanting the song of the Lamb—forever and ever swimming in the ocean of God's love—forever and ever growing in knowledge and holiness and glory—forever and ever with the Lord! Oh, who would not forsake the world, and crucify the flesh, and bear the cross, confess and serve the Savior, live for Him, and die for Him who has by His death, resurrection, and ascension, so blessedly opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers!

"Forever with the Lord!

Amen, so let it be!

Life from the dead is in that word

'Tis immortality.
"Forever with the Lord!
Father, if 'Tis Your will,
The promise of that faithful word
Even here to me fulfill.
"So when my latest breath
Shall rend the veil in twain,
By death I shall escape from death,
And life eternal gain.
"Knowing as I am known,
How shall I love that word!
And often repeat before the throne,
Forever with the Lord!"

Confide in Him for the new year upon which you have embarked. Commit your every way unto Him, trust also in Him, and He shall bring to pass all that He has ordained and appointed for you in the everlasting covenant. Cast not about to know how this need shall be supplied, this difficulty met, and this affliction sustained; but, trust to the wisdom, and skill, to the faithfulness and love of your divine and heavenly Guide, until He brings you to glory. Let your one and only aim be to obey, please, and honor Him. Taking care of His glory, He will watch over your interests for time and for eternity. Take heed how you walk, and seek that a new epoch of time, a yet untried stage and untrodden path of your pilgrimage, shall be more holy, more Christ-exalting, more God-glorifying, and more heavenly than any you yet have passed.

The Divine command is, "Speak unto the children, that they go forward." Forward in obedience and duty—forward in service and suffering—forward in conflict and toil—forward, Christian, forward, even though the foe pursues, and the pathless water roll at your feet. Onward, Onward, "For the Lord your God knows your walking through this great wilderness." Blessed Lord! "You shall guide me with Your counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside You."

'Tis Jesus, the First and the Last,
Whose Spirit will guide us safely home;
We'll praise Him for all that is past,
And trust Him for all that is to come.

"For this God is OUR GOD for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end." Psalm 48:14